THE ACADEMY OF AMERICAN POETS AWARDS $1.1 MILLION TO 22 POET LAUREATE FELLOWS ACROSS THE COUNTRY IN SUPPORT OF PUBLIC PROJECTS

New York, NY (August 2, 2022)—The Academy of American Poets announced today that it is awarding a combined total of $1.1 million to its 2022 Poet Laureate Fellows. These 22 individuals, each of whom will receive $50,000, have been named poets laureate of states, cities, and counties, and have made positive contributions to their communities in these roles and beyond. Funds will support their respective public poetry programs in the year ahead as presented in their proposals to the Academy. In addition, the Academy will provide a total of $72,200 to eight local 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations that have agreed to support the Fellows’ proposed projects.

The public position of poet laureate began in 1919 when Governor Oliver Shoup appointed Alice Polk Hill the Poet Laureate of Colorado. Fifteen other states followed suit, all establishing poet laureate positions by 1936. A similar national position was created when the Library of Congress named Joseph Auslander its first Consultant in Poetry in 1937. This position was renamed the Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry in 1985. On July 12, 2022, Ada Limón was named the 24th poet to serve in this capacity, succeeding Joy Harjo.

Poets laureate at state and local levels promote the art of poetry and the position is an important way to recognize the place and possibilities that poets and poetry have in civic life, including in helping communities address issues of importance.

Through its Poets Laureate Fellowship program, the Academy has become the largest financial supporter of poets in the nation, awarding a total of $4.35 million in fellowships to 81 poets laureate since 2019, plus $250,000+ to local 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations that have supported the Fellows’ projects. In addition to helping poets reach tens of thousands of individuals in 73 different communities with creative and timely poetry programs, the Academy has helped encourage more than 30 communities across the U. S. to create new poet laureate positions since launching its program in 2019.

The 2022 Poet Laureate Fellows and the communities they serve are Emanuée Outspoken Bean (Houston, TX), Cyrus Cassells (Texas), Andru Defeye (Sacramento, CA), Ashanti Files (Urbana, IL), B. K. Fischer (Westchester County, NY), KaNikki Jakarta (Alexandria, VA), Ashley M. Jones (Alabama), Holly Karapetkova (Arlington, VA), Kealoha (Hawai‘i), J. Drew Lanham (Edgefield, SC), Julia B. Levine (Davis, CA), Matt Mason (Nebraska), Airea D. Matthews (Philadelphia, PA), Ray McNiece (Cleveland Heights, OH), Huascar Medina (Kansas), Gailmarie Pahmeier (Nevada), Catherine Pierce (Mississippi), Rena Priest
(Washington), **Lynne Thompson** (Los Angeles, CA), **Emma Trelles** (Santa Barbara, CA), **Gwen Nell Westerman** (Minnesota), and **Crystal Wilkinson** (Kentucky).

**Additional information about the 2022 Poet Laureate Fellows and their projects:**

**Emanuelee Outspoken Bean, Poet Laureate Fellow, Houston, Texas**
Outspoken Bean was born in New Jersey and raised in San Antonio, Texas. He was the first poet to perform on Houston Ballet's main stage in the production “Play” and created and produced his own festival, Plus Fest: The Everything Plus Poetry Festival. Bean will compile Space City Mixtape, a twenty+ track spoken-word and creative audio experience of Houston from Houstonians telling their stories. He will also facilitate bi-weekly writing sessions for six to eight months through the Houston Public Library system to serve Houston’s diverse populations. The first year will be dedicated to collecting stories and voices from the workshops and the second year will focus on recording the writers. The album will be produced by local music producer and frequent collaborator Russell Guess. The tentative release date of the album is May 2023.

**Cyrus Cassells, Poet Laureate Fellow, Texas**
The author of nine poetry collections, **Cyrus Cassells** is the recipient of a Pushcart Prize, the Peter I. B. Lavan Younger Poets Award, and fellowships from the Guggenheim, the Lannan Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. He lives in Austin and teaches at Texas State University. In honor of Juneteenth, Cassells will hold a poetry contest for students in grades six through twelve across the state that encourages them to explore what makes the day significant. Final judges will be Texas poets Wendy Barker, Jennifer Chang, Amanda Johnston, and Roger Reeves, as well as Texas historian Martha Hartzog. The contest will end with a public reading and ceremony at the Neill-Cochran House Museum in Austin, which has fostered several African American events and cultural exhibitions and features the city of Austin's only intact slave cabin. The ten winning students will receive travel stipends to the Austin ceremony. The judges, screeners, top three winners, and seven honorable mentions will each receive an honorarium, plus copies of Pulitzer Prize winner Annette Reed's book *On Juneteenth* and Edward Cotham Jr.’s *Juneteenth: The Story Behind the Celebration*.

**Andru Defeye, Poet Laureate Fellow, Sacramento, California**
**Andru Defeye** is a poet, writer, community organizer, and musician. In 2021, Defeye was listed by *Sacramento Magazine* as one of the city’s one hundred business leaders, and was nominated to receive an honorary doctorate from California State University, Sacramento. Defeye will implement a citywide Sacramento Poetry Day curriculum, host the city's first cash prize poetry contest, and employ local poets in publishing, performing, and judging. Mayor Anne Rudin declared October 26 Sacramento Poetry Day in 1986, and this program will bring the day to life for the next generation by creating a diverse and engaging curriculum for the 250,000+ students in schools. The curriculum and contest-winning work will be made available for free and promoted on the website SacramentoPoetryDay.com. The curriculum will help honor the
legacy of Sacramento poets like Viola Weinberg-Spencer, Francisco X. Alarcón, and José Montoya, while celebrating the current generation and cultivating the next.

**Ashanti Files, Poet Laureate Fellow, Urbana, Illinois**

Ashanti Files is the author of *Woven: Perspectives of a Black Woman* (2019). In 2021, she released *Awaken2*, a personal workbook that promotes self-reflection on identity and emotional regulation. She currently resides in Chandler, Arizona where she is a registered nurse working for the Phoenix Children’s Hospital Center for Resilience and Wellbeing. She has led numerous workshops and programs that address the impact of identity on mental health. Files will expand the Writers of Oya program, which teaches the art of spoken word poetry to teenage girls struggling with trauma and provides a safe space for them to reflect on their struggles. Files will partner with local libraries to lead bimonthly workshops over a sixteen week period that will use poetry to open the hearts and minds of young women, facilitate dialogue about mental health, and empower the youth to speak their truth in their communities. After the workshops, Files will work on a book that features the work and provides insight into how local programs tailored for girls of color can decrease negative outcomes and how the art of spoken word poetry aids in mental wellness.

**B. K. Fischer, Poet Laureate Fellow, Westchester County, New York**

B. K. Fischer is the author of five collections of poetry, including *Ceive* (BOA Editions, 2021), a finalist for the 2021 National Books Critic Circle Award. Fischer is a former poetry editor at *Boston Review* and teaches at Columbia University. She lives in Sleepy Hollow, New York and is the first poet laureate of Westchester County. In collaboration with ArtsWestchester, Fischer will start the Floodwaters Workshops, an outdoor writing workshop series at sites of flooding and flood risk in Westchester County, to bring poetry into the local conversation about climate. The workshops will explicitly mark the intersection of the climate crisis, conservation, and social injustice. The project will culminate in the creation of a short documentary film that tells the story of the workshops’ movements through diverse communities and varied landscapes, recording student performances and interviews as well as their encounters with these environments. The workshops will focus on high school students, especially youth in underserved communities and queer youth, and will be adapted to include recently or currently incarcerated students and seniors in community settings. Participants will develop indigenous land acknowledgments tied to particular locales where Wappinger, Lenape, and Mahican peoples have stewarded the lands and waterways of what is now Westchester County.

**KaNikki Jakarta, Poet Laureate Fellow, Alexandria, Virginia**

KaNikki Jakarta is a performance poet and the author of two poetry collections, including *Alabama Girl, Virginia Woman* (Great Publishing Company, LLC, 2021); three novels; and a memoir. Jakarta is the inaugural poet in residence for the Northern Virginia Fine Arts Association. She is the first African American poet laureate of Alexandria, Virginia, where she hosts #KaNikkiHarmony and facilitates several workshops. Jakarta will launch “How to Poet,” an eight-week workshop/seminar offered virtually and in person. Spoken word poets will utilize their experiences to create a curriculum with step-by-step information. “How To Poet” will also offer performance mentorships to young poets ages sixteen to twenty-one. The workshops and
seminars will assist with a wide variety of topics such as manuscripts, marketing, and booking profitable performance opportunities. Performance mentors will provide information to youth on stage presence, poem memorization, tone, pace, pitch, and more.

Ashley M. Jones, Poet Laureate Fellow, Alabama

Ashley M. Jones is the author of three books, including REPARATIONS NOW! (Hub City Press, 2021), which was longlisted for the PEN/Voelker Award for Poetry. She is the first person of color and the youngest person to hold the position of Alabama’s poet laureate. She lives in Birmingham, where she is the founding director of the Magic City Poetry Festival, the co-director of PEN Birmingham, and a faculty member in the creative writing department at the Alabama School of Fine Arts. Jones will implement the Alabama Poetry Delegation, a multi-regional leadership and service initiative which seeks to engage and support poetry projects and poets across the state. Jones will identify five regions and five regional delegates to shepherd poetry projects over three years. Phase one will involve the selection of delegates from each region; during this phase, Jones will work with libraries and literary organizations across the state to distribute an online Regional Delegate application. Delegates will be chosen based on strength of application materials and a demonstrated history of working within the region on poetry projects and events. During phase two, delegates will distribute a nominations page for each region and choose two projects per year. The Alabama Writers’ Forum will assist with Jones’s fellowship project.

Holly Karapetkova, Poet Laureate Fellow, Arlington, Virginia

Holly Karapetkova is the author of two collections of poetry, including Towline (Cloudbank Books, 2016), winner of the Vern Rutsala Book Prize. The recipient of a fellowship from the Virginia Center for Creative Arts, Karapetkova lives in Arlington and teaches literature and writing at Marymount University. In collaboration with Day Eight, Karapetkova (who will work with Arlington Youth Laureate Charlotte Maleski and the county’s Youth Poetry Ambassadors) will organize an anthology of youth poetry, offering a central point around which the community can organize readings and workshops. The anthology, launching in the spring of 2023, will be open to all high school county residents and will focus on the theme of resilience.

Kealoha, Poet Laureate Fellow, Hawai‘i

Kealoha was appointed the first poet laureate of Hawai‘i on May 3, 2012. His full-length spoken word album, Kealoha, was released in 2004. He previously worked at MIT’s Plasma Science and Fusion Center, conducted research at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, and wrote a white paper on the national security consequences of climate change, which was presented at the Pentagon by the Institute for Defense Analysis. Kealoha will offer his poetry workshop techniques to teachers in Hawai‘i and abroad. He will film a ten-day poetry residency at a low-income, predominantly Native Hawaiian middle school, collect writing samples from these workshops, create full lesson plans, film a two-hour professional development session for teachers, and publish all of these resources on a website that will be made available to the public. Once the website is created, other teaching artist poets and poets laureate around the nation will be invited to publish their workshops on the website by following the same format, creating even more content that addresses regional differences in poetry and learning.
J. Drew Lanham, Poet Laureate Fellow, Edgefield, South Carolina

J. Drew Lanham is the author of several books, including *Sparrow Envy: Field Guide to Birds and Lesser Beasts* (Hub City, 2021). Lanham holds an endowed chair position at Clemson University, where his most recent scholarly efforts address the confluences of race, place, and nature. He is a conservation and cultural ornithologist. Lanham's project, “Literary Reparations,” proposes through illumination, education, and dedication, to recognize Dave Drake as the first poet laureate of Edgefield County and the premier poet laureate of South Carolina. Drake, who lived in the 1800s, was an enslaved African American man known for his exceptional pottery, on which he sometimes wrote poems. The project will draw on a unique and complicated history, seeking to uplift communities by illuminating an oppressed poet’s words. It will incorporate civic engagement and education through poetry readings and writing projects, and build on the momentum of gathering around a heroic figure. The project places history in the present and melds poetry into civic policy. Lanham will also work to have a day in February or April proclaimed as “Dave Drake Poetry Day,” which will be celebrated with readings, workshops, and poetry contests.

Julia B. Levine, Poet Laureate Fellow, Davis, California

Julia B. Levine is the author of four collections of poetry, including *Small Disasters Seen in Sunlight* (LSU press, 2014), winner of the Northern California Book Award in Poetry. She is the recipient of several honors, including the Pablo Neruda Prize in Poetry, the Bellevue Literary Review Poetry Prize, and a Discovery/The Nation prize. Levine has created a program for middle school students to express their climate concerns in small groups, listen to scientists from University of California, Davis talk about solutions, and read and write their own poetry in response to climate change. A selection of these poems will be recorded by the teen authors and installed with geo-locating technology along a bike path that Davis youth utilize daily. This Sound River will be available to anyone with a mobile phone on the path. The Design Tech Lab at American River College will assist with Levine’s fellowship project.

Matt Mason, Poet Laureate Fellow, Nebraska

Matt Mason is the author of four collections of poetry, including *At the Corner of Fantasy and Main: Disneyland, Midlife and Churros* (The Old Mill Press, 2022). Mason is the recipient of a Pushcart Prize and two Nebraska Book Awards. The former executive director of the Nebraska Writers Collective, he lives in Omaha and serves as the Nebraska State Poet. In collaboration with Humanities Nebraska, Mason will create the Nebraska Poetry Pen Pal Program, which will bring poetry and poets into rural Nebraska county schools, libraries, correctional facilities, cultural centers, reservations, museums, and other parts of Nebraska’s varied communities. On his tour, Mason will work with Nebraska writers of different ethnicities, backgrounds, and experiences. This project will showcase poetry in a way that will stir interest in and generate excitement about the art form.

Airea D. Matthews, Poet Laureate Fellow, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Airea D. Matthews is the author of two collections of poetry, including *Simulacra* (Yale University Press, 2017), winner of the 2016 Yale Series of Younger Poets. Matthews is an associate
professor and directs the poetry program at Bryn Mawr College, where she was presented with the Lindback Distinguished Teaching Award. Matthews will establish a Philadelphia speaker’s bureau that identifies Philadelphia-area writers and matches them with potential reading opportunities. The model of the speaker’s bureau is equity-based and all published writers can participate. The system for matching will be online and accessible to all potential contractors. Mathews’s second project, “Re/Vision,” a public/private collaboration between Lamar Advertising, Philadelphia Contemporary, and the Free Library of Philadelphia, will use billboards and digital projection to showcase excerpts of poetry from established writers with ties to the areas in Philadelphia that have been greatly impacted by violence. For twelve months, beginning in December of 2022, the messages will rotate monthly across the city and will direct people to visit local branches of the Free Library of Philadelphia. The goal for these engagements with poetry is to offer moments of contemplation and to increase poetry readership among a new generation.

Ray McNiece, Poet Laureate Fellow, Cleveland Heights, Ohio
Ray McNiece is the author of several collections, including Breath Burns Away (Red Giant Press, 2019). The recipient of the Cleveland Arts Prize Lifetime Achievement Award in 2021, he works for both the Ohio Arts Council Arts in Education Residency Artist program and the Center for Arts Inspired Learning of Northeast Ohio. In collaboration with Heights Arts, McNiece will organize the “Poem for Cleveland Project” and create a mosaic of Cleveland voices through intergenerational and multicultural poetry workshops. These will be monthly community-based workshops established with the help of partner organizations that pair youth poets with elders to tell the story of Cleveland. The workshops will feature prompts of place created by youth poets and serve as a template to be shared virtually by the Center for the Book to help other Ohio communities create similar programs. The project will serve as a bridge between cultures, generations, and neighborhoods. It will conclude with an intergenerational reading and celebration at Cleveland Public Library’s main branch, sponsored by the Center for the Book and Heights Arts. An anthology of the work, Poem for Cleveland, will be published by Red Giant Press.

Huascar Medina, Poet Laureate Fellow, Kansas
Huascar Medina is the author of two collections of poetry, including Un Mango Grows in Kansas (Spartan Press, 2020). Medina is the literary editor for seveneightfive magazine, a Sunday columnist for the Kansas Reflector, and a staff editor at South Broadway Press. Medina will organize Words Save Lives, a poetry reading event, in conjunction with mental health professionals, advocates, and suicide prevention organizations, to be held annually on World Suicide Prevention Day as an offering of support and outreach to communities across the state with poetry.

Gailmarie Pahmeier, Poet Laureate Fellow, Nevada
Gailmarie Pahmeier is the author of six collections of poetry, including Of Bone, Of Ash, Of Ordinary Saints: A Nevada Gospel (WSC Press, 2020), which was nominated for the High Plains Book Award. Now emerita, Pahmeier taught creative writing and contemporary literature at the University of Nevada, Reno, for thirty-seven years. Pahmeier will launch “Nevadan to
Nevadan: What I Need to Tell You,” an epistolary poetry project for Nevadans to write letters to other people and places in the state. The project invites participants of all ages, including students in grades K–12, and aims to have both statewide and nationwide reach. Through the project, Pahmeier hopes to encourage Nevadans to speak honestly to one another and to have compassion for Nevada’s many voices and land.

Catherine Pierce, Poet Laureate Fellow, Mississippi
Catherine Pierce is the author of four collections of poetry, including Danger Days (Saturnalia, 2020). She is the recipient of a 2019 Creative Writing Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts and the co-director of the creative writing program at Mississippi State University. Pierce’s project, The Mississippi Young Writers Poetry Festival, will be a day-long celebration of poetry that will serve as the culmination of a statewide poetry-writing initiative. In collaboration with the Mississippi Center for the Book, Pierce will distribute a poem prompt to all K–12 schools across the state, along with resources to help teachers incorporate the prompt into classes. Schools will select poems from each grade and submit them to a panel of Mississippi poets, who will select statewide winners. All school-level winners will be invited to the Mississippi Young Writers Poetry Festival, which will include a reading by the winners, writing workshops for different ages, a keynote by a poet, and an anthology, given to each attendee, featuring the work of student writers.

Rena Priest, Poet Laureate Fellow, Washington
Rena Priest is a citizen of the Lhaq’temish (Lummi) Nation and the author of three poetry collections, including Sublime Subliminal (Floating Bridge Press, 2018). She is the 2022 Maxine Cushing Gray Distinguished Writing Fellow and the recipient of an American Book Award. In recognition of the fact that in the Lhaq’temish (Lummi) Nation, salmon are sacred and celebrated in ceremony and song, central to the tribe’s Sche’le’ngen, or way of life, Priest will create a poetry anthology celebrating Washington state salmon runs and Washington poets. The anthology hopes to raise goodwill and a feeling of reverence for the salmon—a feeling that has guided the tribe’s long-standing stewardship over salmon habitats and harvest management to ensure their success as a species. Priest will work with the Washington Center for the Book and regional tribal organizations to offer workshops where new poems can be created, and the anthology will be publicized through a call for submissions. Priest will launch her fellowship project in collaboration with Humanities Washington.

Lynne Thompson, Poet Laureate Fellow, Los Angeles, California
Lynne Thompson is the author of three collections of poetry, including Fretwork (Marsh Hawk Press, 2019), winner of the Marsh Hawk Press Poetry Prize. Thompson sits on the boards of the Los Angeles Review of Books and Cave Canem, and is the chair of the Board of Trustees at Scripps College, her alma mater. She is the recipient of an Individual Artist Award from the City of Los Angeles, where she lives. Thompson will conduct workshops at the Los Angeles Public Library branches and at literary venues across the city that focus on story-telling through poems as a way of codifying Los Angeles’s recent history and its diverse population. Participants of all ages will be encouraged to attend. Thompson will solicit and compile the poems of the city’s middle and high school students for an anthology. In addition, a select group of poets will be
identified to work with a videographer on reciting their pieces for public distribution. She will partner with the Los Angeles Review of Books on panels that promote and connect the small press publishers working in the greater Los Angeles region.

Emma Trelles, Poet Laureate Fellow, Santa Barbara, California

Emma Trelles is the author of *Tropicalia* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), winner of the Andrés Montoya Poetry Prize and a finalist for Foreword/Indies poetry book of the year. She teaches creative writing at Santa Barbara City College, where she also coordinates the Writing Center. She is the ninth poet laureate of Santa Barbara, California, and the first Latina poet to be appointed to this post. Trelles will further develop the Mission Poetry Series to include additional honoraria for poets and four seasonal community poetry classes in conjunction with the Santa Barbara Public Library. The workshops will be taught by Mission Poetry Series poets at the library’s central and auxiliary branches, and they will be free and open to the public. One poem written by each class participant will be selected to be published and publicly displayed in an outdoor poetry walk at the library’s branches and local schools. Trelles will also continue to fund and develop the Gunpowder Press *Alta California* Chapbook Prize in 2022–23. Open to all Latinx poets throughout California, the prize amplifies and honors the voices of Latinx writers and their communities through publication in bilingual editions, a $250 honoraria, ten copies of their chapbook, and an invitation to read at the Mission Poetry Series.

Gwen Nell Westerman, Poet Laureate Fellow, Minnesota

Gwen Westerman is the author of *Follow the Blackbirds* (Michigan State University Press, 2013), a poetry collection written in Dakota and English. The first indigenous poet laureate of Minnesota, Westerman teaches American and Native Nations literature, technical communication, and humanities at Minnesota State University, Mankato. In collaboration with the Minnesota Center for the Book, Westerman will engage underserved Minnesota youth in grades five through eight with art and nature through three summer workshops at regional state parks, where students will write poetry about their relationships to the land. Westerman will work with poet Michael Torres, as well as graduate students in the creative writing program at Minnesota State University, to bring these young people to inspiring landscapes. She will encourage the students to write poems in English and their home languages on the beauty of the state parks. In addition to the three workshops, there will be a state-wide call for students to write a poem about their favorite state park that will be part of a digital anthology that includes the poems from the summer workshops. The anthology will be published through a free, online resource: MN Writes MN Reads. Poetry in the Parks will be promoted widely through both statewide and local networks.

Crystal Wilkinson, Poet Laureate Fellow, Kentucky

Crystal Wilkinson is the author of the poetry collection *Perfect Black* (University Press of Kentucky, 2021) and three works of fiction. The recipient of a 2022 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Poetry, among other honors, Wilkinson is a professor in the MFA in Creative Writing program at the University of Kentucky and an associate chair of English. In collaboration with Louisville Public Radio, Wilkinson will initiate and host the podcast “Words for the People,” which is produced and distributed by Louisville Public Media. It will explore themes of
community, socio-political issues, diversity, and healing through conversations and artmaking with intergenerational guests, including established and emerging Kentucky writers. Listeners will be inspired to pursue their own artmaking after hearing compelling testimonials and audience prompts.

These 22 Poet Laureate Fellows met the Academy’s eligibility requirements and expectations as confirmed by them and as determined and approved by members of the Academy’s Board of Directors.

The Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellowship program has been made possible by the Mellon Foundation.

For more information, visit: https://poets.org/academy-american-poets/prizes/academy-american-poets-laureate-fellowships

About the Academy of American Poets

Founded in 1934, the Academy of American Poets is the nation’s leading champion of poets and poetry with supporters in all fifty states. The organization annually awards more funds to individual poets than any other organization through its prize program, giving a total of $1.25 million to more than 200 poets at various stages of their careers. The organization also produces Poets.org, the world’s largest publicly funded website for poets and poetry; established and organizes National Poetry Month each April; publishes the popular Poem-a-Day series and American Poets magazine; provides award-winning resources to K–12 educators, including the Teach This Poem series; hosts an annual series of poetry readings and special events; and coordinates a national Poetry Coalition working to promote the value poets bring to our culture.

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