

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.¹ 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

- Which artwork stands out most to you and why?
- What was your first impression of Bervin's work? Do you feel differently about any of the artworks after taking time to learn about the materials and processes used to create them?
- Do any of the materials in Bervin's work surprise you? How and why do they surprise you?
- If you could create an artwork using any of the materials Bervin has used, which would you choose and why?

cultural frame

- Look at *Silk Poems*. How does the pattern of the poem relate to silk? Can you find any other connections between materials Bervin has used to create artworks in the exhibition and the artworks themselves?
- Which aspects of women's stories does Bervin focus on in her works? Why do you think she chooses to focus on women's stories?
- How do Bervin's artworks reference different ways humans communicate ideas, thoughts, and feelings?

structural frame

- What formal qualities such as color, shape, and form do you see repeated in Bervin's work?
- Choose an artwork to focus on. How many adjectives can you think of to describe this piece?
- What types of materials has Bervin used to create her artworks? Can you find any similarities between these materials?



River (installation view), 2006-2018. Silver foil-stamped cloth sequins, metallic thread, silver mulberry paper, mull, Tyvek. 230 curvilinear ft. Install dimensions 100 ft x 20 ft. Courtesy of the artist.

VOCABULARY

ADJECTIVES

descriptive words such as soft, small, or curvy

BIOSENSOR

a medical device that monitors and detects chemical levels, such as insulin levels for diabetics

CODE

a system of symbols (such as letters or numbers) used to represent assigned and often secret meanings²

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 use³

FORMAL QUALITIES

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

PALINDROME

a word or sentence that reads the same forwards as it does backwards (examples: mom or wow)

SCALE

refers to the size of something—a scale model is an enlarged or shrunken replica of an image or object that maintains accurate relationships between its parts

SUBJECTIVE

up to the viewer to decide

SUBJECT MATTER

what is being depicted in an image or artwork

SYMBOL

an image or object that stands for an idea or a feeling such as a peace sign or a red light

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

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

³ 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/>

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/ 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 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 Bervin's performance *Silk Line*. In what way does the artist mimic the movement of silkworms? Study the patterns of movement of an animal, insect, or natural force of your choice. Record the pattern(s) of movement through a performance artwork. Then write a poem from the perspective of your chosen animal, insect, or natural force.
- Su Hui's reversible poem *Xuanji Tu*, or *Picture of the Turning Sphere*, has been likened to a palindrome. After viewing and discussing the complexity of Su Hui's poem, create your own palindrome and design an artwork with your word or sentence embedded within the work.
- As a class, discuss the function of Emily Dickinson's variant marks in her original manuscripts. Then, analyze *The Dickinson Composites Series*. Collaboratively design an artwork with "variants," or alternate parts, that allow the viewer to rearrange the artwork. Consider using movable "puzzle pieces" such as ceramic tiles, wooden blocks, or peg boards.
- Consider Bervin's use of scale in works such as *River*, a 1 inch to 1 mile replica of the Mississippi River made of hand-sewn silver sequins; *The Dickinson Composite Series*, large-scale embroidered quilts of Emily Dickinson's variant marks from her manuscripts; and *Silk Poems*, a microscopic poem printed on a biosensor. Collaboratively design a scale model of an image, item, or landmark.
- *The Gorgeous Nothings Edition* is a collection of poems written by Emily Dickinson on portions of envelopes. Analyze how this collection of poems is similar to scientific collections, such as butterfly displays, in its manner of categorizing, organizing, and documenting items and images. Create and document a collection of items and/or images that represent a significant time, place, or relationship in your life. How does the organization of these items and/or images affect the way a viewer might "read" your collection?
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of us have been unable to share familiar spaces and places with our family and friends. *River* is a hand-sewn model of the Mississippi River, a body of water linked to Bervin's childhood and hometown. As a class, learn about various ways the Mississippi River has connected people throughout time. Individually create an artwork inspired by a place or space that you have enjoyed sharing with others.