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**academy of
american poets**

**Pulitzer Prize-winning Poet Tracy K. Smith
Selects Sjohnna McCray
as 2015 Walt Whitman Award Recipient**

Prize includes first-book publication by Graywolf Press, a six-week residency at the Civitella Ranieri Center in Italy, five thousand dollars, and more.

New York, NY (March 30, 2015) – The Academy of American Poets is pleased to announce that Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Tracy K. Smith has selected Sjohnna McCray as the recipient of the 2015 Walt Whitman Award, the nation’s most valuable first-book prize. As the winner of the Whitman Award, McCray’s manuscript, *Rapture*, will be published by Graywolf Press in 2016, and the Academy of American Poets will purchase and send thousands of copies of the book to its members, making it one of the most widely distributed poetry books of the year. McCray will also receive a six-week all-expenses-paid residency at the Civitella Ranieri Center in Umbria, Italy, \$5,000, and will be featured on Poets.org and in *American Poets* magazine.

Established in 1975, the Academy of American Poets’ Walt Whitman Award is designed to encourage the work of emerging poets. Previous recipients include poets Nicole Cooley, Suji Kwock Kim, Eric Pankey, Matt Rasmussen, and Alberto Ríos, among others.

About Sjohnna McCray’s *Rapture*, Tracy K. Smith writes, “These poems are so beautifully crafted, so courageous in their truth-telling, and so full of what I like to think of as lyrical wisdom—the visceral revelations that only music, gesture and image, working together, can impart—that not only did they stop me in my tracks as a judge, but they changed me as a person. Sjohnna McCray’s is an ecstatic and original voice, and he lends it to family, history, race and desire in ways that are healing and enlarging. *Rapture* announces a prodigious talent and a huge human heart.”

Sjohnna McCray was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio. He was educated at Ohio University and received his MFA from the University of Virginia where he was a Henry Hoyns Fellow. He has a master’s degree in English education from Columbia University’s Teachers College. McCray was the winner of the AWP Intro Journal Award and Ohio University’s Emerson Poetry Prize, and his poetry has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His work has appeared in numerous journals, including *The Southern Review*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, and *Shenandoah*. He lives and teaches in Savannah, Georgia, and has taught in New York City, Phoenix, and Chicago.

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In 2014 the Academy of American Poets distributed over \$200,000 to poets at various stages of their careers through the American Poets Prizes. For more information, visit Poets.org.

About Tracy K. Smith

Poet Tracy K. Smith's memoir, *Ordinary Light*, will be published on April 2, 2015, by Alfred A. Knopf. Her most recent poetry collection, *Life on Mars* (Graywolf Press, 2011), won the 2012 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Her other awards include the Academy of American Poets Fellowship (for distinguished poetic achievement) and the James Laughlin Award from the Academy of American Poets, an Essence Literary Award, the Cave Canem Poetry Prize, a Rona Jaffe Writers Award, and a Whiting Award. She has also received fellowships from Stanford University and the Breadloaf Writers' Conference. Smith teaches at Princeton University and lives in Brooklyn.

About the Academy of American Poets

Founded in 1934, the Academy of American Poets is the largest member-supported nonprofit organization fostering an appreciation for contemporary poetry and supporting American poets. In addition to the American Poets Prizes, the organization produces Poets.org, the largest publicly supported website for poets and poetry; National Poetry Month, the largest literary celebration in the world, which takes place each April; Poem-a-Day; and *American Poets* magazine; as well as poetry readings and special events throughout the year.

About Civitella Ranieri

Located in a fifteenth century castle in the Umbrian region of Italy, Civitella Ranieri Center is a workplace for international writers, composers, and visual artists. Since 1995, Civitella has hosted more than six hundred Fellows and Director's Guests. In keeping with the spirit of its founder, Ursula Corning, and the tradition of hospitality and support for the arts that she established at the castle, the Center enables its Fellows to pursue their work and to exchange ideas in a unique and inspiring setting. For more information, visit civitella.org.

About Graywolf Press

Graywolf Press is a leading independent, nonprofit publisher committed to the discovery and energetic publication of contemporary American and international literature. Graywolf champions outstanding writers of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry at all stages of their careers to ensure that diverse voices can be heard in a crowded marketplace. Recent books published by Graywolf have won the Pulitzer Prize, the Nobel Prize, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the National Book Award, among others. For more information, visit graywolfpress.org.

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