

2013 Literature Grantees – 6 projects, representing 6 artists

Jessica Anthony

Portland, ME

Project Title: *Enter the Aardvark*

Literature: Fiction

Enter the Aardvark is a collection of four American novellas. In "The Amazing Discovery of Télémaque Gauche," a Haitian banana picker discovers what appears to be the headframe to an underground nuclear facility in the jungle north of Port-au-Prince; in "The Difficult Son of Tching Dok Chow," a Mongolian farm boy becomes a transvestite in Ulaanbaatar through the tutelage of a mysterious officer; in "The Most," a Czech man crosses a bridge to find himself transported to the condominium of a housewife in 1970s Delaware; and in "Enter the Aardvark," a gubernatorial candidate has a fleeting affair with a young man who dies shortly thereafter, leaving him the charge of a gigantic taxidermic aardvark.

Jessica Anthony is the author of *The Convalescent* (McSweeney's/Grove), an ALA Adult Notable Book and Barnes and Noble "Discover Great New Writers" selection, and *Chopsticks* (Penguin/Razorbill), a multimedia novel created in collaboration with the creative director at Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Rodrigo Corral. *Chopsticks*, called a "21st Century Novel," was an Amazon Book of the Month, and selected as App of the Year. Anthony's short stories can be found in *Best New American Voices*, *Best American Nonrequired Reading*, *New American Writing* and elsewhere. She has received fellowships from the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, the MacDowell Colony, the Millay Colony, the Ucross Foundation, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts and the Maine Arts Commission. Her books have been published in a dozen countries and reviewed in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Boston Globe* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. She lives in Portland, ME.

Jen Bervin

Brooklyn, NY

Project Title: *The Silk Poems*

Literature: Genre-Defying

Silk, as a material, is compatible with body tissues; our immune system accepts it on surfaces as sensitive as the human brain. *The Silk Poems* is an experimental book that takes this textile as its subject and form, exploring the cultural, scientific, and linguistic complexities of silk, mending and the body in poems imprinted on cast silk pages. Drawing on contemporary biomedical engineering research using patterned silk as sensors under human skin, the artist will fabricate the book by pouring silk solution on nanopatterned plates. The resulting pages will be combined into a transparent "book" resembling a piece of microfiche film—a single small sheet, with every poem present, that can be read with fiber-optic light.

Jen Bervin's work brings together text and textile in a practice that encompasses poetry, archival research, artist books and visual art. Her books include *The Gorgeous Nothings* (2012), *The Dickinson Composites* (2010) and *The Desert* (2008) from Granary Books, and *A Non-Breaking Space* (2005) and *Nets* (2004, seventh printing 2013) from Ugly Duckling Presse. Her work is included in the exhibition *Postscript: Writing After Conceptual Art* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver (traveling). Recent solo exhibitions include *Jen Bervin: Weaving* at Gridspace in Brooklyn and *The Wildest Word We Consign to Language* at Poets House in New York. Bervin has received fellowships in art and writing from The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, The New York Foundation for the Arts, Centrum, The MacDowell Colony, Visual Studies Workshop, Center for Book Arts and The Camargo Foundation. She was born in Iowa in 1972, and lives and works in Brooklyn.

John McManus

Norfolk, VA

Project Title: *Jack Sprat's Wife: A Novel*

Literature: Fiction

The novel *Jack Sprat's Wife* looks through the eyes of an American fabulist reporter at a community of gay refugees in Cape Town, South Africa, who have fled African regimes that threaten and imprison gay citizens. The novel's narrator, Hank Hardesty, is a closeted gay man who abandons a sick wife he unwittingly infected with HIV to start a new life in New York under an assumed name. Years later, as a reporter spinning outrageously false stories for a prestigious political magazine, Hank is commissioned to cover the extreme anti-gay laws in Uganda. The assignment leads him to a South African gay refugee community, where events force him to confront his own hypocrisy, the enormity of what he has done to his wife, and the need to write something true.

John McManus is the author of the novel *Bitter Milk* and the story collections *Born on a Train* and *Stop Breakin Down*. He was born in Knoxville and grew up in Maryville, TN. In 2000, McManus received the Whiting Writers' Award. His fiction has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Tin House*, *American Short Fiction*, *The Oxford American* and other journals. He recently completed a new novel entitled *The Cultivationists* and is finishing a new collection of stories. McManus was a Michener fellow at the University of Texas and has received numerous fellowships for his writing, including the Camargo Foundation Fellowship, the Fellowship of Southern Writers' New Writing Award, and residencies at Yaddo, Ucross and elsewhere. He is a professor of creative writing at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA, and also teaches in the low-residency MFA program at Goddard College. He serves as a contributing editor for *Fiddleblack*, a literary journal dedicated to writing with a strong sense of place.

Maggie Nelson

Los Angeles, CA

Project Title: *The Myth of Freedom and Other Essays*

Literature: Fiction

The Myth of Freedom and Other Essays is a book of experimental scholarship centered on the linked but distinct ideas of freedom, emancipation and liberation. Guided by Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that one fundamental liberty of the intellectual is "the freedom to think aloud," Maggie Nelson's collection of idiosyncratic essays will cover diverse topics in art, culture, politics and literature.

Described as “genre-busting” by Michael Miller of *Time Out New York*, Maggie Nelson is the author of eight books. Her nonfiction includes *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning* (Norton, 2011), a work of art and cultural criticism which was a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year; *Bluets*, an unclassifiable prose work about the color blue, inspired by Goethe and Wittgenstein; *The Red Parts: A Memoir*, a work of autobiography and reportage about a 2005 homicide trial affecting the writer’s family; and *Women, the New York School, and Other True Abstractions*, a work of art and literary criticism about women poets and painters associated with the New York School. Nelson’s 2005 mixed-genre book, *Jane: A Murder*, told the story of the 1969 murder of her mother’s sister. She is also the author of three collections of lyric poetry. Nelson holds a PhD in English Literature from CUNY. In 2005, she moved from New York City to join the faculty at CalArts, where she has taught a wide variety of courses in art, literature, writing, theory and cultural studies.

Srikanth Reddy

Chicago, IL

Project Title: *Underworld Lit*

Literature: Poetry

Underworld Lit is a book-length poem, cast in the form of lecture notes for an imaginary course in the humanities. In this extended poem, Srikanth Reddy explores academic satire, a survivor’s memoir, translations from obscure works of world literature and a Borgesian journey through the underworlds of various cultures. Accompanied by a class full of skeptical students, the quixotic protagonist, haunted by the prospect of perpetual night, undertakes to scale the Tower of Babel that is world literature, and learns in the process that learning itself may count for precious little in the final reckoning. “Contrary to the accounts of Mu Lian, Odysseus and Kwasi Benefo,” this speaker discovers, “it is not customarily permitted to visit the underworld. No, the underworld visits you.”

Srikanth Reddy is a poet and literary scholar on faculty in the English Department at the University of Chicago. He received an MFA from the Iowa Writers’ Workshop and a PhD in English Literature from Harvard University. Reddy is the author of two books of poetry, *Facts for Visitors* and *Voyager*, both published in the New California Poetry Series by the University of California Press. A scholarly study, *Changing Subjects: Digressions in Modern American Poetry*, was published by Oxford University Press in 2012. Reddy’s first book, *Facts for Visitors*, received the 2005 Asian American Literary Award for Poetry. In advance praise for *Voyager*, Marjorie Perloff described this work as “one of the great political poems of our time,” and John Ashbery called it “a work unlike any other, deeply moving, disturbing and ultimately fulfilling.” A preliminary sketch of Reddy’s new project, the book-length poem *Underworld Lit*, was published in chapbook form by Omnidawn Books in January 2012.

Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts

New York, NY

Project Title: *It Is Written: Notes on Literacy, Liberation and Belief*

Literature: Nonfiction

It Is Written: Notes on Literacy, Belief and Liberation will explore African-American literacy under slavery and freedom as haunted by opposing strains of revolt and domination. The pursuit of literacy is often told as a triumphant story, defying laws which criminalized the education of enslaved Africans. Less explored is how literacy was coercive, taught to ease conversion to Christianity and control

slaves. Using real and forged archives, Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts will combine images with short texts, recreating the shock of reading as a tool for transformation.

Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts is a writer whose work has appeared in *Transition*, the *New York Times*, *Harper's*, *Vogue* and *Essence*, among others. She has received awards from the Rona Jaffe Foundation, the Lannan Foundation and the New York Foundation for the Arts. Originally from Houston, TX, she graduated in 2000 from Harvard University and was a Fulbright Scholar in the United Kingdom. Rhodes-Pitts is writing a trilogy on African Americans and utopia; her first book, *Harlem Is Nowhere*, was published in 2011 by Little, Brown & Company and Granta Books (UK). It was named to the *New York Times*' list of 100 Notable Books for 2011 and nominated for a 2012 National Book Critics Circle Award.