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Sze receives poetry lifetime achievement award from Library of Congress

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Arthur Sze, the city of Santa Fe's first poet laureate, at his home in 2021.

Luis Sánchez Saturno/New Mexican file photo

In January, he was named the recipient of a Science and Literature Award from the National Book Foundation for *The Glass Constellation: New and Collected Poems*, one of his 11 poetry collections. In December, he's set to receive the 2024 Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt National Prize for Poetry, awarded by the Library of Congress, for his lifetime achievements as a poet.

"In 11 books and over more than 50 years, Arthur Sze has developed a signature lyricism of seeing," the prize-selection committee wrote in its citation for Sze. "His poems focus on images and declarations — but they also move through breathtaking juxtapositions, create layers of fragments that open up rather than direct their readers. Sze's imaginative capaciousness pulls in languages, traditions and systems from both East and West, and it can speak to the cosmos then turn to the smallest natural detail.

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"His latest collection, *The Glass Constellation: New and Collected Poems*, captures the range and the commitment of his life's work, to create 'points of connection, reflection, and refraction ... part of an organic growing whole.'"

Sze will deliver a talk about poetry and engage in a moderated discussion with Rob Casper, the Library of Congress's head of poetry and literature, on December 5 in Washington, D.C. Sze's presentation is titled "Lines of Sight, and Beyond."

Sze had a high-profile role in this year's Santa Fe International Literary Festival, conducting a discussion with noted Chinese poet and translator Wang Jiaxin. Before that May festival, he reflected on his career in an interview with Pasatiempo.

“I’m in my early 70s, and I think each generation needs to create its own distinct voice and style,” he said. “I think there is a generation of poets writing in their 30s who don’t, and shouldn’t, sound like poets writing in their 70s.”

The biennial Bobbitt Prize, which includes a \$10,000 award, recognizes a book of poetry written by an American and published during the preceding two years — or, as is the case with Sze, an American poet's lifetime achievements. Award namesake Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt was the sister of President Lyndon B. Johnson and worked in the cataloging department at the Library of Congress.

Sze was Santa Fe's first poet laureate and has taught at the Institute of American Indian Arts. His other recognitions include the National Book Award for Poetry, for his 2019 collection *Sight Lines*; the PEN Southwest Book Award and Mountains & Plains Independent Booksellers Association Book Award, both for *The Ginkgo Light* from 2009; the Balcones Poetry Prize and Asian American Literary Award, both for *The Redshifting Web: Poems 1970–1998*; an American Book Award for *Archipelago* from 1995; the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize from the Poetry Foundation; a Shelley Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America; a Jackson Poetry Prize from Poets & Writers; and a Lannan Literary Award.

The Library of Congress is the world’s largest library. To access its archive, visit loc.gov. For more information about the Bobbitt Prize, visit sfnm.co/40OCTPb.

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