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Inaugural Orange County Poet Laureates Appointed

16-year-old Tina Mai & award-winning poet Natalie J. Graham recognized by LibroMobile Arts Cooperative and O.C. Public Libraries

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[Santa Ana, CA] – In partnership with Orange County Public Libraries (OCPL) and the National Youth Poet Laureate Program (NYLP) championed by Urban Word, LibroMobile Arts Cooperative (LMAC) celebrates and honors local poets who exhibit a commitment to not just artistic excellence but also civic engagement, youth leadership and social justice. On August 28th, at the LibroMobile bookstore in downtown Santa Ana, local poets will be appointed as Orange County’s first Youth Poet Laureate (OCYPL) and Poet Laureate (OC-PL) by LMAC and OCPL.

“The O.C. Poet Laureates program is important because it celebrates and creates visibility for local poets who utilize empowering words to impact social change,” says LMAC Founder and local author, Sarah Rafael García.

The O.C. Poet Laureates program collaborates with local literary arts organizations across the county and will seek to engage with leading national literary organizations including Women Who Submit, Academy of American Poets, Poetry Society of America, PEN Center USA, and the Library of Congress.

Tina Mai, a 16-year-old writer and student residing in Newport Coast, CA, is the first O.C. Youth Poet Laureate in Orange County history. She has received recognition from the Library of Congress, the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers, the Poetry Society of the UK, Bow Seat, the North Carolina Poetry Society, and the CSLA, among others. Outside of writing, she finds passion in public speaking and computer science, including developing an app to aid writing accessibility through spoken word stories.

“I feel so grateful for the opportunity to share my voice, to represent a program that shapes the community through the power of words,” says Mai.

Natalie J. Graham, a resident of Buena Park, CA and currently Chair of African American Studies at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF), is the first O.C. Poet Laureate. Graham is an award-winning author and performer who has toured nationally with her collection of poems, *Begin with a Failed Body* (University of Georgia Press, 2017). Since moving to Orange County in 2013, Natalie has coordinated art-centered community events, workshops, and readings for hundreds of participants.

“We create what we can imagine and articulate. So, poetry is central to justice and transformation,” says Graham. “I’m excited to create, dream, and build together.”

Both candidates were chosen by a panel of esteemed judges, which included local author and LibroMobile founder Sarah Rafael García, OCPL librarians, and Orange County-based community advocates.

“Natalie and Tina were chosen not only because of their polished, timely and necessary poetic voice,” explains García. “But because their work elevates the intersection between artistic excellence and social justice in a region that is 60% people of color. In a region where most literary and arts institutions do not reflect the majority.”

Following the incredible inaugural year of naming O.C. Poet Laureates, Mai and Graham will give readings across Orange County, at several venues including local libraries, museums, and cultural centers.

More About LMAC

Established in 2016 in Santa Ana, LibroMobile Arts Cooperative (LMAC) is a community-based collaboration between a mobile bookstore and cultural center practices. It builds on anti-gentrification movement culture and cultivates diversity through literature and the arts by prioritizing Black, Indigenous, people of color and integrating free reading and writing programs, visual exhibits, and year-round creative workshops in Santa Ana, California, and its surrounding areas. For more information visit, <https://www.libromobile.com>

More About OC Public Libraries

OC Public Libraries is a network of 32 community libraries across Orange County, California. With over 100 years of commitment to its residents, OC Public Libraries offers millions of resources to contribute to the quality of life. The library aims to empower and enrich the community with access to books, eBooks, databases, literacy services, programming, and more. Learn more at <https://www.ocpl.org/>

More About the National Youth Poet Laureate Program

Founded in 2008, the National Youth Poet Laureate Program identifies and celebrates teen poets who exhibit a commitment to artistic excellence, civic engagement, youth leadership and social justice. Learn more at <http://www.youthlaureate.org>

More About Urban Word

Urban Word is an award-winning youth literary arts and youth development organization that collaborates with local youth literary arts organizations across the country to provide uncensored platforms for youth voice. It is championed by the leading national literary organizations, including the President’s Committee on the Arts & Humanities, the Academy of American Poets, Poetry Society of America, PEN Center USA, Cave Canem, and the Library of Congress. For more information visit, <https://www.urbanwordnyc.org/>

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