



Writing NSW Varuna Fellowships Announced

Writing NSW is delighted to announce its 2022 Varuna Fellowships have been awarded to **Lucy Nelson** and **Hajer Al-awsj**.

Lucy Nelson was awarded the general fellowship for her short story collection, *Wait Here*, exploring the widely varied experiences of childless women. *Wait Here* asks, 'How do we grieve the children we never had and what shape does their absence take in our lives?' The judges said, 'Lucy's writing was gorgeous and effortless, exploring a timely subject matter. We feel this writer is perfectly positioned to benefit from the time and space at Varuna to focus on her own work.'

The fellowship for a writer under 30 was awarded to **Hajer Al-awsj** for her novel *Zainab's Not Home*. Hajer's work was a standout piece for all three judges, showing real promise. The judges said, 'The potential of *Zainab's Not Home* is not just in the quality of writing, but in the strong exploration of themes relevant to Australian society now, covering domestic violence, the queer experience, and a young immigrant finding their way between two cultures. We're looking forward to seeing this young novelist's voice flourish, and for *Zainab's Not Home* to find its way onto bookshelves.'

The judges for this year's fellowships were Wiradjuri poet and artist **Jazz Money**, editor at Hachette Australia **Vanessa Radnidge**, and Writing NSW professional development officer **Amy Lovat**.

The two runners up for the Writing NSW Varuna Fellowships are **Paris Rosemont** and **Tracy Ellis**. Paris' poetry collection, *Banana Girl*, is visceral and bold, covering themes including identity, ethnicity, queerness, trauma and displacement. Tracy's work, *Break It Gently*, is an incredibly strong collection of short stories that find people grappling with the arrival of news, both good and bad.

Owing to the strength of this year's submissions, the judges would like to acknowledge two highly commended writers: **Lisa Kenway**, for *East Coast Low*, a domestic suspense exploring climate change in contemporary Australia, and **Diana Renner** for *The Art of Exile*, which blends memoir, autofiction, experimental prose

and art criticism to offer a fresh perspective on the diverse experiences of exile and life at the margins.

The judges were impressed by the high calibre of entries this year, and would like to encourage all applicants to continue submitting to competition and fellowship opportunities. 'It was incredibly tough to choose the winners, particularly owing to the wonderful diversity of entries – from poetry, to screenplays, and memoir to short stories. Thank you to all the writers for their willingness to submit works in progress; we know firsthand how vulnerable a process it can be. From when you pick up the pen to scribble the seed of an idea, to when you press send and hope to see your work out in the world, each moment deserves recognition for the bravery, creativity and strength that goes into it. We would also like to thank Writing NSW and Varuna for the opportunity to read and discuss the work of fellow writers. To all of you: keep going. The world always needs more stories, and we hope to see yours in print one day.'

Awarded annually, the Writing NSW Varuna Fellowships are for members of Writing NSW who have a work that is ready for the next stage of development. Two fellowships were available this year, with one place reserved for a writer under the age of 30. Through this initiative, the winners Lucy and Hajer will receive a week-long residency at [Varuna, the National Writers' House](#), and the runners up will receive a book pack from [Hachette Australia](#) and the opportunity to submit their manuscript to Hachette for assessment.

For more information on the Writing NSW Varuna Fellowships, including past winners, see [here](#).





"Varuna is such a beloved part of the literary community and I am chuffed to finally have the opportunity to experience the magic. My novel will be very happy for the time I'm going to have to focus on it!"

- Hajer Al-awsi, winner of the Under 30's category

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