



# THE POETRY CENTER AT SMITH



## Fall 2018

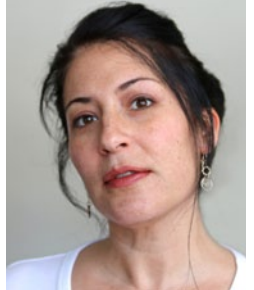
"How / masterful and mad is hope."

—ADA LIMÓN

Tuesday, September 25  
7:30 pm  
Weinstein Auditorium, Wright Hall

## ADA LIMÓN

"Here it is," writes **ADA LIMÓN**, "the new way of living with the world / inside of us so we cannot lose it, / and we cannot be lost." Limón is the author of five books of poetry including *Lucky Wreck*, *This Big Fake World*, *Sharks in The Rivers*, and *Bright Dead Things*—a finalist for the coveted National Book Award, Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award, and National Book Critics Circle Award. The universe of her poems is deeply verdant and mysterious: poet Matthew Zapruder describes her as a writer who "picks things up, puts them down, daydreams, sings, and casually, unpretentiously finds everything strange." Limón's tough and curious speakers command the reader's notice with vivid transformations, asking questions about mortality and tenderness by watching a retired police horse or an invisible heron. Each stanza is washed in a symphony of dogs, birds, flowers, bugs, grasses; growing and dying creatures of every imaginable kind. Limón's latest collection, *The Carrying*, was named one of the most anticipated books of 2018 by NPR; each poem uncovers beauty on its own terms and follows its own trajectory toward startling hope, a gift that seems more vital now than ever. Recipient of fellowships from the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center, and the Kentucky Foundation for Women, Ada Limón currently writes, teaches and works as a freelance writer. She shares her time between Lexington, Kentucky and Sonoma, California.



Supported by the Department of English Language & Literature

Tuesday, October 16  
7:30 pm  
Campus Center Carroll Room

## NORMAN FISCHER



**NORMAN FISCHER** has written more than twenty-five books of poetry and nonfiction. A Soto Zen priest, he initially envisioned poetry and Zen as two separate practices. After a time, he realized that writing had unintentionally become a way of describing an intimate religious experience. As he says in an interview with Hank Lazer, "Religion is essentially an imaginative practice. As writing is. It's not 'real' in the sense we commonly use that word... And yet it is essential." Fischer earned his MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop in 1970 and became associated with the avant-garde Language Poets, a group that included Charles Bernstein, Ron Silliman and Leslie Scalapino. His work, both experimental and spiritual, is essential to the field of language-centered poetics, immersing readers in the immediate—whether through narration of the path a speaker walks daily or the abstract fragments of an unnamed environment. Fischer's recent collections find junctions between seemingly disparate words and phrases. With these differently angled, vector-like bursts of language, he points toward a host of possibilities. In praise of his 2013 collection *The Strugglers*, Ron Silliman wrote, "Nobody gives more completely of himself in the act of writing than Norman Fischer and, like every poet I know, I am in awe of this gift." Fischer's Buddhist workshops and conferences have reached varied audiences from caregivers of the dying to software engineers to conflict resolution specialists. Today he lives in Muir Beach, California with his wife, a retired science teacher and ordained Zen priest.

Presented by the Program in Buddhist Studies as part of the 2018-19 series Putting Pen to Palm Leaf, with support from the Poetry Center, the Ada Howe Kent Fund, the Kahn Liberal Arts Institute, Amherst College, the Five College Lecture Fund, and the Smith College Lecture Committee

Tuesday, October 30  
7:30 pm  
Weinstein Auditorium, Wright Hall

## DANEZ SMITH

**DANEZ SMITH** is the author of *Don't Call Us Dead*, a finalist for the 2017 National Book Award, which circles their Black, queer, and HIV positive identities: "i'm not the kind of black man who dies on the news. / i'm the kind who grows thinner & thinner / until light outweighs us" (from "it won't be a bullet"). This haunted, sensual, explosive and intensely deliberate epic of a book tangles with death even as Smith defies it, sourcing power both from the deep roots of American violence it traces and from the poet's visionary, fantastical style. Having come to writing through theater, they refined their craft through performance—twice earning the title of Individual World Poetry Slam finalist—and developed an understanding of "how language lives and is performed by the body." Their chapbooks include *hands on your knees* and *Black Movie*. Smith's first full length collection, *[insert] boy*, winner of the 2016 Kate Tufts Discovery Award and the 2015 Lambda Literary Award, explores and criticizes the erasure of queer and Black identities, interrogating a society that views Black boys as "monster until proven ghost." Winner of many awards and fellowships, Danez Smith has also been featured by *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Buzzfeed*, *LitHub Daily*, *Best American Poetry*, *PBS NewsHour*, and the *Late Show* with Stephen Colbert. They are a founding member of the Dark Noise Collective, a multigenre multicultural movement committed to "radical truth telling," and currently co-host of the Poetry Foundation's podcast *VS*.



Supported by the Otelia Cromwell Day Committee, the Program for the Study of Women & Gender, Meridians, American Studies, Africana Studies, and the Smith College Lecture Committee

Tuesday, November 13  
7:30 pm  
Campus Center Carroll Room

## MATT DONOVAN



**MATT DONOVAN** is poetry's time traveler: his vast reservoir of artistic, literary and historical knowledge is matched by a profound sensitivity to his own surroundings, allowing him to artfully crisscross centuries of human existence. In his first collection, *Vellum*, named for a parchment made from animal skin, he explores the movement between violence and beauty, visiting, in the process, the Sistine Chapel, the Congo Free State, and a friend's memorial service. His recent chapbook *Rapture & The Big Bam* brings famous painters, philosophers, writers, musicians and inventors in conversation with a speaker's life, creating dexterous and bizarre equations that transcend time and ask us to question what we hold sacred. In its title poem, he asks: "why pretend the wondrous & the useless weren't the same / all along? The meaningless, the miraculous—who are we to say?" Donovan also lends his poetic sensibility to other genres: he is the author of a collection of fifteen essays, *A Cloud of Unusual Size and Shape*, connecting the ruins of history with relics and remains of here and now, as well as the libretto to the opera *Inheritance*, an inventive metaphor for America's complex relationship to gun culture based on the life of the heir to the Winchester firearms company, Sarah Winchester, premiering this October in San Diego. Matt Donovan's accolades include a Rome Prize in Literature, a Literature Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, and a Lannan Writing Residency Fellowship. He recently relocated from Santa Fe, and serves as the new director of the Poetry Center.

Tuesday, December 4  
7:30 pm  
Campus Center Carroll Room

## TIANA CLARK

**TIANA CLARK** aims to start a conversation with her poetry: "I'm humming; I want people to hum too." Subverting old forms and fashioning new ones with electric confidence, her mind draws poetic inspiration from idiosyncratic sources: from crossbites to volcanic eruptions to the image of pop-star Rihanna. Hailing from Tennessee and southern California, Clark majored in Africana Studies and Women's Studies at Tennessee State University. While working toward her MFA at Vanderbilt University, she was poetry editor of the *Nashville Review*. Her collection *I Can't Talk About the Trees Without the Blood* won the 2017 Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize from the University of Pittsburgh Press. In rich dialogue with artists and activists across decades, Clark's poems scatter, divide, expose their gaps, and swallow their own tails. She bravely traces the firsts of southern Black girlhood with vulnerability that Ross Gay describes as "a reaching toward." Clark's 2016 chapbook, *Equilibrium*, chosen by Afaa Michael Weaver for the Frost Place Chapbook Competition, explores a biracial speaker's inner and outer opposing forces, asking in its title poem "what is left / whispering in us, once we have / stopped trying to become the other?" The recipient of honors such as the Academy of American Poets University Prize and the Rattle Poetry Prize, Clark currently teaches creative writing at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville.



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## From the Director



I'm honored and completely thrilled to begin my work as the Director of the Poetry Center. It's all too common for poetry to be marginalized in this country, and it feels exhilarating to be joining a campus with so many students, faculty, and members of the community who are profoundly invested in the possibilities of the written word. And because we're living in an age in which language is devalued on a regular basis, it seems more important than ever that the Poetry Center continue its indispensable work, while also seeking new means of connecting, collaborating, and fostering the poetic voice.

We have a stellar line-up of writers scheduled for the 2018-2019 academic year, including readings by Ada Limón and Danez Smith (both National Book Award Finalists), and in April a return visit by beloved poet Jane Hirshfield. This fall will also feature readings by Zen Buddhist priest Norman Fischer, and vibrant new talent Tiana Clark. Meanwhile, I'm already looking forward to the next round of poetry postcards, Barry

Moser's gorgeous broadsides, and this year's Poetry Prize for High School Girls (to be judged by Amherst-native poet Jenny George), as well as new initiatives that will extend the Poetry Center's ability to serve as an interdisciplinary hub.

I'm sure we'll get to know each other better over the next year, but here's a quick snapshot of where I'm coming from: I studied as an undergraduate at Vassar College, and received my MFA in Poetry from New York University. For the past fifteen years, I taught creative writing and literature courses at Santa Fe University of Art and Design, where I also chaired the department and directed our visiting writer series. I absolutely can't wait for this season's readings at the Poetry Center, and hope you'll also stay tuned for more information about upcoming events. I'm so looking forward to meeting all of you, and continuing to bring a diverse range of exemplary poets to Smith and the larger Pioneer Valley community.

*Matt Donovan*

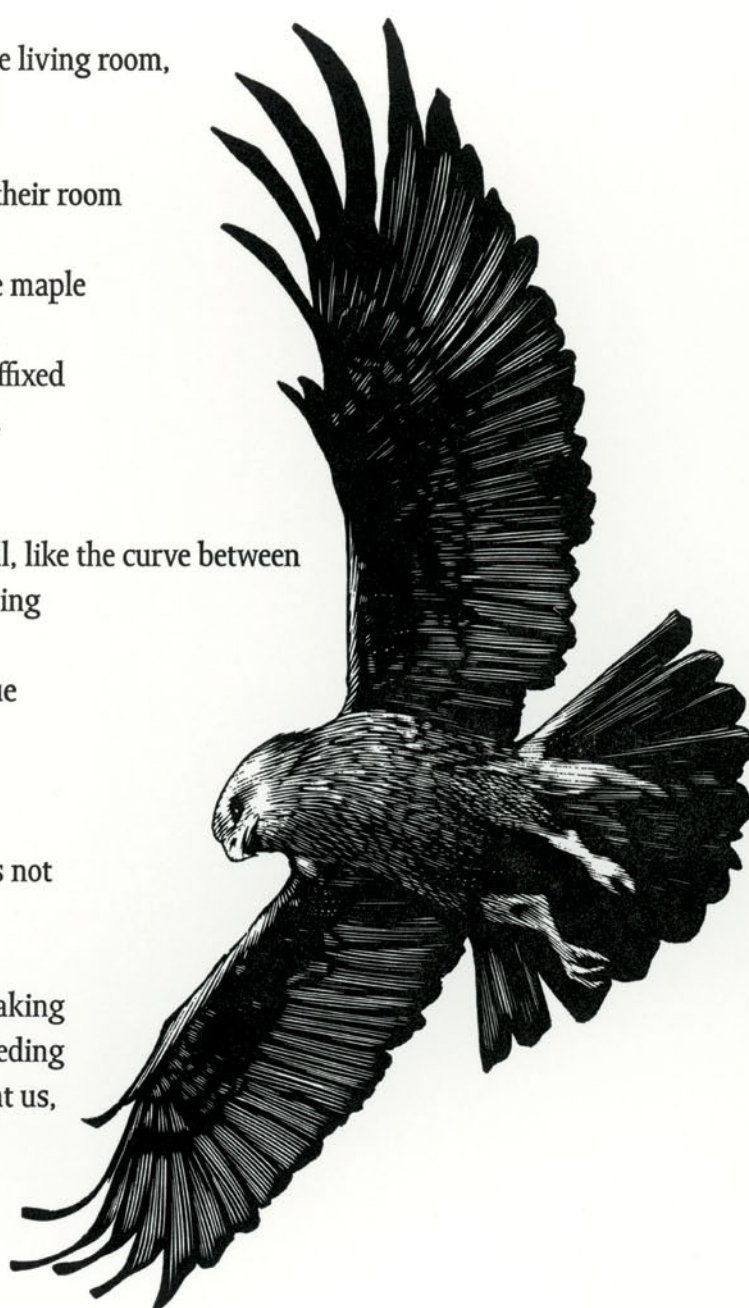
This summer, the poetry world lost another of its giants, Donald Hall (1928-2018). A keen interpreter of the natural world, Hall was also known for unflinching poems of love and grief for his wife, the poet Jane Kenyon (1947-1995). We share this Barry Moser broadside of Sharon Olds' poem "April, New Hampshire," as a tribute to both Kenyon and Hall.

For more information, contact Jen Blackburn at 413-585-4891 or [jblackbu@smith.edu](mailto:jblackbu@smith.edu)  
See all of our series of fine letterpress broadsides by BARRY MOSER at [www.smith.edu/poetrycenter/support/broadsidesgallery.html](http://www.smith.edu/poetrycenter/support/broadsidesgallery.html)

## APRIL, NEW HAMPSHIRE

*(for Jane Kenyon and Donald Hall)*

Outside the door, a tiny narcissus  
had come up through leaf mold. In the living room,  
the old butterscotch collie let me  
get my hand into the folds  
of the mammal, and knead it. Inside their room  
Don said, *This is it, this is where  
we lived and died.* To the center of the maple  
painted headboard—sleigh of beauty,  
sleigh of night—there was an angel affixed  
as if bound to it, with her wings open.  
The bed spoke, as if to itself,  
it sang. The whole room sang,  
and the house, and the curve of the hill, like the curve between  
a throat and a shoulder, sang, in praising  
grief, and the ground, almost, rang,  
hollowed-out bell waiting for its tongue  
to be lowered in. At the grave site,  
next to the big, smoothed, beveled,  
felled, oak home, like the bole  
of a Druid *duir*—inside it what comes not  
close to being like who she was—  
he stood, beside, in a long silence,  
minutes, like the seething harness-creaking  
when the water of a full watering is feeding  
down into the ground, and he looked at us,  
at each one, and he seemed not just  
a person seeing people, he looked  
almost another species, an eagle  
gazing at eagles, fierce, intent,  
wordless, eyelidless, seeing each one,  
seeing deep  
into each—  
miles, years—he seemed to be Jane,  
looking at us for the last time  
on earth.



*Sharon Olds*

This broadside commemorates Sharon Olds' visit to the Poetry Center at Smith College on April 8, 2008. It was designed by Barry Moser, Printer to the College, who also designed and engraved the illustration. The paper is Arches and the typefaces are Octavian and Octavian italic, designed by David Kindersley and Will Carter in 1961 for the Monotype Corporation. The broadside was printed by Art Larson at his shop, Horton Tank Graphics, in Hadley, Massachusetts. "April, New Hampshire" is from THE UNSWEPT ROOM, published by Alfred A. Knopf, 2002, and is used by permission. Of the 100 copies printed, this is copy number 100.



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