



The Loft Literary Center

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The Loft Literary Center Announces 2021–2022 Mentor Series Fellows

Twelve Minnesota Early Career Writers Selected for the Year-long Fellowship Program

The Loft Literary Center is pleased to announce the recipients of the Loft Mentor Series Fellowship. The Mentor Series Fellowship offers 12 early career Minnesota writers the opportunity to work intensively with six nationally acclaimed writers of prose and poetry.

Selected participants work throughout the year with the six mentors, and all participants and mentors give public readings at the Loft. Dates for those readings will be announced in December. Learn more [about the program here](#).

This program is funded by the Jerome Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the generous support of Loft members.

2021–2022 ENTRIES AND SELECTIONS

The Loft Literary Center received 69 entries to the 2021–2022 Loft Mentor Series Fellowship in Poetry and Creative Prose, from which the current program mentors had the difficult task of choosing the four fellows and two honorable mentions each



in the genres of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. The selection process included the current mentors and program alumni. The fellows are listed below.

Nonfiction Selections

Lizabeth Fiedorow Sjaastad, Irna Landrum, Maureen Ramirez, and Kou Thao have been selected for the yearlong fellowship program in creative nonfiction.

Honorable mentions are Ruth Denny and Cindy Mundahl.

Poetry Selections

Ty Chapman, Eva Song Margolis, Jna Shelomith, and Rupa Shenoy-Thadhani have been selected for the yearlong fellowship program in poetry.

Honorable mentions are Bethany Battafarano and Zach Goldberg.

Fiction Selections

Jessica Eckerstorfer, Alice Paige, Ashley Richardson, and Matt Sharkey-Smith have been selected for the yearlong fellowship program in fiction.

Honorable mentions are Kay Cunningham and A.L. Guetebier.

BIOS FOR THE 2021–2022 LOFT MENTOR SERIES FELLOWS

Twin Cities based author and poet of Nigerian and European descent, **Ty Chapman's** recent accomplishments include being named a Loft Literary Center Mirrors and Windows fellow, creating a one-man shadow puppet and marionette show for Puppet Lab, and publishing poems through multiple literary journals. His poems made the longlist for both Button Poetry's 2020 Chapbook Contest, and Frontier Magazine's 2021 New Voices contest.

His debut picture book *SARAH RISING*, represented by Savannah Brooks, is set to release in May 2022, through Beaming Books.

Jessica Eckerstorfer: Eckerstorfer supposedly means *egg-seller* in old German, but in reality Jessica (she/her) is a strong Filipina-American feminist, writer, and artist based in Minneapolis. She earned her MFA in creative writing, fiction from



Columbia College Chicago in 2021 and is a two time recipient of the Albert P. Weisman Award. Her work can be found in *Pilcrow and Dagger*, *Paper Darts*, and the *Ivory Tower*. In addition, she is the co-founder and arts and community director for Paranoid Tree Press.

Lizabeth Fiedorow Sjaastad was raised in Galesburg, Illinois, and has a BA from Knox College and an MSIR from Loyola University. She came to creative writing later in life after two decades working in organization development with startup businesses and social entrepreneurs. Liz was part of the Loft Literary Center's memoir project cohort in 2018 and was a finalist for the mentor series fellowship the same year. She performed an essay as a cast member in *Listen to Your Mother*, Twin Cities in 2016. Following the performance, she was a guest on the podcast, *This Moved Me*. Her writing has appeared in *Sun Magazine's* Readers' Write section in 2017 and *Motherwell Magazine* in 2020. A chapter from her memoir manuscript was a finalist in the *Midwest Review* Writing Contest, 2021.

Irna Landrum is a Louisiana-bred child of the bayou and a Mississippi River rat. She is a recovering evangelical. Black out loud. Queer on purpose. Hard headed and tender hearted. Irna's work strives for congruency, and she often writes about and through experiences that misalign with her values. Her essays invite the reader into her explorations of grief, curiosity, and full embodiment.

Eva Song Margolis was born in South Korea and grew up in Minneapolis, Minnesota. A Korean American and transracial adoptee, her poems frequently explore identity, kinship, and loss. Her work is also interested in deconstructing ideologies and structures to question what liberation and justice could look like.

Alice Paige is a trans woman, poet, and storyteller living in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Her writing focuses on topics like mythology and the transformative power of queer love. Her work can be found at *FreezeRay Poetry*, *Crabfat Magazine*, *Coffin Bell*, *VASTARIEN*, *Button Poetry*, *Write About Now*, *Luna Station Quarterly*, and *Take A Stand*, *Art Against Hate: A Raven Chronicles Anthology*. She is a Digital Pedagogical Lab Fellow and has her MFA in creative writing from Hamline University.

Maureen Ramirez is a creative nonfiction writer and birder who lives in West St. Paul. She writes from the middle of everything about the boundaries we cross every day, weaving together personal stories and ecological principles. She's a Mexican-Irish, mixed-race, Midwest mom, primarily interested in how we see each



other and understand ourselves. She has taught writing and advocacy at Metro State.

Ashley Richardson is a born and raised New Yorker and Twin Cities transplant. She has learned (with ease) to call both home. Recently, Ashley has received grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board and Art to Change the World. Her short story “The Things My Afro Knows” was a finalist in the 46th New Millennium Writing Awards and published in Tulip Tree’s 2018 anthology, *Stories That Need To Be Told*. Her in-progress novel, *Far Cry From A Woman*, was a finalist in the 2021 Miami Fellowship for Emerging Writers. Ashley graduated with a Master of Fine Arts in fiction from Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Matt Sharkey-Smith is a writer and teacher. He has an MFA in creative writing from Hamline University, and he lives in Minneapolis with his wife and his dog.

Jna Shelomith grew up sporadically homeless in a family that spoke six different languages, with Jewish roots in Morocco and Russia. She found poetry at the intersection of Arabic (created to write sacred poetry) and Riot Grrrl (created for punk rock feminist expression). She is a board member of Mizna and a member of two writing groups. For pay, Jna focuses on community engagement and systems change addressing complex challenges impacting communities in Ramsey County.

Rupa Shenoy-Thadhani is a poet, an immigrant, an artist, a slow learner, an educator, and a community builder. She writes, befriends ducklings, and plants trees in Minnesota.

Kou Thao is a queer Hmong-American writer and healer. He writes at the intersections of culture, identity, resilience, and love. Kou is a 2013 Bush Fellow and a 2014 White House Champion of Change. He is the author of the book chapters: “Mov Ntse Dlej” in *What We Hunger For: Refugee and Immigrant Stories about Food and Family* and “Dangerous Questions: Queering Gender in the Hmong Diaspora” in *Claiming Place: On the Agency of Hmong Women*.

BIOS FOR THE 2021–2022 MENTORS

Fiction



Poupeh Missaghi is a writer, a translator both into and out of Persian, an editor, and an educator. She holds a PhD in English and creative writing from the University of Denver, an MA in creative writing from Johns Hopkins University, and an MA in translation studies. Her debut novel *trans(re)lating house one* was published by Coffee House Press in February 2020. Her nonfiction, fiction, and translations have appeared in numerous journals, and she has several books of translation published in Iran. *I'll Be Strong for You*, her translation of Iranian author Nasim Marashi's novel, was published in spring 2021. As an editor, she worked for many years with Asymptote and is co-editor of *Matters of Feminist Practice* from Belladonna* Collaborative. She is currently a visiting assistant professor at the Department of Writing at the Pratt Institute, Brooklyn; a faculty mentor at the low-residency MFA of Pacific Northwest College of Art, Portland; and a writing consultant at Baruch College, CUNY, NY.

Shannon Gibney is a writer, educator, activist, and the author of *See No Color* (Carolrhoda Lab, 2015) and *Dream Country* (Dutton, 2018), young adult novels that won Minnesota Book Awards in 2016 and 2019. Gibney is faculty in English at Minneapolis College, where she teaches writing. A Bush Artist and McKnight Writing Fellow, her new novel, *Botched*, explores themes of transracial adoption through speculative memoir (Dutton, 2022). In October 2019, University of Minnesota Press released *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.

Creative Nonfiction

Kiese Laymon is a Black southern writer from Jackson, Mississippi. Laymon is the author of the genre-bending novel, *Long Division*, and the essay collection, *How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America*. Laymon's bestselling memoir, *Heavy: An American Memoir*, won the 2019 Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Nonfiction, the 2018 Christopher Isherwood Prize for Autobiographical Prose, the Austen Riggs Erikson Prize for Excellence in Mental Health Media, and was named one of the 50 Best Memoirs of the Past 50 Years by the *New York Times*. The audiobook, read by the author, was named the Audible 2018 Audiobook of the Year. Laymon is the recipient of 2020–2021 Radcliffe Fellowship at Harvard. Laymon is at work on several new projects, including the long poem *Good God*; the horror comedy *And So On*; the children's book *City Summer, Country Summer*; and the film



Heavy: An American Memoir. He is the founder of the Catherine Coleman Literary Arts and Justice Initiative, a program aimed at getting Mississippi kids and their parents more comfortable reading, writing, revising, and sharing.

Anika Fajardo was born in Colombia and raised in Minnesota. Her memoir about that experience, *Magical Realism for Non-Believers: A Memoir for Finding Family*, was a finalist for the Minnesota Book Award and named Best Book (Nonfiction) 2020 by City Pages. Her debut middle-grade novel, *What If a Fish*, was published in 2020 by Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers. She has earned awards from the Minnesota State Arts Board, the Jerome Foundation, and the Loft Literary Center. Anika teaches at the Loft and in Augsburg University's low-residency MFA program. She also creates websites for writers, artists, and other creatives. Learn more at anikafajardo.com.

Poetry

Tiffany Midge, a citizen of the Standing Rock Sioux, is the author of the essay collection *Bury My Heart at Chuck E. Cheese's*, a finalist for a Washington State Book Award. Her poetry collections include *The Woman Who Married a Bear* (University of New Mexico Press, winner of the Kenyon Review Earthworks Indigenous Poetry Prize); *Outlaws, Renegades & Saints: Diary of a Mixed-up Halfbreed* (Greenfield Review Press, winner of the Diane Decorah Memorial Poetry Prize), and *Horns* (forthcoming, Scablands Books). Midge's other honors include a Pushcart Prize, a Simons Public Humanities Fellowship, a Western Heritage Award, and an Eliza So Fellowship. Her work has appeared in *World Literature Today*, *First American Art Magazine*, *McSweeney's*, *Waxwing*, *GAY Magazine*, *Massachusetts Review*, *YES! Magazine*, and more. A former columnist for *Indian Country Today*, she taught writing for Northwest Indian College and resides on the eastern edge of the Palouse region of north central Idaho, in the Columbia River Plateau, homelands of the Nimiipuu. Visit her website: tiffanymidge.wixsite.com/website.

Chris Santiago is the author of *Tula*, selected by A. Van Jordan as the winner of the 2016 Lindquist & Vennum Prize for Poetry and published by Milkweed Editions. A 2018 McKnight Writing Fellow, he has new work forthcoming in *Copper Nickel*, *Interim*, *Couplet Poetry*, and *Action, Spectacle*. He has also received fellowships from Kundiman and the Mellon Foundation/American Council of Learned Societies and



was a finalist for a 2017 Minnesota Book Award. An associate professor of English at the University of St. Thomas in Saint Paul, he received his PhD from the University of Southern California. In February 2019, *Say Home*, his collaboration with composer Lembit Beecher and ethnographer Todd Lawrence, received its world premiere by the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. He teaches creative writing, worldbuilding, and Asian American literature.

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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.