

Competition Results

2011

Josh Booton, a graduate of the Michener Center for Writers (MCW) at The University of Texas at Austin, has won the \$50,000 Keene Prize for Literature for his collection of poems, "The Union of Geometry and Ash." He is the first poet to win the distinguished award.

The Keene Prize is one of the world's largest student literary prizes. An additional \$50,000 will be divided among three finalists. Booton's collection of poems was chosen from more than 60 submissions in drama, poetry and fiction.

The title sequence is a traditional double or "heroic" crown of sonnets, 14 poems in which the last line of the first poem becomes the first line of the next. "The technical inventiveness of these poems never overwhelms their substance, a profound meditation on how to sustain a working marriage," says Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, chair of the Department of English and the award selection committee. "All of the judges found Josh's work hauntingly memorable and compassionate, as well as formally compelling."

Booton received his bachelor's degree from the University of Oregon, and his master's degree in speech and hearing sciences from Portland State University. A finalist for the 2010 Missouri Review Editors' Prize, his poems have appeared in The Missouri Review, Hayden's Ferry Review, Poetry Northwest, Raleigh Review and The Grove Review.

Members of the selection committee were: Cullingford; Randy Diehl, dean of the College of Liberal Arts (ex officio); Brant Pope, chair of the Department of Theatre and Dance; Joanna Hitchcock, director of The University of Texas Press; and author Tom Zigal, novelist and senior communications writer for The University of Texas System. Established in 2006 in the College of Liberal Arts, the Keene Prize is named after E.L. Keene, a 1942 graduate of the university who envisioned an award that would enhance and enrich the university's prestige and reputation in the international market of American writers.

The competition is open to university undergraduate and graduate students, and the prize is awarded annually to the student who creates the most vivid and vital portrayal of the American experience in microcosm. Students submit poetry, plays and fiction or non-fiction prose.



Keene Prize Finalists:



Carolina Ebeid, master of fine arts student of the Michener Center, for her collection of poems, "An Iceboat Will Carry Us Through the Ice." Ebeid's poems are learned and intricate; the judges praised her richly allusive technique, flashes of humor, and subtle evocation of loss.

Nicole Cullen, graduate of the Michener Center, for her story, "Long Tom Lookout." This melancholy narrative, framed by the oil spill in the Gulf, explores a young woman's developing relationship with her husband's autistic son. Cullen observes her characters and the landscape of the West with the same powerful intensity.

Fiona McFarlane, master of fine arts student of the Michener Center, for three stories, "Rose Bay," "The Movie People," and "Unnecessary Gifts," each of which demonstrates a distinct gift: for highly original characterization, for the absurd, and for the manipulation of suspense. The judges were united in their praise for her immaculate prose.