



**The Loft Literary Center**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**The Loft Literary Center Announces 2021–2022 Mirrors and  
Windows Fellows**

**Twelve Minnesota Emerging Children’s Writers of Color Selected for a  
Yearlong Fellowship Program**

The Loft Literary Center is pleased to announce the recipients of 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



## 2021–2022 ENTRIES AND SELECTIONS

The Loft Literary Center received 24 entries to the 2021–2022 Loft Mirrors and Windows Fellowship. Three judges—the Loft’s director of events and awards, the program’s community lead, and one of the workshop leaders—read through all applications and deliberated to the final twelve.

## 2021–2022 FELLOWS

The 2021–2022 cohort are: **Lorena Duarte, Courtney Green, Regina Santiago, Tyra L. Nelson, Amoke Kubat, Magdalena Kaluza, Meera Thillainatesan, Kimberly Sy, Keenan Jones, May Lee-Yang, Monica Rojas, and Billy Thao.**

Honorable mentions are: Terrence Shambly Jr and Patti Kameya.

## BIOS FOR THE 2021–2022 FELLOWS

**Regina Santiago** is a K-2 educator, author, and freelance curriculum writer who comes from an international background. Regina is originally from Manila, Philippines. She attended international school in Jakarta, Indonesia, and immigrated to the United States in 2003. Regina currently works as a kindergarten teacher in Saint Paul. Regina writes and speaks about her immigrant third-culture identity and its impact on her teaching. She also writes and reviews social justice curriculum for various organizations. When not writing or teaching, you will find Regina cooking for her family, embroidering little stuffed animals, or playing with her two cats.

**Tyra L. Nelson** is an educator, poet, and writer who occasionally blogs and serves as the editor in chief for *The Souttown Magazine*: a five-year-old digital and print magazine that tells stories to “implore positive progress” in Black and Brown communities across the globe. She was born on the south side of Chicago but spent part of her childhood in Cedar Falls, Iowa. Her experience as one of only two Black students at her elementary school was a spark that ultimately flamed Tyra’s fascination with words. For the past 21 years, Tyra has been an educator who seeks



every opportunity to hone her gifts as a poet and writer. She currently works as a teacher education specialist for the state of Minnesota and teaches pre-service teachers at a nearby university. She is married to a supportive partner, Don, and is the mother of two boys—Dantarius and Kalim—and stepmom to her bonus daughter, Megan. She enjoys traveling to tropical climates and dreams of one day moving to the island of Curacao, where she will write, teach, and lay on the beach.

**Amoke Kubat's** writings include her memoir, *Missing Mama: My Story of Loss, Sorrow and Healing*; plays, *ANGRY BLACK WOMAN & Well Intentioned White Girl* and *Old Good Pussy & Good Old Pussy*; stories, "A Letter to Herman" and "The Garden," published in the *Fergus Falls Mini-Anthology*; and essays in the *Minnesota Women's Press*. She loves books with children of color and is ready to write her first book.

**Magdalena Kaluza** is a queer, mixed-race cultural worker. As the child of a working class activist and a Maya K'iche' political refugee, Magdalena learned to practice community organizing and reverence for plants and animals early on. Magdalena has hosted writing workshops for all ages and performed at venues across Minnesota with the latinx poetry collective Palabristas. Magdalena co-wrote the puppet show *Star Girl Clan* and loves to garden, bike, and play with loved ones. They currently work for Inquilinx Unidxs por Justicia, helping to build the Sky Without Limits housing co-operative.

**Meera Thillainatesan** comes from a background in academia and loves books with a STEM angle. She moderated a NE-SCBWI critique group in Connecticut for two years until she moved to Minnesota right before the pandemic hit. To gain a deeper understanding of publishing, she began interning at a literary agency, and now, more than a year later, she's started to work as an agent, building a list in narrative nonfiction. As a literary agent, she hopes to promote the voices of primary researchers, especially those of color; and as a recent addition to the Minnesota writing community, she hopes to meet fellow writers in the area.

**Lorena Duarte** is Salvadoran born, Minnesota raised, and Harvard educated. She is a poet, playwright, and performer and has received grants from the Jerome Foundation and the Minnesota State Arts Board. Her work has been published in



anthologies such as *The Wandering Song: Central American Writing in the United States* (2017) and *Theatre Under My Skin: Contemporary Salvadoran Poetry* (2014).

**Kimberly Sy** is a Minneapolis-based writer, librarian, and teacher. She believes in the power of narrative and the importance of reading stories that are not true.

**Courtney Green** is a toddler-wrangler and hearth-maker that talks to plants. She loves enjoying the beauty of creation while making medicine in the garden. She lives with her husband, Jerad, and two littles, Iggy and Ollie, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on the ancestral lands of the Dakota people.

**May Lee-Yang** is a writer, performer, and educator. She is the author of the children's book *The Imaginary Day*. Her theater-based works have been presented at Theater Mu, the Center for Hmong Arts and Talent, and Intermedia Arts. She is a former Playwright Center McKnight Fellow and a Bush Leadership Fellow, and she holds an MFA in creative writing from the University of Minnesota.

**Keenan Jones** is an educator, leader, and author who is committed to literacy and inspiring the next generation of children. He has been in education for over 10 years, teaching grades 4th–8th. Mr. Jones is also the founder of a new emerging nonprofit called Literacy for Freedom that is dedicated to Black male literacy achievement. In addition to that, Keenan is a member of the Minnesota Children's Cabinet Advisory Council, led by Governor Tim Walz, and is dedicated to making Minnesota the best place for children to grow up. His passion for literacy is infectious, and he is ready to tackle the next phase of his life, which involves producing books that will inspire children of all ages. His education includes an AA from Minnesota State University of Mankato, a BA from Augsburg College in elementary education, and an MA in literacy education from Hamline University.

**Monica Rojas** is a bilingual queer Latina who hopes to engage readers through magical realism, joy, and play. As an educator, she has helped students learn to be heard and to listen. Monica lives with her kinship family (her wife, niece, and nephew) in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she befriends local librarians, mends



clothes, and stoop sits. She has a pending picture book publication: *Nana and Abuela*.

**Billy Thao** is a Hmong visual artist and illustrator based in the Twin Cities. Thao began his career as a freelance visual artist and has exhibited his artworks within Minnesota from Red Wing to Minneapolis. In addition, he has donated numerous artworks to the Center for Hmong Studies and the State Capitol. Billy's debut book, *Yang Warriors*, written by author Kao Kalia Yang, was released on April 13, 2021. Thao has also collaborated with various organizations such as the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators and the Great Northern Festival.

## MIRRORS AND WINDOWS JUDGES

Mirrors and Windows was judged by Dr. Sarah Park Dahlen, Marcie Rendon, and Bao Phi.

**Sarah Park Dahlen** is an associate professor at the School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She co-edits *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*, and her next books address race in the wizarding world with Ebony Elizabeth Thomas and Asian American youth literature with Paul Lai. She is represented by Tricia Lawrence of the Erin Murphy Literary Agency. You can find out more at [sarahpark.com](http://sarahpark.com) or by following @readingspark.

**Molly Beth Griffin** is the author of the picture books *Ten Beautiful Things*, *Rhoda's Rock Hunt*, and *Loon Baby*; the School Sidekicks series of beginning readers; and the YA novel *Silhouette of a Sparrow*. She holds an MFA in writing for children and young adults from Hamline University and has taught classes and critiqued manuscripts at the Loft for twelve years. She is represented by Jennifer Flannery of Flannery Literary and has three forthcoming picture books in the works. She lives in South Minneapolis with her partner and their two children. For info about her books, services, and monthly Picture Book Salon, please visit [mollybethgriffin.com](http://mollybethgriffin.com).



**Bao Phi** is the director of events and awards at the Loft Literary Center. His three books for children have garnered numerous local and national recognition, such as a Caldecott honor, Charlotte Zolotow medal, and Minnesota Book Award.

*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.*