

Hugo House announces 2020–21 Word Works Lineup

Porochista Khakpour | on Writing Toward & Against Identity

Lauren Groff | on Fiction’s Hidden Architectures

Jericho Brown | Nonsense and Senselessness

Melissa Febos | In Praise of the Confessional

Joy Harjo | Our Songs Came Through

Russell Banks | Memory, Abandonment, and Betrayal

SEATTLE, WA—The writers who will be giving craft talks as part of Hugo House’s Word Works: Writers on Writing 2020–21 series include **Porochista Khakpour**, **Lauren Groff**, **Jericho Brown**, **Melissa Febos**, **Joy Harjo**, and **Russell Banks**. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this season will take place entirely online.

Word Works talks draw back the curtain on the process of writing and examine how language works to inspire and provoke new ideas. Through live close readings of the writer’s own or others’ work, these events focus on writing as process rather than finished product. A conversation with a notable critic, editor, or writer follows each talk.

The first Word Works event of the season will take place on December 4, 2020, and feature **Porochista Khakpour**. Khakpour’s talk will explore ways that the personal essay can be instrumental in examining the self. Using her own award-winning writing, as well as classic and contemporary examples, she’ll show how memoirists and essayists can turn intention into action with their own essay projects.

On February 5, 2021, **Lauren Groff**—National Book Award finalist and bestselling author of *Florida* and *Fates & Furies*—will deconstruct the key differences between how short stories and novels are made, laying out pragmatic and achievable blueprints for both.

The third Word Works of the season, on March 5, 2021, features Pulitzer Prize-winning poet **Jericho Brown**, author of *The Tradition*, *The New Testament*, and *Please*. His talk will dive into what’s going on when we read a poem and think, “That doesn’t make sense.” Looking at examples of sense and nonsense in his and others’ work, Brown will explore the different techniques poets use to balance meaning and mystery.

Kicking off the second half of the series will be memoirist **Melissa Febos**, who will speak on April 9, 2021, about the therapeutic power of writing about intimate or traumatic experiences and how aesthetics play into that process.

On April 23, 2021, award-winning writer and US Poet Laureate **Joy Harjo** will discuss the writing techniques that have helped her create a beloved body of work that includes nine books of poems, two children's books, three plays, and more, and which Sandra Cisneros calls "light and elixir, the very best prescription for us in wounded times."

Finally, to conclude the series, on May 14, 2021, **Russell Banks**—the author of *Affliction* and *The Sweet Hereafter*, which were both adapted into critically acclaimed films—will give a talk on how character is defined through memories, confabulations, fictions, and dreams in his newest novel, *Foregone*.

[Season passes](#) and tickets for [the individual events](#) are on sale now. Visiting writers for the series also teach one- or two-day writing classes at Hugo House on a topic of their choice.

All Word Works events this season will start at 6 p.m. Pacific Time. More information on events and classes can be found at hugohouse.org.

About the Writers

Russell Banks is a member of the International Parliament of Writers and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His work has been translated into twenty languages and has received numerous international prizes and awards. He has written fiction, and more recently, nonfiction, with *Dreaming up America*. His main works include the novels *Continental Drift*, *Rule of the Bone*, *Cloudsplitter*, *The Sweet Hereafter*, and *Affliction*. The latter two novels were each made into feature films in 1997.

Jericho Brown is the recipient of a Whiting Writers' Award and fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Brown's first book, *Please* (2008), won the American Book Award. His second book, *The New Testament* (2014), won the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award. He is also the author of the collection *The Tradition* (2019), a finalist for the 2019 National Book Award and the winner of the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. He is the Charles Howard Candler Professor of Creative Writing and the director of the creative writing program at Emory University in Atlanta.

Melissa Febos is the author of the memoir *Whip Smart* and the essay collection *Abandon Me*, which was a LAMBDA Literary Award finalist, a Publishing Triangle Award finalist, and an Indie Next Pick. Her third book, *Girlhood*, an illustrated essay collection, is forthcoming on March 30, 2021 from Bloomsbury. A craft book, *Body Work*, is forthcoming in 2022 from Catapult. In 2018, Febos was the recipient of the Jeanne Córdova Nonfiction Award from LAMBDA Literary and the Sarah Verdone Writing Award from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council. She has been awarded prizes and fellowships from MacDowell, Bread Loaf Writer's Conference, Virginia Center for Creative Arts, Vermont Studio Center, Ragdale, *Prairie Schooner*, and others. She is an associate professor at the University of Iowa, where she teaches in the nonfiction writing program.

Lauren Groff is the award-winning and bestselling author of the celebrated short story collections, *Delicate Edible Birds* and *Florida*, a finalist for the National Book Award, as well as three novels—*The Monsters of Templeton*, shortlisted for the Orange Prize for New Writers, *Arcadia*, winner of the Medici Book Club Prize, and *Fates and Furies*, a finalist for the National Book Award and Amazon’s pick for Best Book of the Year.

Joy Harjo is an internationally renowned performer and writer of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and was named the 23rd Poet Laureate of the United States in 2019. The author of nine books of poetry, several plays and children’s books, and a memoir, *Crazy Brave*, her many honors include the Ruth Lily Prize for Lifetime Achievement from the Poetry Foundation, the Academy of American Poets Wallace Stevens Award, a PEN USA Literary Award, Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund Writers’ Award, a Rasmuson US Artist Fellowship, two NEA fellowships, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. Harjo is a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and is a founding board member of the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation. She lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where she is a Tulsa Artist Fellow.

Porochista Khakpour’s debut novel, *Sons and Other Flammable Objects*, was a *New York Times* Editor’s Choice, one of the *Chicago Tribune*’s Fall’s Best, and the 2007 California Book Award winner in the First Fiction category. Her second novel *The Last Illusion* was a 2014 “Best Book of the Year” according to *NPR*, *Kirkus Reviews*, *BuzzFeed*, *PopMatters*, *Electric Literature*, and many more. Among her many fellowships is a National Endowment for the Arts award. She has been guest faculty at VCFA and Stonecoast’s MFA programs, as well as contributing editor at *Evergreen Review*. Born in Tehran and raised in the Los Angeles area, Khakpour currently lives in New York City.

About Hugo House

Hugo House opens the literary world to everyone who loves books or has a drive to write—giving people a place to read words, hear words, and make their own words better through writing classes, readings and events, and residencies.

hugohouse.org

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Our physical location is closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic; all our programs currently operate online.