

*THE LOST ORIGINS OF THE ESSAY: CELEBRATING THE  
HISTORY OF LITERARY NONFICTION*

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presented by

REDCAT

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California Institute of the Arts

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# THE LOST ORIGINS OF THE ESSAY: CELEBRATING THE HISTORY OF LITERARY NONFICTION

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A reading with Tisa Bryant, Bernard Cooper, Ben Ehrenreich, and Amy Gerstler

This event is sponsored by the School of Critical Studies and the MFA Writing Program at CalArts, and has been organized by Maggie Nelson, with the help of John D'Agata. Special thanks to President Steven Lavine for making this evening possible, as well as to this evening's readers, the MFA Writing faculty, Alecia Menzano, Allie Rowbottom, Skylight Books, and everyone at REDCAT, for all their support and assistance.

**Tisa Bryant** makes work that often traverses the boundaries of genre, culture and history. *Unexplained Presence* (Leon Works, 2007), her first full-length book, is a collection of original, hybrid essays that remix narratives from film, literature and visual arts and zoom in on the black presences operating within them. An excerpt from her novella, *[the curator]*, was published by Belladonna Books in 2009, in a companion volume with writer Chris Kraus. She is also the author of the chapbook, *Tzimmes* (A+Bend Press, 2000), a prose poem collage of narratives including Barbados genealogy, a Passover seder and a film by Yvonne Rainer. Bryant's writing has appeared in a number of places, such as *The Believer*, *1913: A Journal of Forms*, *The Poetry Project Newsletter*, *Sustainable Aircraft*, and with the paintings of artist Laylah Ali. She has served as a juror for the San Francisco International Film Festival, Film Arts Foundation, and Frameline's Gay & Lesbian Film Festival, and has presented recently at black LGBTQ literary conference, Fire & Ink. She is currently at work on a historical novel set on an 18th century Barbados plantation. Bryant is co-editor, with Ernest Hardy, of the forthcoming *War Diaries*, an anthology of black gay male desire and survival, from AIDS Project Los Angeles, and she co-edits the somewhat-annual hardcover of narrative possibility, *The Encyclopedia Project*. In 2009, she joined the faculty of the MFA Writing Program in Critical Studies.

**Bernard Cooper**'s most recent book is *The Bill From My Father* (Simon & Schuster). He is also the author of *Maps To Anywhere* (University of Georgia Press), *A Year of Rhymes* (Viking), *Truth Serum* (Houghton Mifflin), and a collection of short stories, *Guess Again* (Simon & Schuster).

Cooper is the recipient of the 1991 PEN/USA Ernest Hemingway Award, a 1995 O. Henry Prize, a 1999 Guggenheim grant, and a 2004 National Endowment of the Arts fellowship in literature. His work has appeared in several anthologies, including *The Best American Essays of 1988, 1995, and 1997, 2002, and 2008*. His work has also appeared in magazines and literary reviews including, *Harper's Magazine, The Paris Review, Story, The Los Angeles Times Magazine, and The New York Times Magazine*. He has contributed to National Public Radio's *This American Life* and for six years wrote monthly features as the art critic for *Los Angeles Magazine*. Cooper teaches Creative Nonfiction at Bennington College, and held the Mary Routee Distinguished Writer Chair at Scripps College.

**Ben Ehrenreich's** first novel, *The Suitors*, was published in 2006 by Counterpoint Press. His articles, essays and short stories have appeared *BOMB, Harper's, the New York Times Magazine*, and many other publications. He lives in Los Angeles.

**Amy Gerstler** is a writer of poetry, nonfiction and journalism. Penguin published her book *Dearest Creature* in October, 2009, and *Ghost Girl*, 2004. Her previous twelve books include *Medicine, Crown of Weeds*, which won a California Book Award, *Nerve Storm*, and *Bitter Angel*, which won a National Book Critics Circle Award in poetry. Her work has appeared in a variety of magazines and anthologies, including *The New Yorker, Paris Review, American Poetry Review*, several volumes of *Best American Poetry* and *The Norton Anthology of Postmodern American Poetry*. In the late 1980s through the mid 1990s she contributed monthly reviews to *Artforum* magazine. She does a variety of kinds of journalism, including art criticism and book reviews, and has written for the *Village Voice, Los Angeles Magazine, the Los Angeles Times, Bookforum, Art and Antiques*, and numerous other publications. She is a core faculty member at the Bennington Writing Seminars, Bennington College, Vermont and teaches in the MPW program at USC and in the Fine Arts Graduate program at Art Center College of Design. She has taught writing and/or art at the California Institute of the Arts, Cal Tech, the University of California at Irvine, the University of Utah, Pitzer College, and elsewhere.

## UPCOMING PERFORMANCES AT REDCAT

### **April 30–May 1**

*Les Espaces Acoustiques* and *Beyond: New Music after Grisey*

### **May 5**

Party for Betty!

### **May 9**

Idyllwild Arts Academy Orchestra

### **May 16**

Ring Festival LA: *Considering Wagner* featuring Villa Aurora Composers-in-Residence

### **May 20–23**

Lionel Popkin: *There is An Elephant in This Dance*

### **June 2–3**

Partch: *Even Wild Horses*

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