



**The Loft Literary Center**

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

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**CONTACT:**

Chris Jones  
cjones@loft.org

## **The Loft Literary Center Announces Recipients of the 2021 McKnight Artist Fellowships for Writers**

### **Four Minnesota Creative Prose Writers, and One Children's Literature Author Receive \$25,000 Each**

The Loft Literary Center is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2021 McKnight Artist Fellowships for Writers, Loft Awards in Creative Prose and Loft Award in Children's Literature (Older Children). Since 1982, the Loft has partnered with the McKnight Foundation to offer substantial fellowships to Minnesota writers.

The fellowships are judged by prominent American authors and editors, and the winners, all from Minnesota, are awarded \$25,000 each. The judges this year were Hanif Abdurraqib in creative prose and Erin Entrada Kelly in children's literature.

The Loft received 32 qualified applications in children's literature and 88 qualified applications in creative prose. This year's recipients are children's writer V.T. Bidania (Arden Hills) and creative prose writers Angela Pelster (Saint Paul), Abbey Mei Otis (Minneapolis), Carson Faust (Hopkins), and Heather Quinn (Saint Paul).

The honorable mentions in children's literature are Heather Bouman (Saint Paul), Margi Preus (Duluth), Swati Avasthi (Minneapolis), and Sarah Ahiers (Vadnais Heights). The honorable mentions in creative prose are Sun Yung Shin



(Minneapolis), Sheila O'Connor (Edina), Elizabeth Horneber (Mankato), and Emma Torzs (Minneapolis).

## **McKnight Artist Fellowships for Writers, Loft Award in Children's Literature/Middle Grade and Young Adult: 2021 Recipient**

**V.T. Bidania** was born in Laos and grew up in Saint Paul, Minnesota, where her family resettled as refugees after the Vietnam War. She spent her childhood dreaming of the worlds she read about and imagining books that would include Hmong children like her. After college, she left Saint Paul for New York City and received an MFA in creative writing from the New School. She eventually returned to Minnesota and won a Mirrors and Windows Fellowship from the Loft. She is the author of *Astrid and Apollo*, a chapter book series starring second-generation Hmong American twins Astrid and Apollo Lee (Capstone, 2020), which is the first children's book series to feature Hmong characters. *Astrid and Apollo* is on the Chicago Public Library's List of Best Fiction for Younger Readers of 2020 and the 2020 Ultimate List of Diverse Children's Books by Here Wee Read. *The Starry Campout*, the first book in the series, was selected by the St. Paul Public Library as the chapter book for the 2021 Read Brave Program: Owning Our Stories and Rising Together for a Better Saint Paul. *The Starry Campout* is also an Amazon Editors' Pick for Best Books for Readers Ages 6-8. Bidania now lives outside of the Twin Cities with her family and is at work on the next four books in the series.

## **McKnight Artist Fellowships for Writers, Loft Award in Creative Prose: 2021 Recipients**

**Angela Pelster's** new book, *City Symphony: A History in Accumulations*, is forthcoming with Mad Creek Books in 2022. She won the Great Lakes Colleges Association New Writer Award in Nonfiction and was a finalist for the PEN/Diamonstein-Spielvogel Award for the Art of the Essay for her book *Limber* (Sarabande Books, 2014). Her work has previously appeared in *LitHub*, *Ploughshares*, *Granta*, the *Kenyon Review*, *River Teeth*, and the *Gettysburg Review*, amongst others. She's been a Katharine Bakeless Nason Bread Loaf Fellow in nonfiction and a Minnesota State Arts Board grantee, and she was an Iowa Arts fellow during her MFA at the University of Iowa. She teaches nonfiction writing at Hamline University.



**Abbey Mei Otis** is a writer, a teaching artist, a mongrel trash robot, a storyteller, and a firestarter, raised in the woods of North Carolina. She loves people and art forms on the margins. Her story collection *Alien Virus Love Disaster* was a finalist for the Philip K Dick Award. Recently she is the recipient of fellowships from MacDowell, Tin House, and the Vermont Studio Center, among others. After some years of itinerancy she now lives on Dakota land in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she cleans houses and teaches with the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop. She is at work on a novel of climate catastrophe and post-mass incarceration, currently titled *This Is Not a Wasteland*.

**Carson Faust** is a queer writer and an enrolled member of the Edisto Natchez-Kusso Tribe of South Carolina. His writing has received support from the *Tin House Writers' Workshops*, the Minnesota State Arts Board, and the Jerome Foundation and has appeared in *TriQuarterly*, *Waxwing*, *Anomaly Journal*, *Foglifter Journal*, and elsewhere. He serves as a board member for 826 MSP—a nonprofit organization that provides literacy- and creative writing-based programming for underserved K-12 students in the Twin Cities area. He is represented by Annie Hwang of Ayesha Pande Literary.

**Heather Quinn** is an essayist and photographer living in Saint Paul with their husband and two children. A Minnesota native, they spent most of their childhood and early adulthood in Southern California, and their work frequently features the desert landscape around the Salton Sea in the southeastern corner of the state. They earned their MFA from Portland State University, and they were a 2019–2020 Loft Mentor Series fellow. Their essays have appeared in *Longreads*, *Cutbank*, *Salt Hill Journal*, *Vela*, the *Rumpus*, *Under the Gum Tree*, *Green Briar Review*, and the *Riveter*. They also authored a children's world atlas, *Amazing World Atlas*, forthcoming from Silver Dolphin Press this July. They are working on a memoir, *This is How You Disappear*, about the California desert and their father's suicide.

## **McKnight Award Judging**

McKnight Award judges were selected in the summer of 2020. The identities of the judges are not known to the applicants during the application process, and applicant identities are kept confidential from the judges until they make their selections.



## 2021 Children's Literature Judge

**Erin Entrada Kelly** received the 2018 Newbery Medal for *Hello, Universe*, a 2021 Newbery Honor for *We Dream of Space*, and the APALA Award for Children's Literature for *The Land of Forgotten Girls*, among other honors. She is also the author of *Lalani of the Distant Sea*, a finalist for the Mythopoeic Award for Children's Fantasy, and is author and illustrator for the Maybe Maybe Marisol Rainey series. In addition to her novels, Kelly has published more than thirty short stories in literary magazines worldwide and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and the Philippines Free Press Literary Award for Short Fiction. She teaches creative writing in the graduate program at Hamline University. Kelly is a *New York Times* bestseller. She was raised in Louisiana but now lives in Delaware.

## 2021 Creative Prose Judge

**Hanif Abdurraqib** is a poet, essayist, and cultural critic from Columbus, Ohio. His poetry has been published in *PEN American*, *Muzzle*, *Vinyl*, and other journals, and his essays and criticism have been published in the *New Yorker*, *Pitchfork*, the *New York Times*, and *Fader*. His first full-length poetry collection, *The Crown Ain't Worth Much*, was named a finalist for the Eric Hoffer Book Award and nominated for a Hurston-Wright Legacy Award. His first collection of essays, *They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us*, was named a book of the year by NPR, *Esquire*, *BuzzFeed*, *O: The Oprah Magazine*, *Pitchfork*, and the *Chicago Tribune*, among others. *Go Ahead in the Rain: Notes to a Tribe Called Quest* was a *New York Times* bestseller and a National Book Critics Circle Award and Kirkus Prize finalist and was longlisted for the National Book Award. His second collection of poems, *A Fortune for Your Disaster*, won the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize. He is a graduate of Beechcroft High School.

## About the McKnight Artist Fellowships for Writers

Now in its 40th year, the McKnight Artist Fellowships for Writers provide Minnesota writers of demonstrated ability with an opportunity to work on their writing for a concentrated period of time. Five \$25,000 fellowships are awarded. One Award in Children's Literature alternates annually between writers for children under the age of eight and writers for older readers. Four fellowships alternate annually between writers of poetry/spoken word poetry and writers of creative prose. Writers must have either published a book in the genre in which they are applying, have been



featured as a performer for a significant amount of readings and performances, or have a significant number of publications in literary magazines. The Loft McKnight Artist Fellowships for Writers are supported by the McKnight Foundation.

Previous McKnight recipients are too numerous to list, but they include Heid E. Erdrich, Taiyon Coleman, Robert Bly, Patricia Hampl, Margaret Hasse, Jim Moore, Sun Yung Shin, Cary Waterman, Sandra Benitez, Deborah Keenan, Jack El-Hai, Leslie Adrienne Miller, Patricia Weaver Francisco, Barrie Jean Borich, Lorna Landvik, Kate DiCamillo, Molly Beth Griffin, Danez Smith, Kelly Barnhill, Ray Gonzalez, Dobby Gibson, Ed Bok Lee, Heather Bouwman, Khary Jackson, David Mura, Shannon Gibney, and Anne Ursu.

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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. Learn more: [loft.org](http://loft.org)*