

Littoral puts out book of Maine protest poetry

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Nick Gervin's protest photos from a summer of discontent in Portland are part of the collection. *Photo by Nick Gervin*

Until George Floyd was killed by police in Minneapolis, Claire Milliken wasn't a political poet. Floyd's death under the knee of a cop turned her into one.

'Enough! Poems of Resistance and Protest'

Virtual events: 7 p.m. Oct. 14, via Zoom, hosted by Littoral Books. Details: littoralbooks.com/littorally-alive

7 p.m. Oct. 27, via Zoom, hosted by Space Gallery and Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance. Details to come.

The book is available through Littoral's [website](#) and local booksellers.

She began writing a seven-part elegy to Floyd the week he was killed, then pitched the idea of a book of protest poems to Portland-based Littoral Books, which liked the idea so much it fast-tracked the project. The result is “Enough! Poems of Resistance and Protest,” a collection by 27 Maine poets co-edited by Milliken and Littoral co-founder Agnes Bushell. It’s the third in Littoral’s series of contemporary Maine poetry books since the press relaunched two years ago. The writing is supplemented with black-and-white photographs by Nick Gervin, a Portland street photographer who chronicled the Black Lives Matter protests this spring and summer.

Bushell noted, Littoral’s roots are in the streets of Portland. “We began publishing women’s poetry in 1975, so protest is in our blood,” she said. “Staying silent is never brave and has never changed anything. We are a publisher. This is what we do. We are a vehicle for voices.”

Littoral will host a virtual book launch on Zoom at 7 p.m. Oct. 14 with a handful of poets reading their work, and Space Gallery in Portland will host a much larger event, also on Zoom and in conjunction with the Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance, at 7 p.m. Oct. 27 with 10 or more of the book’s poets. That event also will serve as a get-out-the-vote rally, Bushell said.

Among the poets who contributed are Myronn Hardy, a Black poet who teaches at Bates College. Arisa White, another Black poet, teaches at Colby. Donna Loring is a Penobscot elder, Vietnam veteran and adviser to Gov. Janet Mills on tribal affairs. Reza Jalali, who teaches at the University of Southern Maine, is originally from Iran.

As a white woman, Milliken wanted to do something substantial to contribute to the dialogue. “A lot of white people were saying ‘#BlackLivesMatter,’ but I wanted to do something that more than just a hashtag. I wanted to create a book that would last longer than a hashtag,” said Milliken, who lives in Virginia and Maine.

Gervin, who has self-published one book of street photography and is working on a second, hopes the words and images in the book help raise awareness about inequality in Portland and across the country. “I have always had a goal to bring awareness to these issues well before the current temperature of our country has reached the Fahrenheit it has now. To see this all come to light is an eye-opener and amazing and horrifying all at the same time. It’s a good thing people are waking up, but it helps to highlight the difficult road ahead that we have to get to where we want to be.”



The cover of “Enough! Poems of Resistance and Protest” by Littoral Books.

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