PRESS RELEASE
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A MAJOR FIRST PEOPLES LITERARY PRIZE
AND A SOCIAL INNOVATION PROJECT AT CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES

Montreal, April 24, 2018 – With the approach of the International Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019, we would like to highlight the importance that Blue Metropolis gives to its First Peoples programming, something we have been doing for a number of years. In 2015, with the support of the McConnell Family Foundation and the Chadha Family Foundation, Blue Metropolis International Literary Festival created a major literary prize that aims to increase the national and international visibility of writers from Indigenous communities.

In 2018, the Blue Metropolis First Peoples Literary Prize is being awarded to Lee Maracle, a member of the Stó:lō Nation and the author of a number of critically acclaimed literary works. In addition, this year, our First Peoples program features a new element, with the launch of a pan-Canadian project with a focus on social innovation. The goal of this project is to connect with students from First Peoples Studies programs at major Canadian universities, inviting them to find inspiration in the works of our 2018 prizewinner and to write a short essay that takes the form of social commentary.

As authors are often at the forefront of social movements and able to anticipate profound change in a way that many of us are unable to foresee, it seemed fitting to use a book, in this case Lee Maracle’s essay collection, My Conversations with Canadians, as a catalyst and as material for reflection.

Student award for essay writing

In 2018, the Blue Metropolis First Peoples Literary Prize included a short essay-writing contest for students from across Canada who are completing a course in Indigenous Studies and/or Indigenous Literatures. In line with our core values, which include cultural and linguistic diversity, quality, tolerance, and social inclusion, as well as the promotion of reading among young people, Blue Metropolis invited students from across the country to submit a 500- to 750-word essay inspired by a short literary excerpt selected from a recent work by our 2018 First Peoples prizewinner. This contest aims to engage and encourage university students who are studying Aboriginal/First Peoples Studies and/or Canadian Literature, with a specialization in Indigenous Literatures, to think critically and write compelling essays.

The winner of the student contest is Melanie Mercer of Simon Fraser University, in British Columbia. She will receive a $1,000 prize.

The First Peoples Prize

The First Peoples Literary Prize celebrates the literary careers of some of the most acclaimed Indigenous writers of our time. Inaugurated in 2015, the First Peoples Prize has been awarded to authors Marie Annharte Baker (2015), Thomas King (2016), David Treuer (2017) and now Lee Maracle (2018). The prize aims to increase the national and international exposure of writers who belong to diverse Indigenous communities. As with all of Blue Metropolis’ literary prizes, the First Peoples Literary Prize strives to promote diverse voices and intercultural understanding.
Active and engaged partners

It would not be possible to develop a program such as this without the commitment of a number of organizations and financial partners. Blue Metropolis would like to thank the McConnell Foundation, the Chadha Foundation and the Cole Foundation, as well as Concordia University, the University of Manitoba and Simon Fraser University. Special thanks to multidisciplinary artist and performer Moe Clark who will present a reading of Melanie Mercer’s essay at the First Peoples Literary Prize award ceremony, during Blue Metropolis Festival.

Blue Metropolis

Blue Metropolis Foundation is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1997 that brings together people from different cultures to share the pleasures of reading and writing, and encourages creativity and intercultural understanding. The Foundation produces an annual literary festival of international calibre and offers a wide range of educational and social programs year-round, both in classrooms and online. These programs use reading and writing as therapeutic tools, to encourage academic perseverance and fight against poverty and social isolation.

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