

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

University Galleries of Illinois State University is pleased to present *Jen Bervin: Shift Rotate Reflect, Selected Works (1997–2020)* from August 15 through December 13, 2020. In accordance with public health guidance, attendance at University Galleries will be kept under 50 at all times and visitors must book an appointment. Please see additional information below.

*Shift Rotate Reflect*, the first survey of work by American poet and artist Jen Bervin, will present 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.

The exhibition will premiere *Su Hui's Picture of the Turning Sphere* (2016–2020), 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 4<sup>th</sup>-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. Bervin and Lagarde also partnered with a contemporary embroidery studio in Suzhou, China, to create two new renderings of the 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.

Three other major projects, in addition to individual works, will be featured in this exhibition: *The Dickinson Composites* (2004–2008), *River* (2006–2018), and *Silk Poems* (2010–2017). 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. *River* is a scale model of the Mississippi River from the geocentric point of view, hand-stitched in silver sequins and spanning 230 curvilinear feet. *The Dickinson Composites*, a series of 6 x 8 feet embroideries, 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."

*Shift Rotate Reflect* is curated by Kendra Paitz, University Galleries' director and chief curator. This exhibition is supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, and the Illinois Arts Council Agency. An exhibition catalogue, which is also supported by a grant from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, is forthcoming in 2021.

### **Artist biographies**

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. Her *Silk Poems* was a New Museum Book of the Year and a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award, and her *Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinson's Envelope Poems* (with Marta Werner and Susan Howe) was a Book of the Year selection by *The New Yorker*. She has received grants, awards, and fellowships from the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, Asian Cultural Council, Creative Capital, Foundation for Contemporary Art, SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence), Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Banff Centre, and New York Foundation for the Arts, among others. Bervin's work is included in thirty collections, including Bibliothèque Nationale de France; Yale University; Brooklyn Museum; and the J. Paul Getty Museum.

Charlotte Lagarde has made more than twenty films, which have been aired on PBS, HBO, and the Sundance Channel, and exhibited at MASS MoCA. Her many awards include an Academy Award, the PBS Independent Lens Audience Award, and the Ashland Independent Film Festival's Best Documentary award, as well as fellowships from Sundance, BAVC, and Camargo Foundation. Her project *Colonial White* was included in the exhibitions *The Racial Imaginary Institute: On Whiteness* at The Kitchen, New York City, and *Great Force* at the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University as a city-wide participatory project in Richmond, Virginia. Lagarde serves on the board of directors of The Free History Project, and is the executive director of the Swell Foundation, and the COO & co-founder of B.Public.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 3, 2020

Bervin and Lagarde are married and live and work in Connecticut near the Long Island Sound.

### **Coronavirus (COVID-19) response**

Please note the following updates as University Galleries reopens to the public.

- In accordance with Illinois Board of Higher Education and Restore Illinois Phase 4 guidelines, attendance will be kept under 50 at all times.
- University Galleries remains free and open to the public, but visitors must book an appointment through the Bookings link on University Galleries' website.
- Visitors to University Galleries will be required to wear a face covering and practice physical distancing.
- University Galleries' main entrance will function as the "in-door" and the emergency exit in our east gallery will function as the "out-door" to reduce congestion in the entry vestibule and lobby.
- Hand sanitizer stations, physical distancing decals, and directional arrows will be located throughout the gallery spaces.
- There will be additional cleaning of high-contact points and restrooms.

For information on Illinois State University's Coronavirus (COVID-19) response, please see <https://coronavirus.illinoisstate.edu/>. For information on Illinois State University's requirements for face coverings and physical distancing, please see <https://ehs.illinoisstate.edu/safety/face-coverings/>.

### **Events and programming**

- 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.

### **University Galleries**

University Galleries, a unit in the Wonsook Kim College of Fine Arts, is located at 11 Uptown Circle, Suite 103, at the corner of Beaufort and Broadway streets. Parking is available in the Uptown Station parking deck located directly above University Galleries.

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 these exhibitions.