



MONTANA ARTS COUNCIL

AN AGENCY OF STATE GOVERNMENT

Strengthening the Creative Economy of Montana

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Title: Michael Earl Craig of Livingston Appointed Montana Poet Laureate for 2015-2017

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On October 23, Governor Steve Bullock appointed Michael Earl Craig as Montana's next Poet Laureate. The Montana Poet Laureate is a two-year honorary position created by the state legislature in 2005 and administered by the Montana Arts Council. Craig takes over from outgoing Poet Laureate Tami Haaland. He will serve through August 1, 2017.

On announcing Craig's appointment, Governor Bullock said, "I'm honored to appoint Michael Earl Craig to serve as Montana's next Poet Laureate. Through his writing he captured the attention of readers for years. And through his mentorship of students pursuing creative writing, he has inspired the next generation of poets and novelists."

Michael Earl Craig is the author of four books of poetry: *Can you Relax in My House* (2002), *Yes, Master* (2006), *Thin Kimono* (2010) and *Talkativeness* (2014). A farmer who composes his poetry on a manual typewriter and mentors creative writing students at Livingston's Park High School, Craig has been invited to read in cities all over the country, has seen his poetry translated into Dutch and Chinese, and has received national accolades. Amanda Fortini, a writer for *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *Rolling Stone* writes of Craig, "Michael Earl Craig may be my favorite poet writing today...the deadpan humor of his poems (and his in-person readings) is what makes his work so unique – accessible but ultimately mysterious – and so beloved of readers all across the country."

The Montana Poet Laureate recognizes and honors a citizen poet of exceptional talent and accomplishment. The Poet Laureate also encourages appreciation of poetry and literary life in Montana. In 2005, Sandra Alcosser became our first Montana Poet Laureate and served for two years. Other previous Poet Laureates are Greg Pape, Henry Real Bird, Sheryl Noethe and Tami Haaland.

For more information about the Poet Laureate program and Michael Earl Craig, please contact the Montana Arts Council at 406-444-6430 or email mac@mt.gov.

To contact Michael Earl Craig: phone 406-220-0415; email: earlcraig123@gmail.com

For a photo, email KarenDe Herman at kherman2@mt.gov.

Sample poems below:

IN THE ROAD

I had a dream last night, I dreamt
I was trying to shoe a horse in the road. I'd
get under him and swing my hammer and
he'd move his foot, just a little. Hitting the
nails was like trying to strike flies
from the air. My hammer flashed in the sun,
striking the shoe to the left or the right of the nail.
One miss-hit busted my thumb open.
Blood trickled like a wet glove over my hand.
I cursed as he hopped around on three legs,
a totally blank expression on his face.
Occasionally a car came down the road, slowly,
carving a wide arc around us, the passengers
with their windows rolled up, looking silently
out at me, sometimes shaking their heads.
I'd swing and miss. Then swing and hit my thumb.
Finally I swung, he shifted his foot, and my hammer
hit my kneecap with some amazing velocity.
I crumpled to the ground like a worn-out flag.
This horse just stood there, expressionless.
Another car passed by, very close to me.
A child in the backseat cracked her window a bit.
She held out a banana and pretended to shoot me
in the head. She silently mouthed the word *pop*
twice—*pop, pop*—and I felt myself twitch sharply
in my bed. I knew I could wake up if I wanted to,
but it just wasn't my style.

From *Thin Kimono*

THE HELMET

I spun the helmet on the ground and waited for it to stop. When it didn't stop, and probably two days had passed, I stood up and began snapping my fingers, just the one hand, my right hand, and I was kind of squatting a little, just bending my knees a bit, and tapping my right foot, and smiling I guess, like I was listening to something, something catchy. And after two more days of this, this finger-snapping, and after seeing that the helmet would continue to spin in the driveway, at this point I began to dance backward toward town, down the long dirt road toward the pavement that would take me to the highway that would eventually take me to town, always dancing and snapping, always moving backward, mile after mile, smiling, really getting down, never looking over my shoulder, falling and getting up, falling and getting up, traveling backward toward town, snapping, smiling, really covering some ground.

From *Talkativeness*

CURRICULUM VITAE

There's a very distinguished-looking older man sitting near me at the diner. His hair is silver, neatly combed. His gray suit looks immaculate, a crisp handkerchief in his chest pocket. A grandfatherly kindness emanates from him as he eats his eggs. He is from a bygone era, I'm thinking, as he gets up and turns toward me, and now I see a large grease stain on his shirt, which is partially untucked, and his belt appears to be unbuckled. He staggers a bit as he stands – bumping his chair back with his legs

[some Billie Holiday, coming from the Kitchen]

--and glances at me for a second, a few seconds. A restrained burp slips from his mouth. He picks up the most gorgeous briefcase I have ever seen and wields it respectfully, like a sword he has known all his life.

From *Talkativeness*