

# Jen Bervin: Shift Rotate Reflect, Selected Works (1997-2020)

On view at [University Galleries of Illinois State University](#) from August 15 through December 13, 2020.  
Curated by Kendra Paitz, Director and Chief Curator

[Exhibition website](#)

[Exhibition documentation](#)



Jen Bervin

***Silk Poems***

2016

Multimedia installation in 3 parts

For *Silk Poems*, Bervin partnered with scientists at Tufts University to fabricate a nanoimprinted poem on a silk biosensor. Her silk research spanned thirty international nanotechnology and biomedical labs, textile archives, medical libraries, and sericulture sites. The full project is comprised of the nanoimprinted poem on a microscope for viewing; a video documenting Bervin's research and process by Charlotte Lagarde; and the *Silk Poems* book featuring Bervin's poem written from the perspective of a silkworm and composed in a six-character chain corresponding to the DNA structure of silk.



Jen Bervin

***Silk Poems film***

2016

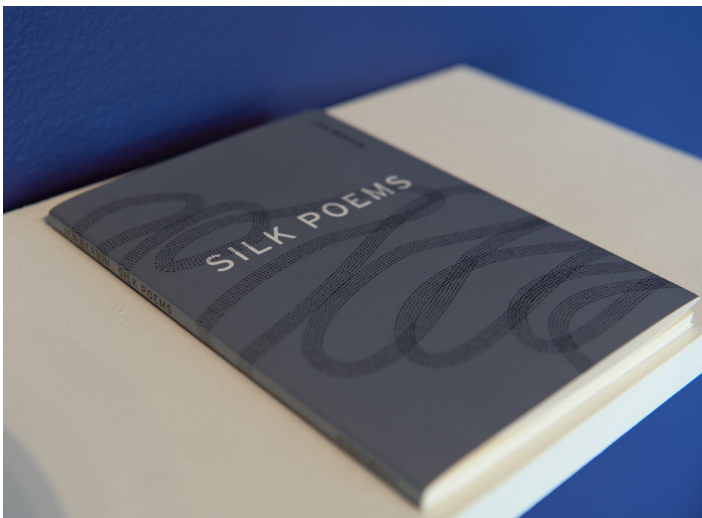
Silk film with poem nanoimprinted in gold spatter  
3.5 inch silk film in 5 x 5 inch acrylic frame on  
microscope  
Courtesy of the artist



Charlotte Lagarde  
**Jen Bervin's *Silk Poems***

2016  
 HD video with sound, 9:16 minutes  
 Courtesy of the artist

This video follows Jen Bervin's research and the fabrication process for *Silk Poems*.



Jen Bervin  
***Silk Poems book***  
 2017  
 Nightboat books



Jen Bervin  
***7S (Seven Silks)***  
 2018

Archival box with foil-backed label, two prints on silk fabric, signed copy of *Silk Poems* by Jen Bervin; a Bombyx Mori cocoon in glass jar, a vial with a scroll printed on silk, a vial with a skein of silk thread, a glass vial of liquid silk fibroin, and a colophon. Granary Books, edition of 100, #79, available.

Courtesy of the artist



Jen Bervin  
***Silk Poems print***

2016

Digital print of silk poem strand on silk fabric,  
suspended on aluminum tube

65 x 52 inches

Courtesy of the artist

This print on silk shows Bervin's poem written  
from the perspective of a silkworm and com-  
posed in a six-character chain corresponding to  
the DNA structure of silk.



Jen Bervin

***Silk Line***

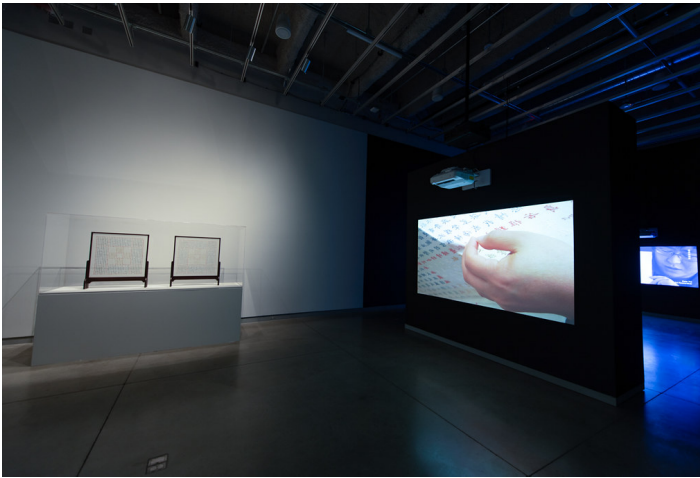
2015, 2016, 2020

Drawing performance

Courtesy of the artist







Jen Bervin and Charlotte Lagarde  
***Su Hui's Picture of the Turning Sphere***

2016-2020

5-channel video installation with sound and two double-sided embroideries

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artists

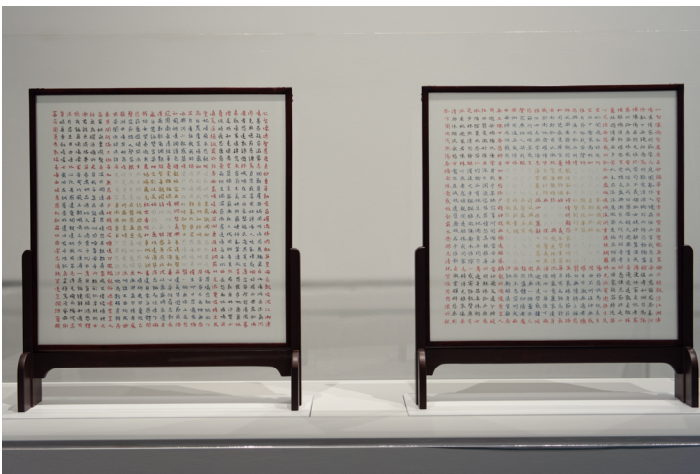
The exhibition premieres *Su Hui's Picture of the Turning Sphere*, a collaboration with filmmaker Charlotte Lagarde. The multi-channel video and textile installation, self-described as a "feminist listening room," focuses on Chinese poet Su Hui and her 4th-century reversible poem, "Xuanji Tu." Structured on an astronomical gauge and stitched in five colors, the poem was written in a 29 x 29-character grid and can be read in any direction to yield almost 8,000 possible interpretations. Bervin and Lagarde created a rotation of four projected videos featuring commentary from eight Chinese women: an algorithmic game theorist, calligrapher, art researcher, astrophysicist, artist, novelist, and literary scholars. The fifth video shows the stitching of the embroideries in this gallery. This work premieres at University Galleries.



***Su Hui's Xuanji tu (840) and Su Hui's Xuanji tu (841)***  
 2020

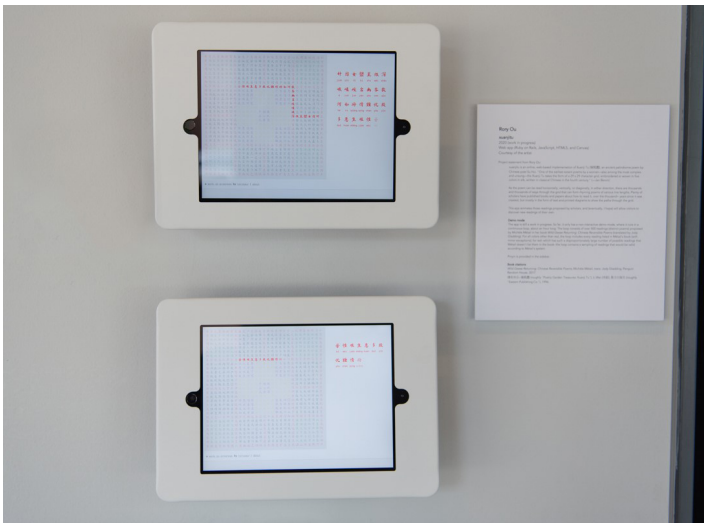
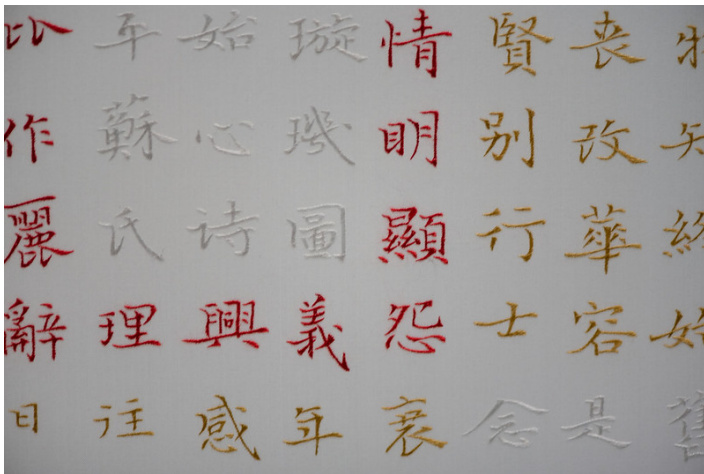
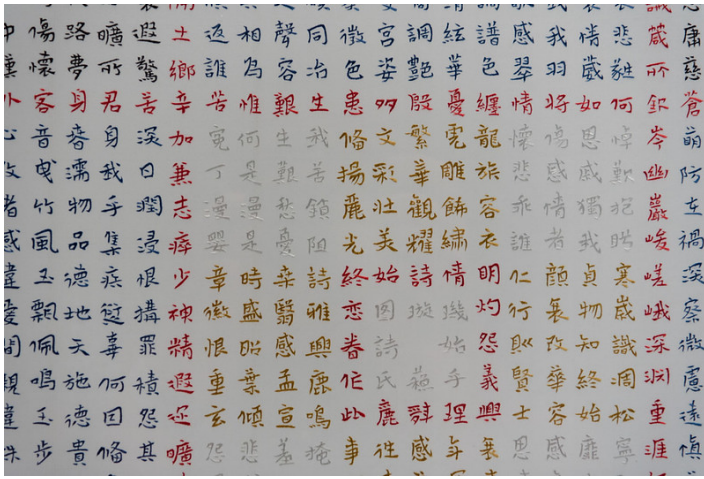
Double-sided silk embroideries of Su Hui's poem framed between two sheets of glass, on support base

34 x 31 x 11 inches



Jen Bervin and Charlotte Lagarde partnered with a contemporary embroidery studio in Suzhou, China, to create two new renderings of Su Hui's "Xuanji tu" poem using a specialized double-sided silk embroidery technique on translucent silk screens. The finished embroideries and a video projection of the embroidery process are included in the installation, *Su Hui's Picture of the Turning Sphere*.



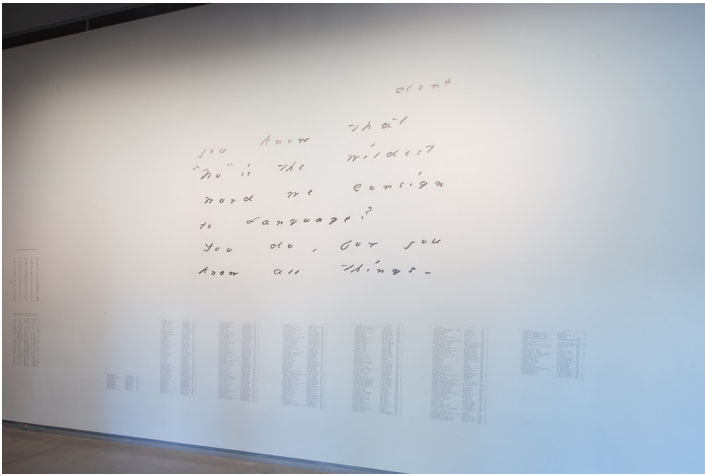


Rory Ou  
[xuanjitu](#)  
 2020 (work in progress)  
 Web app (Ruby on Rails, JavaScript, HTML5, and Canvas)  
 Courtesy of the artist

Jen Bervin  
Concordance Omission: No  
2020

Excerpts from *The Concordance to the Poems of Emily Dickinson* (far left), original research from Dickinson writings (Emily Dickinson Archive, Franklin and Johnson variorum editions), new concordance entry typed on an IBM Wheelwriter (Manifold font), reprinted in vinyl lettering. The handwritten excerpt (dont you know that "no" is the wildest word we consign to language? You do, for you know all things -) pencilled on the wall is from Dickinson manuscript A 739, Amherst College Archive and Special Collections. Fabrication credit: Lisa Lofgren, University Galleries of Illinois State University.

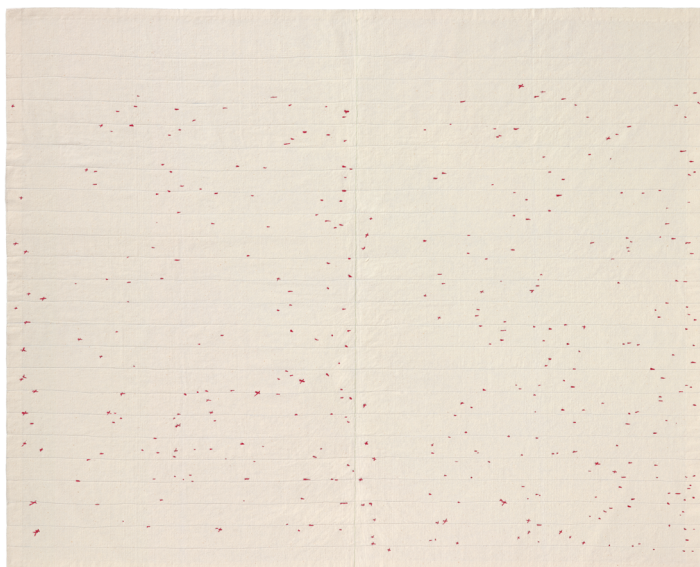
16 x 25 feet  
Courtesy of the artist



Index Words in Order of Frequency

|      |        |         |        |         |
|------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| 1682 | 232    | 143     | 114    | 87      |
| I    | DAY    | HEAVEN  | OUT    | PUT     |
| 980  | 230    | 141     | 112    | TAKE    |
| AS   | KNOW   | DEATH   | EVERY  | UP      |
| 755  | 226    | FACE    | FAR    | 86      |
| MY   | LITTLE | SUCH    | SUMMER | BEE     |
| 719  | 223    | 140     | 110    | HOME    |
| BE   | THEE   | WITHOUT | NATURE | LOOK    |
| 616  | 218    | 135     | 107    | THY     |
| ME   | SHE    | TELL    | ANY    | WITHIN  |
| 579  | 216    | 130     | 106    | 85      |
| HER  | AWAY   | GOD     | FIRST  | DOWN    |
| 563  | 202    | TIME    | LOVE   | 83      |
| WE   | US     | 128     | UNTO   | FEET    |
| 521  | 191    | BEFORE  | 102    | 82      |
| HIS  | NEVER  | 127     | BIRD   | LIGHT   |
| 462  | 189    | COME    | 100    | OH      |
| HE   | MORE   | 125     | SAY    | 81      |
| 395  | 178    | SOUL    | 96     | LAST    |
| 720  | SOME   | 124     | SWEET  | 80      |
| YOU  | 174    | HEART   | 94     | KNEW    |
| 354  | TILL   | 123     | DIE    | MYSELF  |
| ALL  | 170    | YOUR    | 93     | OLD     |
| 352  | SUN    | 122     | MAN    | 79      |
| ONE  | 156    | SEA     | 92     | BECAUSE |
| 349  | LIFE   | 121     | EYE    | HAND    |
| LIKE | 152    | NIGHT   | 90     | LET     |
| 252  | GO     | 119     | MEN    | MIND    |
| HIM  | 151    | ONLY    | 89     | OWN     |
| 248  | YET    | 117     | MAKE   | 78      |
| OUR  | 146    | STILL   | 88     | UNTIL   |
| 244  | SEE    | THOU    | EYES   | 77      |
| JUST |        | 115     |        | SKY     |
|      |        | WAY     |        | 76      |
|      |        |         |        | DOOR    |
|      |        |         |        | NOON    |
|      |        |         |        | PLACE   |
|      |        |         |        | WENT    |





Jen Bervin

***The Dickinson Composites Series: The Composite Marks of Fascicle 40; The Composite Marks of Fascicle 28; and The Composite Marks of Fascicle 19***

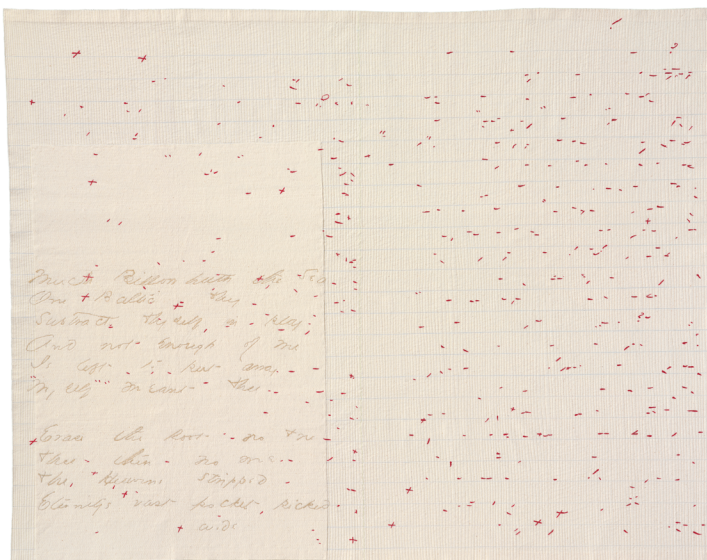
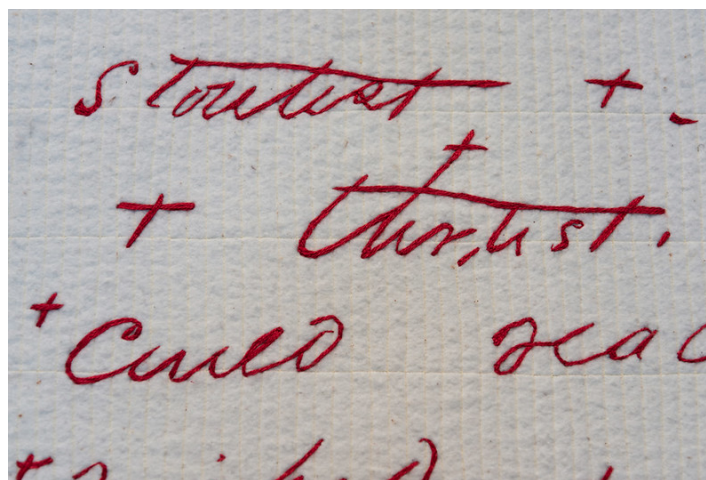
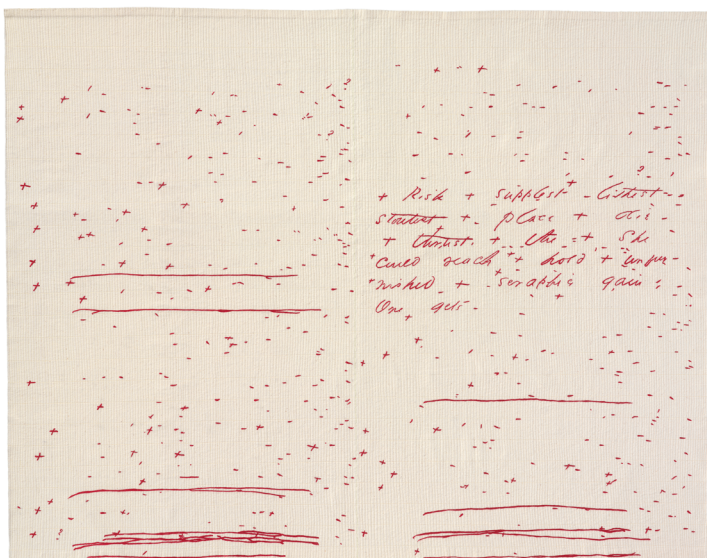
2004-2008

Cotton and silk thread on cotton batting backed with muslin

6 x 8 feet

Courtesy of the artist

*The Dickinson Composites Series* is comprised of stitched composites of the variant marks American poet Emily Dickinson used in her manuscripts to link alternate words and phrases. These marks and the original line breaks were often omitted by editors for print editions, and Bervin describes *The Dickinson Composites* as being "aligned with mending, restitution, and the deeper gesture that Dickinson's poems and variant marks make."







Jen Bervin  
***The Dickinson Composites Edition***

2010

Archival box silkscreened with marks; hand- and machine-sewn cotton batting on muslin, silk, and cotton thread; 6 large color prints; 16-page booklet in a silkscreened pocket fold sewn with a cotton tape lift. Edition of 55. #AP available.

11.5 x 15 x 1.5 inches, 24 pages

Courtesy of the artist

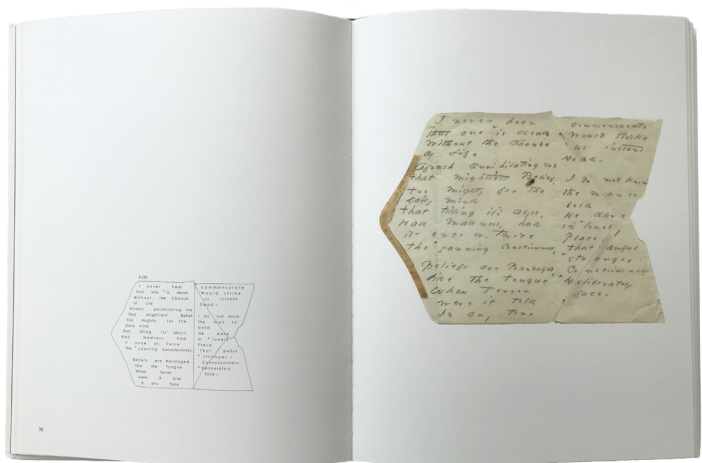


Jen Bervin

***The Gorgeous Nothings Edition***

2012

Portfolio of 48 unbound double-sided color manuscript facsimiles, 11 x 14 inches; a 52-page essay printed letterpress with digital prints tipped-in, bound soft cover, 10 x 7 1/2 inches; a 32-page unbound guide with visual indexes, a directory of manuscripts, a postscript and a colophon in a slipcase, 9 x 11 1/2 inches, an archival box with an original line drawing in blue pencil, and a hand-painted seal of gum arabic, and gouache. Granary Books, edition of 60.



***The Gorgeous Nothings***

2013

Hardcover trade book. Christine Burgin and New Directions in association with Granary Books. First printing: 25,000. Offset interior in full color with 110 illustrations and gatefold. 12 x 9.75 x 1.25 inches, 272 pages.

American poet Emily Dickinson's late writings on deconstructed envelopes, each accompanied by a transcription to facilitate reading of the manuscript facsimile, edited by Jen Bervin and Marta Werner.



Jen Bervin

**River**

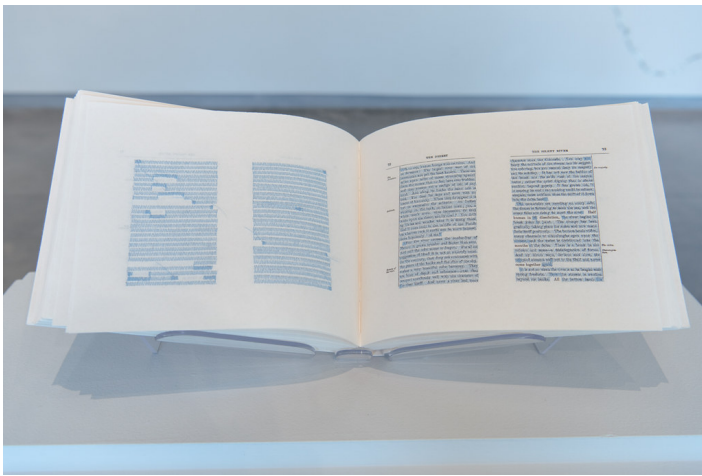
2006-2018

Silver foil-stamped cloth sequins, metallic thread, silver mulberry paper, mull, and Tyvek  
230 curvilinear feet; 100 x 20 feet installed  
Courtesy of the artist

*River* is a scale model of the Mississippi River from the geocentric point of view (from inside Earth's interior looking up at the riverbed). Hand-stitched at a scale of one inch to one mile, the work took twelve years to make. Bervin points out that it took "the same amount of time to sew each section of river that it would take to walk the real one."







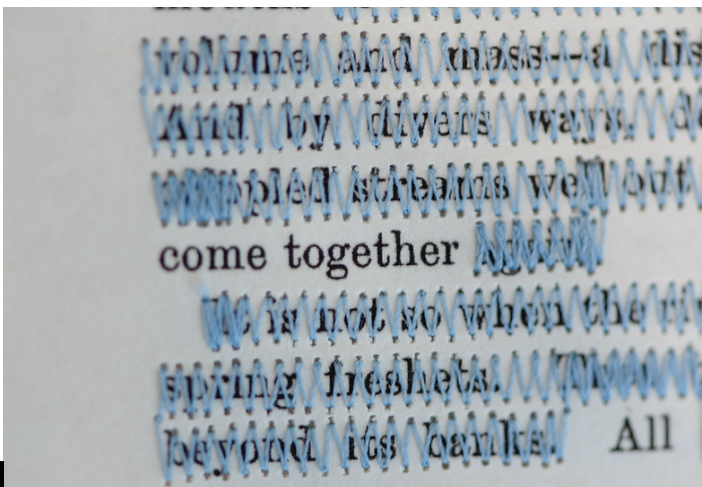
Jen Bervin

***The Desert***

2008

Granary Books, edition of 40, out of print, #40  
Twinrocker handmade bleached abaca paper,  
digitally printed, machine-sewn with pale blue  
zigzag stitching, handbound by Susan Mills in a  
punched abaca cover  
8.25 x 11 x 2 inches, 148 pages  
Courtesy of the artist

Bervin sewed through chapters of John C. Van Dyke's *The Desert* (1901) with pale blue thread to, in her words, "construct a poem narrated by the air." She originally composed the poem for a reading at Roden Crater, artist James Turrell's large-scale artwork within a volcanic cinder cone in the Painted Desert region of Northern Arizona.



Jen Bervin

***Pierced Light***

**[Latitude 31.4482, Longitude 109.9284]**

1998

Topographic perforation of Bisbee, Arizona, and  
paper scraps of various sizes sewn together with  
pale green cotton thread  
64 x 70 inches  
Courtesy of the artist

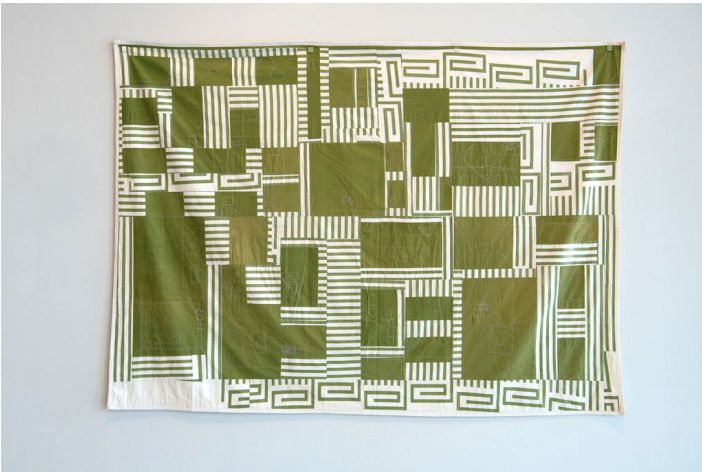




Jen Bervin  
***Envelope Coverlet***  
 1998

Cotton sheets, machine- and hand-sewing, and  
 number stamps  
 76.5 x 56 inches  
 Collection of Hm Mirra

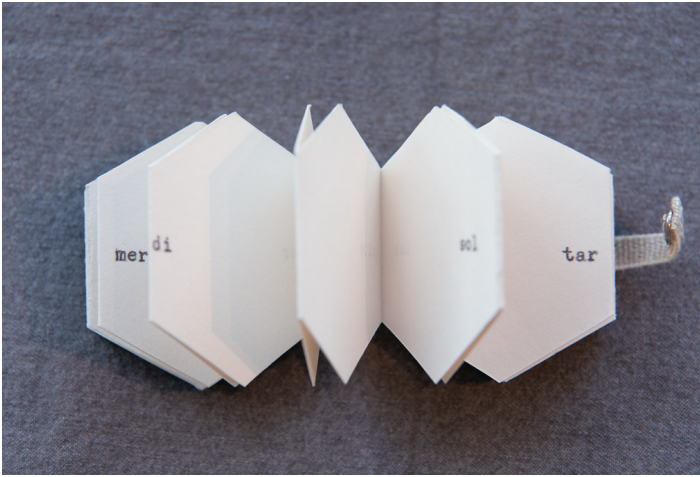
Coverlet quilt blocks in green reflect outlines  
 and markings from correspondence sent by Hm  
 Mirra to Jen Bervin in Bisbee, Arizona, in the  
 late 1990s. It was made as a gift for Mirra.



Jen Bervin  
***Under What Is Not Under***  
 1997

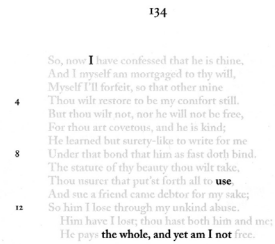
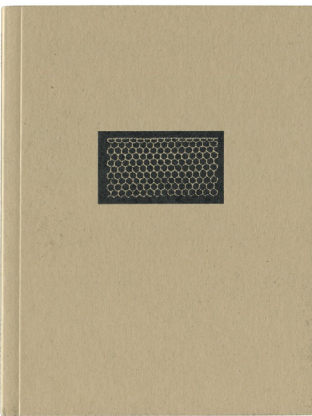
Handbound book in tent cloth, sepia toned  
 photograph frontispiece, sewn in, poem frag-  
 ments pasted in horizon height to the photo-  
 graph. Edition of 20, #19.  
 Courtesy of the artist



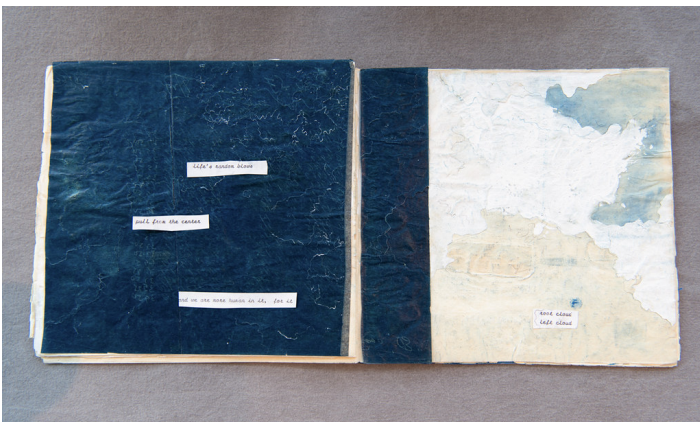


Jen Bervin  
***Juniper Caesura***  
 1999

Binder's board, cotton paper, typed and penciled text, linen tape and metal snap closures. Edition of 30, available. Courtesy of the artist



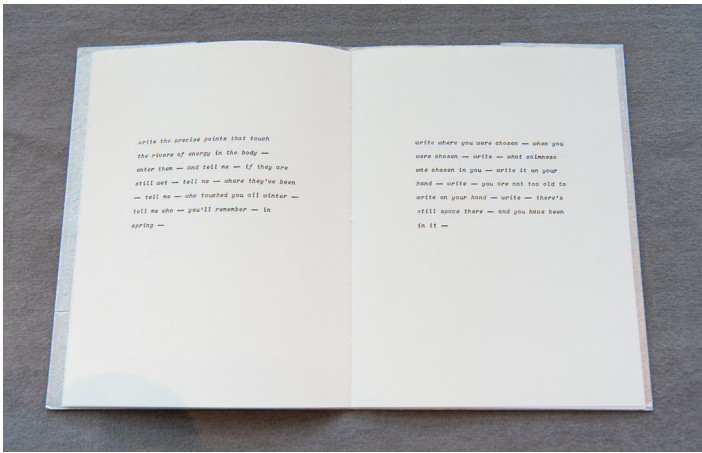
Jen Bervin  
***Nets***  
 2004 (10th printing in 2017)  
 Trade paperback with letterpress cover and perfect bound offset interior. Ugly Duckling Presse.  
 6.5 x 5.5 inches, 130 pages



Jen Bervin  
***A Non Breaking Space***  
 2005

Single unbound signature of rice paper with white bond paper and carbon paper pasted in, with gesso, gouache, ink, pencil, cursive typewriter text, and typewriter opaquing film. 1/1. Courtesy of the artist





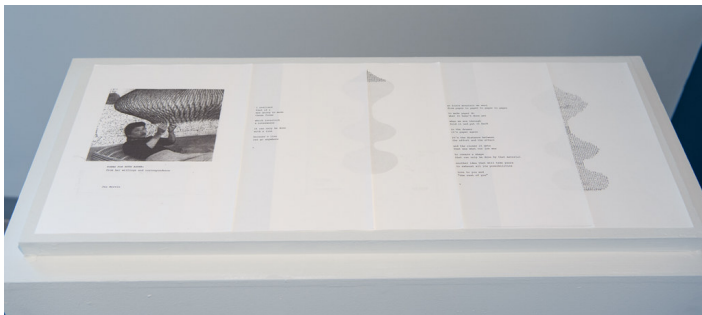
Jen Bervin  
***The Silver Book***  
 2010

Hand-bound chapbook in silver wrapper. Edition of 500: 450 with plain white copy paper interiors, 50 signed and numbered on felt-finish Mohawk paper, out of print. #26/50. Courtesy of the artist



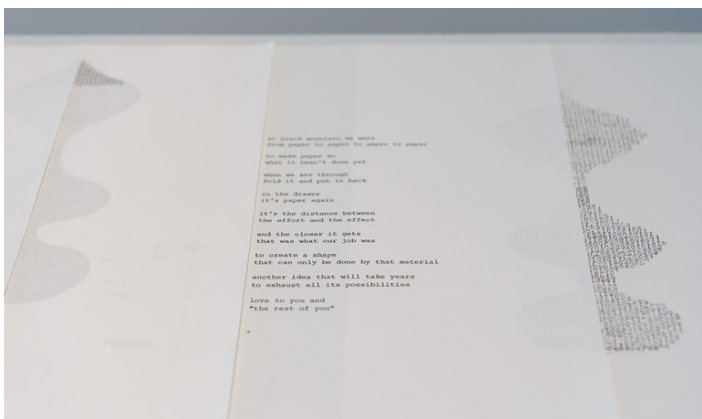
Jen Bervin  
***Draft Notation***  
 2014

Unbound books and prints in linen clamshell box printed letterpress on Khadi, Lettra, and glassine paper; printed digitally, and with an IBM typewriter, on Byron Weston Linen Ledger White and Classic Crest. Granary Books, edition of 75: #40, available. Courtesy of the artist



Jen Bervin  
***Poems for Ruth Asawa: from her writings and correspondence***  
 2020

Letter-sized loose pages, Byron Weston Linen Ledger Bright White. 1/1. 11 x 8.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist



Bervin composed these poems for American sculptor Ruth Asawa (1926-2013) using text from Asawa's writings and formatting them into the shape of Asawa's wire sculptures.