

Winners of the Sky Arts RSL Writers Awards Announced

The RSL is delighted to announce the recipients of the 2022 Sky Arts RSL Writers Awards. The **Awards celebrate and nurture British writers of colour at the beginnings of their careers. Five winners will receive ten mentoring sessions** over the course of 12 months with an RSL Fellow writing in their form, as well as **two sessions with Sky Arts Ambassador Bernardine Evaristo.**

The winners are:

Fiction: **Kim Squirrell**, mentored by Nadifa Mohamed

Non-Fiction: **Sabrina Mahtani** mentored by Nikesh Shukla

Playwriting: **Hannah Shury-Smith**, mentored by Inua Ellams

Poetry: **Zainab Imran**, mentored by Jay Bernard

Screenwriting: **Jenna Al-Ansari**, mentored by Vinay Patel



Kim Squirrell is a British writer of Caribbean-Irish heritage. She explores narratives in poetry and prose drawing on archives, family histories and the natural world. In 2021 she was shortlisted for the James Berry Poetry Prize and won the Bridport Prize Dorset Award for her novel in progress. Mentor **Nadifa Mohamed** said 'I chose Kim as my mentee as I was drawn to the poetry and rhythm of her prose. She is writing historical fiction which feels free and is stylistically interesting, I'm also drawn to her examination of the relationships between women of African and European backgrounds in early Caribbean history.'



Sabrina Mahtani is a British-Zambian lawyer and writer. She formerly worked for Amnesty International and The Elders, a group of global leaders founded by Nelson Mandela. She co-founded AdvocAid, a civil society organisation in Sierra Leone that provides access to justice for women in detention. Sabrina curates Women Beyond Walls, a movement building platform focused on ending the overincarceration of women and hosts a podcast which features women with lived experience and feminist lawyers. Mentor **Nikesh Shukla** said 'There was a clarity of idea in Sabrina's application that excited me, and the writing sample was absolutely knockout. It was visceral and heartbreaking and told the beginnings of a story that demands to be told. I look forward to working with Sabrina to get this story out into the world.'



Hannah Shury-Smith is a writer for stage and screen. Her writing has been performed at the Corpus Playroom, Theatre503 and Talawa's Fairfield Halls Studio, and earned her places on 4Screenwriting 2021, Talawa Young People's Theatre and the Royal Court Introduction to Playwriting Group. Mentor **Inua Ellams** said 'I chose Hannah because in her application, I saw a writer exploring form and voice in theatre. Her voice was fresh, experimental, rhythmic and full of identity and care. It'll be an honour to help her shape what comes next.'



Zainab Imran is a poet, zine-maker and English Literature Student of British Pakistani heritage based in Manchester. She writes on a multitude of issues, with a particular focus on ethnic diaspora and the hidden stories of women in the colonial struggle. She currently runs the poetry collective, 'Poets for Partition'. Mentor **Jay Bernard** said 'I chose Zainab because her poetic voice was instantly engaging. The poems were assured and her curiosity about the form was clear. I also felt much affinity with her ideas about moving away from certain kinds of self-narrativisation that can often burden racialised writers, and look forward to exploring these ideas creatively, and in more depth.'



Jenna Al-Ansari is a Bahraini/British writer. She won the inaugural Screenshot competition in 2021 and is developing her winning entry DUCK & COVER with Sister Pictures and South Of The River. She is developing more original shows with 5Acts Productions and Hat Trick Productions, and writing an original feature for Working Title and DessyMak Productions. Mentor **Vinay Patel** said 'I'm looking forward to working with Jenna because her story of coming to writing late resonated with me, but more than that I'm excited by the range and playfulness of her ideas. She's a talented, driven writer who's on the cusp of great things - I can't wait to see where her career will take her.'

Shortlisted writers:

Fiction: Kalbinder Dayal, Mubeenah Waheed

Non-Fiction: Claire Abji, Theresa Muñoz

Playwriting: Shez Chung-Blake, Maeve Clarke

Poetry: Zarah Alam, Jeda Lewis

Screenwriting: Krishna Isha, Jen Francis

Notes to Editors

Presented for the first time in 2021, the Sky Arts RSL Writers Awards are focused on discovering and nurturing talented emerging writers of colour, working across different literary forms. The scheme was developed in order to counteract the underrepresentation of British writers of colour.

Bernardine Evaristo, Sky Arts Ambassador, said 'It's essential to create new initiatives to help make our culture more inclusive for those from under-represented and marginalised communities. I'm looking forward to discovering and mentoring the next generation of talented writers through this wonderful Sky Arts and RSL programme.'

About the RSL

Founded in 1820, the Royal Society of Literature is Britain's national charity for the advancement of literature. We act as a national voice for the value of literature, engage people in appreciating literature and encourage and honour writers. The RSL's other annual awards are the RSL Ondaatje Prize, the RSL Christopher Bland Prize, the RSL Giles St Aubyn Awards, the Encore Award, RSL International Writers, the RSL Literature Matters Awards and the V.S. Pritchett Short Story Prize.

About Sky Arts

These Awards are made possible thanks to the generosity of Sky Arts, who are passionate about supporting the next generation of artists and are working with four leading creatives: Booker Prize-winner Bernardine Evaristo, dance artist Akram Khan, conductor Charles Hazlewood, Theatre Royal Stratford East Artistic Director Nadia Fall – to run bursary schemes for new and emerging talent.

Sky Arts exists to bring more art to more people across the UK. In 2020, with the creative industries under serious threat, we threw open our doors to make the channel free for everyone to watch. We've redoubled our mission to increase access to the arts and we're committed to getting everyone involved as the industry moves from strength to strength. The fact is, we need the arts like never before, and Sky Arts brings them straight to your living room.

We have something for everyone, championing creative talent by showcasing the best in music, theatre, dance, literature, opera and visual art. From Glyndebourne to Grime and Nina Simone to Noel Gallagher, we've got your passions covered. Millions of viewers tune in to hit returning series such as Portrait Artist of the Year and British cultural institution The South Bank Show, but our acclaimed new programmes might take you anywhere from Wordsworth's favourite landscapes to headbanging at Download Festival.

Collaboration is at the heart of what we do. Sky Arts is the headline sponsor of National Theatre Live in the UK, and we work with cultural partners across the country including the English National Opera, Bristol Old Vic, Tate, Creative UK and the Crafts Council to name but a few.

You can watch Sky Arts for free on Freeview channel 11 and Freesat channel 147. If you've got Sky or a Now TV entertainment pass, you can also watch over 2,000 hours of shows exclusively on demand.

[rsliterature.org](https://www.rsliterature.org)

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