

HISTORY OF THE POET LAUREATE IN THE BOROUGH OF QUEENS

(prepared by Marie-Lise Gazarian, PhD, St. John's University)

The Poet Laureate project, proposed in 1996 by the Friends of the Queens College Library, was endorsed by then-Queens Borough President Claire Shulman, Former Queens Borough President Helen Marshall, and now Queens Borough President Melinda Katz. The Poet Laureate Administrative Committee met for the first time in September 1996 in the Rosenthal Library at Queens College to establish the position of Poet Laureate for a three-year term and develop eligibility criteria for this honor. The Committee, which also established the Poet Laureate Selection Committee (the Panel of Judges), benefited from the dynamic leadership of David Cohen, its Secretary and Director of the Friends of the Queens College Library; and William Green, Professor of English, Queens College.

The Queens Borough President's Office in association with Queens College is honored to partner with the Queens Public Library for the first time. This will help provide space for the Queens Poet Laureate to present poetry and conduct outreach to the Queens Community.

The Administrative Committee's role since 1996 has been to conduct a search every three years for new candidates. Press releases are sent from the Borough President's Office in conjunction with Queens College and Queens Public Library to the media and Queens-based literary communities.

The judges screen the candidates and select those who most deserve to be Poet Laureate. On the recommendation of the judges, the Poet Laureate is appointed by the Borough President. Candidates must be residents of the Borough and able to inspire an appreciation of poetry among all people, young and old.

The Queens Borough President's Office, along with the Administrative Committee, has planned the installation of each of the four Poet Laureates: Stephen Stepanchev (who served an extra year from 1997-2001), Hal Sirowitz (2001-2004), and Ishle Yi Park (2004-2007), Paolo Javier (who served an extra six months from 2010-2013). These poets represent generations of poetry, and their work is diverse in form and content—only fitting for Queens, the home of America's most diverse population.

The first Poet Laureate Administrative Committee (1997) was composed of the following members: David Cohen, Secretary, Poet Laureate Administrative Committee and Director, Friends of the Queens College Library; William Green, Convenor, Poet Laureate Administrative Committee, Professor of English, Queens College; Aida González-Jarrin, Director of Cultural Affairs, Queens Borough President's Office; Marie-Lise Gazarian, former Coordinator and current Director of the Graduate Program in Spanish, Department of Languages and Literatures, and Editor of *Entre Rascacielos*, a literary journal of creative writing published under her direction, St. John's University;

Andrew P. Jackson (Sekou Molefi Baako), Executive Director, Langston Hughes Community Library & Cultural Center; Lee Cogan, Editor, Queens Historical Society newsletter; Karen Kennely, Program Coordinator, Flushing Council on Culture and the Arts; and Carol Sheffer, Director of Programs and Services Department, Queens Borough Public Library.

The first Poet Laureate Selection Committee (1997): Marie-Lise Gazarian; John Watusi Branch, Executive Director, the Center for Culture, the Afrikan Poetry Theatre; Lila Wheeler Duckett, President, Fresh Meadows Poets; Kimiko Hahn, poet and Professor of English, Queens College; Molly Peacock, poet, former President of the Poetry Society of America; and John Tytell, Professor of English, Queens College.

The second Poet Laureate Administrative Committee (2001): William Green; David Cohen; Aida González-Jarrin Culture and Tourism Director, Queens Borough President's Office; Marie-Lise Gazarian Professor of Languages and Literatures, St. John's University; Lee Cogan; Andrew P. Jackson (Sekou Molefi Baako) Executive Director, Langston Hughes Community Library & Cultural Center; and Susan Agin, House Manager, Flushing Council on Culture and the Arts.

The second Poet Laureate Selection Committee (2001): Marie-Lise Gazarian, Professor of Languages and Literatures, St. John's University; John Watusi Branch; George Held, poet and Professor of English, Queens College, and co-editor of the Ledge, a literary review; Suzanne Noguere, poet and magazine editor; and Stephen Stepanchev, First Poet Laureate of Queens.

The third Poet Laureate Administrative Committee (2004): William Green; David Cohen; Marie-Lise Gazarian; Susan Agin; Andrew P. Jackson (Sekou Molefi Baako); Veronique LeMelle, Culture and Tourism Director, Queens Borough President's Office; Susie Tanenbaum, Community & Cultural Coordinator, Queens Borough President's Office; Alexander Campos, Executive Director, Jamaica Arts Center; Tyra Emerson, Executive Director, Culture Collaborative Jamaica; and Sonia Thompson, Queens borough Public Library.

The third Poet Laureate Selection Committee (2004): Marie-Lise Gazarian, Professor of Languages and Literatures, St. John's University; George Held; and Ali J. Ahmed, poet and professor of Comparative Literature, Queens College.

The fourth Poet Laureate Administrative Committee (2007): Marie-Lise Gazarian, Professor of Languages and Literatures, St. John's University; William Green, Professor Emeritus of English at Queens College; Andrew P. Jackson (Sekou Molefi Baako) Executive Director, Langston Hughes Community Library & Cultural Center; Susie Tanenbaum Director of Immigrant & Intercultural Affairs, Queens Borough President's Office; and Maria Terrone, Assistant Vice President of Communications, Queens College.

The fourth Poet Laureate Selection Committee (2007): Marie-Lise Gazarian (Convenor); Linda Bannerman-Martin, Curator of the Black Heritage Reference Center, Langston Hughes Community Library & Cultural Center; Lynn Lobell, Managing Director, Queens Council on the Arts; Ishle Yi Park; Hal Sirowitz; and Stephen Stepanchev.

Poets who received an Honorable Mention (2007) were Hassanal Abdullah, Christine Hamm, Maria Lisella, David Mills, and Norman Stock.

The fifth Poet Laureate Administrative Committee (2010): - Marie-Lise Gazarian, Professor of Languages and Literatures, St. John's University; William Green, Professor Emeritus of English at Queens College; Andrew P. Jackson, Executive Director, Langston Hughes Community Library & Cultural Center; Lynn Lobell, Managing Director, Queens Council on the Arts; Susie Tanenbaum, Community and Cultural Coordinator, Queens Borough President's Office; Maria Terrone, Assistant Vice President of Communications, Queens College.

The fifth Poet Laureate Selection Committee (2010): John Currie, Julio Marzan, Linda Bannerman-Martin, Curator of the Black Heritage Reference Center, Langston Hughes Community Library & Cultural Center; Linda Michelle Baron, Professor, York College; Luis Francia, Professor, Asian American Studies; Marina Yoffe, Director, Jackson Heights Poetry festival; and poet Rajiv Mohabir.

The sixth Poet Laureate Administrative Committee (2015): Marie-Lise Gazarian, Professor of Languages and Literatures, St. John's University; Andrew P. Jackson, Executive Director, Langston Hughes Community Library & Cultural Center; Lynn Lobell, Grants and Resource Director, Queens Council on the Arts; Nayelli Valencia, Director of Cultural Affairs and Tourism, Queens Borough President's Office; Maria Terrone, Consultant, Queens College Communications, Jeffrey Rosenstock, Assistant Vice President for External and Governmental Relations- Queens College; Donna Ciampa-Lauria, Director of Flushing Library.