

NEW WRITING NORTH

Press release: 5 February 2020

New Writing North and Newcastle University appoint Climate Writer in Residence

The poet Linda France has been appointed as Climate Writer in Residence by New Writing North and Newcastle University.

New Writing North and Newcastle University both declared a climate emergency in 2019 and have committed to examining and adapting their own practices, as well as using their platforms and networks to raise awareness of the climate emergency. As part of this commitment, the two organisations have come together to host the year-long Climate Writer residency.

As Climate Writer, Linda France will play a key role in defining how New Writing North and Newcastle University can harness the power of arts and culture to respond to the challenge of the climate crisis. As well as writing new work of her own, in consultation with climate scientists at Newcastle University, Linda will look at how writers, artists and readers can engage with climate change. She will use her role to consider how writing and reading might deepen empathy and understanding, extend our imaginations so we can create new ways to live, help us tell our truths, and encourage us to take action.

The partnership is now inviting members of the public to join a Climate Reading Group, led by Linda France, which will meet in central Newcastle every six weeks to discuss books that consider climate-related issues. The first title, to be discussed on Tuesday 24 March, will be *Whose Story Is This? Old Conflicts, New Chapters* (Granta, 2019) by Rebecca Solnit, a book of essays by a deeply engaged and inspiring writer and commentator who will be appearing with New Writing North at Tyneside Cinema on Tuesday 31 March.

Linda France will also be appearing at Fault Lines, the Newcastle Poetry Festival produced by Newcastle Centre for the Literary Arts, which runs 13-16 May at various venues across Newcastle, including Northern Stage and Sage Gateshead. The 6th annual Newcastle Poetry Festival is to concentrate on climate change and the role of poetry in the climate emergency, with its full programme announced on 4 March.

Linda France's eight full-length poetry collections include: *The Simultaneous Dress* (Bloodaxe 2002) and *The Toast of the Kit-Cat Club* (Bloodaxe 2005), *You are Her* (Arc Publications 2010) and *Reading the Flowers* (Arc 2016). Linda also edited the acclaimed anthology *Sixty Women Poets* (Bloodaxe 1993), a Poetry

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Book Society Special Commendation. She recently completed a PhD on writing, plants and landscape.

Linda France said: "I've been thinking and writing about our dependence on the natural world for over a decade now and the climate emergency is just getting more and more urgent. If we only have ten years left in our carbon budget, as the scientists are telling us, we need to act now.

As Climate Writer, as well as my own writing on the subject, I will be consulting with scientists and environmentalists, engaging widely and developing ways of working with other writers, artists, teachers and anyone at all who is interested in how we might approach the subject of climate change and adaptation with creativity and care.

Everything is connected and climate change and system change also need a change of hearts and minds: this is where a writer can help – cutting through the clamour and chaos, rather than adding to it. I want to plant some seeds to help people think differently and imagine a more robust, creative and optimistic vision of our shared future that we can grow together."

Claire Malcolm, Chief Executive of New Writing North said: "We believe that arts and culture have the power to change the way we think, help us explore possible new futures and ways of living, examine the gap between what we know and what we do, deepen empathy, and ultimately, inspire action. Writers craft the stories that shape us and have a unique and vital role to play in creating a new narrative for the world. We couldn't be happier that Linda France has answered our call to action and we look forward to working with her over what we feel will be a very important year."

Professor Julie Sanders, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Newcastle University said: "We are absolutely delighted to welcome Linda to this pathbreaking role. Engaging our imaginations, regardless of our expertise, discipline, background or context, to shape the future in the context of the climate emergency is both a practical tactic and a deeply needed act of hope right now. We look forward to all the conversations and encounters that her role will enable."

To follow the Climate Writer residency or join the Climate Reading Group, visit <http://newwritingnorth.com/projects/writing-the-climate/>

Ends

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