



The Loft Literary Center

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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**The Loft Literary Center Announces Recipients of
the 2020 McKnight Artist Fellowships for Writers**

**Four Minnesota Poets, Spoken Word Artists, and One Children's
Literature Author Receive \$25,000 Each**

The Loft Literary Center is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2020 McKnight Artist Fellowships for Writers, Loft Awards in Poetry, Spoken Word, and Loft Award in Children's Literature (Younger Children). Since 1982, the Loft has partnered with the McKnight Foundation to offer substantial fellowships to Minnesota writers.

The fellowships are judged by prominent American authors and editors, and the winners, all from Minnesota, are awarded \$25,000 each. The judges this year were Natalie Diaz in poetry, Patricia Smith in spoken word, and Uma Krishnaswami in children's literature. The Loft is compliant with orders for shelter in place, but our hope is that both Natalie Diaz and Patricia Smith will visit the Loft for a public reading on Saturday, September 19, 2020, and Uma Krishnaswami will visit in October of 2020 for a public event.

The Loft received 45 qualified applications in children's literature and 104 qualified applications in poetry and spoken word. This year's recipients are children's writer Lauren Stringer (Minneapolis), spoken word artist Blythe Baird (Minneapolis), and



poets Michael Torres (Mankato), Jacob Lindberg (Victoria), and Claire Wahmanholm (Saint Paul).

The honorable mentions in children's literature are Phyllis Root (Minneapolis), Matt Lilley (Fridley), and Kao Kalia Yang (Saint Paul). The honorable mentions in spoken word are Tish Jones (Saint Paul), Jeffrey Skemp (Minneapolis), and Rebecca Nichloson (Minneapolis). The honorable mentions in poetry are Valerie Deus (Minneapolis), Jennifer Kwon Dobbs (Saint Paul), and Preeti Kaur Rajpal (Minneapolis).

McKnight Artist Fellowships for Writers, Loft Award in Children's Literature/Picture Books: 2020 Recipient

Lauren Stringer is a children's book writer and illustrator whose first picture book, *Mud*, written by Mary Lyn Ray, won a Minnesota Book Award, IRA Children's Choice Award, and Crayola Kids Best Book of the Year Award and was declared a "Flying Starts" by *Publisher's Weekly*. Since *Mud*, Lauren has continued illustrating many award-winning picture books. Her own *Winter is the Warmest Season* was a Booklist Editor's Choice and a finalist for the Minnesota Book Award. Her story *When Stravinsky Met Nijinsky* won the McKnight Foundation Fellowship for writing in Children's Literature in 2012 and was a Booklist's Top Ten Art Books for 2013 as well as an ALA Notable Book. Her story and pictures for *Yellow Time*, 2016, were a Junior Library Guild selection and Minnesota Book Award finalist. Lauren's latest illustrated picture book, *Looking for Smile*, written by Ellen Tarlow, will be published in fall 2020. She is currently painting the illustrations for her own story, *The Dark Was Done*, coming fall 2021.

McKnight Artist Fellowships for Writers, Loft Award in Spoken Word: 2020 Recipient

Blythe Baird is a touring spoken word artist, youth educator, and the author of *IF MY BODY COULD SPEAK* (Button Poetry, 2019). Her award-winning and viral performance poetry has been featured by the National Eating Disorder Association,



ADCAN Los Angeles, *Glamour Magazine*, *ELLE India*, *Huffington Post*, *EverydayFeminism*, *TEDx*, *The Body is Not an Apology*, *Write Bloody*, and more. She graduated from Hamline University in 2018. Currently, she lives in Minneapolis with her best friends and a sweet little cat.

McKnight Artist Fellowships for Writers, Loft Award in Creative Poetry: 2020 Recipients

Jacob Lindberg serves as editor in chief of *Up North Lit* and holds an MFA from the University of Arkansas. He is the recipient of the 2019 Carolyn F. Walton Cole Fellowship in Poetry from the University of Arkansas, judged by poet Todd Davis. He is also the recipient of the James T. Whitehead Award in Poetry from the University of Arkansas (2017, 2019) and received a scholarship to attend the New York Summer Writers Institute at Skidmore. His poems have appeared in or are forthcoming from the *Adroit Journal*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Sycamore Review*, *Rattle*, *Salamander*, *River Styx*, and more.

Michael Torres was born and brought up in Pomona, California, where he spent his adolescence as a graffiti artist. His first full-length collection of poems, *An Incomplete List of Names*, was selected by Raquel Salas Rivera for the National Poetry Series and will be published by Beacon Press in 2020. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Poetry Magazine*, *Ploughshares*, *Georgia Review*, *Water~Stone Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *The Sun*, and online as the *Missouri Review's* Poem of the Week, among others. A VONA alum, Torres's honors include awards and support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, CantoMundo, the Minnesota State Arts Board, the Jerome Foundation, the Camargo Foundation, and the Loft Literary Center. Currently he is an assistant professor in the MFA program at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and a teaching artist with the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop. Visit him at michaeltorreswriter.com

Claire Wahmanholm is the author of *Night Vision* (New Michigan Press, 2017), *Wilder* (Milkweed Editions, 2018) and *Redmouth* (Tinderbox Editions, 2019). Her poems have most recently appeared in or are forthcoming from *Copper Nickel*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Grist*, *RHINO*, *New Poetry from the Midwest 2019*, *PANK*,



Bennington Review, *DIAGRAM*, *The Journal*, and the *Kenyon Review Online*. She lives and teaches in the Twin Cities. Find her online at clairewahmanholm.com.

McKnight Award Judging

McKnight Award judges were selected in the summer of 2019. The identities of the judges are not known to the applicants during the application process, and applicant identities are kept confidential from the judges until they make their selections.

2020 Children's Literature Judge

Uma Krishnaswami writes picture books, novels, chapter books, readers, poems, and short stories for children. Her historical middle grade novel, *Step Up to the Plate, Maria Singh*, won an Asian Pacific American Award for Literature and the FOCAL award from LA Public Library. Her chapter book, *Book Uncle and Me*, won an International Literacy Association Social Justice Literature Award and is a USBBY Outstanding International Book. Uma teaches Writing for Children and Young Adults at Vermont College of Fine Arts. She lives in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.

2020 Spoken Word Judge

Patricia Smith is the award-winning author of eight critically acclaimed books of poetry, including *Incendiary Art* (Triquarterly Books, 2017), winner of the 2018 Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award, the 2018 NAACP Image Award, and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize; *Shoulda Been Jimi Savannah* (Coffee House Press, 2012), winner of the Lenore Marshall Prize from the Academy of American Poets; *Blood Dazzler* (Coffee House Press, 2008), a National Book Award finalist; and *Gotta Go, Gotta Flow* (CityFiles Press, 2015), a collaboration with award-winning Chicago photographer Michael Abramson. Her other books include the poetry volumes *Teahouse of the Almighty* (Coffee House Press, 2006), *Close to Death* (Zoland Books, 1998), *Big Towns Big Talk* (Zoland Books, 2002), *Life According to Motown* (Tia Chucha, 1991), the children's book *Janna and the Kings* (Lee & Low, 2013), and the history *Africans in America* (Mariner, 1999), a companion book



to the award-winning PBS series. Her work has appeared in *Poetry*, *The Paris Review*, *The Baffler*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Tin House* and in *Best American Poetry*, *Best American Essays* and *Best American Mystery Stories*. She co-edited *The Golden Shovel Anthology—New Poems Honoring Gwendolyn Brooks* (University of Arkansas Press, 2017) and edited the crime fiction anthology *Staten Island Noir* (Akashic Books, 2012).

2020 Poetry Judge

Natalie Diaz was born and raised in the Fort Mojave Indian Village in Needles, California, on the banks of the Colorado River. She is Mojave and an enrolled member of the Gila River Indian Tribe. Her first poetry collection, *When My Brother Was an Aztec*, was published by Copper Canyon Press, and her second book, *Postcolonial Love Poem*, was published by Graywolf Press in March 2020. She is a 2018 MacArthur Fellow as well as a Lannan Literary Fellow and a Native Arts Council Foundation Artist Fellow. She was awarded the Princeton Holmes National Poetry Prize and a Hodder Fellowship. She is a member of the board of trustees for the United States Artists, where she is an alumni of the Ford Fellowship. Diaz is director of the Center for Imagination in the Borderlands and is the Maxine and Jonathan Marshall Chair in Modern and Contemporary Poetry at Arizona State University and 2018 MacArthur Fellow.

About the McKnight Artist Fellowships for Writers

Now in its 39th year, the McKnight Artist Fellowships for Writers provide Minnesota writers of demonstrated ability with an opportunity to work on their writing for a concentrated period of time. Five \$25,000 fellowships are awarded. One Award in Children's Literature alternates annually between writers for children under the age of eight and writers for older readers. Four fellowships alternate annually between writers of poetry/spoken word poetry and writers of creative prose. Writers must have either published a book in the genre in which they are applying, have been featured as a performer for a significant amount of readings and performances, or have a significant number of publications in literary magazines. The Loft McKnight Artist Fellowships for Writers are supported by the McKnight Foundation.



Previous McKnight recipients are too numerous to list, but they include Heid Erdrich, Taiyon Coleman, Robert Bly, Patricia Hampl, Margaret Hasse, Jim Moore, Sun Yung Shin, Cary Waterman, Sandra Benitez, Deborah Keenan, Jack El-Hai, Leslie Adrienne Miller, Patricia Weaver Francisco, Barrie Jean Borich, Lorna Landvik, Kate DiCamillo, Molly Beth Griffin, Danez Smith, Kelly Barnhill, Ray Gonzalez, Dobby Gibson, Ed Bok Lee, Heather Bouwman, Khary Jackson, David Mura, Shannon Gibney, and Anne Ursu.

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Incorporated in 1975, The Loft Literary Center is one of the nation's leading independent literary centers. The Loft advances the artistic development of writers, fosters a thriving literary community, and inspires a passion for literature. Learn more: loft.org