



**Program 2021**

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**Haystack Book Festival** brings together in unmoderated conversation writers and thinkers who have something to talk about. Past and upcoming talks are as various as Rose Alcalá and MacArthur Award winner John Keene discussing the relation between their creative writing and their work as translators; Martha Saxton and poet and biographer Judith Thurman on the challenges and possibilities of writing women's lives; Ben Goldfarb and Dan Flores talking about humanity's fanatical and misguided attempts to control unruly and ecological, crucial wildlife; and Connecticut poet laureate Margaret Gibson and writer Fenton Johnson discussing a greater recognition of an essential solitude.

## **Writers in Conversation**

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## FRIDAY, OCTOBER 1

**6:00 PM:** Brendan Gill Lecture

*with* Robert Jones, Jr.

## SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2

**10:00 AM:** Freedom in Black and White

*with* Tyler Stovall & Manisha Sinha

**12:00 PM:** “A Soul Admitted to Itself” – Solitude, Sociability, and Poetry

*with* Fenton Johnson & Margaret Gibson

**2:30 PM:** The Hidden Lives of Ordinary Things—Object Lessons

*with* Dinah Lenney, Kim Adrian, & Matthew Battles

## SUNDAY, OCTOBER 3

**10:00 AM:** A Guided Bird Walk on Dennis Hill

*with* Eileen Fielding

**1:00 PM:** What It’s Like to Be a Bird\*

*with* David Allen Sibley

\*Virtual event



## Brendan Gill Lecture

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by Robert Jones, Jr., author of  
*The Prophets*, a novel

*The New York Times Book Review* says, “May this book cast its spell on all of us, restore to us some memory of our most warrior and softest selves.” Robert Jones, Jr.’s bestselling novel *The Prophets* is a singular and stunning debut about the forbidden union between two enslaved young men on a Deep South plantation, the refuge they find in each other, and the betrayal that threatens their existence.

Isaiah was Samuel’s and Samuel was Isaiah’s. That was the way it was since the beginning, and that was the way it was to be until the end. In the barn they tended to animals, but also to each other, transforming the hollowed-out shed into a place of human refuge, a source of intimacy and hope in a world ruled by vicious masters. But when an older man—a fellow slave—seeks to gain favor by preaching the master’s gospel on the plantation, the enslaved begin to turn on their own. Isaiah and Samuel’s love, which was once so simple, is seen as sinful and a clear danger to the plantation’s harmony.

With a lyricism reminiscent of Toni Morrison, Robert Jones, Jr., fiercely summons the voices of slaver and enslaved alike, from Isaiah and Samuel to the calculating slave master to the long line of women that surround them, women who have carried the soul of the plantation on their shoulders. As tensions build and the weight of centuries—of ancestors and future generations to come—culminates in a climactic reckoning, *The Prophets* masterfully reveals the pain and suffering of inheritance, but it is also shot through with hope, beauty, and truth, portraying the enormous, heroic power of love.

## Friday, October 1 • 6:00 PM

Robert Jones, Jr. is a writer from New York City. He received his BFA in creative writing, and an MFA in fiction from Brooklyn College. He has written for numerous publications including *The New York Times*, *Essence*, and *The Paris Review*. He is the creator of the social justice, social media community Son of Baldwin, which has more than 275,000 members across platforms.

“Powerful and beautiful . . . The lyricism of *The Prophets* will recall the prose of James Baldwin . . . A masterpiece.”

—Edmund White

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Longtime Norfolk resident Brendan Gill died in 1997. In 1998 “The Brendan Gill Lecture” was established by the Norfolk Library Associates to honor Gill’s generous contributions to the library. As an admirer of the library’s cultural spirit, Gill exuberantly donated himself to library events whenever he was asked to participate.

Brendan Gill wrote for *The New Yorker* magazine for over fifty years. He contributed short stories, profiles, book reviews and was in successive decades the movie, theater and architecture critic. Gill’s book, *Here at the New Yorker*, describes the oddities, wonders and joys of his work at the magazine.

As part of his New York City life, Brendan Gill served as Chairman of the Board of the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Municipal Arts Society where he was instrumental in saving Grand Central Station.



## Freedom in Black & White

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Distinguished historians Tyler Stovall, the author of *White Freedom: The Racial History of an Idea*, and Manisha Sinha, the author of *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition*, bring to their conversation perspectives developed in different specialties but connecting over matters of current concern.

Freedom is one of the key words in the American lexicon, but its meanings, both in the United States and abroad, have always been subjects of great debate and conflict. This session brings together two historians who have reflected deeply on those meanings and on the struggles that have played a central role in defining political ideals and cultural identities in the modern world. Tyler Stovall's *White Freedom* connects his longtime scholarly interests in the history of France and the history of race with a desire to explore a seeming paradox in American history and society. Manisha Sinha's *The Slave's Cause* offers the most comprehensive treatment of the abolition movement, placing it in a much-needed transnational context

**Saturday, October 2 • 10:00 AM**

and emphasizing the role of African Americans. Both authors represent current efforts by scholars of freedom and race to look beyond individual national experiences, but the result of their work speaks to any number of particular historical and contemporary settings. Their conversation offers an opportunity to reflect on matters that are central in the current racial and political reckoning and that have deep histories in the Atlantic world and beyond.

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Tyler Stovall is Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Fordham University, for many years a professor of history at the University of California, and past president of the American Historical Association. He is the author of *The Rise of the Paris Red Belt*, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light*, *Paris and the Spirit of 1919: Consumer Struggles, Transnationalism, and Revolution*, and *Transnational France: The Modern History of a Universal Nation*. Among his co-edited works are *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* and *Black France*.

Manisha Sinha is the Draper Chair in American History at the University of Connecticut. She received her PhD from Columbia University, where her dissertation was nominated for the Bancroft Prize. She received the Chancellor's Medal from the University of Massachusetts where she taught for over twenty years. She is the author of *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina*, which was featured in *The New York Times 1619 Project*. Her recent book, the multiple award-winning *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition*, was longlisted for the National Book Award for Nonfiction. She is the author and editor of several other books and articles.



## “A Soul Admitted to Itself” Solitude, Sociability, and Poetry

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Connecticut state poet laureate, Margaret Gibson, author of the recent collection of poetry *The Glass Globe*, and memoirist and novelist Fenton Johnson, author of *At The Center of All Beauty: Solitude and the Creative Life*, explore the solitary world of poets and writers and look at their work in this time of self-discovery.

It's been a year and more of what is called “social distancing,” and what that means for how we now understand our being together and our being apart is an open question. Have we gained, perhaps, a greater recognition of an essential solitude? Have we found ourselves closer to nature or thrown back onto resources we did not know we had? Or have we discovered, conversely, that social distance in an age of digital communication guarantees nothing, and solitude perhaps least of all? What is a poem, a painting, a novel that lets it open the greatest inwardness to sheer publicness and to the transformation of lives given over to its terms?

## Saturday, October 2 • 12:00 PM

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Fenton Johnson is emeritus professor at the University of Arizona and serves on the faculty of the creative writing program at Spalding University. In addition to *At the Center of All Beauty*, his works of fiction include *The Man Who Loved Birds*; *Scissors, Paper, Rock*; and *Crossing the River*. In nonfiction, Johnson has published *Geography of the Heart: A Memoir* and *Keeping Faith: A Skeptic's Journey among Christian and Buddhist Monks*. He is a regular contributor to *Harper's Magazine* and has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Margaret Gibson is the author of *Not Hearing the Wood Thrush*, *Broken Cup* (a finalist for the 2016 Poets' Prize), *The Vigil: A Poem in Four Voices* (a finalist for the National Book Award), *Long Walks in the Afternoon* (a Lamont Poetry Selection), and most recently *The Glass Globe*. The recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship and a Pushcart Prize, and editor of *Waking Up to the Earth: Connecticut Poets in a Time of Global Climate Crisis*, Gibson was named the poet laureate of Connecticut in 2019. She is professor emerita at the University of Connecticut.



## The Hidden Lives of Ordinary Things Object Lessons

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“The Object Lessons series achieves something very close to magic: the books take ordinary—even banal—objects and animate them in a rich history of invention, political struggle, science, and popular mythology. Filled with fascinating details and conveyed in sharp, accessible prose, the books make the everyday world come to life. Be warned: once you’ve read a few of these, you’ll start walking around your house, picking up random objects, and musing aloud: ‘I wonder what the story is behind this thing?’”  
—Steven Johnson, author of *How We Got to Now*

We do not, these days, appear to believe much in “objectivity,” and are increasingly inclined to imagine things more or less as we want and as they answer to our “point of view.” But things—real, ordinary things like remote controls or dust or eggs or eye charts, to choose just a few from the thirty-plus titles that have so far appeared in Bloomsbury Publishing’s brilliant series of little books called “Object Lessons”—things are more insistent than that.

## Saturday, October 2 • 2:30 PM

They are woven into our lives, our bodies, our language, and one another in ways both uncountable and unignorable. Insofar as such things appear, as they do in these books, borne by the idiosyncrasy of a particular voice or style, they may seem to extend and underline our quarrel with objectivity. But they might at the same time offer a path back to a broadened sense of the actual lived fabric within which objectivity, in all its forms, still matters.

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Dinah Lenney, author of *Coffee* and *Bigger Than Life: A Murder, a Memoir*, is an actor, editor, and writer currently teaching at Bennington College. Kim Adrian, the author of *Sock* and *Dear Knausgaard*, is an essayist, memoirist, and novelist; she has taught at Brown University and is the creator of *Write On*, a craft-focused newsletter for writers. Matthew Battles, author of *Tree* and *Palimpsest: A History of the Written Word*, is the Director of Scholarly Initiatives at Harvard's experimental, interdisciplinary metalAB.

Their lives are, in their way, as various as the things about which they write.



## **“I Caught This Morning Morning’s Minion, Kingdom of Daylight’s Dauphin” A Guided Bird Walk on Dennis Hill**

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Hopefully you have your binoculars handy for a walk with Eileen Fielding, director of the Sharon Audubon Center, to scan for soaring hawks and migrating songbirds from the open vistas on the Connecticut state park Dennis Hill. We will explore the surrounding woodland and fields as time allows.

As a longtime resident of New England, Eileen Fielding has both a personal attachment to and passion for the wildlife, landscape, and conservation of our region. She holds both a MS and PhD in ecology from the University of Connecticut, as well as a BS in natural resources from the University of Massachusetts, and has spent more than 20 years working with nonprofits. She joined the center staff in 2018.

## **Sunday, October 3 • 10:00 AM**

This walk is jointly sponsored by the Norfolk Land Trust. Created in 1982 to encourage the preservation of natural heritage and open space, the land trust maintains the trails in this park and the two other state parks in Norfolk. The land trust also maintains many miles of public access trails on five of its properties and protects more than 4,000 acres of open space through conservation easements. For more information go to [norfolklandtrust.org](http://norfolklandtrust.org).



## *What It's Like to Be a Bird—What Birds Are Doing and Why\**

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David Allen Sibley, the author of *What It's Like to Be a Bird: From Flying to Nesting, Eating to Singing—What Birds Are Doing and Why*, explores the many ways birds manage their lives on the wing—the ones we see most often in our backyards as well as less common species of forest, meadow and coast, using his own meticulous illustrations to show

how different species fly, eat, sleep, nest, attract their mates, and avoid danger.

David Sibley has been an avid birder since childhood, starting at the age of eight to draw the birds he observed and make notes. The son of Yale ornithologist Fred Sibley, he is a self-taught illustrator of his own work. He began working on his first guidebook in 2000, focusing on better descriptions of immature birds. In his most recent book, *What It's Like to Be a Bird—What Birds Are Doing and Why*, Sibley answers many frequently asked questions about bird behavior and physiology and covers fascinating new scientific research on the myriad ways birds have adapted to environmental changes.

This special, large-format volume is geared as much to nonbirders as it is to the out-and-out obsessed, covering more than two hundred species and including more than 330 new illustrations. While many are familiar backyard birds—blue jays, nuthatches, chickadees—he also examines less common species like peregrine falcons, bobolinks, eared grebes, and the seashore-dwelling Atlantic puffin. David Sibley's exacting artwork and wide-ranging expertise bring observed behaviors vividly to life, providing a new and

**Sunday, October 3 • 1:00 PM**

deeper understanding of what birds are doing and why. Can birds smell? Is this the same cardinal that was at my feeder last year? Do robins “hear” worms? Why don’t birds fall out of trees when they sleep?

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David Allen Sibley is the author and illustrator of the Sibley Guides Series and numerous other publications. He has contributed to *Smithsonian*, *Science*, *The Wilson Journal of Ornithology*, *Birding*, *Birdwatching*, and *North American Birds*, and *The New York Times*. He is the recipient of the Roger Tory Peterson Award for Lifetime Achievement from the American Birding Association and the Linnaean Society of New York’s Eisenmann Medal.

\*Virtual event

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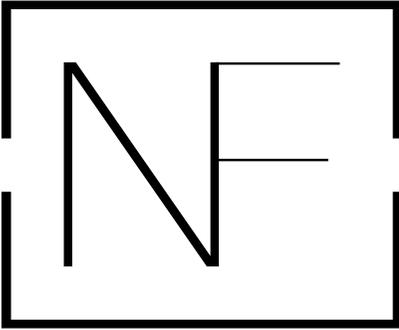
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