



The Loft Literary Center

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The Loft Literary Center Announces 2025–2026 Mentor Series Fellows

Twelve Minnesota Early Career Writers Selected for the Sixteen-month 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 eight nationally acclaimed writers of prose and poetry.

Selected participants work throughout the fellowship with the eight mentors, and all participants and mentors give public readings at the Loft. Dates for those readings will be announced later in the year. 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 Friends of the Loft.

2025–2026 ENTRIES AND SELECTIONS

The Loft Literary Center received 61 entries to the 2025–2026 Loft Mentor Series Fellowship in Poetry and Creative Prose, from which the current program mentors had the difficult task of choosing the three fellows and up to three honorable



mentions each in the genres of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and children's literature. The fellows are listed below.

Nonfiction Selections

Angelina Nguyen, Ellen Rogers, and Rae Rowe have been selected for the fellowship program in creative nonfiction.

Honorable mentions are Betsy Hoody and Leticia Snow.

Poetry Selections

Mary Beth Becker, Tina Gross, and Sook Jin Ong 翁淑君 have been selected for the fellowship program in poetry.

Honorable mentions are Judea DeMaris and Bridget Lee.

Fiction Selections

Michelle Jayne, Yasin Williams, and Madeleine Wolfe have been selected for the fellowship program in fiction.

Honorable mention is Sophie Nitkas.

Children's Literature Selections

Skye Reddy, Mari Richards, and Mishy Wang have been selected for the fellowship program in children's literature.

Honorable mentions are Angie Gentile-Jordan, Avalon George, and Sara Osman.

BIOS FOR THE 2025–2026 LOFT MENTOR SERIES FELLOWS

Mary Beth Becker was raised in the woods north of Omaha, Nebraska, but lives with her wife in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Her poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Mud Season Review*, *Split Rock Review*, *Hobart*, *West Trade Review*, *Spillway*, and *Wayfarer*. She is a Pushcart Prize and Best-of-the-Net nominee, and a friend to all rivers.

Tina Gross lives on the Red River of the North in Moorhead and has an MFA from Minnesota State University, Mankato. She likes to play around with constrained



writing and sometimes creates found poems inspired by her work as a cataloging and metadata librarian. She grew up in Battle Lake, Minnesota and was in the first graduating class of the Perpich Arts High School. After college she moved to Pittsburgh for library school, and lived there for 12 years before returning to Minnesota. Her work has appeared in publications including *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Salamander*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *Maudlin House*, *The Laurel Review*, *Rogue Agent*, and *Lost Pilots*.

Michelle Jayne is a literary fiction writer of short stories and novels. Her fiction reflects a love of and curiosity about the natural world, as well as the alchemy that happens between humans and the environment. She served as a Russian Linguist in the US Army. She holds a BA in Soviet and East European Studies and an MFA in Creative Writing, with a focus on neurodivergent characters in fiction. During the pandemic she sought a writing community, founding The Green Study Workshop and The Grove, consisting of vibrant writers from around the world. For over a decade she has been writing personal essays for her blog, The Green Study. She lives in the Twin Cities with her husband and daughter and a lot of squirrels (some she's named). She is thrilled and grateful to be a participant in The Loft Mentor Series.

Angelina Nguyen is a Vietnamese-American writer—essayist, blogger, and memoirist—who writes to heal intergenerational trauma and strengthen community. Her target audience are fellow Vietnamese-American millennials whose families fought in, survived, and fled from war, who inherit trauma and must rebuild well-being for ourselves, our family, our community, and our progeny. She has blogged for seven years and has published poems and essays in magazines and periodicals such as the *Saint Paul Almanac*, *Diacritics*, and *UnMargin*. She's currently working on a full-length memoir manuscript about intergenerational trauma and resilience.

Sook Jin Ong 翁淑君 (she/her) is a Malaysian Chinese poet. She writes because poetry brings her restfulness, especially as she grapples with migratory and diasporic longings, chronic migraines, and fragments of the many tongues she haltingly speaks. Sook Jin's poems have appeared in *Canto Cutie*, *Cut Fruit*, and *Pandan Weekly*, among others. Learn more at www.ongsookjin.com



Skye Reddy is a South Asian writer, filmmaker, and performance artist. They are a Film Score Fest BIPOC Scholarship recipient (2025), and were a Pillsbury House + Theatre Naked Stages fellow (2024), a member of the Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN) Spotlight Shorts documentary cohort (2024), and the Production Management Fellow at Children's Theatre Company (2022-23). In different capacities, Skye has previously worked with The Southern Theater, Black Ensemble Productions, Red Eye Theater, Children's Theatre Company, Asian Media Access, Theater Mu, LimeArts, and on various Twin Cities-based short films. They hold a degree in Theater and Dance from Macalester College.

Mari Richards is a writer, artist, and award-winning toy designer. As an author-illustrator, she was long-listed for the 2023 British Searchlight Awards and was a finalist in the 2023 -2024 PBParty competitions. Mari is the illustrator of the Archie and Pip picture book series, with a new release scheduled for July 2025. With over 400 toy and children's product designs to her name, Mari has earned more than 30 industry awards for her innovative work. She holds an MFA in Visual Studies from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD). Mari currently lives near St. Paul, MN, with her husband, daughter and two spirited rescue pups. For more information, please visit MariRichards.com.

Ellen Rogers is a poet and essayist. Her work can be found in *AGNI*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Ecotone*, and elsewhere. She holds an MFA in creative writing from Western Washington University and has served as an editor for *Bellingham Review* and *The Hopper*. She works in environmental communications at a nonprofit in St. Paul dedicated to restoring the Mississippi River and its watershed.

Rae Rowe is a queer, non-binary, gender-fluid, Viet-Am, child of a boat person-refugee, writer, movement worker, creator, and future ghost who uses her work to explore inherited trauma, liminal spaces, auntie whispers, and connect with community. Rae is a 2025 Periplus fellow. Rae is also the co-founder of The Paper Lantern Project: An AAPI Gender & Reproductive Justice Mutual Aid Fund and Arts Movement which centers care and creating new narratives around these topics while working towards forming new futures of true liberation. Rae currently lives on unceded, ancestral lands of the Dakota people in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Mishy Wang scribbled words before learning how to talk and has not stopped writing since. As a Chinese American, she is committed to sharing heartwarming picture books and middle grade stories that honor her heritage and celebrate



curiosity. When she's not writing from her cozy cottage in the Twin Cities, she enjoys drinking tea, knitting too many sweaters, and taking care of her bunnies.

Yasin Williams, originally from Newark, NJ, and now based in Minneapolis, MN, is a policy specialist and community organizer who has recently ventured into fiction writing. Holding a BA in History from Saint John's University and an MPP from the University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs, Yasin's deep understanding of historical and cultural narratives enriches his creative pursuits. His fiction writing focuses on exploring themes of identity and community, prompting reflections on freedom and interconnectedness through historical contexts. As a 2025-2026 Loft Literary Mentor Series fellow, Yasin aims to refine his narrative voice and storytelling skills, enhance his character development abilities, and balance historical authenticity with universal appeal, furthering his journey as an emerging fiction writer dedicated to exploring significant socio-political themes.

Madeleine Wolfe is a Minnesotan writer and educator who has lived and taught abroad in Israel and Malaysia. Her work explores her Jewish Midwestern identity, ancestral roots, and the connections we form with the places that define us. When not reading or scribbling in her notebooks, you can find her getting outside, watching tennis, or learning how to play her guitar. She has a Master's of Education in English Education and is a Fulbright grant recipient.

BIOS FOR THE 2025–2026 MENTORS

Fiction

Vanessa Hua is the author of *Deceit and Other Possibilities* (2016), winner of the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature and a finalist for the California Book Award, as well as *A River of Stars* (2018) and *Forbidden City* (2022). She has received a Rona Jaffe Foundation Writers' Award, a Steinbeck Fellowship in Creative Writing, Dr. Suzanne Ahn Award for Civil Rights and Social Justice reporting as well as honors from the Society of Professional Journalists, Asian American Journalists' Association, and Best of the West. A columnist at the *San Francisco Chronicle*, she has written for the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *ZYZZYVA*, among others, and has filed stories from China, Burma, South Korea, and elsewhere. She teaches at the Warren Wilson MFA Program for Writers, Sewanee Writers Conference, and elsewhere.



Chris Stark's second novel, *Carnival Lights*, about two Ojibwe teen girls who leave their reservation for Minneapolis in 1969, was a 2022 Minnesota Book Award finalist and won the NEMBA Award for Best Fiction Book. Her first novel, *Nickels: A Tale of Dissociation*, was a Lambda Literary finalist. She has also published creative non-fiction essays and academic articles and conducted groundbreaking primary research. In 2011, Chris was a Loft Mentor Series Fellow. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from Minnesota State University, Mankato and an MSW from the University of Minnesota Duluth. She has taught writing and literature at colleges and universities for twenty years. Chris is Indigenous and white, and a lesbian. For more information, visit christinestark.com.

Creative Nonfiction

Anaïs Duplan is a trans* poet, curator, and artist. He is the author of the books *I NEED MUSIC*; *Blackspace: On the Poetics of an Afrofuture*; *Take This Stallion*; and the chapbook, *Mount Carmel and the Blood of Parnassus*. He was a 2017-2019 joint Public Programs fellow at the MoMA and the Studio Museum in Harlem, and in 2021 received a Marian Goodman fellowship from Independent Curators International for his research on Black experimental documentary. In 2016, he founded the Center for Afrofuturist Studies, an artist residency program for artists of color, based at Iowa City's artist-run organization Public Space One. He is the recipient of the 2021 QUEER|ART|PRIZE for Recent Work, and a 2022 Whiting Award in Nonfiction. Duplan is a professor of postcolonial literature at Bennington College, and has taught poetry at The New School, Columbia University, and Sarah Lawrence College, among other places.

Taiyon J. Coleman is a poet, writer, and educator whose work has been anthologized widely. She is the author of *Traveling without Moving: Essays from a Black Woman Trying to Survive in America*. A Cave Canem and VONA fellow, she is a 2017 recipient of a McKnight Fellowship for Writers in Creative Prose and was one of twelve emerging children's writers of color selected as a recipient of the 2018–2019 Mirrors and Windows Fellowship funded by the Loft Literary Center and the Jerome Foundation in Minnesota. After many years as an associate professor of English and women's studies at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota, she is currently dean of liberal arts and academic foundations at North Hennepin Community College in Brooklyn Park, MN.



Children's and Young Adult Literature

Aida Salazar is an award-winning author, arts activist, and translator whose writings for adults and children explore issues of identity and social justice. She is the author of the critically acclaimed middle grade verse novels, *THE MOON WITHIN* (International Latino Book Award Gold Medal, Americas Award Honor); *LAND OF THE CRANES* (Américas Award, California Library Association Beatty Award, Northern CA Book Award, NCTE Charlotte Huck Honor, Jane Addams Peace Honor, International Latino Book Award Honor); as well as *A SEED IN THE SUN* (Tomás Rivera Children's Book Award, ALA RISE Feminist Book Project Top 10 Book, NCTE Notable Poetry/ Verse Novel Honor, Jane Addams Peace Award Finalist). Her other works include the bio picture book *JOVITA WORE PANTS: The Story of a Mexican Freedom Fighter* (Caldecott Honor, Malka Penn Award, International Latino Book Awards- Rising Star and Gold Medal); the picture book anthology, *IN THE SPIRIT OF A DREAM: 13 Stories of Immigrants of Color* (Eureka Silver Medal); the board book series, *MY LIVING WORLD* which includes, *WHEN MOON BLOOMS*, *WHEN WATER FLOWS*, *WHEN SUN RISES*, and the anthology *CALLING THE MOON: Period Stories* by BIPOC Authors. Aida's most recent verse novel, *ULTRAVIOLET*, published by Scholastic 2024, about a 13-year-old boy who falls in love for the first time and sees everything in ultraviolet colors, is a loose companion to her first novel, *THE MOON WITHIN*. *ULTRAVIOLET* received a glowing review from the New York Times who called it "savagely funny and deeply human." Salazar was named a finalist for the NSK Nuestdat Children's and Young adult Literature Award for *ULTRAVIOLET*. She has translated works by Alejandra Algorta, Isabel Quintero, Traci Sorrell, Jackie Azua Kramer, Baptiste and Miranda Paul. She lives with her family of artists in Oakland, CA.

Molly Beth Griffin is the author of several acclaimed picture books including *Ten Beautiful Things*, *Just Us*, and *Rhoda's Rock Hunt*. She has also published an award-winning YA novel, *Silhouette of a Sparrow*, two poetry chapbooks, and a series of beginning readers. Five more picture books are forthcoming in 2025 & 2026. Molly is a graduate of Hamline University's MFA Program in Writing for Children and Young Adults, and was the recipient of the 2014 McKnight Artist Fellowship in Children's Literature. Molly has been teaching writing for children at the Loft for 15 years. She also critiques manuscripts, speaks at schools and libraries, and hosts a



monthly Picture Book Salon. She lives in South Minneapolis with her partner and their two children. For more information please visit www.mollybethgriffin.com.

Poetry

Julian Talamantez Brolaski is a two-spirit and transgender poet and musician of mixed Mescalero and Lipan Apache, Latin@, and European heritages. Its pronoun is it. Julian is the author of *Of Mongrelitude* (Wave Books, 2017), which was recently shortlisted for a Lambda Literary Award for Transgender Poetry; *Advice for Lovers* (City Lights 2012); and *Gowanus Atropolis* (Ugly Duckling Press, 2011). It is coeditor of *NO GENDER: Reflections on the Life & Work of Kari Edwards*, as well as lead singer and rhythm guitarist for the Brooklyn-based Juan & the Pines and Oakland-based The Western Skyline. Julian is currently at work on *The Apache Pollen Path* (forthcoming from University of New Mexico Press) with its grandmother, Inés Talamantez. It maintains a blog of handwritten poems [here](#).

Sarah Ghazal Ali is a writer, editor, and educator. She is the author of *THEOPHANIES* (Alice James Books, 2024), selected as the Editors' Choice for the 2022 Alice James Award. Winner of *The Sewanee Review* Poetry Prize, her poems have been published in *The American Poetry Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Pleiades*, *Narrative Magazine*, the Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day series, and elsewhere. A Stadler and Kundiman Fellow, Sarah has received fellowships and residencies from Tin House, the Stadler Center for Poetry and Literary Arts, the Hambidge Center, the Kenyon Review Writers Workshop, Community of Writers, and others. She is the poetry editor for *West Branch* and an Assistant Professor of English at Macalester College.

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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.