



SUPPORTING ART AT ITS SOURCE

LaSalle Storyteller Award Recipients Sample Applications

Contents

Artist Biographies	Page 2
Impact Statements	Page 3
Essays	Page 4

**Samples taken from previous LaSalle Storyteller Award applications. Samples based on previous years' guidelines and applications.*

Artist Biographies

Peter Mountford
2016 LaSalle Storyteller Award Recipient

When I graduated from the UW's MFA program in 2006 I was 30-years-old, unemployed, and unpublished, carrying an additional \$28,000 in student loans. That summer I directed traffic in a parking lot wearing a bright yellow vest.

I'd written and thrown away two novels, dozens of stories. I very badly wanted to quit writing and find a viable path to financial security, but I was incapable of not writing. So I wrote yet another novel. Most of what I've written since that summer has been published—2 novels, and at least 30 stories or essays.

Someone recently told me: "Writing isn't as hard as ditch digging, but at least with digging you've got a shovel." Yes. It's not easy, but I'm learning. I still fail often, but I fail better, as Beckett would say. And if failure is the price for taking risks, I'll happily fail every day.

Impact Statements

Peter Mountford
2016 LaSalle Storyteller Award Recipient

This award would be a huge benefit to me, financially, and as a very high-profile validation of my work. Despite applying everywhere, in the last four years I've only received one paying fellowship/grant/award, and my work has never been supported by Artist Trust.

My resume looks "fancy," so panelists might assume I'm just fine.

In fact, I earn less than \$10,000/year from my writing, and I'm a single parent of two daughters (that's \$15,000+ in childcare expenses). I "sold" a screenplay to James Franco, which sounds glamorous, except I was paid 25 cents. Literally. My income is unpredictable (e.g. at the MFA program where I teach, I make \$1200/student. This semester I got zero students).

The majority of my income comes from an unreliable patchwork of part time gigs, mostly as a teaching artist, but also as the part-time events curator at Hugo House (where I'm salaried, but average \$10/hr).

Essays

Peter Mountford
2016 LaSalle Storyteller Award Recipient

W.H. Auden said: “Great art is clear thinking about mixed feelings.” The pursuit of a literary space plagued by my own “mixed feelings,” or what I like call my “passionate ambivalence,” is absolutely central to my writing life.

Everyone knows that a good story will have a struggle within it—often protagonist vs antagonist—but that’s not necessarily artful, it might just be a Bruce Willis movie. I like action movies a lot, but they usually don’t infect my mind and heart with something that I find difficult to forget. And I very badly want to infect the minds and hearts of my readers with something that they can’t easily put aside.

How do you accomplish that? You go after mixed feelings.

Plot is also needed, absolutely, but I think stories require a struggle on the level of the idea. And it needs to be a fair fight. I can’t write a book about why killing journalists is bad for democracy because the argument is too straightforward. I can write a 700-word op-ed on that subject—in fact, I have—but it gets pretty redundant if you stretch that message over 70,000 words. There’s just no moral ambivalence.

I recently finished a rough draft of my third novel after six years of working on it (I started writing it before my first book came out). The delay was because for years I didn’t have mixed feelings about the subject. The book takes place during the climax of the Sri Lankan Civil War in 2009, and I only felt outraged at the injustice of what happened. But outrage isn’t interesting. I needed to get close enough to the characters to find more nuanced problems.

In her introduction to “Against Forgetting,” Carolyn Forché argues that successful “political” literature erases the boundary between personal and social inquiry. Yes. And this, I’d argue, is how it’s done: you go so close to the subject that you can’t see the politics anymore, where you can only see more difficult problems, the stuff that you will remember, whether you want to or not.

Anca Szilagy 2015 LaSalle Storyteller Award Recipient

A yearning for something lost or just out of reach continually recurs in my fiction. But, on the other side of that, my fiction celebrates movement, serendipitous change, and fleeting magic. I see the world as both treacherous and marvelous; elements of the macabre often creep into my work, and, in response, flight recurs as a motif. My aesthetic ranges from a realism gone slightly askew to more fully realized encounters with magic or wonder. This is motivated by attempts to catch those lost or fleeting moments.

Storytelling offers so many possibilities for capturing the ephemeral. I strive to explore multiple voices in my work. Each voice in each story conveys a particular place and moment in time, a particular mood or charged atmosphere. In my zeal for capturing such moments, I aim for a lighter touch, erring on the side of subtlety. Italo Calvino's "Six Memos for the New Millennium" lauds quickness, lightness, and multiplicity in writing. Maintaining these qualities is key to my approach. My short stories are quite short, and my novels hover around 200 pages. I rather cut to the bone than pile it on. Life is short. And it would be shorter without telling the many stories needing to be told.

Myth and fairy tale, in their quickness and multiplicity, have long influenced my writing. Fabulists Angela Carter, Gunter Grass, and Salman Rushdie have been major contemporary influences on my work. Studying with Maya Sonenberg at the University of Washington also led me to Kate Bernheimer and Joy Williams. The realists Anton Chekhov and Mavis Gallant help me think of the highly specific and selective intimate detail – a vision for storytelling and for conjuring the mysterious that has its own special powers. All of these writers illuminate my sense of an elastic realism. By playing with these gradations, I hope readers will see, from time to time, glints of magic in their own lives.