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The Loft Literary Center Announces
2023 Mirrors and Windows Fellows

Thirteen 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.

2023 ENTRIES AND SELECTIONS

The Loft Literary Center received 22 entries to the 2023 Loft Mirrors and Windows Fellowship. Three judges read through all applications and deliberated to select the final thirteen.
2023 FELLOWS

The 2023 cohort is: Kapono Asuncion, Ifrah Mansour, Matshoshi Matsafu, Rebecca McCammon, Beatrice Ogeh, Maureen Ramirez, Jamie Schumacher, Said Shaiye, Abdullahi Soyan, Debra Stone, Angelica Torralba-Olague, Mishy Wang, Andrew Young.

Honorable mention: Keliyah Perkins.

BIOS FOR THE 2023 FELLOWS

Kapono Asuncion
Kapono Asuncion is a visual artist, writer, and poet based in Minneapolis, MN. Emerging from academia with a Master's of Science in Inequalities and Social Science from the London School of Economics, Kapono pivoted to the visual arts and storytelling to bring their craft into alignment with their desire to create in ways unhampered by entrenched academic conventions. Their art is an archive of an autistic, ADHD, trans, queer, and Indigenous artist's daydreams. Their goal is to affirm the place of imagination and fantasy in exploring questions around home, identity, family, and community. They work toward this mission by creating worlds and beings that invite imagination, playfulness, and curiosity. Kapono lives in a little blue cottage with their partner and elderly dog, where they add to piles of paintings, enjoy Ursula K. Le Guin read alouds, and doodle little aliens.

Ifrah Mansour
Ifrah Mansour is a Somali, refugee, black, Muslim, multimedia artist and an educator based in Minnesota. Her artwork explores trauma through the eyes of children to uncover the resiliencies of blacks, Muslims, and refugees. She interweaves poetry, puppetry, films, and installations. She creates art out of her most painful experiences, to connect diverse communities and spark a healing conversation.

Matshoshi Matsafu
Matshoshi Matsafu is a multidisciplinary creative, working primarily in the tech industry doing product, visual design as well as illustration. With a background in advertising, marketing, and education, they continually pursue the craft of storytelling in various contexts. When they aren't cooking up a feast, dancing salsa in their socks, or absorbing sci-fi literature and anime, they experiment with creating immersive experiences that center on intersectional Black narratives. One day they hope to make small humans smile on the inside when they see themselves reflected in the stories Matshoshi creates.
Rebecca McCammon
Day to day and season to recent seasons, Becky McCammon is a circle keeper and restorative ally to schools and community organizations around the Twin Cities and Midwest. Becky claimed self-employment and becoming her own fairly mediocre "office manager" in June 2021. Since then, her life has accumulated subscriptions to Zoom, Canva, Squarespace, Seoulbox (for fabulous Korean treats) and August: For and With Menstruators (for her kiddo). But can she write? These days, Beau Sia’s lines from "Give Yourself Permission" purr like a life melody: no one taught you what healthy relationships are. give yourself permission to become self-taught". Often, Becky wonders if she was ever really taught to write for herself, for others, and a braiding of the two important audiences towards liberation. Becky is more likely to write notes in cursive than printing, is dedicated to two spaces after every period, and is recently claiming a great deal of creative license with ALL CAPS and italicized import.

Beatrice Ogeh
Beatrice Ogeh is an emerging writer and a recent graduate of the University of St. Thomas. Her work, which aims to shine a light on subjects such as race and representation, mental illness, and queerness, has appeared in Runestone and other undergraduate literary journals. She lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota, where she is hard at work (occasionally) on her first novel.

Maureen Ramirez
Maureen Ramirez is a creative nonfiction writer and birder who has published in the Under Review and The Breakwater Review. 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.

Jamie Schumacher
Jamie Schumacher is a Sri-Lankan Polish American artist living in Bloomington, Minnesota whose work reflects her passion for culture and community. Her murals can be seen throughout the Twin Cities Metro, her paintings and photography have been exhibited nationally, and her written work has been featured by Pollen, the Star Tribune, and MN Women’s Press.

Said Shaiye
Said Shaiye is an Autistic Somali Writer & Photographer. His debut book, Are You Borg Now? was named a 2022 Minnesota Book Award Finalist in Creative Nonfiction & Memoir. He has contributed essays to the anthologies Muslim American Writers at Home, The Texas Review’s All-Poetry Issue, and We Are Meant to Rise: Voices for Justice from Minneapolis to
Abdullahi Soyan
Abdullahi Janno is a storyteller and educator. He writes short stories in Somali and English about the global experiences of Somalis and is the author of Dhakafaar, a collection of Somali stories published in 2017. "When River Stopped Singing to Cloud" is his first picture book in English. Abdullahi lives with his wife and children in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Debra Stone
Debra J Stone is a writer, advocate for bicyclist of color and a member of Minnesota's Major Taylor Bicycle Club and Black Girls Who Bike. When not riding the bicycle paths, cross-country skiing or traveling, she belongs to several writing groups in Minneapolis. Debra's poetry, essays and fiction can be found in Under the Gum Tree, Random Sample Review, Green Mountains Review (GMR), About Place Journal, Saint Paul Almanac, Wild Age Press, Gyroscope, Tidal Basin, and forthcoming in other literary journals. Sundress Publishers nominated Debra's essay, Grandma Essie's Vanilla Poundcake, Best of the Net, judged by Hanif Abdurraqib in 2019. In 2021 her poem, year-of-staying-in-place, was nominated as Best of the Net and Pushcart nominated. She's received residencies at the Vermont Studio Center, Callaloo, The Anderson Center for Interdisciplinary Studies, New York Mills Arts Residency and is a Kimbilio Fellow. In 2019, she was a Loft Fellow for The Loft Mentor Series in creative nonfiction. She is also a recipient of a Minnesota State Arts Board Cultural Community Partnership Grant and Minnesota Regional Arts Council Grant. Debra is Vice-chair and Chair of the Governance Committee at Graywolf Press in Minneapolis.

Angelica Torralba-Olague
Angelica Torralba-Olague writes historical and realistic fiction, poems and ethnographical anthologies. She believes that storytelling is what humanizes our lived experiences and creates compassion with one another. She hopes her stories inspire children and teens to share their experiences, celebrate and sustain culture and language. Additionally, to encourage them to explore challenges and process grief through writing. A licensed ESL and social studies teacher, Angelica is a stalwart advocate for Ethnic Studies curriculum in K-12 schools and for legislation to increase the number of BIPOC educators. She has published a collection of her students' literary works as celebrated anthologies entitled “Immigrant Stories” and “Words Unburden Me.” A national fellow for the Institute for
Teachers of Color, and an alumna of the Minnesota Writing Project cohort, Angelica teaches, writes and resides in Minnesota.

Mishy Wang
Mishy Wang is committed to sharing heartwarming stories that celebrate her Chinese-American heritage. She has advocated for Asian-American communities through her work in local nonprofits and higher education. In her spare time, she enjoys drinking tea, knitting too many sweaters, and taking care of her two bunnies, Bao and Mochi.

Andrew Young
Andrew Young (he/they) is a Taiwanese-Indonesian-American puppeteer, artist, and educator based in Minneapolis. Andrew is a shy but aspiring writer. As a part of their work they are interested in collaboration and community building, exploring the natural world, and aiming light towards mental health and our inner worlds.

Honorables/Alternates

Keliyah Perkins
Keliyah Perkins is a 25 year old Behavioral Therapist. She has created several pieces of work from poetry to short stories to screen plays. It has been her passion to write since the age of 11 years old. She started a blog to document her writing in another form in high school and posted her collection of poetry from the ages 13-15 on Wattpad. She has continued to post work that she has created throughout her life out of randomness or from class assignments on Wattpad. She hopes to continue to write and get recognition in Minnesota if nowhere else.

MIRRORS AND WINDOWS JUDGES

Mirrors and Windows applications were judged by Dr. Sarah Park Dahlen, Molly Beth Griffith, and Mélina Mangal.

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 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.

Mélina Mangal’s work has been published by Milkweed Editions, Coffee House Press, W.W. Norton, and Carolina Wren Press. She is the author of five biographies for youth, including The Vast Wonder of the World: Biologist Ernest Everett Just, winner of the Carter G. Woodson Award. Her latest book, Jayden's Impossible Garden, won the first Strive/Free Spirit African American Voices in Children's Literature contest, was recognized as a Blueberry Honor book by the Evanston Public Library for inspiring love of nature and action for planet earth, was named One of the Best Children's Books of the Year by Bank Street Center for Children's Literature, and was nominated for the Minnesota Star of the North Reading Award. Mélina is also a school library media teacher and enjoys spending time outdoors with her family. https://www.melinamangal.com/

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.