



STEVEN M. FULOP
MAYOR OF JERSEY CITY

CITY OF JERSEY CITY OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

CITY HALL | 280 GROVE STREET | JERSEY CITY, NJ 07302
P: 201 547 5500 | F: 201 547 5442



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 22, 2024

Contact: Kim Wallace-Scalcione
Press Secretary

***** PRESS RELEASE *****

Jersey City Announces Melida Rodas as Poet Laureate

JERSEY CITY, NJ – Mayor Steven M. Fulop, the Jersey City Arts Council (JCAC), and the Jersey City Office of Cultural Affairs are pleased to announce *Melida Rodas as Jersey City’s next Poet Laureate*. This prestigious position offers an exceptional opportunity for a talented poet to engage with the community, celebrate the literary arts, and contribute to the cultural vitality of Jersey City.

The position of Poet Laureate for the City of Jersey City was established by a resolution of the City Council in 2018. The Poet Laureate serves as an ambassador for poetry, representing the artistic spirit of Jersey City while fostering public appreciation for the literary arts. This role involves a variety of responsibilities, such as hosting readings, conducting workshops, and collaborating with local organizations to inspire and engage residents through the power of poetry. The term of service is two years with an honorarium of \$3,000 per year.

The review panel, comprised of former poet laureates, and the JCAC Board of Directors, assessed the applications and evaluated candidates on poetic value, community impact and engagement, and poetry experience through performance and publication.

"We are proud to honor Melida Rodas as Jersey City’s new Poet Laureate, a testament to our commitment to celebrating the arts and fostering creative expression within our community. Through their work, Melida will inspire, unite, and amplify the voices that make our city so vibrant and diverse," said **Mayor Fulop**.

Rodas has a long history of collaborating with local organizations on creative projects that celebrate the community. She also co-founded Greenville Arts Crossroads, a grassroots poetry and arts organization that connects, uplifts, and inspires creative talent in Hudson County. In 2023, her impactful work earned her a Jersey City Woman of Action Award.

"The Jersey City Arts Council is thrilled to present Melida Rodas as the next poet laureate. We are confident that Melida will use this position to continue and expand her dedication to innovative projects that promote the art of poetry in the Jersey City community and beyond," adds **Jersey City Arts Council Board member Jeff Dessources**.

This year, JCAC implemented a new application and evaluation approach for the poet laureate role. Applicants submitted a personal statement, poetry portfolio, video performance, poetic resume, community involvement statement, and letter of recommendation. Applicants were required to be current residents of Jersey City, at least 18 years old, and demonstrate meaningful ties to the Jersey City community.



In this new role, Rodas invites others to join in exploring new artistic horizons through poetry. As with her previous projects, she aims to maintain a forward-thinking vision that reconstructs, revitalizes, and revolutionizes the art of poetry. "Thank you on behalf of my adolescent self, who poured her heart onto her marble notebooks in the hallways of her high school when no one else was around. She grappled with her reality as an immigrant, as a daughter of two hardworking people. She wished to understand the world around her and dreamed of telling their story of fortitude, resilience, and unconditional love. Thank you on behalf of my present self, the mother, the teacher, who so wants every little child in this city to inherit the wisdom, peace, and power gifted to us by the art of poetry. Thank you on behalf of those who have loved me into being: my family, my teachers, my ancestors. Thank you on behalf of those who are still struggling for their voices to be heard - let us remember them, let us help them."

Rodas has held teaching positions at All Saints Catholic Academy and Saint Peter's University - 21st Century Program. At Infinite Therapy Solutions, she occupies various positions including Education and Community Engagement Coordinator, where she leads community initiatives dedicated to supporting neurodivergent children. Rodas has fulfilled the role of Dodge Poetry Festival School Coordinator and has been involved in educational initiatives, including the Poetry and Journalism Project with Marist High School and The Literature of Immigration Project with SaveEllisIsland.org. She has served as a poetry group leader as founder of Destination Art Space and The New York City Poetry Festival as a member of The Poetry Society of New York. Melida's work has appeared in various publications, including Transformations - The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy, American Working-Class Literature, What We Hold In Common, Literature and Work, and The Sun Magazine.

All media inquiries should be directed to Kim Wallace-Scalcione at KScalcione@jcnj.org.