



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CONTACT:

Chris Jones
612-215-2589
cjones@loft.org

Loft Announces 2017 Spoken Word Immersion Fellowship Recipients

The Loft Spoken Word Immersion Fellowship for artists of color and Indigenous artists provides writers financial support and professional assistance to develop and implement self-selecting community learning and enrichment plans.

MINNEAPOLIS, MINN (December 15, 2016)—The Loft Literary Center is excited to announce recipients of the 2017 Spoken Word Immersion Fellowships: **Saymoukda Duangphouxay Vongsay** (Saint Paul, MN), **Diego Vazquez and Marcie Rendon** (Minneapolis, MN), **#BlackTransMagick, J Mase III & Vita E.** (Seattle, WA & Chicago, IL), and **Camisha L. Jones** (Herndon, Virginia). Alternate Hieu Minh Nguyen and Honorable Mentions Keno Evol, May Lee Yang, and Alysia Harris were also named.

The Immersion Fellowship Recipients

The four recipients were selected from a pool of many qualified applications from all over the United States. Each poet or team will receive \$7,500 in support of a self-defined project and will perform at the Loft as part of its Equilibrium Spoken Word series. The winning projects include:

- **Saymoukda Duangphouxay Vongsay** (Saint Paul, MN) will hold conversations with ethnic Lao survivors of the Vietnam War to develop a new body of work exploring memory, violence, trauma, and healing. The poems will go on to live in a series of videos online.
- **Diego Vazquez and Marcie Rendon** (Minneapolis, MN), through their work in the county jails' Women's Writing Project will add a concentrated aspect of spoken word poetry performance for women. Utilizing the latest technology they will work with the jails, the women and Equilibrium to produce a 'virtual' live show for the women and themselves to perform spoken word poetry for an outside audience.
- **#BlackTransMagick**, a performance duo made up of poet/educator **J Mase III** & poet/mc/percussionist **Vita E.** (Seattle, WA & Chicago, IL) will facilitate a 4 day retreat for Black trans spoken word artists.
- **Camisha L. Jones** (Herndon, Virginia) will learn from communities making art accessible to people who are d/Deaf and hard of hearing, share best practices with DC area spoken word event organizers, connect with other poets with disabilities, and



integrate ASL and lessons learned about disability poetics into her own writing and performance.

The Immersion Fellowship Judges

Sham-e-Ali Nayeem is a Philadelphia based poet and visual artist. She is currently working on her forthcoming book of poetry, *The City of Pearls* (UpSet Press 2017).

Danez Smith is a Black, Queer, Poet writer and performer from St. Paul, MN. They are the author of the award-winning *[insert] boy* (YesYes Books, 2014) and the forthcoming *Don't Call Us Dead* (Graywolf Press, 2017). Danez, a member of the Dark Noise Collective, is the recipient of fellowships from the Poetry Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, and is a 2017 National Endowment for the Arts Fellow.

Marisa Carr is a poet, playwright and actor based in Minneapolis, MN. She is a multi-show veteran of The Loft's nationally-acclaimed EQ Spoken Word series. Selected Awards and Fellowships include Minnesota State Arts Board, The Playwrights' Center Many Voices Fellowship, Naked Stages at Pillsbury House + Theatre, Creative Community Leadership at Intermedia Arts and Inroads for Native Writers at The Loft.

The Immersion Fellowships and Spoken Word

From Native storytelling to kwv kxhij (traditional Hmong poetry chanting), from rap to hip hop, spoken word lies at the intersection of community, individual life experience, and art. This art form has long been misunderstood, misrepresented, and pushed to the margins of the literary world. Defined by dynamic, interactive literary performance rich with cultural commentary, the Loft recognizes spoken word as its own genre. For a decade, the Loft has presented Equilibrium, a spoken word performance series in which artists of color engage audiences in provocative issues. The Minnesota Council of Nonprofits honored Equilibrium with its [Nonprofit Mission Award for Anti-Racism](#).

The Immersion Fellowships will support artists of color or indigenous descent in self-designed projects that help them better understand the communities and issues that inform their work. Examples of projects might include a month-long mentorship with elders on a reservation or a series of performances and discussion in a neighborhood market. The goal is to buy artists time to work, to advance and catalyze their artistic development, and to increase exposure to the art of spoken word.

Surdna Foundation

This program is made possible by a major grant from the Surdna Foundation and by the generous support of Loft members. The Surdna Foundation seeks to foster just and sustainable communities in the United States—communities guided by principles of social justice and distinguished by healthy environments, strong local economies, and thriving cultures.



For five generations, since 1917, the Foundation has been governed largely by descendants of John Andrus and has developed a tradition of innovative service for those in need of help or opportunity.

More information is available at www.surdna.org.

###END###

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.