

# Fresno State MFA at 25

Celebrating the publishing accomplishments of the  
first 25 years of the Master of Fine Arts program  
at California State University, Fresno

This booklet was produced by Fresno State's Department of English to mark the 25th anniversary of the department's Master of Fine Arts program in creative writing.

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Special thanks to Dr. Corrinne Clegg Hales and Prof. C. G. Hanzlicek.

# Fresno State MFA at 25

A publication of  
the Department of English  
at California State University, Fresno

**FRESNO****STATE**®

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Master of Fine Arts Program  
in Creative Writing

# Note from the Editors

Dear readers,

“Fresno is the capital of poetry in the world.”

By now, you’ve probably heard this infamous understatement from U.S. Poet Laureate Emeritus Juan Felipe Herrera. He said it in 2016, during a keynote address for the city’s LitHop festival.

But if you’re a Fresno writer — poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, or otherwise — Juan Felipe only confirmed what you already knew. The Central Valley grows writers, and Fresno State’s Master of Fine Arts program in creative writing plays a big part.

To mark the MFA program’s 25th anniversary, we have assembled in this e-booklet an astonishing listing of our alumni’s professional accomplishments. We focused on the 36 alumni who’ve published their debut books — more than half of those in the past five years alone — as well the alumni who’ve went on to secure jobs in editing and publishing. This listing also includes two anthologies, two poets laureate, and multiple national literary honors.

Our MFA alumni have also made their marks as educators, and in a wide variety of jobs outside of publishing and academe. While those success stories are not included in this booklet, they are equally as impressive. We hope to document them in the future.

So please join us in celebrating the first 25 years of the Fresno State MFA program. It’s a celebration directly from the capital.

Jefferson Beavers (MFA, 2007)

Sydney Hinton (MFA, 2022)

Jer Xiong (MFA, 2021)

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# ° Faculty Timeline

## Fiction

Steve Yarbrough 1995-2009

Liza Wieland 1995-2006

Craig Bernthal 2003-2006

David Anthony Durham 2007-2009

Alex Espinoza 2007-2016

Randa Jarrar 2010-present

Joseph Cassara 2018-2020

Venita Blackburn 2018-present

# Poetry

C. G. Hanzlicek 1995-2001

Corrinne Clegg Hales 1995-2020

Ruth Schwartz 2000-2003

Tim Skeen 2004-present

Brynn Saito 2018-present

Mai Der Vang 2019-present

# Creative Nonfiction

Lillian Faderman 2001-2007

John Hales 2001-present

Steven Church 2006-present

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# Distinguished Alumni



## ► Megan Anderson Bohigian

MFA 2006 (Poetry)

**Debut book:**

*Sightlines*

(Tourane Poetry Press, 2013)

**Additional book:**

*Vanishing Point*

(Orchard Street Press, 2018, chapbook)

**Also of note:**

Fresno Poet Laureate, 2021–23



## ► Kyle Aisteach

MFA 2014 (Fiction)

**Debut book:**

*Little Dystopias: A Collection*

(Lightning Cellar Publications, 2015)

**aisteach.com**



# Distinguished Alumni



## ► Stacey Balkun

MFA 2014 (Poetry)

### Debut book:

*Jackalope-Girl Learns to Speak*  
(Dancing Girl Press, 2016, chapbook)

### Additional books:

- *Lost City Museum*  
(Bull City Press, 2016, chapbook)
- *Eppur Si Muove*  
(Porkbelly Press, 2019, chapbook)
- *Fiolet & Wing: An Anthology of Domestic Fabulist Poetry*  
(Liminal Books, 2019, anthology co-editor)

### Publishing work:

Chapbook editor, Sundress Publications

[staceybalkun.com](http://staceybalkun.com)



## ► J.J. Anselmi

MFA 2014 (Creative Nonfiction)

### Debut book:

*Heavy: A Memoir of Wyoming, BMX, Drugs and Heavy Fucking Music*  
(Rare Bird Books, 2016)

### Additional book:

*Doomed to Fail: The Incredibly Loud History of Doom, Sludge, and Post-Metal*  
(Rare Bird Books, 2020)

[jjanselmi.com](http://jjanselmi.com)

# Distinguished Alumni



## ► Michelle Brittan Rosado

MFA 2011 (Poetry)

**Debut book:**

*Theory of Falling Into a Reef*  
(Anhinga Press, 2016, chapbook)

**Additional book:**

*Why Can't It Be Tenderness*  
(U of Wisconsin Press, 2018)

[michellebrittanrosado.com](http://michellebrittanrosado.com)



## ► Kenneth Robert Chacón

MFA 2004 (Poetry)

**Debut book:**

*The Cholo Who Said Nothing and Other Poems*  
(Turning Point Books, 2017)

[kennethrobertchacon.com](http://kennethrobertchacon.com)

# Distinguished Alumni



## ► Anthony Cody

MFA 2020 (Poetry)

### **Debut book:**

*Borderland Apocrypha*

(Omnidawn, 2020, finalist for the National Book Award and the PEN/Jean Stein Award)

### **Publishing work:**

- Assistant poetry editor, Noemi Press
- Poetry editor, Omnidawn

### **Previous publishing work:**

- Assistant poetry editor, Boom California
- Editor, Nomadic Press + Nomadic Coffee

**[anthonymcody.com](http://anthonymcody.com)**



## ► Brian Dunlap

MFA 2013 (Poetry)

### **Debut book:**

*Concrete Paradise*

(Finishing Line Press, 2018, chapbook)

**[briansdunlap.wordpress.com](http://briansdunlap.wordpress.com)**

# Distinguished Alumni



## ► Ronald Dzerigian

MFA 2016 (Poetry)

**Debut book:**

*Rough Fire*  
(Finishing Line Press, 2018)

**[rdzerigian.com](http://rdzerigian.com)**



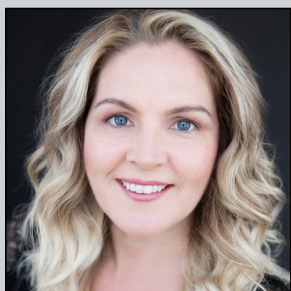
## ► Carole A. Firstman

MFA 2013 (Creative Nonfiction)

**Debut book:**

*Origins of the Universe and What It All Means*  
(Dzanc Books, 2016)

**[carole-firstman.com](http://carole-firstman.com)**



## ► Kristin FitzPatrick

MFA 2009 (Fiction)

**Debut book:**

*My Pulse Is an Earthquake*  
(West Virginia U Press, 2015)

**[kristinfitzpatrick.com](http://kristinfitzpatrick.com)**

# Distinguished Alumni



## ► Monte Francis

MFA 2004 (Poetry)

**Debut book:**

*By Their Father's Hand: The True Story of the Wesson Family Massacre*  
(Harper Collins, 2007)

**Additional book:**

*Ice and Bone: Tracking an Alaskan Serial Killer*  
(WildBlue Press, 2016)

**[montefrancis.com](http://montefrancis.com)**



## ► Guiseppe Getto

MFA 2007 (Poetry)

**Debut book:**

*Familiar History*  
(Finishing Line Press, 2016, chapbook)

**[guiseppegetto.com](http://guiseppegetto.com)**

# Distinguished Alumni



## ▶ Jeffery Gleaves

MFA 2014 (Creative Nonfiction)

### **Publishing work:**

Digital Engagement and Content Director,  
The Academy of American Poets

### **Previous publishing work:**

- Digital Manager, *The Paris Review*
- Director of Marketing and Publicity,  
Dzanc Books
- Web Assistant, *Harper's Magazine*

To see videos of Jeffery talking about  
his time in the program, visit the  
**Fresno State MFA YouTube channel**



## ▶ Cynthia Guardado

MFA 2012 (Poetry)

### **Debut book:**

*Endeavor*  
(World Stage Press, 2017)

[cynthiaguardado.wordpress.com](http://cynthiaguardado.wordpress.com)

# Distinguished Alumni



## ► Sarah Harian

MFA 2013 (Fiction)

### **Debut book:**

*The Wicked We Have Done: A Chaos Theory Novel*

(Penguin/InterMix, 2014)

### **Additional books:**

• *Our Broken Sky: A Chaos Theory Novel*  
(Penguin/InterMix, 2014)

• *A Vault of Sins: A Chaos Theory Novel*  
(Penguin/InterMix, 2014)

• *Eight Will Fall*  
(Henry Holt and Company, 2019)

**sarahharian.com**



## ► Michael Maniquiz

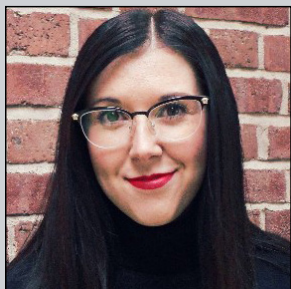
MFA 2006 (Poetry)

### **Debut book:**

*Revolver*

(U of the Philippines Press, 1997)

# Distinguished Alumni



## ► Sarah Fawn Montgomery

MFA 2010 (Creative Nonfiction)

**Debut book:**

*The Astronaut Checks His Watch*  
(Finishing Line Press, 2014, chapbook)

**Additional books:**

- *Leaving Tracks: A Prairie Guide*  
(Finishing Line Press, 2017, chapbook)
- *Regenerate: Poems of Mad Women*  
(Dancing Girl Press, 2018, chapbook)
- *Quite Mad: An American Pharma Memoir*  
(Ohio State U Press, 2019)

**Previous publishing work:**

Nonfiction assistant editor, *Prairie Schooner*

[sarahfawnmontgomery.com](http://sarahfawnmontgomery.com)



## ► Andrea Mortimer Rhodes

MFA 2006 (Poetry)

**Debut book:**

*The River: Reflections on Life and Poetry*  
(Tourane Poetry Press, 2017, chapbook)



# Distinguished Alumni



## ► Janet Nichols Lynch

MFA 2002 (Fiction)

### **Debut book:**

*American Music Makers*  
(Walker and Company, 1991)

### **Additional books:**

- *Women Music Makers*  
(Walker and Company, 1992)
- *Casey Wooster's Pet Care Service*  
(Atheneum, 1993)
- *Where Words Leave Off, Music Begins: Stories*  
(2004)
- *Peace is a Four-Letter Word*  
(Heyday Books, 2005)
- *Chest Pains: A Novel*  
(Bridge Works Press, 2008)
- *Messed Up*  
(Holiday House, 2009)
- *Addicted to Her*  
(Holiday House, 2010)
- *Racing California*  
(Holiday House, 2012)
- *My Beautiful Hippie*  
(Holiday House, 2013)
- *Wheel of Fire*  
(2016)
- *Commie Pinko*  
(2017)
- *Clara Schumann, Pianist and Composer*  
(Bedazzled Ink Publishing, 2021)

**[janetnicholslynch.com](http://janetnicholslynch.com)**

# Distinguished Alumni



## ► Tanya Nichols

MFA 2004 (Fiction)

**Debut book:**

*The Barber's Wife*  
(Alternative Book Press, 2014)

**Additional books:**

- *The Circle Game*  
(Alternative Book Press, 2018)
- *Stinger: A Novel*  
(West of West Books, 2019,  
co-authored with Bill McEwen)

**tanyanichols.net**



## ► Monique Quintana

MFA 2016 (Fiction)

**Debut book:**

*Cenote City*  
(Clash Books, 2019, novella)

**Additional book:**

*My Favorite Sancho and Other Fairy Tales*  
(Sword and Kettle Press, 2020, chapbook)

**Publishing work:**

Contributing editor, *Luna Luna Magazine*

**moniquequintana.com**

# Distinguished Alumni



## ► Sasha Pimentel

MFA 2007 (Poetry)

**Debut book:**

*Insides She Swallowed*

(West End Press, 2020, winner of the American Book Award)

**Additional book:**

*For Want of Water and Other Poems*

(Beacon Press, 2017, winner of the National Poetry Series)

**sashapimentel.com**

To see videos of Sasha talking about her time in the program, visit the **Fresno State MFA YouTube channel**



## ► Feroz Rather

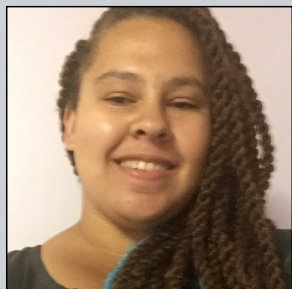
MFA 2010 (Fiction)

**Debut book:**

*The Night of Broken Glass*

(HarperCollins India, 2018)

# Distinguished Alumni



## ► Yinka Rose Reed-Nolan

MFA 2013 (Poetry)

**Debut book:**

*First Crush*

(Hyacinth Girl Press, 2016, chapbook)



## ► Michael David Roberts

MFA 2004 (Poetry)

**Debut book:**

*The Particulars of Being*

(In the Grove Press, 2003)



## ► Emily Jo Scalzo

MFA 2010 (Poetry)

**Debut book:**

*The Politics of Division*

(Five Oaks Press, 2017, chapbook)

# Distinguished Alumni



## ► Steven Sanchez

MFA 2014 (Poetry)

**Debut book:**

*To My Body*

(Glass Poetry Press, 2016, chapbook)

**Additional books:**

• *Photographs of Our Shadows*

(Agape Editions, 2017, chapbook)

• *Phantom Tongue*

(Sundress Publications, 2018)

**[stevensanchezpoetry.com](http://stevensanchezpoetry.com)**



## ► Navdeep Singh Dhillon

MFA 2006 (Fiction)

**Debut book:**

*Sunny G's Series of Rash Decisions*

(Dial Books/Penguin Random House, 2022)

**[navdeepsinghdhillon.com](http://navdeepsinghdhillon.com)**

To see videos of Navdeep talking about his time in the program, visit the **Fresno State MFA YouTube channel**

# Distinguished Alumni

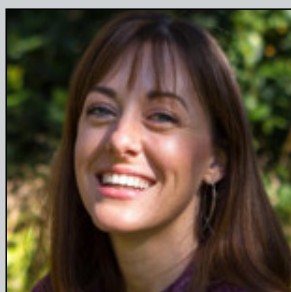


## ► Liz Scheid

MFA 2008 (Poetry)

**Debut book:**

*The Shape of Blue: Notes on Loss, Language, Motherhood and Fear*  
(The Lit Pub, 2013)



## ► Rachel Starnes

MFA 2010 (Creative Nonfiction)

**Debut book:**

*The War at Home: A Wife's Search for Peace and Other Missions Impossible*  
(Penguin Books, 2016)

[rachelstarnes.com](http://rachelstarnes.com)



## ► Elizabeth Schulte Martin

MFA 2009 (Fiction)

**Debut book:**

*Everything You Came to See*  
(Skyhorse Publishing, 2018)

# Distinguished Alumni



## ► Burlee Vang

MFA 2009 (Fiction)

**Debut book:**

*The Dead I Know: Incantation for Rebirth*  
(Swan Scythe Press, 2010, chapbook)

**Also of note:**

Winner of a Nicholl Fellowship from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, with his brother Abel Vang. Co-directed the feature films *Bedeviled* and *They Live In the Grey*.

**vangbrothers.iom**



## ► James Tyner

MFA 2009 (Poetry)

**Debut book:**

*The Ghetto Exorcist*  
(Autumn House Press, 2009, chapbook)

**Also of note:**

Fresno Poet Laureate (2013–15)

# Distinguished Alumni



## ► Soul Choj Vang

MFA 1999 (Poetry)

**Debut book:**

*To Live Here*

(Imaginary Friend Press, 2014)

**Also of note:**

The first MFA alumni to endow a creative writing scholarship at Fresno State



## ► Ashley Wells

MFA 2012 (Creative Nonfiction)

**Debut book:**

*The Cowgirl and the Racehorse: A Recovery*

(Skinner House Books, 2020)

[ashley-wells.com](http://ashley-wells.com)



## ► Erik Wilbur

MFA 2018 (Poetry)

**Debut book:**

*What I Can Do*

(Chestnut Review Press, 2020, chapbook)

[erikwilbur.com](http://erikwilbur.com)



# Distinguished Alumni

## ▶ Erin L. Álvarez

MFA 2013 (Creative Nonfiction)

**Previous publishing work:**  
Editorial assistant, *Fourth Genre*

## ▶ Cindy Bradley

MFA 2016 (Creative Nonfiction)

**Publishing work:**  
• Assistant nonfiction editor,  
*Pithead Chapel*  
• Reader, *Under the Sun*

## ▶ Peter Driscoll

MFA 2012 (Fiction)

**Previous publishing work:**  
Production manager,  
*Dwell Magazine*

## ▶ Karen Eileen Sikola Kovach

MFA 2009 (Creative Nonfiction)

**Publishing work:**  
Senior editor, Beable Education

**Previous publishing work:**  
Development editor,  
National Geographic Learning

## ▶ Angel Gonzales

MFA 2021 (Fiction)

**Publishing work:**  
Editorial assistant,  
*Poetry Magazine*

## ▶ Nicole Lassen

MFA 2014 (Creative Nonfiction)

**Previous publishing work:**  
• Production manager,  
*Dwell Magazine*  
• Production manager,  
*Afar Magazine*

## ▶ Brandi Spaethe

MFA 2013 (Poetry)

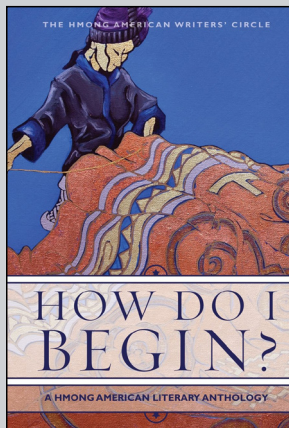
**Previous publishing work:**  
Program associate,  
Poets & Writers, California office

## ▶ Vuong Quoc Vu

MFA 2006 (Poetry)

**Publishing work:**  
• Founder and publisher,  
Tourane Poetry Press  
• Founder and editor,  
*Perfume River Poetry Review*

# Anthologies Published



## ► Hmong American Writers' Circle

### Book:

*How Do I Begin? A Hmong American Literary Anthology*  
(Heyday Books, 2011)

### Co-editors:

Including Prof. Mai Der Vang and  
MFA alumni Anthony Cody, Burlee Vang,  
Soul Choj Vang, and Andre Yang

[hmongwriters.org](http://hmongwriters.org)



## ► The Normal School

### Book:

*The Spirit of Disruption: Landmark Essays from The Normal School*  
(Outpost19, 2018)

### Editor:

Prof. Steven Church

### Also of note:

With selections, editing, and promotions  
by MFA students in the English 286  
Practicum in Literary Arts course

[thenormalschool.com](http://thenormalschool.com)

For the latest news from the creative writing program at Fresno State, you can follow the **@FresnoStateMFA** social media channels on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube.

Students have studied creative writing at Fresno State since the late 1950s, long before the MFA Program was started in 1995-96. The Creative Writing Alumni Chapter of the Fresno State Alumni Association aims to bring together the multiple generations of Fresno writers. Visit **Facebook.com/Groups/FresnoStateCreativeWriting** to participate in the alumni chapter's efforts.

To directly support students in Fresno State's Master of Fine Arts program in creative writing — and to provide the ballast for the scholarships and projects that will help lift up the next 25 years of Fresno writers — please consider a tax-deductible gift to Fresno State.

Visit **FresnoState.edu/CreativeWriting** and click on Support, or contact the Department of English at 559.278.1569.

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[FresnoState.edu/CreativeWriting](https://FresnoState.edu/CreativeWriting)