

Hill-Stead MUSEUM

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ENVIRONMENTAL POETS ROBERT HASS AND BRENDA HILLMAN OPEN 2009 SUNKEN GARDEN POETRY & MUSIC FESTIVAL JUNE 10th *Music performed by the trio Classical Spirits*

"Hass has significantly broadened the role of poet laureate to include not only his love for poetry but also his concern for literacy and his passion for environmentalism." — Los Angeles Times

FARMINGTON, CT - Environmentalist, teacher and former United States Poet Laureate, Robert Hass will kick off the 17th season of Hill-Stead Museum's summer-long Sunken Garden Poetry Festival on June 10, 2009.

Robert Hass has published numerous books of poetry, as well as a book of essays on poetry. His most recent book is a collection of poems entitled *Time and Materials* (Fall 2007), which won both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. As US Poet Laureate, Hass worked tirelessly both to heighten literacy and to promote awareness about the environment.

Hass will be joined by his wife, acclaimed poet and environmentalist Brenda Hillman. Their performances will be preceded by the ensemble *Classical Spirits*.

"I am thrilled to have poets with such environmental passion perform in the Sunken Garden this year," said Hill-Stead's Estate Naturalist. "As a naturalist, I believe nature and art inform one another in a vital way. To host world-class poets so aware of the garden's stunning natural environment will make our opening performance that much more unique and impactful, for the poets and our audience alike."

About Robert Hass

Robert Hass is a poet of great eloquence, clarity, and force, whose work is rooted in the landscapes of his native Northern California. Widely read and much honored, he has brought the kind of energy in his poetry to his work as an essayist, translator, and activist on behalf of poetry, literacy, and the environment. Most notably, during his tenure as United States Poet Laureate (1995-1997), Mr. Hass battled American illiteracy armed with the mantra, "imagination makes communities." He crisscrossed the country speaking at Rotary Club meetings, raising money to organize conferences such as "Watershed," which brought together noted novelists, poets, and storytellers to talk about writing, nature, and community.

Mr. Hass has published many books of poetry including *Field Guide*, *Praise*, *Human Wishes*, and *Sun Under Wood*, as well as a book of essays on poetry, *Twentieth Century Pleasures*. His essay collection *Now & Then*, which includes his *Washington Post* articles, was published in April 2007.

As US Poet Laureate, his deep commitment to environmental issues led him to found River of Words (ROW), an organization that promotes environmental and arts education in affiliation with the Library of Congress Center for the Book. Mr. Hass was chosen as Educator of the Year by the North American Association on Environmental Education and, in 2005, elected to the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. His most recent book is a collection of poems entitled *Time and Materials* (Fall 2007), which won both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize.

Awarded the MacArthur “Genius” Fellowship, twice the National Book Critics’ Circle Award (in 1984 and 1997), and the Yale Series of Younger Poets in 1973, Robert Hass is a professor of English at UC Berkeley.

About Brenda Hillman

Acclaimed poet and non-violent activist, Brenda Hillman has published seven collections of poetry: *White Dress* (1985), *Fortress* (1989), *Death Tractates* (1992), *Bright Existence* (1993), *Loose Sugar* (1997), *Cascadia* (2001), and *Pieces of Air in the Epic* (2005), all from Wesleyan University Press, and three chapbooks: *Coffee, 3 A.M.* (Penumbra Press, 1982); *Autumn Sojourn* (Em Press, 1995); and *The Firecage* (a+bend press, 2000). She has edited an edition of Emily Dickinson's poetry for Shambhala Publications, and, with Patricia Dienstfrey, co-edited *The Grand Permission: New Writings on Poetics and Motherhood* (2003).

Among the awards Ms. Hillman has received are the 2005 William Carlos Williams Prize for poetry and Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation. Hillman is the Olivia Filippi Professor of Poetry at Saint Mary's College in Moraga, California, where she teaches in the undergraduate and graduate programs. She is also a member of the permanent faculties of Napa Valley Writers' Conference and of Squaw Valley Community of Writers. Ms.

Hillman is also involved in non-violent activism as a member of the Code Pink Working Group in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Ms. Hillman has been increasingly interested in the innovative and experimental lyric traditions, particularly in how the Romantic concepts of nature and spirit have manifested in contemporary poetry.

Classical Spirits, a trio comprised of flute, viola and guitar, offers an exotic blend exploring both classical and contemporary repertoires of the world. On flute is *Gonzalo Cortés*, a native of Chile and formerly Principal Flute of the Classical Orchestra of Santiago, Chile; playing viola is *Jessica Heller*, a Connecticut native and Hartt School graduate who has performed with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, the Erie Philharmonic, Classical Orchestra of Santiago, and the New Britain Symphony, among others; guitarist *Daniel Hartington* has performed in numerous master classes, teaches at several local schools including the Hartt Community Division at the University of Hartford, and is the director of the Connecticut Guitar Society's classical guitar ensemble.

About the Sunken Garden Poetry and Music Festival

Festival gates open at 4:30 pm. Music begins at 6:30 pm; Poetry begins at 7:30 pm. Books and CDs are available for sale 5:30–8:30 pm. All performances will be at Hill-Stead Museum, rain or shine. Admission is free and open to the public. On-site parking is \$10 per vehicle. Bring a lawn chair or blanket for seating in and around the garden.

Al fresco dining is allowed on the West Lawn and in the Sunken Garden on performance evenings. Participants are welcome to bring their own picnic suppers, or purchase food and beverages on site from Metro Catering of Avon (sandwiches, salads, desserts, beverages, wines by the glass). Hill-Stead’s Sunken Garden is wheelchair accessible.

Hill-Stead's literary history dates from the time of museum architect and founder Theodate Pope Riddle, whose literary house guests included Henry James, Edith Wharton, Thornton Wilder, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Archibald McLeish, and who regularly held salon-type concerts in the Drawing Room. Described by United States Poet Laureate Billy Collins as a "cultural phenomenon," the Sunken Garden Poetry Festival picked up 16 years ago where Theodate left off, with a roster of poets including Grace Paley, Galway Kinnell, Yusef Komunyakaa, Sharon Olds, Philip Levine and Marilyn Nelson, among many others.

After a one-year hiatus in 2007, the critically acclaimed Festival returned in 2008 with attendance doubling previous years, much to the delight of poets and poetry aficionados nationwide. Performances in 2009 will take place every other Wednesday evening as follows:

June 10: Robert Hass and Brenda Hillman, Music by Classical Spirits
June 24: Baron Wormser, CT Poetry Circuit Winners, Music by Uptown Trio
July 8: Night of Fresh Voices, Kim Roberts, Music by Freddie Bryant
July 22: Cave Canem Poets, Marilyn Nelson, Music by Tomas Doncker
August 5: C.K. Williams, Don Thompson, Music by the Bagboys

A National Historic Landmark and an Official Project of Save America's Treasures, Hill-Stead Museum in Farmington, CT, is a stop on the Connecticut Art Trail and a member of Connecticut's Historic Gardens. The period rooms are open for tours Tuesday through Sunday, 10 am – 5 pm May - October and 11 am – 4 pm, November – April. Grounds are open daily 7:30 am-5:30 pm.

For tour and program information, browse www.hillstead.org or call 860.677.4787.

Noted for its 1901 33,000-square-foot house filled with art and antiques, Hill-Stead is one of the nation's few remaining representations of early-20th-century **Country Place Estates**. Pioneering female architect **Theodate Pope Riddle** designed the Colonial Revival-style house, set on 152 hilltop acres, to showcase the **Impressionist masterpieces** amassed by her father, Cleveland iron industrialist Alfred A. Pope. Collections include original furnishings, paintings by Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Édouard Manet, James M. Whistler and Mary Cassatt, as well as numerous works on paper and Japanese woodblock prints. Stately trees, seasonal gardens, over three miles of stonewalls and woodland trails for walks or cross-country skiing accent the grounds. A centerpiece of the property is the c. 1920 sunken garden designed by landscape architect **Beatrix Jones Farrand**, today the site of the acclaimed Sunken Garden Poetry and Music Festival.

For more information browse www.hillstead.org or call 860.677.4787.

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