

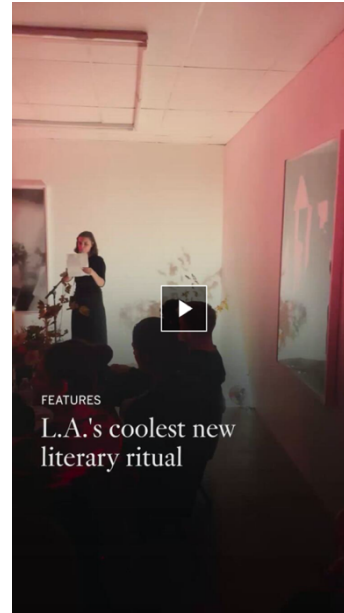
# Los Angeles Times

## Where to find L.A.'s lit scene this winter: 11 reading events worth the drive

By **Maddie Connors**  
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Poet Mary Bryce on stage during Electric Blue: Hypersphere.  
(Brian van der Brug / Los Angeles Times)



It's a Friday night in Chinatown. In the Asian Center, storefronts are closed, their neon signs still buzzing in the rain. Upstairs, lively chatter echoes from the Bel Ami Gallery. Inside, under red lights, the monthly series This Friday hosts a reading. On each table, a spread of challah and wine glows in candlelight.

"Jane just needed to write something that felt like talking to a hot, crazy person very far away," fiction writer Anna Dorn reads aloud. The mischievous line prompts smirks from the audience. Her delivery is playful, sharp and wildly entertaining. For a brief moment, she is the "hot crazy person very far away."

Hosted by Ruby Zuckerman and Evan Laffer, This Friday is touted as a "nondenominational Sabbath." The literary event is secular, but centers on Jewish values. "Jewish tradition of art and culture isn't about being Jewish — it's about arts and culture," Laffer says.

Zuckerman, a fiction writer, and Laffer, a poet and host of the Jokermen podcast, met on the literary reading circuit. This Friday was born when the friends "wanted to fill a hole in the ecosystem — something less stuffy than a bookstore reading, but still felt like a party," Zuckerman says.

The series is one of many readings that have emerged across the city. The events often take place in unorthodox venues — bars, backyards, restaurants and art galleries — and are crowded with young, curious audience members, often with cigarettes in hand.

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For many, readings have become the antidote to a nightlife scene weary of Hinge dating and heavy alcohol consumption. The scene offers community: space for readers and writers to mingle, listen and be absorbed by prose.

“I was interested in writing, loved reading and didn’t have any friends that had those things in common,” Zuckerman says. “I just started going to readings — at Stories Books, Casual Encountersz — and very quickly was able to find community in a way.”

Molly Lambert, a writer and host of the reading series Jazz Roulette, is grateful for the city’s newfound literary appetite. “I think people are still excited to gather again in person. There’s a literary chic thing happening that I am all for,” says Lambert.

According to Lambert, in the literary scene, one can also avoid some of the climbing and striving that runs rampant in Hollywood. “In L.A., all the psychos are trying to write film and TV, so everybody who’s trying to write anything else is more chill.”



Audience members during Electric Blue: Hypersphere, an immersive reading experience.  
(Brian van der Brug / Los Angeles Times)

Independent bookstores are still home to traditional readings, often boasting celebrity authors. Book Soup in West Hollywood has been hosting readings for decades, showcasing iconic authors like Hunter S. Thompson and Joan Didion. “Book Soup programming has an eye toward representing our store as a literary oasis in a town run by movies and music,” says Adam Messinger, assistant promo director at Book Soup. The legendary bookstore just celebrated its 50th anniversary. “At a Book Soup reading, you can expect to see Hollywood in all of its glitz, glamour and tattered gowns reflected back at you.”