

PARRAMATTA LAUREATE IN LITERATURE



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MEDIA RELEASE

YUMNA KASSAB IS PARRAMATTA'S FIRST LAUREATE IN LITERATURE

Local Parramatta author **Yumna Kassab** will be the inaugural Parramatta Laureate in Literature, an accolade announced today by the *Sydney Review of Books* and the Writing and Society Research Centre at Western Sydney University.

Eminent literary journal the *Sydney Review of Books* has partnered with City of Parramatta and the Writing and Society Research Centre, one of Australia's leading centres for literature and writing, to select a highly regarded writer with links to the Parramatta region to undertake the role.

The Laureate is a writer who is making an outstanding contribution to literature, and who will help animate a vision for the future of Parramatta as it cements its position as the true heart of global Sydney.

Yumna Kassab is a renowned fiction writer with deep connections to the region. She is a Parramatta-based novelist and short fiction writer, a high school teacher, and a staunch supporter of the Western Sydney Wanderers. Her most recent book *The Lovers* (2023) was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award, the Prime Minister's Literary Award for Fiction, and the Victorian Premier's Award for Fiction. She also authored *The House of Youssef* (2019) and *Australiana* (2022).

Kassab will receive a stipend of \$50,000 to write what she describes as "a dictionary of Parramatta", grounded in the city's complex histories and diverse communities. She will run a number of writing workshops with local participants, and advocate publicly for writing cultures.

She comments: "It is a delight to be chosen as the Parramatta Laureate, and I can't wait to highlight what I love about the place I call home. I approach this as a writer with a dedication to emphasising the stellar writers already here. It is a golden generation, and my aim is to draw a circle around them so they can be celebrated properly."

Associate Professor Kate Fagan, Director of the WSRC and Chair of the selection panel, commented: "Yumna will be an outstanding Laureate for the Parramatta region. She has a profound understanding of storytelling and its rich traditions across our city, and an ability to reach people in the most heartfelt and direct way."

"We're incredibly excited to be working with Yumna," said Dr James Jiang, Editor of the *Sydney Review of Books*. "She brings to the role exceptional talent, and the cosmopolitan sensibility and civic-mindedness that are hallmarks of the city's culture and ambitions. It's hard to think of a project better suited to the aims of the Laureateship."

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The judges were delighted by the quality and deep commitment of all the applications, which confirmed again that the Parramatta region has a world-class literary culture, and excels in mentoring writing across generations. All applicants were passionate advocates for literary cultures as places of transformation and writing as a powerful way to nurture social change.

The selection panel shortlisted five additional writers for the Laureateship, observing that the depth of the field confirmed the region as an Australian literary powerhouse. The shortlisted authors include Gary Dixon, Eda Gunaydin, Bilal Hafda, and Fiona Murphy.

Upon receiving her new commission, Kassab was ecstatic. “To be the Parramatta Laureate is a joy,” she reflects. “There is so much to celebrate in this city.”

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Photo: Yumna Kassab by Tiger Webb

