

# J E N B E R V I N

## *Shift Rotate Reflect, Selected Works (1997-2020)*

### ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

*Shift Rotate Reflect*, the first survey of work by American poet and artist [Jen Bervin](#), presents twenty-three solo and collaborative projects, artist's books, embroideries, videos, drawings, prints, and a performance created from 1997-2020. The selected works demonstrate the interdisciplinary range of Bervin's long-term research on topics including legacies of women artists and writers, relationships between text and textiles, and abstractions of language and landscape.

### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jen Bervin is a poet and visual artist who works at the intersections of art and scholarship, text and textiles, science, technology, and craft.<sup>1</sup> Jen Bervin's projects have been exhibited at the Hong Kong University Museum and Art Gallery; Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Iowa; Ian Potter Museum of Art, Melbourne; The Power Plant, Toronto; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts; Tufts University Art Galleries, Medford, Massachusetts; Rhode Island School of Design, Providence; and Morgan Library and Museum, New York, among others. Bervin has authored eleven books and artist's books.

### subjective frame

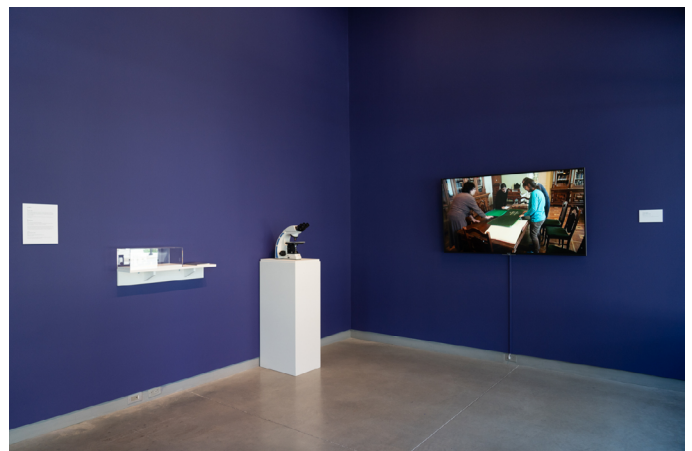
- What is your immediate response to Bervin's work? How does viewing the work on an online platform affect your response?
- Which artworks stand out most to you and why?
- What did you learn from viewing and reading about the artworks in this exhibition?

### cultural frame

- How do Bervin's artworks each reference human connection and communication in different ways?
- In what ways does Bervin's work celebrate the skills, wisdom, and brilliance of women, both past and present?
- In what ways do the women in the video installation *Su Hui's Picture of the Turning Sphere* provide contemporary, historical, cultural, and scientific contexts for the poem?
- What connections can you find between materials and techniques used to create the works in this exhibition? In what ways do Bervin's works connect the histories of materials with their uses and production in the present day?

### structural frame

- What formal qualities such as color, shape, and form do you see repeated in Bervin's work?
- In what ways does Bervin employ scale on the macro and micro levels in her work?
- What materials has Bervin used to create her works? How has she used similar materials in different ways?
- How many different techniques has Bervin employed to create the works in this exhibition?



*7S and Silk Poems* (installation view), 2010-2017. Courtesy of the artist.

# VOCABULARY

## CODE

a system of symbols (such as letters or numbers) used to represent assigned and often secret meanings<sup>2</sup>

## CONCEPTUAL

based on an idea

## CONTEMPORARY

something that belongs to the present or current time

## CONTEXT

the situation in which something happens

## FIBER ART

textile-based artworks not intended for use<sup>3</sup>

## FORMAL QUALITIES

refers to elements and principles of design such as line, shape, color, balance, movement, contrast, and unity

## SUBJECTIVE

something that is open to interpretation; up to the viewer to decide

## SUBJECT MATTER

what is being depicted in an image or artwork

<sup>1</sup> Bervin, J. (2020). Jen Bervin. Retrieved August 26, 2020, from <http://jenbervin.com/about>

<sup>2</sup> code (2020). In Merriam-Webster.com. Retrieved July 28, 2020, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/code>

<sup>3</sup> Barnes, S., (2017, May 05). *Art History: Ancient Practice of Textile Art and How It Continues to Reinvent Itself*. Retrieved July 16, 2020, from <https://mymodernmet.com/contemporary-textile-art-history/>

<sup>4</sup> [Technology and Society Program (VCU)]. (2017, March 17). *Jen Bervin*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eprPpb6MZbQ>

# EVENTS

- Online panel discussions and additional programming, including a performance of Bervin's *Silk Line*, will be announced throughout the duration of the exhibition via University Galleries' Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts.
- A reading list prepared by Jen Bervin will be shared online early in the exhibition.
- Educator resources, activities for children and youth, and art lesson videos will be shared.
- A selection of artist's books from Milner Library's Special Collections will be on display in the Special Collections department. Please visit [Library.IllinoisState.edu/services/special-collections/](http://Library.IllinoisState.edu/services/special-collections/) for information on visiting Special Collections.

You can find [University Galleries](#) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#), and sign up to receive email updates through the [newsletter](#). Please contact [galleries@IllinoisState.edu](mailto:galleries@IllinoisState.edu) or call (309) 438-5487 if you need to arrange an accommodation to participate in any events related to this exhibition.



# ART-MAKING ACTIVITIES

- Analyze and discuss how the reflective nature of the silver sequins in *River* impacts the viewer's experience and interpretation of the work. Compare with [Teresita Fernández's](#) reflective artworks such as [Landscape \(Panoramic Mirror\)](#), [Fata Morgana](#), and [Blind Blue Landscape](#). Design an artwork with intentional reflective qualities.
- Bervin talks about "the legacy of female genius"<sup>4</sup> and the tendency for female accomplishments to be neglected in dominant historical narratives. How do Su Hui's reversible poem [Picture of the Turning Sphere](#) and Emily Dickinson's variant marks in [The Dickinson Composites](#) relate to these lost "legacies of female genius?" As a class, discuss examples of overlooked accomplishments of marginalized groups or individuals. Collaboratively create an artwork celebrating and elevating underrepresented stories and voices.
- Compare and contrast [River](#), [The Silver Book](#), and [The Desert](#). Develop a three-part series consisting of an artwork, a poem, and a book that are interconnected conceptually.
- Analyze the design choices Su Hui made to create her poem *Xuanji Tu*, or [Picture of the Turning Sphere](#). Consider her intended audience. Collaboratively design an artwork that is intentionally coded in a way that only one person, or a limited audience would understand. Consider designing a coded "language" with a partner, then individually create artworks using this code. When completed, use your code to decipher one another's finished works.
- Examine the function of Emily Dickinson's [variant marks](#) in her original manuscripts. Then analyze [The Dickinson Composites Series](#). Design an artwork with "variants" that allow the viewer to substitute aspects of the artwork for something else, providing alternative "readings" of the work. How does this viewer engagement and autonomy impact the meaning of the work?
- Inspired by Bervin's performance [Silk Line](#), record the pattern of movement of an animal, insect, or natural force through a performance artwork. Write a poem from the perspective of your animal, insect, or natural force in the pattern of the movement to accompany your performance.
- Watch selections from the video installation [Su Hui's Picture of the Turning Sphere](#). After watching the videos, research aspects of 4th century China, especially those pertaining to astronomy, reversible embroidery, and the daily lives of women. How does this information contextualize Su Hui's poem and inform your understanding of the work? Select an artwork you have made this year. What aspects of contemporary culture would be necessary for a future "reader" to understand this artwork? Consider the subject matter, mediums, and cultural references.