



## Twenty-six Elected to Texas Institute of Letters

Members of the Texas Institute of Letters have overwhelmingly approved twenty-six new writers to the TIL, a distinguished honor society established in 1936 to celebrate Texas literature and recognize distinctive literary achievement.

The TIL's elected membership consists of the state's most recognized and serious writers of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, journalism, and scholarship. The membership includes winners of the MacArthur Fellowship, Man Booker Prize, Pulitzer Prizes in drama, fiction, and nonfiction, as well as prizes awarded by PEN, and dozens of other regional and national award and grant-giving institutions.

The 2023 honorees are Sheila Black, Jenny Browne, Christopher Carmona, Hayan Charara, Rubén Degollado, Heath Dollar, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Owen Egerton, Brian Floca, Fernando Flores, Héctor Galán, Liz Garton Scanlon, Kari Anne Holt, Cynthia Levinson, Caleb McDaniel, Marcia Argueta Mickelson, Michael Mooney, Robert Moore, Michael Parker, Ashley Hope Pérez, Roger Reeves, Terry Shames, Helen Thompson, Christian Wallace, Suzan Zeder, and Joaquín Zihuatanejo.

### Introducing TIL's New Members

#### Sheila Black



From San Antonio, she is the director of Zeoglossia, a literary organization seeking to pioneer an inclusive space for poets with disabilities. She has also held a position at AWP and been the director of Gemini Ink, a nonprofit committed to teaching the writing craft and facilitating writers-in-communities programs. An accomplished poet, she has written *All the Sleep in the World*; *Iron*, *Ardent*; *Wen Kroy*; *Love/Iraq*; and *House of Bone*. She is co-editor of an anthology called *Beauty is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability*, which one reviewer calls "a stunningly diverse array of conceptions of self and other."

## Jenny Browne



She has lived in San Antonio since 1997 and was named Texas Poet Laureate in 2017. Her collections of poetry include *At Once*, *The Second Reason*, *Dear Stranger*, and *New and Selected Poems*, which memorialized her appointment as Texas Poet Laureate. A Michener fellow, she has also received grants from the San Antonio Artist Foundation, the Texas Writers League, and the National Endowment for the Arts. In 2020, she was the Distinguished Fulbright Scholar in Creative Writing at the Seamus Heaney Center at Queens University in Ireland. She shares her love of poetry by teaching at Trinity University and for a variety of nonprofit organizations.

## Christopher Carmona



From the Rio Grande Valley, his works include *I Have Always Been Here, beat*, and *The Road to Llorona Park*, which won the 2016 Best Fiction Book Award by the National Association for Chicana/Chicano Studies-Tejas Foco. He has also co-edited two anthologies, *The Beatest State in the Union: An Anthology of Beat Texas Writing* and *Outrage: A Protest Anthology about Injustice in a Post 9/11 World*. He has twice been an Invited Poet at the Americas Poetry Festival of New York, a Featured Poet at The Austin International Poetry Festival, and a Writer in Residence for the Langdon Review Writer-in-Residence Program. He shares his love of writing by serving as an educator, anthologist, academic panelist, and community organizer.

## Hayan Charara



A resident of Texas since 2003, his poetry collections include *These Trees*, *Those Leaves*, *This Flower*, *That Fruit*; *The Sadness of Others*; *The Alchemist's Diary*; and *Something Sinister*, which won the Arab American Book Award and was nominated for The Pulitzer Prize, National Book Award, and National Book Critics Circle Award. He is also the recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship (Poetry), 2009-10. Ito Romo describes his poetry as "a blend of artistic form and commentary that takes from the old as well as from the contemporary to forge an original voice that imagines for us that which we can no longer imagine, or choose not to, a world of poems whose painful realness, distracts us, shakes us, wakes us, makes us think."

## Rubén Degollado



He calls McAllen home and is the author of several short stories appearing in literary magazines and anthologies. His YA novel, *Throw*, won TIL's Jean Flynn Award for Best Young Adult Book and was included in the TAYSHAS list of best books for young readers by the Texas Library Association. His latest book, a novel-in-stories called *The Family Izquierda*, has received starred reviews in *Publisher's Weekly* and *Kirkus*, and was praised in the *New York Times* for its "plot that draws on

magic, language steeped in Tejano specificity, deftly rendered insight into the nature of humanity."

### Heath Dollar



His books include *Waylon County: Texas Stories* and *Old Country Fiddle*, which was named *Southern Literary Review's* 2022 March Read and which won TIL's 2021 Jesse H. Jones Prize for Best Book of Fiction. In their comments for the TIL award, the judges noted "the vast expanse of voices that ranges from a pregnant teenager, to a roadside flag salesman, to a musician in a local symphony. The characters ring true so that in the end the reader says, 'I know these people.'" A gifted short story writer, Dollar was a finalist for the Kay Cattarulla Award for Best Short Story and won the 2018 *Texas Observer* Short Story Prize for "Ink Upon the Furrows." He calls Fort Worth home.

### Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz



Born in San Antonio, her writings on indigenous communities and colonization demonstrate her strong connection to Texas. Her work focuses on how we view our U.S. History and identity. She is the author and/or editor of fifteen books including *Not "A Nation of Immigrants:" Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy and A History of Exclusion and Elimination*; *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment*; and *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, which won an American Book Award in 2015. She is also the winner of 2017 Lannan Foundation's Cultural Freedom Prize.

### Owen Egerton



He has been a resident of Austin since 1975. His novels include *Everyone Says That at the End of the World*; *The Book of Harold, the Illegitimate Son of God*; and *Hollow*. He's also a screenwriter and director with film credits for *Mercy Black* (2019), *Blood Fest* (2018), and *The Axe Murders of Villisca* (2016). He manages a reading series called *One Page Salon*, which features local authors. His awards and honors include the PEN Southwest Book Award and his novel, *Hollow*, being named one of NPR's Best Books of the Year.

### Brian Floca



His titles have received many awards and honors for children's literature including the Orbit Pictus Honor Award, given by the NCTE for outstanding nonfiction, four Robert F. Sibert Honor awards from the American Library Association for informational books, an Irma Black Honor Award for excellence in children's literature, and the Randall Caldecott Medal, awarded annually by the ALA to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children. His titles

include *The Racecar Alphabet*, *Moonshot: The Flight of Apollo 11*, and *Keeping the City Going*, which focuses on the essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. He was born and raised in Temple.

### Fernando Flores



Photo by Eric Morales

His many awards and recognitions include the Alfredo Cisneros del Moral Foundation Award, BuzzFeed's Best Books of Spring 2019, and Tor.com's Best Books of 2019. His titles include *Death to the Bullshit Artists of South Texas*, *Tears of the Trufflepig*, *Valleyesque*, and the forthcoming *Brother Bronte*. Will Evans writes that Flores is "at once a part of the great Texas literary tradition while still redefining what's possible in stories set in Texas, especially those set in the border cities that are so often neglected by major New York publishing houses." He grew up in South Texas and now calls Austin home.

### Héctor Galán



A documentary filmmaker, he has contributed to *Frontline* and to two PBS series, *The American Experience* and *Chicano! History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*. His work has earned numerous awards and recognitions including two Imagen Awards, the Cine Golden Eagle Award, the Telly Award, SXSW Best Documentary, the Golden Apple, and the Blue Ribbon Award. His writing for documentaries focuses on a range of topics from the drug trade, to the history of Tex Mex music, to the plight of farm workers. He was born in San Angelo and now lives in Austin.

### Liz Garton Scanlon



Writing from Austin, she is the author of poetic picture books, most notably *All the World*, which won an ALA Caldecott Honor Medal and is widely regarded as a modern classic. Her more than twenty books showcase her range as a writer of comedy (*Bob, Not Bob*), animal fantasy (*Noodle & Lou*), character- and community- driven narratives (*Kate, Who Tamed the Wind; Thank You, Garden*), and concept books (*One Dark Bird*). Her awards and recognitions include the 2009 Cybils Award, 2010 Indies Choice Honor Award, a School Library Journal Best Book Award, and a New York Times Bestseller.

### **Kari Anne Holt**



She has written over a dozen books for children, including the multi-award-winning novels, *Rhyme Schemer*, *House Arrest*, and *Knockout*. Her books have been recognized at both the state and national level, including by the Texas Library Association, NCTE, ALSC, and Bank Street College. Her novel, *Redwood and Ponytail*, provided powerful representation for LGBTQ youth, and after becoming a target of many book bans, motivated Holt to speak out against censorship. She has taught classes for writers through The Writers' League of Texas, SCBWI, Highlights Foundation, and local libraries and is now on faculty at the Vermont College of Fine Arts' Writing for Children and Young Adults program. She grew up in the Dallas area and now lives in Austin.

### **Cynthia Levinson**



A resident of Texas since the 1980's, she is the author of many nonfiction books for children including *The Youngest Marcher: The Story of Audrey Faye Hendricks, a Young Civil Rights Activist*; *Hillary Rodham Clinton: Do All the Good You Can*; and *Watch Out for Flying Kids!: How Two Circuses, Two Countries, and Nine Kids Confront Conflict and Build Community*. Her latest title, *The People's Painter: How Ben Shahn Fought for Justice with Art*, won the prestigious Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal and was also a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award, Jane Addams Children's Book Award, and the Writers League of Texas Book Award.

### **Caleb McDaniel**



He has lived in South Texas, San Antonio, and now in Houston where he serves as the chair of the Department of History at Rice University. He is the author of *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform*, which won the 2014 Merle Curti Intellectual History Award from the Organization of American Historians. He also wrote *Sweet Taste of Liberty: A True Story of Slavery and Restitution in America*, winner of the 2020 Avery O. Craven Civil War and Reconstruction Book Award from the Organization of American Historians and of the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in History.

### **Marcia Argueta Mickelson**



Originally from Guatemala, she has called Texas her home for most of her life. She has published several adult titles but has made her mark as the YA author of *The Huaca* and *Where I Belong*, which won several awards and honors including Bank Street College Best Children's Book of the Year, Pura Belpré Young Adult Author Honor, In the Margins:

Best Books for Teens, Writer's League of Texas Discovery Prize, and Kirkus Best Teen Books of the Year. Her third YA book, *The Weight of Everything*, will be published this year.

### Michael Mooney



The Dallas-based writer has achieved literary acclaim as one of the nation's most prominent journalists and narrative nonfiction writers. His long-form, nonfiction narratives have appeared in *Texas Monthly*, *Texas Highways*, *D-Magazine*, *The Atlantic*, *GQ*, *Mother Jones*, *Outside Magazine*, *Grantland* and many other regional and national magazines.

His work has been included in the *Best American Sports Writing* series four times and the *Best American Crime Reporting* series. He has won an Eddie & Ozzie Award from *Folio Magazine*, SPI awards for Best Feature Writing and Best Sports Writing, and multiple Florida Press Club awards. His Axios Dallas newsletter was picked as the Best Local Newsletter by the *Dallas Observer*.

### Robert Moore



He is known for his work as an editor of the *El Paso Times* and founder and CEO of *El Paso Matters*, a digital news organization. He has won many awards including the Benjamin C. Bradlee Editor of the Year Award from the National Press Foundation; the Burl Osborne Award for Editorial Leadership from the American Society of News Editors; the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award, as part of a ProPublica reporting team covering the Border Patrol; and the James Madison Award from the Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas. He was also honored as a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize as a reporter for the *Washington Post's* coverage of the mass shootings in El Paso and Dayton, Ohio on August 3, 2019.

### Michael Parker



He is the author of eight novels and three short story collections, several of which have characters and landscapes affiliated with Texas. His forthcoming novel, *I Am the Light of This World*, is set in the early 1970's in Stovall, Texas. He has won fellowships from the North Carolina Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts. Among his awards and honors are several O. Henry Prize stories, the Sir Walter Raleigh Award for Fiction for his collection *The Geographical Cure*, and finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Prize for *Hello Down There*. He lives in Austin.

## Ashley Hope Pérez



From East Texas, she is the author of *The Knife and the Butterfly*, *What Can't Wait*, and *Out of Darkness*, which was a finalist for the Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award sponsored by NCTE's Assembly of Literature for Adolescents, an honoree of the Michael L. Printz Award sponsored by the ALA, a winner of the Américas Award from the Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs and of the Tomás Rivera Award from Texas State University College of Education. A review in *School Library Journal* states that her work "resonates with fear, hope, love and the importance of memory . . . [and] gives voice to many long-omitted facets of U.S. history."

## Roger Reeves



*Photo by Ana Schwartz*

He has lived in Texas since 2017 and is an associate professor of English at UT-Austin. His poetry has been featured in *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *The Nation*, *Sewanee Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Yale Review*, and the Pushcart Prize and Best American Poetry anthologies. He is the author of poetry collections *King Me* and *Best Barbarian*; the plays, "Here, Nigger," "In Preparation of Eden," and "Joan, or The Light That Came in the Name of the Voices"; and a forthcoming collection of essays called *Dark Days*. He is a finalist for the National Book Award for Poetry and the Theodore Roethke Prize.

## Terry Shames



She grew up in Lake Jackson, and her critically acclaimed Samuel Craddock mystery series is set in small-town Texas. She is the winner of several honors and awards including the Macavity Award for Best First Novel for *A Killing at Cotton Hill* and the Romantic Times Reviewers Choice Award for *The Necessary Murder of Nonie Blake*. She was twice named one of the top five Texas mystery authors by *Mystery People*, and her works have been nominated for best novel six times for the Left Coast Crime Award, the Lefty Award for Best Novel, the Macavity Award for Best Novel, and the Strand Critics Award.

## Helen Thompson



She was a vital presence at *Texas Monthly* during the 1980s-1990s, where she published dozens of pieces. When TM created a spinoff lifestyle magazine called *Domain*, she became its editor, and later, she became the first managing editor of *Texas Monthly's* website. She has published several cookbooks and what she calls "a trilogy of Modernism and its place in the American Southwest" that includes *Marfa Modern*, *Texas Made / Texas Modern: The House and the Land*, and *Santa Fe Modern*. She is a recipient of the John G.

Flowers Award from the Texas Society of Architects for Excellence in the Promotion of Architecture, and her papers are now archived as part of the Witliff Collections.

### Christian Wallace



From the West Texas town of Andrews, he writes for *Texas Monthly* and was promoted to senior editor in 2020. Wes Ferguson calls him "one of the most exciting nonfiction stylists writing about Texas right now," and Skip Hollandsworth describes his work as following "the muscular, spirited style of West Texas writing personified by Larry L King." His subjects include oilfields, rodeo cowboys, honkytonks, and the Panhandle Plains. His articles have been finalists for several awards including TIL's Edwin "Bud" Shrake Award for Best Short Nonfiction, National Magazine Awards for "The Resurrection of Bass Reeves," and City and Regional Magazine Awards for "Long Live Honky-Tonks!"

### Suzan Zeder



A graduate of Southern Methodist University in Dallas, she is one of the leading playwrights in the United States for young audiences. As a professor of Theatre at UT Austin, she developed the New Play Development workshop, partnering with national theatre companies and professional artists to create new works with student playwrights. Among her many works are *When She Had Wings*, *The Edge of Peace*, and *Grete! The Musical*. She is a six-time winner of the American Alliance of Theatre and Education (AATE) Distinguished Play Award and has been inducted into the College of Fellows of the American Theatre.

### Joaquín Zihuatanejo



He is the first ever Poet Laureate of Dallas and has published six books of poetry, including his most recent, *Arsonist*, winner of the Robert Dana-Anhinga Prize. Other titles include *Fight or Flight*, *Like & Share*, and his forthcoming *Occupy Whiteness*. He has won the European World Cup of Poetry Slam Championship in Paris, France, and the Individual World Poetry Slam Championship in Charlotte, North Carolina. He has also been a featured performer on *Def Poetry Jam* on HBO, and a featured opening poet for Dr. Maya Angelou at the University of North Texas.