Event Title: Poetry on the Plains: Laureateship in the Midwest

Event Description:
Midwestern states cover large geographic areas, and people who serve as state poet laureates must find a way to serve as arts ambassadors across these large and diverse states. How can state laureates--and state arts organizations--reach both the urban and rural populations of their states? How can they offer the arts to historically underserved communities? And how are these roles being shaped by the state arts organizations that create them?

Moderator Opening Remarks:
The panelists here today represent state laureates in different Midwestern states. Though the British title of poet laureate dates back to the 17th century and required writing occasional poems for the crown as part of the official royal appointment, most laureates now are seen as arts ambassadors in their communities. Every state and city with a laureate defines those positions with different term limits and responsibilities—and also different finances (or lack thereof) to fund literary initiatives.

The word laureate dates back to the Greek and Roman practice of using a crown of laurel leaves to honor achievement. The laurel was sacred to Apollo, who was the patron of poets. While the word is beautiful and connotes a loftiness, so often the role is one of service and a persistence to help bring poetry to audiences who might not find poetry otherwise.

Here to share their experiences of bringing the literary arts to their Midwestern states are the following panelists…

Event Participants:

Traci Brimhall is the author of five collections of poetry: Love Prodigal (forthcoming), Come the Slumberless to the Land of Nod, Saudade, Our Lady of the Ruins, and Rookery. A recipient of fellowships from the NEA and National Parks Service, she is a Professor at Kansas State University.

Nicholas Gulig is a Thai American poet from Wisconsin. He is the author of Orient (Cleveland State University, 2018), winner of the 2017 CSU Poetry Center Open Book Competition; Book of Lake (CutBank, 2016); and North
of Order (YesYes Books, 2015). In 2011, Gulig was the recipient of a Fulbright Fellowship to Bangkok. He is the current poet laureate of Wisconsin.

Matt Mason has run poetry workshops for the U.S. State Department and his poetry has appeared in The New York Times. He is the Nebraska State Poet and has received a Pushcart Prize and a fellowship from the Academy of American Poets. His 5th book, Rock Stars, is out this fall from Button Poetry.

Christine Stewart-Nuñez is the author of five books of poetry, most recently The Poet & The Architect, as well as Chrysopoeia: Essays of Language, Love, and Place. She served as South Dakota’s poet laureate from 2019-2021, and currently teaches for the University of Manitoba.

Maryfrances Wagner’s newest books include Red Silk (Thorpe Menn Book Award), Immigrants New Camera, and Solving for X. Published widely in journals, she is Writers Place President, Co-Editor of I-70 Review, and has served as Missouri Individual Artist of 2020 and Missouri Poet Laureate 2021-23.

**Moderator Questions:**

How can state laureates--and state arts organizations--reach both the urban and rural populations of their states?

How can laureates and arts organizations offer the arts to historically underserved communities?

How are these roles being shaped by the state arts organizations that create them?

What was the most satisfying experience you have had as a laureate/literary arts ambassador?

**Q&A Session**