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Contact: Beth Hessel

Phone: 215-925-2688

Email: bhessel@philaathenaeum.org

Emma Copley Eisenberg's *Housemates* and Elizabeth A. Athens's *William Bartram's Visual Wonders* win 2024 Athenaeum Literary Award

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA—April 8, 2025—The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, among the nation's oldest membership libraries, announced the recipients of the 2024 Athenaeum Literary Award at its 210th Annual Shareholder Meeting on April 7. The prestigious award goes to Philadelphia author Emma Copley Eisenberg for her debut novel *Housemates* (Hogarth) and art historian Elizabeth A. Athens for her historical study *William Bartram's Visual Wonders: The Drawings of an American Naturalist* (University of Pittsburgh Press).

At Monday night's meeting, Athenaeum Literary Award Committee member Mary Hawkesworth announced the winners to a packed audience and enthusiastic applause. "Although markedly different in genre and focus," Hawkesworth said, "the two winning works are deeply thoughtful, beautifully crafted, lyrically written, and provide keen insight into the human condition."

With its vivid depictions of West Philadelphia life and timely narrative of love and art, Eisenberg's *Housemates* was one of The Athenaeum's most widely-circulated titles of the year. On receiving news of the award, the author said, "*Housemates* was born in part from a desire to render Philadelphia as the complex, artistically fertile, politically significant, and racially stratified place that it is, and to highlight Philadelphia's deep queer community, so it is especially sweet and meaningful to receive this recognition from the premiere literary prize in my home city." Eisenberg, who is also a cofounder of the literary organization Blue Stoop, added, "*Housemates* also raises the question, 'What is the point of making art in times of great uncertainty and struggle?' This award, and the fellowship it represents, feels like a partial answer.

Athens, upon accepting the award for nonfiction, wrote, "It is difficult to express how meaningful this award is to me [. . .] Over the years my research on William Bartram has been supported by various Philadelphia libraries and archives, and to have the resulting book recognized by the Athenaeum of

Philadelphia is a wonderful culminating honor. With this book I hope I have been able to capture, in some small way, the richness and complexity of the city's history and its invaluable cultural institutions." The Athenaeum Literary Award Committee recognized *Visual Wonders* as a tour de force study of the intersections between observational drawing, knowledge, and the history of science. Athens, whose scholarship and curation focuses on 18th and 19th century art and natural history, is also an Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of Connecticut.

For 75 years, The Athenaeum Literary Award has recognized literature of outstanding merit by Philadelphia authors, as well as books whose subject matter focuses on Philadelphia culture or history. The Award Committee evaluates each submission for quality, freshness, and the work's capacity to invite distinct conversation about our city and our world. Given to up to two books annually in fiction and/or non-fiction, the award carries a \$1,000 cash prize and an invitation to deliver a public lecture.

In recognition of his role in establishing the Literary Award in 1949, the award and related lectures are part of the Charles Wharton Stork Memorial Lecture program, endowed by Stork's children in 1983. A writer, translator, and professor of English, Dr. Stork (1881-1971) was a member of the Board of Directors of the Athenaeum from 1919 until 1968.

For more information about The Athenaeum or the Literary Award, please contact Executive Director Beth Hessel at bhessel@philaathenaeum.org or go to <https://philaathenaeum.org/literary-award/>.