

OPINION

Celebrating poetry together

Four poet laureates share their work, an art form with the power to heal, unite

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Poetry uplifts, inspires, sparks joy and helps us express some of our more difficult emotions. Poetry can be serious, silly or thought-provoking. It can be educational and entertaining. Oftentimes people think of poetry as a solitary, meditative craft, but it can bring a community together.

April is National Poetry Month. And while poetry should be celebrated year-round, this is the perfect time to gather poets and poetry lovers, but also those who might be curious about poetry and even those who've never

been exposed to it.

To help bring our readers together in celebrating National Poetry Month, I've asked our current poet laureate, Andrea "Vocab" Sanderson, and four past poet laureates, Octavio Quintanilla, Jenny Browne, Laurie Ann Guerrero and Carmen Taffola, to share a poem they've written.

These are all showcased on this Opinion page today. In addition, you can find videos of the poets reading their work on ExpressNews.com.

I hope you enjoy these poems, and I encourage you to explore more of what San Antonio is doing to celebrate National Poetry Month.

Please visit getcreativesanantonio.com for more information.

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Richard Vasquez / Courtesy photo

The poem former San Antonio Poet Laureate Laurie Ann Guerrero offers today is "REDWOOD."

A Mi Padre

The ocean glitters golden in memory
The shore is saturated with good times
The convergence of bodies of water meeting for the first time
Salt over skin speaks to me sentimentally
White sand between toes
Seabreeze upon my nose
The ebb and flow of cool liquid
The pounding, rolling, rushing and courageous as a man migrating to a new beginning.
Rinsing me in understanding and tugging me to undertow
I embrace the tide, strong as my father's arms and surmounting to a crest
Waves of love surround me with froth and foam
Lifting me as I surf, sending me out to sea.
Sunlight lines honey colored dunes
Wind choreographs the movement of colorful kites and parasails above the beach where exalted ribbons float through the Azure skyline. They glide among the albatross.
We are all islands unto ourselves with tiny hills that peak by the sea.



Andrea "Vocab" Sanderson

Palms trees stipple the landscape and my heart feels free
From a Father's love that marks my emancipation
Together we have built
Like Castillos de Arena yet we're immovable. Sand castles
Never erased, never eroding
Never washed away. (x2)
They stay grounded at sea level
Fortress of grains warmed dry by the sun.
Shells embedded in the topography.
We lounge like beach bums, our sandy legs stretched out wide as the firmament of the Pacific.
We gaze into the waters to see where the sky lands upon the ocean,
an endless kiss that ombres sky blue to marine blue.
A hue so deep, our hearts sink into the sight.

Andrea "Vocab" Sanderson is the current San Antonio poet laureate.

Feeding you

I have slipped *chile* under your skin
secretly wrapped in each enchilada
hot and soothing
carefully cut into bitefuls for you as a toddler
increasing in power and intensity as you grew
until it could burn
forever
silently spiced into the rice
soaked into the bean *caldo*
smoothed into the avocado
I have slipped *chile* under your skin
drop by fiery drop
until it ignited
the sunaltar fire
in your blood
I have squeezed *cilantro* into the breast milk
made sure you were nurtured with
the clean taste of corn stalks
with the wildness of thick leaves
of untamed *monte*
of unscheduled growth
I have ground the earth of these Américas in my *molcajete*
until it became a fine and piquant spice
sprinkled it surely into each spoonful of food
that would have to expand to fit your soul
Dear *Mijo*, Dear *Mija*,
Dear Corn *Chile Cilantro Mijos*
This
is your *berencia*
This
is what is yours
This
is what your mother fed you
to keep you
Alive

Carmen Taffola was San Antonio poet laureate from 2012-2014.

I Am Trying to Love the Whole World

is such a public display of affection
a flex even, one the lone magpie
staring back from the backside
of a badly shorn sheep finds suspect.
I flap my arms and blink three times.
Bad luck to glimpse just one,
magpie being the only creature
rumored to have refused the ark,
preferring to perch high on the mast
& curse the rain. Today I too
might like to rewind the mixtape
of the plague years until I can hear it
snap like a tendon, or a tentpole.
The world is still so busy hammering
itself into softer ground with a rock
& yet the sound of wind softly
shaking the stars awake. My world
I have missed your mouth, your morning
breath coming round the wild garlic, your fat
lilacs forgetting to be the flower of death.

Jenny Browne was San Antonio poet laureate from 2016-2018.



Carmen Taffola



Laurie Ann Guerrero



Jenny Browne



Octavio Quintanilla

REDWORK

*Failure is always partial: every tense—
future or past or present—is an arc
only, not the full circle, which must work
elsewhere its recompense.*
—Rhina P. Espaillat
from "Motto Suitable for Embroidery"

To forgive, over and over
the insufficient red
was to forgive myself,
over and over,
for loving it.
The gift was in the repetition.
Though my fingers bled,
and the bowing of my head for the stitch
made knots of my eyes, my neck,
a twisted and dying root, I held still
for the documenting—
what came a long way
to be mine and good:
piercing, making, naming,
one breath another,
I love you with my hands, stretching
skins, the needle, the thread, the suture,
the art of us the process.
A god of something.
Something like empathy.

Laurie Ann Guerrero was San Antonio poet laureate from 2014-2016.

Vulnerability

Some mornings the world is soft.
It sends you a bird you can't name
to chirp outside your window.
The bird could be anyone
you want it to be.
It could be the love you lost
because of selfishness.
Or a younger version of yourself
asking for an apology.
How many times have you dipped
your hand into the mirror
and tried to touch the last ripples
of what you are ceasing to be?
You used to believe in innocence
and now this bird reminds you
that today all you want is
for it to be a chirping bird.
Nothing more.
You have all you want next to you:
a body against your body, your face
half-buried in light,
your arms around all the ripeness
you can possibly hold.

Octavio Quintanilla was San Antonio poet laureate from 2018-2020.