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### Overview of Poet Laureate Programs

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

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## The Language of Art

The world reveals itself in leaf fall and story, unfolds its limbs across canvas or screen, all we know spoken in the language of art. How else to see the expanse of dark upon dark that brings forth an infinity of stars? How else to feel the quick lifting of the chest, arms opening wide? How else to hear birdsong or falling sleet? Art maps the continual pulse of the wind in the reddening branches, the stories of impossible loss and forgiveness articulating the heart's flaws and yearnings, the rising call of one voice winding around another to break us open in love. This is the song of time's mechanics and mystery: the understanding in our bones, the layers of history held in rock, the weather unfurling across the shimmering tilt of changing land. The painting's finger lines of fire tracing slope and expanse show us slope and expanse. The end of the novel proves how each moment is composed of signs and wonders. The nested stories of ancestors and those not yet born call through motion or sound from the other side of the horizon. All who come to the fire of this language make visible the visible world. How can we not open wide the closed places in time, budget or intent to speak this language of heron and chorus? How can we not return, how can we not begin again and continue, how can we not come home to the words of days so that we can hear what the world asks of us, and how we will answer?

~ Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg  
Poet Laureate of Kansas

**BACKGROUND:** The Poet Laureate program began in 2005 under the auspices of the Kansas Arts Commission. Previous poets laureate are Jonathan Holden and Denise Low. Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg is the third poet laureate, appointed by then-governor Kathleen Sebelius in July, 2009. After the defunding of KAC, the poet laureate program continued without an organizational sponsor from May, 2011 until now. The current poet laureate webpages from all three poets laureate are currently archived on Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg's website ([www.carynmirriamgoldberg.com](http://www.carynmirriamgoldberg.com)) and will be transferred to KHC in the future.

**BACKGROUND ON PRESENT POET LAUREATE:** Dr. Mirriam-Goldberg is the author of a forthcoming book on the Holocaust, *Needle in the Bone: How a Holocaust Survivor and Polish Resistance Fighter Beat the Odds and Found Each Other*; four collections of poetry; *The Sky Begins At Your Feet: A Memoir on Cancer, Community and Coming Home to the Body*; a writing guide for teens, *Write Where You Are*; several anthologies; and a novel, *The Divorce Girl*. She is the founder of Transformative Language Arts Program at Goddard College, where she teaches. She leads writing workshops statewide. Holding a PhD in literature from the University of Kansas, Mirriam-Goldberg has been as a discussion leader for KHC's popular TALK program since 1992.

**HUMANITIES COUNCILS & POET LAUREATE PROGRAMS:** There are presently 40 states with poet laureate programs, six under the auspices of state humanities councils (Louisiana, Oklahoma, Colorado, Iowa and Minnesota, and in partnership with other organizations, Washington), 19 under state arts agencies, and the remaining under tourism departments or other organizations.

## **POET LAUREATE PROGRAMS DURING CARYN MIRRIAM-GOLDBERG'S TERM:**

Miriam-Goldberg's Poet Laureate projects build on the work of Dr. Denise Low, who published electronic broadsheets, a book on Kansas poets, and started a blog on Kansas writers, and Dr. Jonathan Holden, who presented statewide tele-seminars on the craft of poetry, and began a website on Kansas poets. Here is a summary of her work to convey what a Kansas poet laureate can bring to the state:

### ▲ **PUBLICATIONS:**

- ▲ *Begin Again: 150 Kansas Poems:* In commemoration of the Sesquicentennial, Miriam-Goldberg edited the anthology *Begin Again: 150 Kansas Poems* (Woodley Memorial Press), which was followed by a 20-city poetry caravan book tour (up to 20 poets at a time) with readings and workshops in Garden City, Ulysses, Dodge City, Manhattan, Salina, Topeka, Wichita, Lawrence, Kansas City, Pittsburg, Emporia, Leavenworth, St. Francis and other communities.
- ▲ *An Endless Skyway: Poems from the State Poets Laureate of America:* Miriam-Goldberg, Low and two other state poets laureate co-edited an extensive anthology of poems by state poets laureate (Ice Cube Press), released in March, 2011.
- ▲ *To the Stars Through Difficulties: A Kansas Renga in 150 Voices:* Miriam-Goldberg is currently in final stages of editing a renga, a Japanese conversational poem (each poet adds 10 lines, building previous poets' writing), to be published (Mammoth Publications) this year and followed by a book tour featuring the poetry caravan.

### ▲ **STATE POET LAUREATE CONFERENCES:**

- ▲ Poetry and Politics: A Gathering of State Poets Laureate. Miriam-Goldberg represented Kansas at a national event in New Hampshire on October, 2011, with statewide readings and a conference including legislators, politicians, journalists, and the public.
- ▲ Poet Laureati: A National Convergence of Poets Laureate: Miriam-Goldberg organized a conference in Lawrence in March, 2011, featuring 20 poets laureate from across the country (Alabama to Alaska), which drew 120 participants from eight states.
- ▲ Poet Laureati: A Midwest Convergences of Poets Laureate: Miriam-Goldberg organized a conference in Lawrence in March, 2011, featuring 8 poets laureate from the Midwest.

### ▲ **PROGRAMS:**

- ▲ Poetry Across Kansas: Reading and Writing Our Way Home: This program includes public readings, writing workshops, and trainings designed to facilitate ongoing writing circles in communities throughout Kansas. Events are scheduled at the initiative of the local host organization.
- ▲ Readings & Workshops: Poets laureate give public readings and workshops throughout Kansas in schools, colleges and universities, libraries, arts and community centers.
- ▲ Talks: Miriam-Goldberg has given talks on poetry, including on various aspects of poetry and its applications at colleges, conventions and community centers.
- ▲ Collaborative Programs: Miriam-Goldberg has helped organized and/or participated in collaborative programs with visual artists, musicians, dancers, etc.

▲ **POETRY MONTH:** In April each year, Miriam-Goldberg has offered special projects, including (over the years) the Poetry Pen-Pal project, Kansas Daily Poem in Your Pocket, weekly poetry contests, and special writing prompts, readings and podcasts.

▲ **POETRY OUT LOUD:** The poet laureate serves as one of the judges for this state contest, now sponsored by the Department of Education.

▲ **150 KANSAS POEMS WEBSITE:** Miriam-Goldberg created and maintained this site for two years: [www.150KansasPoems.wordpress.com](http://www.150KansasPoems.wordpress.com)

▲ **SOCIAL MEDIA:** The poet laureate has maintained a blog about literature and the writing life with automatic posts to the Poet Laureate pages on Facebook and Twitter. She also has shared podcasts and videos on topics related to poetry and the writing life.