

SAN MATEO COUNTY POET LAUREATE



Poetry Reading by San Mateo County Poet Laureate Aileen Cassinetta Tuesday, June 28, 2022

About the poet:

Aileen Cassinetta is an Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellow and served as Poet Laureate of San Mateo County for two terms (January 2019-June 2022). During her tenure, she launched the “San Mateo County Youth Ecopoetry Project,” a series of workshops, short films and documentary that highlight young people’s climate advocacy through the lens of poetry, film and equity. One of the films premiered at the Nature & Culture Film Festival in Copenhagen in November 2021. Her other cornerstone project is “Speak Poetry in San Mateo County,” which included readings and a web archive featuring the work of poets from the county and the greater Bay Area on the theme of belonging. Between 2020 and 2021, she launched the first anthology of inaugural poems by San Mateo County youth, and the first collaborative poem which raised funds for the county’s pandemic relief efforts and was also used as resource material or featured in four other states. As poet laureate, she collaborated with local agencies and organizations to amplify the role of poetry in the context of larger intersectional movements. She received a Special Congressional Recognition in 2021, and was appointed by the Board of Supervisors to serve as Commissioner for the Commission on the Status of Women through 2025. A 2022 Metro Film and Arts Foundation grantee, she worked in collaboration with other artists and filmmakers to raise funds for the House of Ukraine and to showcase how the performing arts can create common ground for recognition and celebration of our shared humanity. She is part of a working group on environmental justice that will be releasing an anthology in 2023.

About this poem:

“Speak Poetry” is part of a longer collaborative work by the 2021 Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellows. It is also Aileen Cassinetta’s laureateship in a nutshell.

Speak Poetry

I was taught to gather
Only what belonged to me
To never pick wildflowers
But instead commit
To memory the shape
And sound of what they
Shelter, painted lady
Bumblebee, when I say
Speak poetry—
I mean know the language
Of wild and fragile things
Speak of flight and firelight
How to measure a wingspan
A lifespan, a split second
That changes everything
Carry each other
The poet says, this matters
More than anything.