



THE GRIFFIN TRUST  
For Excellence In Poetry

*Press Release*

## THE GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE ANNOUNCES

### Trustees:

Mark Doty  
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### THE 2020 INTERNATIONAL AND CANADIAN SHORTLIST

**TORONTO – April 7, 2020** – Scott Griffin, on behalf of the trustees of The Griffin Trust For Excellence In Poetry, is pleased to announce the International and Canadian shortlist for this year's prize. Judges Paula Meehan (Ireland), Kei Miller (Jamaica/UK), and Hoa Nguyen (Canada) each read 572 books of poetry, from 14 countries, including 37 translations.

The two winners, to be announced via our social media channels (web site, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) on Tuesday, May 19, will each be awarded \$65,000. The other finalists – 3 International, and 2 Canadian, will be awarded \$10,000.

### International

### Trustees Emeriti:

Margaret Atwood  
Robert Hass  
Michael Ondaatje  
Robin Robertson  
Colm Tóibín

*How to Dress a Fish* • Abigail Chabitnoy  
Wesleyan University Press

*Arias* • Sharon Olds  
Jonathan Cape and Alfred A. Knopf

*Time* • Sarah Riggs, translated from the French written by Etel Adnan  
Nightboat Books

*Lima :: Limón* • Natalie Scenters-Zapico  
Copper Canyon Press

### Canadian

*How She Read* • Chantal Gibson  
Caitlin Press

*heft* • Doyali Islam  
McClelland & Stewart

*Magnetic Equator* • Kaie Kellough  
McClelland & Stewart



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**NOTE TO BOOKSELLERS:** Griffin Poetry Prize book stickers are supplied free of charge by The Griffin Trust. Please contact [info@griffinpoetryprize.com](mailto:info@griffinpoetryprize.com) to place an order. Winner book stickers will be available after May 19.

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[info@griffinpoetryprize.com](mailto:info@griffinpoetryprize.com)

**Links:**

**Shortlisted Publishers' web sites:**

Alfred A. Knopf: [knopfdoubleday.com](http://knopfdoubleday.com)  
Caitlin Press: [caitlin-press.com](http://caitlin-press.com)  
Copper Canyon Press: [coppercanyonpress.org](http://coppercanyonpress.org)  
Jonathan Cape: [penguin.co.uk/company/publishers/vintage/jonathan-cape](http://penguin.co.uk/company/publishers/vintage/jonathan-cape)  
McClelland & Stewart:  
[penguinrandomhouse.ca/imprints/mcclelland-stewart](http://penguinrandomhouse.ca/imprints/mcclelland-stewart)  
Nightboat Books: [nightboat.org](http://nightboat.org)  
Wesleyan University Press: [Wesleyan.edu/wespress](http://Wesleyan.edu/wespress)

**Downloadable photographs of the 2020 shortlisted poets:**

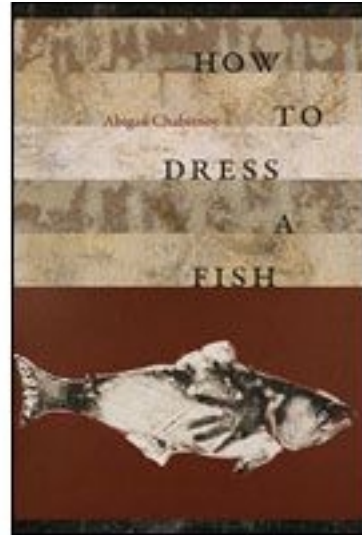
<http://www.griffinpoetryprize.com/news-and-events/media-resources/>



THE GRIFFIN TRUST  
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THE 2020 GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE SHORTLIST  
BIOGRAPHIES AND CITATIONS

International



*How to Dress a Fish* • Abigail Chabitnoy  
Wesleyan University Press

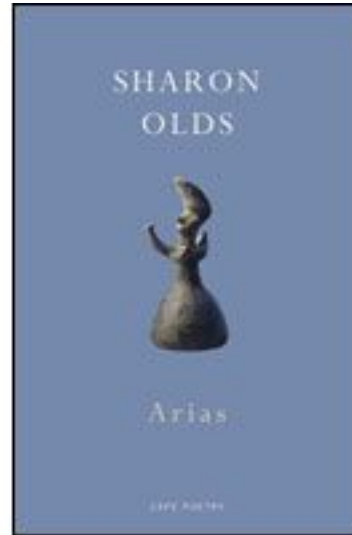
**Biography:** Abigail Chabitnoy earned her MFA in poetry at Colorado State University and was a 2016 Peripheral Poets fellow. Her poems have appeared in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Boston Review*, *Tin House*, *Gulf Coast*, *LitHub*, and *Red Ink* among others. She is a Koniag descendant and member of the Tangirnaq Native Village in Kodiak, Alaska, grew up in Pennsylvania, and currently resides in Colorado. *How to Dress a Fish* is her debut poetry collection.

**Judges' Citation:** "Bringing languagelessness into language, Abigail Chabitnoy's *How to Dress a Fish* is an act of re-mythologizing and personal re-collection, a text of redress to the violence of US colonialism. Like the conronym cleave, like swallowed fish that appear whole, her poems assemble a narrative of displacement and emergence, of that which is half-revived and half-buried, to address instability and unify across divides. With gestures of archival investigation and assemblage, the poems move with undercurrent, sections, elision, and invention into voicings of self, land, story, and mythic place. 'One face is not enough/ to adapt/ to survive/ to be both predator and prey/ and a shark is after all/ not so different'. *How to Dress a Fish* speaks of division's expression and history's fracturing violence. This is a mending inquiry."



THE GRIFFIN TRUST  
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International



***Arias* • Sharon Olds**

Jonathan Cape & Alfred A. Knopf

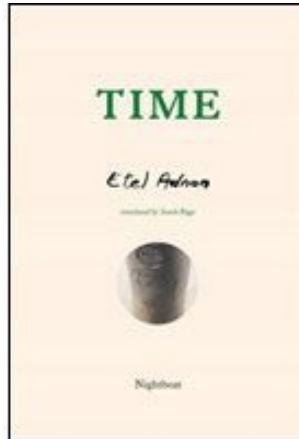
**Biography:** Sharon Olds was born in San Francisco and educated at Stanford University and Columbia University. The winner of both the Pulitzer Prize and England's T. S. Eliot Prize for her 2012 collection, *Stag's Leap*, she is the author of eleven previous books of poetry and the winner of many other honors, including the National Book Critics Circle Award for *The Dead and the Living*. Olds teaches in the Graduate Creative Writing Program at New York University and helped found the NYU outreach programs, among them the writing workshop for residents of Goldwater Hospital on Roosevelt Island, and for the veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. She lives in New York City.

**Judges' Citation:** "The aria is a melody for single voice and these poems sing the music of what happens in the everyday with mother, father, lover, child, unknown citizen. Memory is elevated onto some plane of eternity by the pure lyric grace of this work, this witness. And work it is – there is the heft of heavy lifting, of difficult emotional material moving like magma under enormous pressure to issue volcanically, irrupting into the moment of the poem. It is not just that the personal is political, the intimate here is revolutionary. If there is elegy, there is also transformative empathy and an authoritative moral force. Like Dickinson, like Whitman, like Snyder, like Rich, hers is a voice, demotic and mythic, that defines our times."



THE GRIFFIN TRUST  
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International



**Time** • Sarah Riggs, translated from the French written by Etel Adnan  
Nightboat Books

**Biography:** Sarah Riggs is the author of five books of poetry in English: *Waterwork* (2007), *Chain of Miniscule Decisions in the Form of a Feeling* (2007), *60 Textos* (2010), *Autobiography of Envelopes* (2012), and *Pomme & Granite* (2015). She has translated and co-translated six books of contemporary French poetry into English, including most recently Oscarine Bosquet's *Present Participle*. Sarah Riggs lives in Brooklyn, NY. this is a conversation the world should be leaning into, listening to a writer who has earned every right to be listened to."

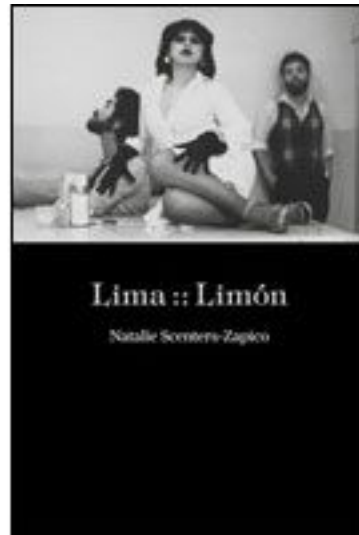
Etel Adnan was born in Beirut, Lebanon in 1925. She studied philosophy at the Sorbonne, U.C. Berkeley, and at Harvard, and taught at Dominican College in San Rafael, California. In 2014 she was awarded one of France's highest cultural honors: l'Ordre de Chevalier des Arts et Lettres and was a winner of the Lambda Literary Award for Lesbian Poetry, and the California Book Award for Poetry in 2013 for *Sea and Fog*. Her most recent books are *Night* (2016) and *Surge* (2018).

**Judges' Citation:** "I say that I'm not afraid/of dying because I haven't/ yet had the experience/ of death' writes Etel Adnan in the opening poem to *Time*. What is astonishing here is how she manages to give weariness its own relentless energy. We are pulled quickly through this collection – each poem, only a breath, a small measure of the time that Adnan is counting. Every breath is considered, measured, observant – perceiving even 'a crack in the/ texture of the day.' If Adnan is correct and 'writing comes from a dialogue/ with time' then this is a conversation the world should be leaning into, listening to a writer who has earned every right to be listened to."



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International



***Lima :: Limón* • Natalie Scenters-Zapico**  
Copper Canyon Press

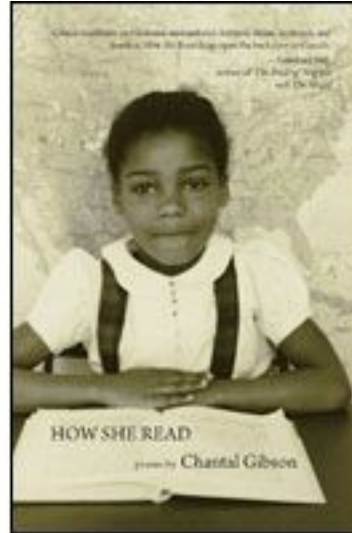
**Biography:** Natalie Scenters-Zapico is a *fronteriza* from the sister cities of El Paso, Texas, USA, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, México. Her first collection, *The Verging Cities* (2015), won the PEN America/Joyce Osterweil Award, GLCA's New Writers Award, NACCS Foco Book Prize, and Utah Book Award. *Lima :: Limón*, is her second collection. She has won fellowships from the Lannan Foundation, CantoMundo, and a Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Fellowship from the Poetry Foundation. Her poems have appeared in a wide range of anthologies and literary magazines, including *Best American Poetry 2015*, *POETRY*, *Tin House*, *Kenyon Review*, and more. She is currently teaching at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington, USA.

**Judges' Citation:** "There is a driving, deliberate, righteous indignation to *Lima :: Limón*, a force that that will unsettle many readers though it is tempered with a mature and forgiving undersong of empathy and love. Natalie Scenters-Zapico is a *fronteriza*, a frontier dweller, a woman shaped by the contending cultures of Mexico and the USA. Her unflinching gaze is turned on machismo and marianismo, and the quotidian reality of community in crisis, in an elegant poetry that speaks through masks both sacred and profane. The shadow of femicide is never far, but the poet finds a redemptive magic in the voices of the mutilated, in the traditions of ancestors, in the salvific powers of language, in poems pushed to the very edge of what can be said."



THE GRIFFIN TRUST  
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Canadian



***How She Read* • Chantal Gibson**

Caitlin Press

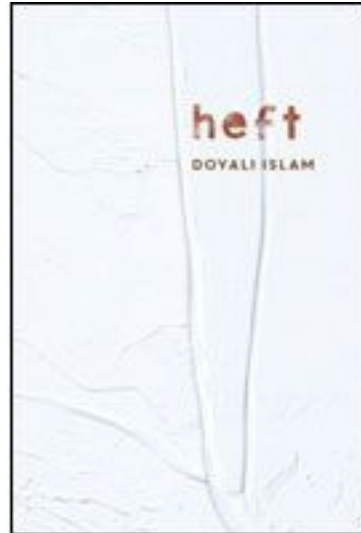
**Biography:** Chantal Gibson is an artist-educator living in Vancouver with ancestral roots in Nova Scotia. Her visual art collection *Historical In(ter)ventions*, a series of altered history book sculptures, dismantles text to highlight language as a colonial mechanism of oppression. *How She Read* is another altered book, a genre-blurring extension of her artistic practice. Sculpting black text against a white page, her poems forge new spaces that challenge historic representations of Black womanhood and Otherness in the Canadian cultural imagination. *How She Read* is Gibson's debut book of poetry. An award-winning teacher, she teaches writing and visual communication in the School of Interactive Arts & Technology at Simon Fraser University.

**Judges' Citation:** "Chantal Gibson invites scrutiny of where language maps, or fails to map, the quiddity of the world. Here the English language carries and transmits the burden of its service to the imperial 'adventure', in schoolbooks, in literature, in historical artifacts and through image and portraiture in paint and photograph. Her interanimation of the visual and the verbal energises a private mark-making, a resistance poetry to the coded, at times subliminal, oppressions of history. To detox the soul then, to be free and creative as citizens, we deserve to read each mark with schooled attention. And trust in our own mark making, our right to speak it the way we see it. This is a fabulous primer, ludic and ferocious, in the grand tradition of liberation handbooks."



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*heft* • Doyali Islam  
McClelland & Stewart

**Biography:** Doyali Islam’s poems have been published in *Kenyon Review Online*, *The Fiddlehead*, and *The Best Canadian Poetry in English*, and have won several national contests and prizes. Doyali serves as the poetry editor of *Arc Poetry Magazine*. In 2017 she was a guest on CBC Radio’s *The Sunday Edition* and was a poetry finalist for the National Magazine Awards. She lives in Toronto, Ontario. *heft* is her second collection of poetry.

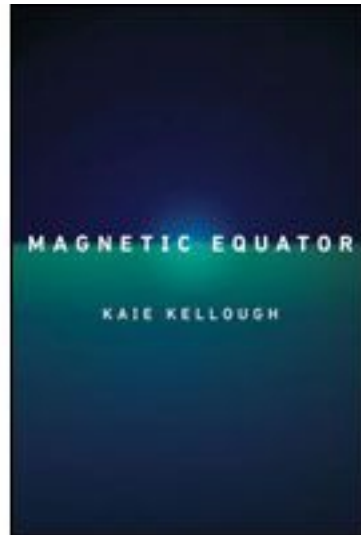
**Judges’ Citation:** “Laid out against the horizontal landscape of the page, from the very beginning these poems demand from the reader a reorientation, and set out a goal to teach us how to read differently – not only the poems but also the world. What is beautiful and successful here is the way Doyali Islam takes small moments and gives to them an incredible, sometimes aching, heft: the ephemera left in a pocket become a map leading us back to love; an ant observed on the floor finds its way onto a white page – a black mark effectively writing its own poem, ‘struggling to interpret its situation’. In each of these poems, Islam makes that struggle for interpretation both wonderful and worthwhile.”





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*Magnetic Equator* • Kaie Kellough  
McClelland & Stewart

**Biography:** Kaie Kellough is a novelist, poet, and sound performer. He was born in Vancouver, British Columbia, raised in Calgary, Alberta, and in 1998 moved to Montreal, Quebec where he now lives. He is the author of the novels *Dominoes at the Crossroads*, and *Accordéon*, which was a finalist for the Amazon.ca First Novel Award, two books of poetry, *Lettricity* and *Maple Leaf Rag*, and two albums, *Vox:Versus* and *Creole Continuum*. He has performed and published internationally.

**Judges' Citation:** "Speaking to Caribbean and hemispheric migrations, the poems in *Magnetic Equator* recall trouble, hybridity, steep falls, continuance, and elaboration. Taking on influence, place, and racialized diasporic experience as it draws language into geographic drifts and historic collisions, these are voicings that cascade and collect 'an accent adrift in its second language / over a b-side version of empire'. Singing of exile and scattering, the text negotiates survival and revolt as it moves with the surety and complexity of improvisation and collaboration. Sonic, visual, and intertextual, Kaie Kellough traces source and accumulation: 'our crossings of past, we depart / opposite, along the sentence that encircles the world'."