

Manley Award Press Release

[FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE]

The Poetry Lab Announces Winner of Inaugural Markus D. Manley Award

Long Beach, California. April 5, 2024 - The Poetry Lab, an online learning space dedicated to mentoring poets and writers as they craft their learning journeys, is thrilled to announce Shakeema Smalls as the winner of the inaugural Markus D. Manley Award. This prestigious award, named in honor of one of The Poetry Lab's Co-Founders, celebrates and supports BIPOC poets on their creative pursuits.

Shakeema Smalls, a talented poet whose work explores themes of identity, culture, and familial connections, was selected from a pool of exceptional applicants. Raised by her grandmother, Shakeema found solace and inspiration in her family's stories, particularly during times of hardship when her parents and other relatives were incarcerated. She recalls how writing letters to her incarcerated loved ones from the tender age of five became a lifeline, fostering a deep connection and fueling her passion for the written word.

"As a Black child in a Black family navigating a hostile societal landscape, I found refuge in reading, listening, and storytelling," Shakeema shares. "The rich traditions of the Black church and the rhythmic cadences of Gullah Geechee culture infused my upbringing and shaped me into the poet I am today."

As the recipient of the Markus D. Manley Award, Shakeema will receive a \$1,000 stipend to support her artistic endeavors. Over the course of six months, she will have access to free poetry courses, personalized mentorship from accomplished poets and educators, and a wealth of resources provided by The Poetry Lab.

Shakeema's proposed goals for her residency include completing her second manuscript, titled *MACHINE*, and engaging in critical analyses of poetry collections by authors such as Taylor Johnson, Yusef Komunyakaa, and Lucille Clifton. She also plans to conduct craft interviews with BIPOC poets and explore the intersections of prose poetry and lyrical drama in her own work.

"We are thrilled to award Shakeema Smalls with the Markus D. Manley Award," said Danielle Mitchell, Executive Director and surviving Co-Founder of The Poetry Lab. "Her innovative approach to the project proposal was very inspiring. We look forward to supporting Shakeema on her creative journey and witnessing the impact of her work in our poetry community."

Markus D. Manley (1974 - 2014), was a beloved entrepreneur, innovator, and cultural advocate in Long Beach, California. His passion for the arts and his dedication to fostering collaboration

within the community left an indelible mark on all who knew him. Markus's impact extended beyond the realm of poetry; he also played a pivotal role in the establishment of an art gallery, a tour management company, and various other creative ventures. His commitment to community building continues to inspire us to this day.

The Markus D. Manley Award is made possible by the generous support of the Hawthornden Foundation. The Poetry Lab is a fiscally sponsored project of The Arts Area, a 501c(3) nonprofit organization. Applications for the award were open to BIPOC poets who demonstrate a commitment to their craft and a desire to contribute to the literary community. The judges for the 2024 award were members of The Poetry Lab's team including: Danielle Mitchell, Kelsey Bryan-Zwick, Anne Marie Wells, Talicha Johnson, and Joanna Velez.

For more information about The Poetry Lab and the Markus D. Manley Award, visit thepoetrylab.com/manleyaward.

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