



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Friday, January 15, 2021

Contact: Mayor's Office of Communications, mayorspressoffice@sfgov.org; Kate Patterson, kate.patterson@sfpl.org

***** PRESS RELEASE *****

**MAYOR LONDON BREED NAMES TONGO EISEN-MARTIN
AS SAN FRANCISCO'S POET LAUREATE**

Eisen-Martin, a poet and Bernal Heights resident, will be the City's eighth Poet Laureate

San Francisco, CA — Mayor London N. Breed and City Librarian Michael Lambert today announced that Tongo Eisen-Martin has been named San Francisco's Poet Laureate, the eighth artist in City history to hold the title. Eisen-Martin was appointed by Mayor Breed after being nominated by a nine-member Selection Committee comprised of past Poets Laureate, City officials, and members of the Bay Area poetry and literary community. He will succeed Kim Shuck, who served as San Francisco's seventh Poet Laureate.

"I've had the pleasure of working with Tongo when he was teaching artist at the African American Arts and Culture complex, and I've seen his remarkable ability to spur creativity in youth and inspire them to find their own voice," said Mayor Breed. "I am excited to appoint him as the next San Francisco Poet Laureate and look forward to seeing what he will accomplish in this role. His work on racial justice and equity, along with his commitment to promoting social and cultural change, comes at such a critical time for our city and our country."

Eisen-Martin is a poet and the founder of Black Freighter Press. His book, *Heaven Is All Goodbyes* (City Lights, Pocket Poet series), received a 2018 American Book Award, the 2018 California Book Award for Poetry, and was short-listed for the Griffin Poetry Prize.

Born and raised in San Francisco, Eisen-Martin spent his childhood at the Western Addition Cultural Center, now the African American Arts and Culture Complex. In his vision for Poet Laureate, Tongo writes of organizing poetry circles in the Tenderloin, Bayview-Hunters Point and Sunnydale and recruiting and nurturing artists from San Francisco's marginalized communities.

"I and my poetry are an absolute product of every nook and cranny of San Francisco. It is the city's cultural institutions, chartered in ink, demonstration, spirit, and bloodline, that taught me how to relate to the world," said Tongo Eisen-Martin. "As deep into the various communities of the city as our poets have already brought the craft, I want to push even further into places where poetry has not yet permeated. Give poetry even more of a mass personality; as mass participation has always been the staple of what could be described as San Francisco futurism."

He is also an educator and movement worker, whose work has focused on incarceration and human rights. He has taught at detention centers around the country and at the Institute for Research in African American Studies at Columbia University, where his curriculum on the

1 DR. CARLTON B. GOODLETT PLACE, ROOM 200
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94102-4681
TELEPHONE: (415) 554-6141



extrajudicial killing of Black people, “We Charge Genocide Again!” has been used as an educational and organizing tool throughout the country. His not-yet-titled second book in the City Lights Pocket Poet series will be released in the fall of 2021.

As the Poet Laureate, Eisen-Martin will deliver an inaugural address at the San Francisco Public Library. He will also participate in community-based poetry programs that reflect and honor the diversity of San Francisco, and lead poetry-centered events in collaboration with the Library, Friends of the San Francisco Public Library, the San Francisco Arts Commission, and community partners such as Youth Speaks, Litquake and others.

“I’m thrilled to see Mr. Eisen-Martin receive this recognition, as he is among the most exciting poets of a generation and we are so lucky to have him here in San Francisco,” said City Librarian Michael Lambert. “He will be a remarkable and inspiring Poet Laureate, a perfect and outstanding addition to our city’s long and flourishing literary tradition.”

To qualify for San Francisco’s Poet Laureate, applicants must be San Francisco residents and have a substantial body of published work, including at least one full length book and 20 or more published poems in established publications, print or online, over the past five years.

###