

PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release



Blue Metropolis - Highlighting Indigenous Cultures: Two Recent Initiatives

Montreal, April 9, 2020 – Even under the difficult circumstances that the planet is currently experiencing due to the coronavirus pandemic, Blue Metropolis Foundation continues to pursue some of its activities (respecting the prescribed sanitary restrictions, needless to say). Two recent initiatives should be noted:

- In partnership with the McConnell Foundation, the presentation of two awards for excellence in Indigenous Studies at the university level;
- In collaboration with Sarah Henzi, professor in the Department of World Languages and Literatures at the Université de Montréal, the addition to the Blue Metropolis team (via teleworking) of an intern who will focus on promoting Indigenous literatures and cultures.

The details.

The Blue Metropolis Awards for Excellence in Indigenous Studies are an initiative of Blue Metropolis International Literary Festival and the McConnell Foundation. The awards are presented to two students, one francophone, one anglophone, enrolled in either an Indigenous Studies or Indigenous Literature program, during fall 2019 or winter 2020, in recognition of their outstanding academic performance (excellence, perseverance, creativity and engagement). To be eligible, each candidate must write a short essay in the form of a personal, critical and engaged reflection on issues related to the situation of Canada's First Peoples. Supported by various documented sources, the essay must answer the following question: "What is the definition of a just society?" Sixty-two professors and program directors were contacted in order to let their students know about this Blue Metropolis initiative, such that that eleven candidacies were received from the following six Canadian universities: Concordia University, Université de Montréal, the University of Calgary, Simon Fraser University, and the University of New Brunswick. Two judges evaluated the essays and delivered their decisions: in English, writer Darrel J. McLeod, winner of a 2018 Governor General's award for non-fiction; in French, the poet and publisher Rodney Saint-Éloi, who is the founder of the publishing house Mémoire d'encrier, which regularly publishes works by Indigenous authors.

In 2020, the two winning students are:

In English, **Juhnke Peyton, from the University of New Brunswick**. Regarding her essay, judge Darrel J. McLeod wrote: "In a few paragraphs Peyton was able to establish a clear and compelling voice, to articulate a powerful and clear vision of hope for Indigenous peoples, persuading the reader that there could indeed be a more just life for

Indigenous people in Canada if each of us, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, steps up and does his or her part.”

In French, **Émilie Sarah Caravecchia, of the Université de Montréal**. Regarding her essay, judge Rodney St-Éloi wrote: “Fluid, powerful and well-researched, this short essay by d’Emilie Sarah Caravecchia provides a condensed history of Canadian injustice toward the First Peoples. Caravecchia shows the power of the inertia that characterizes the different Canadian governments, from Pierre Trudeau to Justin Trudeau, and the necessity, now, of achieving a decolonial awareness in order to build a more just and egalitarian society in which co-existence between Canadians of European origin and Indigenous people will be possible.

The two winning students have been invited to send us a video in which they will read or talk about their essay. They will each receive a **\$1,000 prize** without delay, by bank transfer. In addition, an honorary plaque will be given to each winner, either at the next edition of the Indigenous Voices Awards or during the next edition of Blue Metropolis International Literary Festival, which will take place April 28 to May 2, 2021. They will each read their essay at the start of an event in the Festival’s Indigenous Literatures and Cultures series. It should be noted that the 2020 edition of Blue Metropolis Festival, which was scheduled to take place May 1 to 6, 2020, was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Previous winners:

2018 – Melanie Mercer, a First Nations undergraduate student in Indigenous Studies at Simon Fraser University, in British Columbia, for her essay “Dearest Canada: A Letter from Your Daughter”.

2019 – Matthew John Micheal Leblanc, a member of the Natoaganeg Nation and an undergraduate student in Nursing at the University of New Brunswick, for his essay “Understanding the Indian Condition.”

Watch on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWlwo1HTIDE&list=PLLvZ9yZWUwm8iD2viN7caU9M7fDhfHzzc&index=7&t=14s>

2019 – Coline Souilhol, a graduate student in English Literature at the Université de Montréal, for her essay “La responsabilité du conteur d’histoire face aux perceptions historiques”.

Watch on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBCH5vIBSy4&list=PLLvZ9yZWUwm8iD2viN7caU9M7fDhfHzzc&index=5>

An intern with a focus on promoting Indigenous cultures and literatures joins the Blue Metropolis team (via teleworking)

Florence Fontaine, who is studying for a graduate diploma in Indigenous Literatures and Media at the Université de Montréal, will do an internship (via teleworking) at the Foundation, from April 1 to July 1, 2020. A French citizen born in Réunion, she holds a master's in Arts and Culture Marketing from the Université de Montpellier. An avid reader with a love of the arts and culture, her task will be to highlight Indigenous authors by writing articles and blogposts on topics related to Indigenous literatures and cultures, both in Canada and abroad. Her writing will appear on Blue Metropolis Foundation's website and social media platforms, as well as on those of our partners.

A reminder: Blue Metropolis Festival and its Indigenous Voices series

Each edition of Blue Metropolis Festival includes an Indigenous Voices series which showcases the richness of this literature and its voices, which invite us to look at the world from a different perspective. These diverse voices contribute to a renewal of the literary landscape and speak of the beauty of life, of its grandeur and fragility. Blue Metropolis Festival is pleased to provide an opportunity for them to be heard. In addition, during each edition of the Festival the Blue Metropolis First Peoples Literary Prize is awarded. The aim of this prize, which was created five years ago, is to increase the national and international visibility of writers from Indigenous communities, be they novelists, non-fiction writers, playwrights or poets. The prize is awarded thanks to the sponsorship of the McConnell Foundation, the Chadha Family Foundation, Concordia University and the Cole Foundation.

Several Indigenous authors from the Festival's 2019 edition can be seen on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLvZ9yZWUwm8iD2viN7caU9M7fDhfHzzc>

Blue Metropolis at a glance

Blue Metropolis Foundation is a not-for-profit organization that brings together people of various languages and cultures to share the pleasures of reading and writing, while encouraging creativity and intercultural understanding. The Foundation produces an annual international literary festival and offers a wide range of educational and social programs year-round, both in the classroom and online. Because reading and writing are more than simply entertaining pastimes, these programs are also used as therapeutic tools, to encourage academic perseverance and fight against poverty and social isolation.

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