



The Loft Literary Center

Open Book, Suite 200
1011 Washington Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55415

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CONTACT:

Chris Jones
612-215-2589
cjones@loft.org

The Loft Literary Center Announces 2018–19 Mirrors and Windows Fellows

Twelve Minnesota Emerging Children’s Writers of Color Selected for a Year-long Fellowship Program

The Loft Literary Center is pleased to announce the recipients of the The Loft Mirrors and Windows Fellowship.

While books for young readers is a thriving sector in publishing, those that are by or about Indigenous people and people of color are significantly underrepresented. This Fellowship’s focus is to mentor Indigenous writers and writers of color to write picture books, middle grade, and young adult literature, Mirrors and Windows. The name is inspired by Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop’s crucial essay, “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors” (1990). The fellows will go through six different workshops with six different experts in the field, as well as be involved with annual Loft events such as Wordplay and Wordsmith. Fellows will also receive individual manuscript consultations.

This program is funded by the Jerome Foundation and through Loft membership support.



2018–19 ENTRIES AND SELECTIONS

The Loft Literary Center received 52 entries to the 2018–19 Loft Mirrors and Windows Fellowship. Three judges—the program’s community lead, and two of the workshop leaders—read through all applications and deliberated to the final twelve.

2018–19 FELLOWS

The 2018-2019 cohort are: **Saymoukda Vongsay, Vong Bidania, Tlahtoki Xochimeh, Taiyon Coleman, Venessa Fuentes, Shalini Gupta, Piyali Dalal, Marcelle Richards, Michael Torres, Zarlisht Niaz, Soojin Pate, and Maya Beck.**

Honorable mentions are: Boonmee Yang, Vanessa Ramos, Regina Santiago, Mai Neng Moua, Lydia Negussie, and Jessica Kieran.

BIOS FOR THE 2018–19 FELLOWS

Maya Beck is a Cali transplant, lapsed Muslim, recovering otaku, and socially-anxious social justice bard. She is also an alum of Givens, Kimbilio, VONA, and the Loft Mentor Series; and volunteers as Paper Darts Story Editor. Her writing has been published or is forthcoming in *LitHub*, *Mizna*, *PANK*, *Pollen Midwest*, *NAT BRUT*, *Catapult*, *Water~Stone Review*, and more. She lives and works in Minneapolis.

Born in Laos, **Vong Bidania** grew up in Saint Paul, Minnesota, where her family resettled as Vietnam War refugees. After studying journalism at St. Catherine University, she moved to New York City and received an MFA in Creative Writing from The New School. She now lives outside the Twin Cities and spends her time daydreaming, reading, writing, and learning to draw.

Taiyon J Coleman’s writing has appeared in *Bum Rush the Page*; *Sauti Mypya*, *Drumvoices Revue*, *Riding Shotgun*; *The Ringing Ear*; *Blues Vision*; *How Dare We! Write*; *A Good Time for the Truth: Race in Minnesota*, and *Places Journal*. Her essay, “Sometimes I Feel like Harriet Tubman,” appears in the fall 2018 issue of *Minnesota Alumni Magazine*, and Taiyon has an essay forthcoming in *Shadowlands: An Illustrated Reader in Racialized Violence in America, Selected Writings on the Art of Ken Gonzales-Day* (Minnesota Museum of American Art). Taiyon J Coleman is a 2017 recipient of a McKnight Foundation Artist Fellowship in Creative Prose, and she is Assistant Professor of English Literature at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota. Currently, Taiyon is working on her YA novel, *Chicago@Fifteen*.



Piyali Nath Dalal, daughter of Indian immigrants, grew up in Wayne, Nebraska. She studied English literature and public policy at the University of Minnesota. Her work experience includes facilitation, teaching, and coordination of student programs. She writes for children, in Minneapolis, where she lives with her husband, daughter, and son.

Venessa Fuentes is a Queer Black Latina who writes. She's one of 16 people of color and indigenous people featured in *A Good Time for the Truth: Race in Minnesota*, an anthology of essays edited by Sun Yung Shin. In 2017, Fuentes and composer Dameun Strange produced "Mother King," an opera about Alberta Williams King, slain activist and mother of Martin Luther King, Jr. She lives in Minneapolis with her wife, their son, and their three dogs.

Shalini Gupta is a writer, researcher and environmental justice activist. A Bush Leadership Fellow and co-founder/former executive director of the Center for Earth, Energy and Democracy, her work is centered in solutions to our ecological crises that are grounded in people and place; and our economic and social histories. Shalini lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota with her husband, two sons, mother, and a community of friends and extended family. Website: www.sgupta.org

Zarlasht Niaz is an Afghan-American writer based out of Minneapolis. Her work centers on youth first language retention and critically examining popular constructions of Afghan and Afghan-American women's issues. Part of this work will be featured on her website zelzela.com, a blog that reinvigorates the cultural heritage of Afghans in the diaspora. When not writing, Zarlasht enjoys cooking, supporting youth development in South Minneapolis, and choreographing dances to Ahmad Zahir's top tracks.

Soojin Pate is a writer and educator who is dedicated to centering the lives and experiences of historically marginalized peoples in her writing and teaching. Since receiving her PhD in American Studies, she has taught courses on critical race theory, women of color feminism, and U.S. history and literature at various colleges and universities in the Twin Cities. She is the author of *From Orphan to Adoptee: U.S. Empire and Genealogies of Korean Adoption* and *Motherloss: A Memoir* (forthcoming). She is excited to participate in the "Mirrors and Windows" program at the Loft to develop her children's books.

Marcelle Richards is a queer, genderfluid, mixed-race Korean (혼혈) word+artist who made Minneapolis home in Nov. 2017. They have roots in Hawaii, California,



and Wisconsin, and they are thrilled to be a part of the vibrant literary community in the Twin Cities. Their current project for the Mirrors and Windows Fellowship is centered on an exploration of anticipatory grief and death through the lens of dream, informed by their life journey with a special bull terrier and spiritual navigations into unseen worlds.

Michael Torres was born and brought up in Pomona, California where he spent his adolescence as a graffiti artist. He has received grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board and the Jerome Foundation. Torres teaches creative writing at Minnesota State University-Mankato, and through the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop. Visit him at: michaeltorreswriter.com

Saymoukda Duangphouxay Vongsay is a Lao American writer whose plays have been presented by the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, Theater Mu, Consortium of Asian American Theater Artists, and Theater Unbound. She's a Playwright's Center and Theater Mu fellow in playwriting, a Loft Literary Center fellow in poetry, a Twin Cities Media Alliance fellow in public art, and an Aspen Ideas Bush Foundation scholar and has received creative grants from the Jerome Foundation, Bush Foundation, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Forecast Public Art, Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, and the MN State Arts Board, to name a few.

Tlahtoki Xochimeh, PhD, LAc ("Dr. T") is a consultant, researcher, and educator. Born in Mexico and residing in Minneapolis, much of his work highlights the need for communities to be able to represent and speak for themselves. He's an adjunct professor at a local university, where he teaches courses in psychology and philosophy. Dr. T is also an acupuncturist, an herbalist, and a nutritional therapist at his private practice, Blackstone Acupuncture.

MIRRORS AND WINDOWS JUDGES

Mirrors and Windows was judged by Dr. Sarah Park Dahlen, Marcie Rendon, and Shannon Gibney.

Sarah Park Dahlen is an associate professor in the Master of Library and Information Science Program at St. Catherine University in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Her research addresses transracially adopted Koreans in children's literature, the information behaviors of adopted Koreans, and diversity in children's literature and



library education. She co-founded and co-edits *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature* with Gabrielle Atwood Halko, co-edited *Diversity in Youth Literature: Opening Doors Through Reading* with Jamie Campbell Naidoo, and co-edited the Children's Literature Association Quarterly's Special Issue on Orphanhood and Adoption in Children's Literature with Lies Wesseling. Her next book projects address race in the wizarding world with Ebony Elizabeth Thomas and Asian American youth literature with Paul Lai.

Shannon Gibney is a writer, educator, activist, and the author of *See No Color* (Carolrhoda Lab, 2015), a young adult novel that won the 2016 Minnesota Book Award in Young Peoples' Literature. Gibney is faculty in English at Minneapolis Community and Technical College, where she teaches critical and creative writing, journalism, and African Diasporic topics. A Bush Artist and McKnight Writing Fellow, her critically-acclaimed new novel, *Dream Country*, is about more than five generations of an African descended family, crisscrossing the Atlantic both voluntarily and involuntarily (Dutton, 2018). In October 2019, University of Minnesota Press will release *What God is Honored Here?: Writings on Miscarriage and Infant Loss By and For Native Women and Women of Color*, which she co-edited with writer Kao Kalia Yang.

Marcie Rendon, citizen of the White Earth Nation. Her debut novel, *Murder on the Red River* (Cinco Puntos Press) won the Pinckley Women Crime Writer's Award 2018 and the Spur Finalist in the Western Writers of America 2018 contemporary novel category. The second novel in the series will be published by Cinco Puntos Press April 2019. One of four nonfiction children's books is *Pow Wow Summer* (MN Historical Press). With four published plays she is the creative mind behind Raving Native Theater productions. She received the Loft's 2017 Spoken Word Immersion Fellowship with poet Diego Vazquez.

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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.