Cal Poly Announces Winners of Academy of American Poets Contest

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- Poet Lisa Coffman has chosen Cal Poly English junior Kate Asche as the winner of the Cal Poly Academy of American Poets Award. Asche, from Fair Oaks, will be awarded $100 for her poem "Kidnapping Olympus."

Coffman also chose English graduate student Marnie Parker from San Luis Obispo as honorable mention for Parker's poem "The Breaking of Coral."

Coffman called Asche's poem a "polished, deliberate poem that moves lightly for all its studied choices." The judge also said that she admires the way the poem "balances a cynicism and a reverence, a wise choice in retelling the myth for an 'undefined people.'"

Coffman said that Parker's poem "does what I like a poem to do: tell its tale in terms of the physical world." Coffman asserted that Parker's language "manages to stay plain but still get lovely and excessive at times."

Cal Poly poetry writing professor and contest coordinator Kevin Clark said both women are excellent writers who have been coming into their own as writers for the last couple of years.

"All of Kate's work is remarkably balanced," Clark said. "Her poetry is marked by a steadiness of voice and a diversity of form. Each poem is formally well-wrought.

"Her poetry is primarily lyric, though often it will take stunning inward turns," Clark said. "Kate's language can be simultaneously colloquial, ethereal and ritualized. Her theme is typically a romantic self in search of an essential but often out-of-reach identity."

According to Clark, Parker is "a poet of intensely and closely perceived descriptions."
"Marnie is a subtle, highly stylized writer for whom description of the outer world typically equates to insight about the interior world," Clark said.

"I was very happy that the nationally recognized poet Lisa Coffman agreed to judge this year's contest," he said.

Coffman is the author of the widely praised book of poems "Likely," issued by Kent State University press. Formerly a professor at Penn State Altoona, Coffman moved to the Central Coast a couple of years ago. She has taught briefly at Cal Poly.

The Academy of American Poets is an organization that promotes poetry throughout the country and sponsors individual university contests. In order to maintain the award, Cal Poly's English Department contributes to the group annually.

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