

# CATHARINE CLARK GALLERY



**Above:** Jen Bervin, *River*, 2006 – 2018 (detail). Silver foil-stamped cloth sequins, metallic thread, silver mulberry paper, mull, Tyvek. 230-curvilinear feet. Photo: Lyndsie Schlink.

## Jen Bervin: *Source*

April 1 – June 10, 2023

**April 1:** Opening Reception 3 – 5pm. Artist walkthrough at 3:30pm. Dance party with DJ set by Steve Zavattero: 8 – 10pm

**April 4:** Artist talk at 7:00pm in conjunction with UCSF's Orlo H. Clark Lectureship

**South gallery closes on May 20; exhibition continues in North gallery through June 10**

**San Francisco:** Catharine Clark Gallery announces the opening of *Jen Bervin: Source*, the inaugural exhibition in its newly expanded 9,200 square-foot space. *Source* is the artist's first West Coast survey and follows the acclaimed 2020 survey exhibition *Jen Bervin: Shift Rotate Reflect, Selected Works (1997 – 2020)*, curated by Kendra Paitz, Director and Chief Curator of the University Galleries of Illinois State University, and monograph publication.

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Founding Director Catharine Clark writes: “Bervin’s remarkable solo survey exhibition at Illinois State University opened in 2020 at the height of Covid, and at a time when limited audiences were able to see it. In planning for the opening of our new space, we saw an important opportunity to bring this body of work to the West Coast, which our expanded space makes possible. We are especially proud to feature several of Bervin’s most important projects – including her monumental sculpture *River* (2006 – 2018) – and to offer our audiences the chance to engage with Bervin’s deeply researched and exquisitely crafted work. The artworks in the exhibition encompass installation, sculpture, bookmaking, video, and the range of Bervin’s practice is emblematic of the conceptual rigor and capaciousness that is a hallmark of the gallery and its artists.”

Bervin approaches medium expansively: from silk biosensors inscribed with nanoscale poems, to installations in hand-sewn silver sequins that meander and flow across hundreds of feet, her work stems from a restless curiosity about how we observe the world around us. Poet Claudia Rankine writes that Bervin’s work “invites [us] into a search for the unknowable... The science is precise. The method is documented. The structure is informed by interrogated processes, but the experience of the encounter is beyond the stability of language.” Bervin asks us to reflect on those moments just outside our grasp and to imagine what’s possible in that space of ambiguity. Her work directs us away from easy answers or defined endpoints, but instead leads us back to that source anew.

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**Above:** Jen Bervin installing *River*, 2006 – 2018 at Des Moines Art Center, Iowa. Photo: Charlotte Lagarde.

Bervin’s ambitious sculpture *River* (2006 – 2018) imagines an impossible vantage: the Mississippi River as if viewed from the core of the earth, its headwaters, alluvial path, and confluence in the delta stretching across 230 curvilinear feet of ceiling and wall. Rendered in hand-sewn silver sequins on mull – a material used to line the spines of books – *River* catches the natural light as it moves through space, evoking light glinting on water. Bervin’s sculpture inspires awe, fabricated at a scale of one inch to one mile; this twelve-year process took her as long to sew as it would to walk the actual river. Bervin describes the Mississippi as a “spine,” a metaphor that suggests this river’s relation to its life-giving support of a body, or an open book to be read. As an immersive installation, *River* evokes the Mississippi’s outsized place in the American imagination, especially as a gateway for westward expansion that is inextricably tied to Manifest Destiny and the violent displacement of Native peoples, as well as the river’s centrality in America’s growth through industrialization, a history that is inseparable from both slavery and environmental destruction. Bervin’s sculpture powerfully reminds us of these cycles of destruction and regeneration, pointing to how our collective histories, like geological time scales, are always in process and take time to understand.

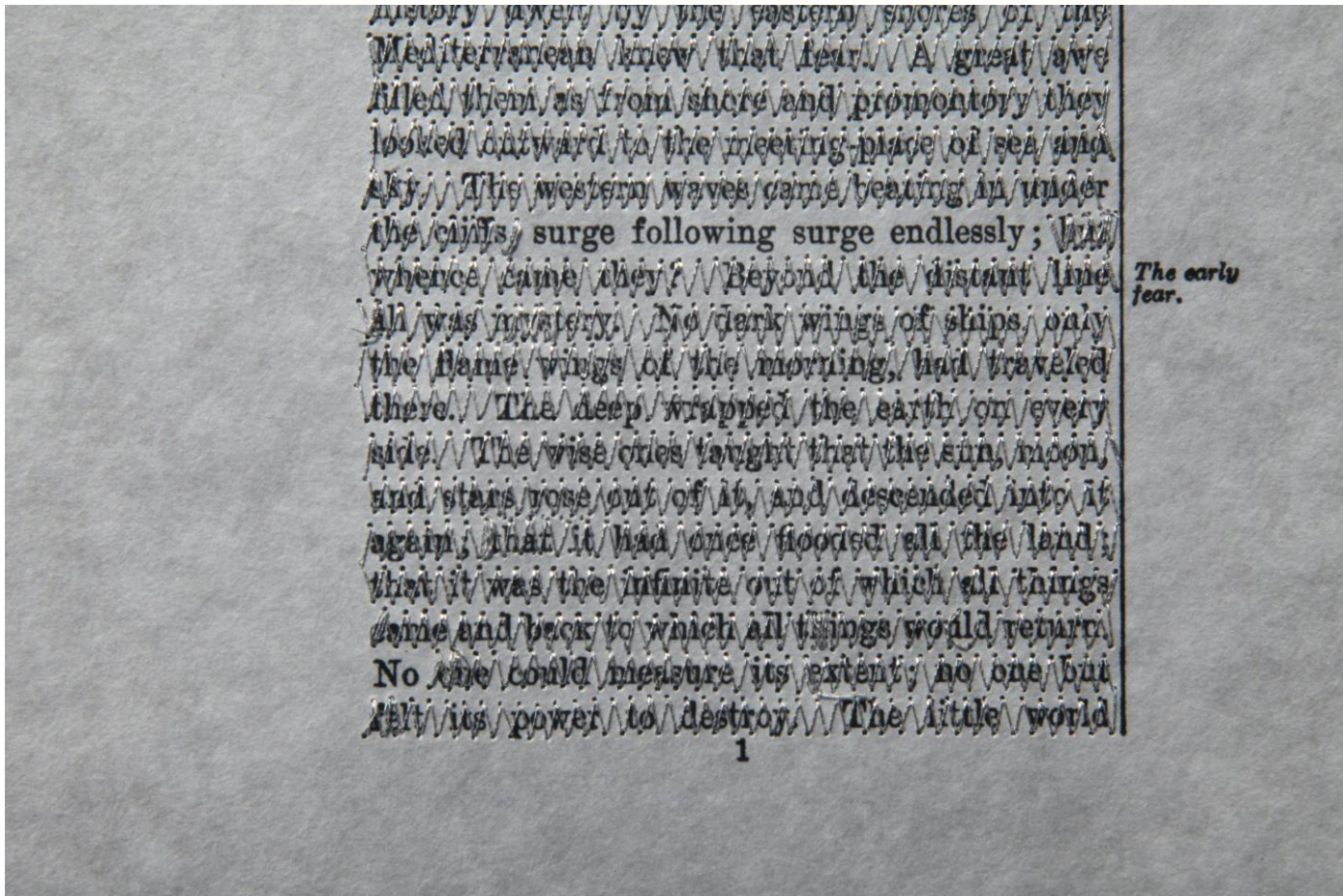
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**Above:** Jen Bervin, *Measure (after Susan Hiller)*, 2023 (detail). Burned journals 1992-2012; 15 borosilicate glass tubes with mirrored text. 2 rectilinear handblown glass vessels.

Bervin's sculpture *Measure (after Susan Hiller)* (2023), debuting in *Source*, also plays on themes of transformation and memory. *Measure* contains material from across time – twenty years of writing and reflection – that has been irreversibly changed by fire, a tribute to conceptual artist Susan Hiller (1940 – 2019), who created a series of work in which she burned her old paintings, transferring the ashes to glass tubes. In Bervin's work, the borosilicate tubes hold ashes from her burned journals from 1992 – 2012, each simultaneously representing a “piece” of time and a posthumously written new poem. On the exterior of the tubes, Bervin mirrorizes textual excerpts from her journals: THREE INVERTED SHOVELFULS, 1993 on one, GETTING LANGUAGE TO MOVE, 2008 on another. Standing loosely against one another in glass containers, the tubes resemble available tools, or geological core samples, as if containing the substance or matter of one's life or at the ready to measure it. Taken from their original context, the texts can be read and recombined into new poems: THE MISSISSIPPI IN YOU, 2006; A BODY OF WATER INCREASINGLY ABSTRACT, 2009; ALL LINES OF A MAP ARE IMAGINARY, 1997. *Measure* asks us to think about how our lives are in a constant state of doing and undoing – and how this space of in-betweenness offers us the chance to reflect on our own processes of transformation, as well as the role of writing over the course of a lifetime, and how the legacies of women artists take shape.

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Above: Jen Bervin, *The Sea*, 2023 (detail). Artist book: Digitally printed spreads from John Van Dyke's *The Opal Sea*, zigzag stitched with metallic silver thread.

*Source* also features several defining bodies of Bervin's work that stage situated poetics, explicitly contextual engagements with and within the works of artist and writers. These include new works within a presentation of *The Dickinson Composites Series* (2004 – ongoing), Bervin's large-scale embroidered quilts that depict Emily Dickinson's variant marks, a radically experimental system in her manuscripts that has been omitted in print.

A much anticipated follow up to *The Desert* (2008), *The Sea* (2023) is a sculptural artist book that was featured in MOMENTA Biennale, wherein Bervin stitches zigzagging silver thread around fragments of prose in American art historian John Charles Van Dyke's *The Opal Sea: Continued Studies in Impressions and Appearances* (1906). Through the intervention of sewing, Bervin redacts Van Dyke's prose while writing new poems from submerged narratives "in the wake" of expropriation and enslavement.

*Source* also features *Silk Poems*, Bervin's multi-year research project (2010 – 2016) supported by a grant from Creative Capital, developed with expertise from more than thirty international textile archives, medical libraries, nanotechnology and biomedical labs, and sericulture sites in North America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia. Silk, as a material, is compatible with body tissues; our immune system accepts it on surfaces as sensitive as the human brain.

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**Above:** Jen Bervin, silk filament in cocoon from *Silk Poems*, 2016. Multimedia installation.

In conjunction with Tufts University's Silk Lab's cutting-edge research on liquefied silk, Jen Bervin wrote a poem fabricated nanoscale in the form of a silk biosensor. The project stems from her belief that poems have work to do, and that reading such a biosensor inside the body is not a neutral context, but rather one pre-inscribed with concern about health and mortality, written in a material with a 5,000-year-old international history. The form of the poem strand is modeled on the filament deposition pattern that silkworms create when making their cocoon, and the beta sheet structures of silk proteins—both of which form like the weft thread in weaving. In the installation, Bervin's research and fabrication process for *Silk Poems* is presented in a short film by Charlotte Lagarde.

On Tuesday, April 4 at 7pm, Bervin will present a special artist talk at the gallery in conjunction with the University of California San Francisco's Orlo H. Clark Lectureship, an annual invited lecture in honor of Dr. Orlo H. Clark (1941 -2022) that presents speakers whose work explores the intersections between science and art. Jen Bervin is this year's invited lecturer and will present two talks: "Source," an artist talk at Catharine Clark Gallery on April 4 at 7pm; and "Embodied Knowledge: Poetry in a Silk Biosensor," at UCSF on April 5 at 7am. Contact Catharine Clark Gallery for additional details.

Join us for an opening reception on Saturday, April 1 from 3 – 5pm, with an artist walkthrough at 3:30pm and a first look at the gallery's expanded space, including *EXIT*, a jewel-box boutique for artists' books, objects, and multiples, as well as works presented in partnership with Arion Press and Crows Shadow Institute of the Arts. Following the opening, Catharine Clark Gallery will host a special celebration of our expansion from 8 – 10pm with dancing, a DJ set by Steve Zattero (Executive Director of the San Francisco Art Dealers Association), and "beers and bao" by Chairman Bao.

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**Jen Bervin** is an artist and poet whose multidisciplinary practice delves into entangled relationships between text, textiles, and situated poetics to create complex, yet elegant work. Bervin's solo and collaborative works often result from long-term research and collaboration with artists and specialists ranging from literary scholars to material scientists. Her conceptual, scientific, and literary investigations of material histories are attuned to the embodied, visual, and tactile aspects of language, and forms of inscription by non-human agencies. This work has been exhibited internationally at MOMENTA, Biennale de l'Image, Montreal; the Hong Kong University Museum and Art Gallery; Ian Potter Museum of Art, Melbourne; The Power Plant, Toronto; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; MASS MoCA; Tufts University Art Galleries, Medford; Rhode Island School of Design, Providence; Des Moines Art Center; and Morgan Library and Museum, New York. Bervin has earned numerous awards, fellowships and grants including The Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library Short Term Research Fellowship at Yale University (2023–24), the Banff Centre Fleck Fellowship (2022), SETI Institute Artist in Residence (2016–2019), Foundation for Contemporary Art (2017), The Rauschenberg Residency (2016), Asian Cultural Council (2016), Montalvo Arts Center Lucas Artist Program (2016), Bogliasco Foundation (2014), Creative Capital (2013), The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation (2012), New York Foundation for the Arts (2007), Camargo Foundation (2006), and MacDowell Colony (2006).

Bervin's books include *Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinson's Envelope Poems* (New Directions/Christine Burgin with Marta Werner and Susan Howe); a Book of the Year selection by *The New Yorker*; *Silk Poems* (Nightboat Books), a New Museum Book of the Year and a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award; *Nets* (UDP) and many others with Granary Books. A monograph publication *Jen Bervin: Shift Rotate Reflect, Selected Works (1997–2020)* is published in conjunction with the first survey exhibition of artist and poet Jen Bervin (b. 1972), organized by director and chief curator Kendra Paitz at University Galleries of Illinois State University, supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Her work can be found in more than sixty international collections, including Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Yale University, Brooklyn Museum, and The J. Paul Getty Museum. Bervin's work has been covered in media outlets such as *Artforum*, *Huffington Post*, *NPR*, *The Nation*, *LA Times*, *Frieze*, *The New Yorker*, and *The New York Times*. Bervin lives and works in Connecticut with her wife, Charlotte Lagarde, and has been represented by Catharine Clark Gallery since 2021.