

Works of poetry, fiction and nonfiction receive \$10,000 "Science + Literature" awards

January 24 2024, by Hillel Italie



This combination of photos shows "The Glass Constellation" by Arthur Sze, left, "The Bathysphere Book" by Brad Fox, center, and "Digging Stars" by Novuyo Rosa Tshuma. Credit: Copper Canyon Press/Astra House/W. W. Norton & Co. via AP

A poetry collection, a coming-of-age novel and a history of deep sea exploration are unlikely to be found in the same section of your favorite bookstore. But they all have enough in common to be this year's winners

of Science + Literature awards, \$10,000 prizes administered by [the National Book Foundation](#) and the [Alfred P. Sloan Foundation](#).

The two foundations announced Wednesday that poet Arthur Sze's "The Glass Constellation," Novuyo Rosa Tshuma's novel "Digging Stars" and Brad Fox's nonfiction "The Bathysphere Book: Effects of the Luminous Ocean Depths" have been cited as works that "deepen readers' understanding of [science](#) and technology" and "highlight the diversity of voices" in [modern science](#) and technology writing.

While "The Bathysphere Book" is the only winner you could officially classify as science, all three works draw upon science and the natural world. In "Digging Stars," the protagonist is an astronomer from Zimbabwe who emulates her father's profession. Sze, a National Book Award winner for poetry in 2019, has written often about nature and the cosmos. His poem "At the Equinox" begins, "The tide ebbs and reveals orange and purple sea stars/I have no theory of radiance/but after rain evaporates/off pine needles, the needles glisten."

The authors will be formally honored during a March 27 ceremony in downtown Manhattan.

"This year's deeply researched and inventive selections by Brad Fox, Arthur Sze, and Novuyo Rosa Tshuma exemplify why science and technology are so important to the arts and to our daily lives," Ruth Dickey, executive director of the National Book Foundation, said in a statement.

Doron Weber, vice president and program director at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, said in a statement that "these gifted storytellers shine a light on the complex inner lives of their characters as they explore the mysteries of the external world, from the ocean to the cosmos, from Japan to Zimbabwe."

Science + Literature was established in 2022 through a three-year, \$525,000 grant from the Sloan foundation, which has provided [financial support](#) for numerous books over the years, including two that became the basis for acclaimed movies: Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin's "Oppenheimer" biography and Margot Lee Shetterly's "Hidden Figures."

The grant is in its final year, and Weber said he hopes the Sloan board will approve funding for another three years. A vote is expected in March.

"We are very pleased with the results this far," Weber said.

The winners were chosen by a panel of authors and scientists, including [evolutionary biologist](#) and PBS host Shane Campbell-Staton, poet Brian Teare and committee chair Ricardo Nuila, author of "The People's Hospital: Hope and Peril in American Medicine."

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