



## Milestones in Loft History

Incorporated on August 22, 1975, the organization started in Marly Rusoff's book store when she encouraged a group of writers to offer a few classes and readings in the upstairs loft. Over the years, it grew as a community-based nonprofit to become one of the nation's leading independent literary centers. The Loft now has an annual budget over \$2 million and serves thousands of writers and readers each year. Annually, the Loft offers hundreds of classes, many awards and grants, reading and spoken word series, and literary resources such as small library, writing studios, and a book club room.

### 1973

At Rusoff & Co. Book Dealers (1302 Southeast 4th Street) in Dinkytown near the University of Minnesota's Minneapolis campus, Marly Rusoff coaxes Robert Bly into reading his poems aloud. The response from the customers leads to more readings at the store.

### 1974



In a second floor room above the store, in a space devoted to small press and little magazines, Marly Rusoff begins to host publication readings for local authors. The idea to hold workshops in the space begins when Saint Paul poet Jim Moore, in search for a space to conduct a poetry workshop, asks Rusoff if he could use the room.



Unable to afford continuing rent payments on the upstairs room, Rusoff contacts several friends, including Moore, Patricia Hampl, Phebe Hanson, and Michael Dennis Browne, and presents them with the idea of forming a "poets' club" that would support itself by charging dues of \$15 per year. A fundraising party, emceed by Garrison Keillor, is held and 100 memberships are sold.

### **1975**

The "poets' club," becomes what is now known as "the Loft," and files for nonprofit status and receives a grant from the State Arts Board to hire a part-time coordinator, Sue Ann Martinson, and sponsor a series of workshops.

### **1976**

The Loft officially opens in its new home at 406 13th Avenue SE on September 11 and classes begin on October 1. The monthly Loft Newsletter begins publication with Sue Ann Martinson as editor.

### **1977**

On April 29, the Loft holds a benefit reading featuring Allen Ginsberg. The Loft plans to move again in June, but that move is cancelled when a deal with Dinkytown Liquors falls through. Peter Mladinic is hired as part-time Loft Coordinator.

### **1978**

The Loft eventually moves to 3200 Chicago Avenue, in South Minneapolis, the former site of Modern Times Dry Cleaners. Rusoff's husband, Ed Felien, plans to open a restaurant with an artsy counter culture ambience on the first floor. Loft members have to dodge the rubble of cafe construction as they climb the narrow stairway to participate in Loft activities up on the 2nd floor. Finally, long behind schedule, Modern Times Cafe opens for business in November.

The move is not without incident. A group of local Powderhorn neighborhood residents, outraged by the plans, circulate flyers warning of activities that would take place in the establishment—beer drinking, live music, readings, and performance. One woman in the area asks, "Why can't they keep poetry on Lake Street?" [Lake Street was a nearby "adult" entertainment district.] Another irate neighbor storms into Rusoff's [literary] bookstore back at the University to "check out the pornography that will be coming into our Powderhorn neighborhood."



Nonetheless, on May 20, a benefit reading for the new Loft is scheduled with Senator Eugene McCarthy and Robert Bly. Due to an Airline strike, McCarthy is forced to cancel. Etheridge Knight reads in his place.

## **1979**

The annual Loft Benefit takes place at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and features Eddie Benton Banai and Three Fire Drum, Jane Katz, Carey Waterman, Charley Waterman, and David Martinson. The monthly Loft Newsletter is redesigned and expanded to become *A View from the Loft*.

The Loft offers studio space to writers. The Writers' Support Group begins regular meetings, free and open to the public, the predecessor of all Loft open groups. Jill Breckenridge Haldeman becomes Loft Coordinator.

## **1980**

The Loft launches the Mentor Series, bringing together nationally prominent authors with promising local writers. Gretchen Artisg of *The Sun* declares it "Destined to be imitated," and the series has been a resounding success ever since. The first year features poets Marge Piercy, Philip Levine, and Galway Kinnell. Mona Van Duyn replaces Muriel Rukeyser, who passed away. Program Director Margot Kriel becomes Loft Coordinator.

## **1981**

The Loft Board of Directors approves a new mission statement: "The mission of the Loft is to foster a writing community, the artistic development of individual writers, and an audience for literature." The Loft seeks to recognize and encourage cultural diversity and pluralism in its membership and in all of its programs.

Playwright's Center and the Loft present a weekend Writer's Survival Workshop and publish a *Writer's Survival Manual*. Featured presentations include editors, agents, tax experts, funders, and other professionals in the publishing industry. Ellen Hawley becomes editor of *A View from the Loft*, growing the membership publication into a monthly literary magazine through 1999. Susan Broadhead becomes Loft Director, building programs and guiding the Loft forward into 1994.



## 1982

In March, the first winners of the Loft McKnight Fellowships for Writers are announced. From 140 entries, cash grants are awarded to poets Robert Bly, Marisha Chamberlain, William Meissner, and Michael Moos. In prose, grants go to Patricia Hampl, Susan Allen Toth, Susan Welch, and Robert Williams. The Loft holds its first Used Book Sale in Town Square Park in Saint Paul.

## 1983

The Northwest Area Foundation grants funding to the Loft for an innovative new performance collaboration of writers and theater professionals called Writers On Stage. Northwind Story Hour begins the Loft's first competition for authors of children's literature. Loft offers credit-earning courses at Metro State University.

## 1984

On September 7, the Loft moves from the Modern Times to the Playwright's Center, 2301 East Franklin Avenue, in Minneapolis. The building is an old church requiring heavy renovation under the guidance of architect Garth Rockcastle, the skills of author/carpenter Lester Joos, and the volunteer labor of many dedicated Loft members.

The Loft Scholarship fund is created, awarding five scholarships to writers who might not otherwise be able to take advantage of Loft classes. The Loft wins a "Distinguished Production" Kudos Award from the Twin Cities Drama Critics Circle for its production of *Secret Traffic*, the first of its pioneering Writers On Stage events. KUOM radio and the Loft present *The Poem That Never Ends*, a series of 13 programs of contemporary poetry featuring more than 50 poets. *Selections*, an anthology of work from the recipients of Loft-McKnight Fellowships, is published for the first time.

## 1985

The Creative Nonfiction Residency is launched, bringing a nationally recognized author to work for one month with local writers. The initial writer-in-residence is Terrence Des Pres. The Loft organizes and hosts a national meeting of literary centers. Fifteen organizations are represented in this first-ever of its kind gathering. Deborah Keenan and Carol Bly initiate the Loft Manuscript Critique Service.



## 1986

The Loft hosts a special weekend tribute to poet Tom McGrath on his 70th birthday. Events feature Robert Bly, Meridel LeSueur, Reginald Gibbons, Fred Whitehead, Sharon Dubiago, Alvaro Cardona-Hine, and many others, along with a screening of *The Movie at the End of the World* (a portrait of McGrath's life and works).

Milkweed Editions, the Loft, and Nodin Press begin work on a series of anthologies featuring Minnesota writers. The Loft initiates a new writers Study and Retreat Fund, with backing from the Jerome Foundation.

## 1987

In May, the Loft sponsors a reading by controversial poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko, his first appearance in the Twin Cities since 1972, when he suffered a broken rib caused by demonstrators who interrupted his reading at Macalester College.

Minnesota Public Radio and the Loft produce an eight-part radio program, *Himpl and Bly On Books*, featuring Patricia Himpl and Carol Bly, discussing current books and literary topics. The Loft sponsors *Minnesota Writes Poetry*, an anthology edited by Jim Moore and Cary Waterman, published by Milkweed Editions and Nodin Press.

## 1988

British Poet and journalist James Fenton becomes the Loft International Writer-in-Residence, a new program funded by the McKnight Foundation. The Loft begins an ongoing initiative, the Amnesty Action Project in Memory of Terrence DesPres, in which they coordinate letter-writing campaigns on behalf of specific imprisoned writers, as identified by Amnesty International. Prominent Malawian poet Jack Mapanji is the first.

The Loft helps celebrate the 20th anniversary of the anti-war Honeywell Project with a reading by Grace Paley at the University of Minnesota.

## 1989

WCCO anchor Dave Moore reads from Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* at the Loft in protest of the Ayatollah Khomeini's sentence of death on Rushdie. The reading was



a response from the Twin Cities Artistic Community Ad Hoc Committee in Protest of Censorship and Intimidation.

The Loft takes over sponsorship of the annual Minnesota Festival of the Book, to be held in Saint Paul at the Landmark Center and Rice Park. The Loft receives a grant from the Blandin Foundation to begin the Minnesota Literature Live program.

### **1990**

In November, the Loft moves to the Pratt Community Center, 66 Malcolm Avenue, in southeast Minneapolis. Loft membership passes the 2,000 mark. The Loft begins the Inroads program, a mentorship program serving emerging writers in the African American, Asian American, Native American, and Latino communities.

The Loft publishes *The Origin of Tigers*, its first perfect bound anthology of Loft-McKnight Fellowship winners' work. The Loft cosponsors a two-day event celebrating Meridel LeSueur's 90th birthday featuring Pete Seeger, Ancestor Energy, the Heart of the Beast Puppet Theater, and others. Loft begins the Loft at Loring reading series (at the Loring Bar).

### **1991**

The Loft receives a two-year \$208,000 grant from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. At the time, this is the largest grant in the organization's history, and is meant to underwrite programs that transcend the traditional formats of literary events. The Loft kicks off its Literary Travel Program.

### **1992**

Loft Small Press Library opens in its first dedicated space. Off the Page Literature Performance grants are offered by the Loft to support interdisciplinary productions. Minnesota Center for Book Arts publishes a series of chapbooks by mentors from the Loft Inroads program (Alexs Pate, David Mura, Sandra Benítez, and Jim Northrup).

### **1993**

Coinciding with National Banned Books Week, Just Say #%&\*@! is a week-long series of Loft events celebrating freedom of expression. Events include: a dialogue with Kathy Acker, Amiri Baraka, and Nat Hentoff; a reading and forum with Lorrie



Moore and Mona Simpson; free speech read-ins; and performance art with J. Otis Powell! and Patrick Scully at the Rogue nightclub.

The Loft sponsors Sunday Slams, kicking it off with special host Miguel Algarín, founder of the Nuyorican Poets Cafe. Readings are held throughout the Twin Cities in venues such as the Rogue, Borders Book Shop, the Uptown Bar, and the New Franklin Theater. The slams culminate in December with performances by the Nuyorican Poets, including Dana Bryant, Bob Holman, Tracie Morris, and Edwin Torres, who read to a sold-out crowd at the Walker Art Center.

Minnesota Dance alliance and the Loft present IMIX, a special holiday production based upon the writings of children's author Virginia Hamilton. IMIX is staged at the Hennepin Center for the Arts and combines dance, sculptural stage design, story, and music.

## **1994**

The Minnesota Writers Career Initiative program is announced, funded by the Jerome Foundation. The Loft-at-Large series begins, featuring established writers from the Upper Midwest reading from their works-in-progress. The Inroads mentorship program adds a gay/lesbian/bisexual category. The Loft is instrumental in founding LitLink, an association of not-for-profit literary organizations and presses.

The Loft opens new Loft-McKnight International Residency program with Central American author and activist Claribel Alegría. The Loft National Prize in Poetry and Literature begins accepting submissions. *Speaking in Tongues*, a perfect bound anthology of work by Inroads program mentors and participants is published. Basic Needs, a new program at local high schools encouraging teen parents to write about their experiences, is initiated.

David Mura and Alexis Pate collaborate on *Secret Colors*, a performance piece offering a compelling alternate vision of being artists, men of color, and friends.

Administrative Director Nancy Gaschott assumes the responsibilities of Interim Loft Executive Director in July. In November, Linda Myers, former director of Hamline University's Liberal Studies Program, becomes the new Loft Executive Director.



## 1995

The Minnesota History Center is filled to capacity for a Loft tribute to Minnesota literary legend Frederick Manfred. Readers include Michael Dennis Browne, Carol Bly, and others. The Loft, Graywolf Press, and KFAI Radio launch *Write On Radio!*, a weekly radio anthology of readings, performance, and literary news.

In collaboration with the Walker Art Center, the Loft launches SPINE, a program that encourages young writers to push the limits of page-to-stage performance. The Loft also introduces Local Motion, a new reading series at the Blue Moon Café featuring writers who are also Loft teachers.

## 1996

The Loft, now the Nation's largest literary center, gives more than \$160,000 in grants and awards to writers. John Irving makes his first-ever Twin Cities appearance before over 500 people for a Loft benefit. LitLink and the Loft celebrate National Poetry Month with a six-hour poetry fest and literary fair at Mall of America. The Loft and the Archie Givens Sr. Collection present a special Langston Hughes Birthday Celebration featuring J. Otis Powell! and Alexis Pate.

*Colors* magazine and the Loft cosponsor Journey from Anger to Wisdom: Perspectives from Communities of Color, a national competition for writers of color. The Loft goes online with its new Web page at [www.loft.org](http://www.loft.org), with webmasters Pete Munene and Bob Williams.

## 1997

Irish poet Evan Boland is featured with a reading and master class in conjunction with the Center for Irish Studies of the University of St. Thomas. The Loft begins its highly successful summer youth writing classes, later expanded to include fall, winter, and spring offerings.

The Loft and Walker Art Center present no place (like home), a collaboration of readings, performance, and exhibition between visual artists and writers. The John Engman Scholarship Fund is established in memory of the late poet by his parents.

## 1998





Awakenings to a Literary Life is a new series in which successful writers recall their own literary “awakenings” and the authors who inspired them. Featured writers include Judith Guest, Kate Green, Diane Glancy, Bart Schneider, Patricia Weaver Francisco, Alexis Pate, Jonis Agee, and Patricia Hampl. Seeing Whiteness, presented by the Loft and *Hungry Mind Review*, is a new series of screenings and discussion exploring cross-cultural issues.

The Loft Mentor Series celebrates its 20th anniversary. The Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund selects the Loft, along with 7 other U.S. literary centers, to participate in the new Audience for Literature Network. Loft forms a search group to find a permanent home for the organization. *Write On Radio!* wins a National Federation of Community Broadcasters award. New Stories, Old Stories is a new Loft program in metro area schools encouraging students to chronicle the stories of their ancestors.

## **1999**

The Loft, Minnesota Center for Book Arts, and Milkweed Editions agree to purchase and renovate an 1880’s vintage warehouse at 1011 Washington Avenue, in Minneapolis. A \$5.5 million capital campaign is underway. Garth Rockcastle is architect for the project. On May 25th, a naming ceremony attended by hundreds of well wishers including Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton, names the new facility Open Book. Loft Administrative Director Nancy Gaschott also serves as Open Book’s Transition Director.

Former Poet Laureate of the United States, Rita Dove visits the Twin cities as part of the Loft Mentor Series 20th Anniversary/Dayton Hudson Visiting Writer Series. Pulitzer Prize winning poet Yusef Komunyakaa draws overflow crowds for his Mentor Series reading and U of M Given’s Collection forum.

## **2000**

In February, the Loft, Milkweed Editions, and the Minnesota Center for Book Arts move into their permanent homes in Open Book. The center also includes Ruminator Books, the Coffee Gallery restaurant, writer’s studios, MCBA Shop, book & writer’s group meeting room, Dayton Hudson Performance Hall, and more. Thousands of literati attend the Grand Opening Celebration in May.



The Ford Foundation announces that the Loft is 1 of only 27 organizations nationwide to receive a \$1 million challenge grant to create a general operating endowment. The McKnight Artist Fellowships for Writers, Loft Awards in Poetry and Creative Prose increase to \$25,000 each, and a new category for children's literature is added.

Talking Volumes, a new regional book club cosponsored by the *Star Tribune*, Minnesota Public Radio, and the Loft debuts on Minnesota Public Radio. Nationally prominent authors read from and discuss their latest books on air with Katherine Lanpher at the Fitzgerald Theater. Fall term includes a record 70 class and workshop offerings.

## **2001**

*A View from the Loft* receives the Minnesota Magazine and Publications Association Publishing Excellence Award for Overall Design. The Loft receives the U.S. Bank Sally Ordway Irvine Award for Initiative and the Minnesota Council of Nonprofit's Nonprofit Mission Award for Innovation.

A new collaboration between the University of Minnesota/Guthrie BFA Acting Program and the Loft, Reading Allowed, brings actors together with writers for special staging and discussion of their work. Marshall Field's Project Imagine and the Loft present a special appearance by fabled poet Grace Paley.

Salman Rushdie, author of *Satanic Verses*, is scheduled for a Talking Volumes (cosponsored by the Loft, MPR, and the Star Tribune) regional book appearance on September 11. The event is hastily cancelled in the wake of the World Trade Center tragedy that same day. On September 22, a special memorial reading called Beyond Words, September 11, 2001, Minnesota Writers Respond, takes place. The event is broadcast on Minnesota Public Radio and an anthology by the same name is published.

The Equilibrium spoken word/performance/tribute poetry series opens, bringing together national and local artists, showcasing the talents of people of color, Indigenous artists, and marginalized communities. Internationally known poet Robert Bly celebrates his 75th birthday with a reading, tribute, and exhibit of memorabilia at the Loft. The Rachel Gaschott Ritchie Resource Library is dedicated.



## 2002

Reflecting the Loft's expansion of programs with its move into Open Book, increases include: membership, 42%; honoraria and fellowships, 27%; youth programs, 76%; and adult education, 78%. The Loft Mentor Series and the Loft Creative Nonfiction Program are combined to offer 12 Minnesota writers the opportunity to study with six nationally prominent mentors in each of the three forms.

*Speakeasy* magazine is launched. Edited by Bart Schneider, *Speakeasy* is a national literary journal featuring literary commentary, book reviews, and original fiction, nonfiction and poetry. The Loft announces the first annual *Speakeasy* Prize in Poetry and Prose, offering both cash prizes and publication.

*A View from the Loft* becomes a bi-monthly, tabloid-size, Loft membership publication, edited by Sarah Anderson. Each issue features articles on the writer's craft and life, news of Loft programs and events, and news about Loft members. Author Salman Rushdie makes a belated appearance on Talking Volumes, following the cancellation of his visit one year earlier on 9/11.

## 2003

The first annual Festival of Children's Literature features a weekend of presentations and workshops by prominent authors, publishers, illustrators, agents, and other professionals in children's literature. The Loft and Parents in Community Action join together on a national literacy program for preschoolers called StoryQUEST.

*One Nation News*, a Twin Cities' African American newspaper, and the Loft cosponsor Write O.N.N., a competition to celebrate emerging authors of short fiction. Intermedia arts and the Loft present a new series, Film First Fridays, an opportunity for literary artists to respond to the work of local filmmakers.

The Loft, together with the National Writers Union and the Minnesota Magazine Publishers Association present the Magazine Celebration, a networking event for publishing professionals. The Loft cosponsors the Minnesota Poetry Festival featuring Juan Felipe Herrera, Jane Hirshfield, and Charles Simic.



Poet and Loft founder Phebe Hanson celebrates her 75th birthday and the publication of her newest collection, *Why Still Dance, 75 Years; 75 Poems*, with a reading and tribute at the Loft.

## **2004**

The Loft Mentor Series celebrates its 25th anniversary with Super Book Sunday, an all day reading and book fair. The Loft begins offering weekend retreats for writers at Open Book and Words in the Woods, a 3-day workshop at the Gunflint Lodge, on the Gunflint Trail in Northern Minnesota.

*Speakeasy* magazine receives a Gold Medal for Excellence from the Minnesota Magazine and Publications Association. The magazine also begins its series of Speak Out town hall-style dialogue events in bookstores around the country.

The Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, the Minnesota International Center, and the Loft host a discussion and book signing by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Former senator and anti-war presidential candidate Eugene McCarthy reads at the Loft.

Poet/musician Billy Corgan, of rock group Smashing Pumpkins, makes a surprise publication reading/discussion/book signing appearance at the Loft to a double capacity overflow crowd. *Polar Express* author Chris Van Allsburg is featured in a special holiday presentation of Talking Volumes.

The Loft celebrates its 30th anniversary and kicks off the public phase of its million-dollar endowment drive with a gala dinner and auction, featuring nationally acclaimed author Pat Conroy. The benefit takes place at the Mill City Museum.

## **2005**

The Loft Endowment Drive is a resounding success, making its goal of raising one million dollars to match the Ford Foundation's challenge grant which recognizes the Loft for innovative artistic programming and for defining the role of the literary center. This is the Loft's first endowment and ensures the organization's permanence in the local and national arts community.



The Shabo Award for Children's Picture Book Writers is inaugurated, providing a mentorship opportunity for up to 8 writers with nearly completed manuscripts. U.S. Poet Laureate Ted Kooser visits the Loft. The Loft organizes Headwaters to the Delta, a literary benefit for those affected by Hurricane Katrina.

## **2006**

The Loft is one of only ten organizations selected by the National Endowment for the Arts for the inaugural year of The Big Read. The program is a national initiative to encourage literary reading by encouraging communities to come together to read one book (*Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston). The Loft's summer creative writing program for children and teens celebrates its 10th year. A day-long convening, Reading and Writing in the Age of the iPod, brings together visionaries to discuss the literary arts' changing technological landscape. The Loft offers a new two-year nonacademic apprenticeship for advanced writers, the Loft Master Track. The Loft's first weekend Fiction Writers' Festival takes place. *A View from the Loft* celebrates 30 years of publication.

## **2007**

The Loft offers two new weekend writing festivals: the Memoir Festival, featuring Patricia Hampl and Katherine Lanpher; and the Travel Writers' Festival, featuring Dan Buettner, Catherine Watson, and Jane Wilson. Equilibrium Spoken Word & Performance Poetry mentorships are offered. Two selected artists work with mentor Alexis Pate, then become mentors themselves to local high school students.

After 13 years of leadership, Loft Executive Director Linda Myers retires and is succeeded by Jocelyn Hale. A grand gala, Moon Lit Bridge, featuring former U.S. poet laureate Billy Collins, marks the leadership transition by celebrating Minnesota's strong literary community. A teen advisory board, inkTank, is established. The Loft announces a new strategic plan. The U.S. economy collapses.

## **2008**

The Loft hosts Mary Oliver in collaboration with the Hennepin Theater Trust. The Rachel Vaughan Memorial Scholarship is established to underwrite the Loft's commitment to poetry, the disability community, and cultural diversity. A new spoken word program is established, Echolocation, to connect exciting artists from the Twin Cities with marginalized voices and communities in Greater Minnesota.



The Loft offers a new weekend Poetry Festival, featuring Martín Espada and Linda Hogan. The Minnesota Psychological Association presents the Loft with the “Psychologically Healthy Workplace Award.” The Loft offers First Pages, free writing classes at Hennepin County Libraries.

## **2009**

The annual Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) conference in Chicago prominently features Loft staff and writers. The Loft Mentor Series celebrates its 30th anniversary with a special Talking Volumes appearance by two-time former mentor Nikki Giovanni. Equilibrium produces *¿Nation of Immigrants?*, its first CD, showcasing Minnesota poets, spoken word artists, and artists of color/indigenous artists. The Loft Inroads program returns offering Latino and Native writers the opportunity to work with established mentors (Lorena Duarte and Gwen Griffin) who share their ethnic heritage. Loft Education Director, Brian Malloy wins a Minnesota Book Award.

Jim Moore and Judith Roche are featured in Poetography readings and discussions at Richard Hugo House in Seattle and at the Loft. After more than 30 years of print publication, *A View from the Loft*, goes online. The Loft’s first-ever Mystery, Crime, & Thriller Festival features best-selling author Vince Flynn; three days later, Talking Volumes features all-time master of the thriller, Stephen King. After 17 years, Finance Director and two-time interim executive director Nancy Gaschott announces her retirement from the Loft.

## **2010**

The Loft celebrates its 35th anniversary with a homecoming celebration keynoted by Kate DiCamillo and the publication release of *Views from the Loft*, a portable writer’s workshop, edited by Daniel Slager and published by Milkweed Editions. Open Book celebrates its tenth anniversary. The Minnesota Council of Nonprofits honors Equilibrium with its annual Anti-Racism Initiative Award, accepted for the Loft by curator, Bao Phi. The Loft launches a new blog, *Writers' Block*. The Loft offers its first online class featuring teaching artist, Mary Carroll Moore. The class sells out and helps launch the Loft’s online education program.

## **2011**



Open Book's Target Performance Hall reaches capacity with the reading, *Same Difference: Writers with Disabilities*.

Loft mentors include Patricia Weaver Francisco, Toi Derricotte, Kristin Naca & E. Ethelbert Miller. Hip-hop performing artist, Dessa headlines a free writing conference for teens. The Loft collaborates with the National Book Foundation to present *Lineage: American Poetry since 1950*. Poet Gary Snyder dines with writers at the Loft and performs at Plymouth Congregational Church as part of the Literary Witness program.

## **2012**

Jerod Santek, longtime Loft Program Director, chairs the Association of Writers and Writing Program's (AWP) annual conference in Chicago. Registration reaches 12,000. Loft mentor, Tracy K. Smith wins the Pulitzer Prize shortly before she is scheduled to keynote the Loft's poetry conference along with Mark Doty. Surdna Foundation awards the Loft \$150,000 to expand EQ and create a spoken word immersion award. The Loft, in partnership with Hennepin County Libraries, offers a free conference for writers, 50 and better, with keynote author Molly Peacock. It reaches registration capacity in ten minutes. In August, the Loft announces the successful completion of the 2007–2012 Strategic Plan.

## **2013**

The board of directors approves a new strategic framework which includes an updated mission statement to advance the artistic development of writers, foster a thriving literary community, and inspire a passion for literature. Bao Phi is promoted to Program Director and Jennifer Dodgson is named Education Director. National Book Award winner, William Alexander speaks at Loft Second Story series. Mentors Oliver de La Paz and Jewell Parker Rhodes read with mentor participants through the spring and Beau Sia and Gyasi Ross along with Fes Thao perform at EQ. The Loft, along with Milkweed Editions and the Minnesota Center for Book Arts, raise \$1.1 million dollars to renovate and update Open Book.

## **2014**

The winter includes 50 days below zero and many snow-related closings. Rumor has it that more people stay home to read and write. The Loft starts managing Poetry Out Loud for the state of Minnesota and expands First Pages to more library



systems. The Children's & Young Adult Literature Conference includes Anne Ursu, Jordan Brown, Marek Oziewicz, Lisa Von Drasek, and Jack Zipes.

## **2015**

The Loft begins the New Year with a bang, hosting poet Claudia Rankine to a record crowd of more than 500 people. The Loft also announces its first-ever agents and editors conference coming in November, an all-star lineup for AWP in Minneapolis including a live Talking Volumes with Louise Erdrich and Charlies Baxter, Roxane Gay, the poets of Cave Canem, and an EQ Supershow, and a 40th anniversary celebration August 21–22 that will include 40 events in 40 hours. Executive Director Jocelyn Hale announces she will step down in August. The Loft's new Executive Director Britt Udesen takes over the helm of the Loft in September.

## **2016**

The Loft hosts a series of high profile events including Helen Macdonald, Into Quarterly's launch of their Minneapolis edition, and a conversation between Benjamin Percy and Lidia Yuknavitch. The Loft also introduces a series of classes led by David Mura intended for writers of color and indigenous writers. The Loft hosts its first Big Ideas conversation, putting literature at the center of difficult conversations.

## **2017**

The Loft introduces a new brand and launches the Novel Writing Project with Peter Geye which sells out in five minutes. The Loft's Big Ideas with Lisa Lucas and Marlon James discussing "Can Literature Make a Damn Bit of Difference?" moves to the Guthrie Theater to accommodate the number of attendees. Lesley Arimah, Kiese Laymon, Abdul Ali, Ayana Mathis, Kelly Barnhill, and Angela Flournoy all visit the Loft.

## **2018**

The Loft announces Wordplay, the largest literary festival the midwest has ever seen, to launch in 2019. A successful Kickstarter campaign engages hundreds of new donors ready to support this major community event. Year Long Writing Projects are expanded to include both the novel and memoir, taught by Peter Geye and Nicole Helget. Chris Abani, Lesley Arimah, Marlon James, Kevin Young, Solmaz





Sharif, Richard Blanco, Eileen Myles, Hannah Tinti, and Geoff Dyer all present at the Loft.

## **2019**

The Loft introduced three major new programs in 2019: Wordplay, a 10,000-person outdoor book festival with more than 100 participating authors; Wordsmith, a craft, career, and connection conference for writers featuring dozens of visiting agents and editors; and Mirrors and Windows, a program dedicated to mentoring indigenous writers and writers of color to write picture books, middle grade, and young adult literature. In 2019, the Loft hosted dozens of authors including Stephen King, Amy Tan, Madeline Miller, Moustafa Bayoumi, Rumaan Alam, Reed Bobroff, May Lee Yang, Carmen Maria Machado, Harryette Mullen, Cristina García, Naomi Kritzer, Tommy Orange, Mitch Albom, Ross Gay, Morgan Parker, Danez Smith, Mitchell Jackson, Bill McKibben, Dani Shapiro, and many more!

## **2020**

Global and local events shaped the Loft in 2020. The global health and economic crisis caused by Covid-19 pushed the Loft to move its operations virtually. Within a matter of weeks, the 10,000-person Wordplay street festival shifted to a five-week virtual celebration of books at the height of lockdown and uncertainty. The Loft also shifted all of its events and classes into the virtual space. Through it all, the Loft successfully hosted events and classes with Samantha Irby, Kate DiCamillo, Charles Yu, Major Jackson, Natalie Diaz, Scott Pelley, Amber Sparks, Danielle Evans, Megha Majumdar, Maria Konnikova, Jane Friedman, Ross Gay, Mark Doty, Manuel Gonzales, and more.

## **2021**

While the world continued to adjust to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Loft continued to offer virtual classes, events, and community. We were able to host both Wordsmith and Wordplay online, inviting national and international talent because of the more accessible format. We also started to think really critically about the evolution from being a safe and welcoming to becoming an actively anti-racist organization and, teaming up with a community partner, began that essential work. In spring, we said goodbye to longtime executive director Britt Udesen, and in November, we were thrilled to introduce our new ED, Arleta Little.