

Three Laureates

Poets of the New California

Featuring

JUAN FELIPE HERRERA, DANA GIOIA, AND ROBIN COSTE LEWIS

Thursday, September 28, 2017, at 7 p.m.
Bovard Auditorium

ABOUT CALIFORNIA POETRY

- California is the home state of several towering figures of contemporary poetry, including Lyn Hejinian, Sharon Olds, and Kay Ryan.
- Other California poets, such as Marilyn Chin and Ishmael Reed, moved here from elsewhere but have made a longtime mark on California poetry and poetry education.
- The history of California poetry includes such landmark figures as nineteenth-century feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman and modernists Kenneth Rexroth and Gertrude Stein, whose famous line “there is no there there” is thought to refer to her childhood home in Oakland.
- Numerous California poets have written works that are deeply rooted in place, including Beat poets Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Gary Snyder (San Francisco), Gary Soto (the San Joaquin Valley), and Charles Bukowski and Wanda Coleman (L.A.).

JUAN FELIPE HERRERA

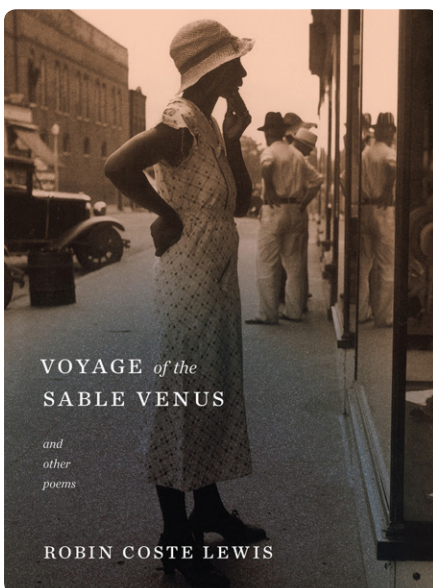
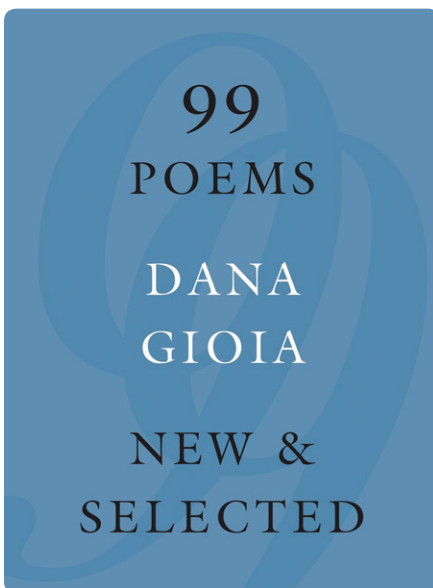
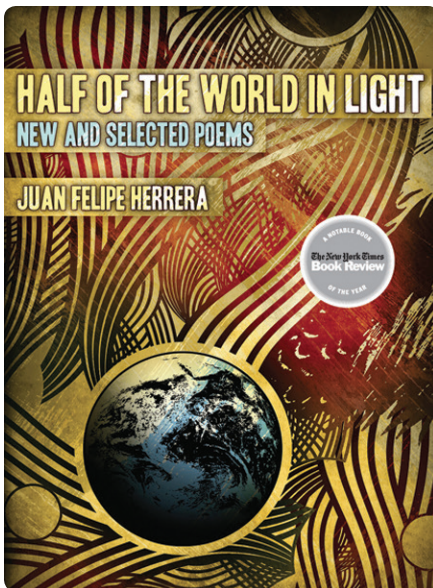
Juan Felipe Herrera is the 21st Poet Laureate of the United States and the first Latino to hold the position. His many books of poetry include *Notes on the Assemblage*; *Half of the World in Light*; and *187 Reasons Mexicanos Can't Cross the Border: Undocuments 1971–2007*. He is the son of migrant farmworkers, and was educated at UCLA, Stanford, and the Iowa Writers' Workshop. In addition to writing poetry, Herrera is an author of children's books, a performance artist, and an activist on behalf of migrant and indigenous communities and at-risk youth.

Herrera said in a 2004 interview that he has been influenced by three Californias: the small agricultural towns of the San Joaquin Valley he knew as a child, San Diego's Logan Heights, and San Francisco's Mission District: “all these landscapes became stories, and all those languages became voices in my writing, all those visuals became colors and shapes, which made me more human and gave me a wide panorama to work from.”

DANA GIOIA

Dana Gioia is the Poet Laureate of California and the Judge Widney Professor of Poetry and Public Culture at USC. A former chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, Gioia has published numerous collections of poetry, including *Interrogations at Noon* and *99 Poems*:





New and Selected. Also an influential critic, Gioia was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award for his 1991 book *Can Poetry Matter?*, which helped to revive the role of poetry in American public culture. Gioia was born in Hawthorne, California, and studied at Stanford and Harvard. He worked as a businessman for fifteen years before becoming a poet.

ROBIN COSTE LEWIS

Robin Coste Lewis is the Poet Laureate of Los Angeles and the author of the National Book Award-winning poetry collection *Voyage of the Sable Venus*, which explores, among other things, representations of the black female body. She was born in Compton and received an MFA from New York University and an MTS from the Divinity School at Harvard University. As a teenager, she interned at Kitchen Table Press, the legendary women-of-color press founded by Barbara Smith at the suggestion of poet and writer Audre Lorde. She recently joined the faculty of USC's PhD program in creative writing and literature.

ON BEING AN "L.A. POET"

In an interview in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Robin Coste Lewis said:

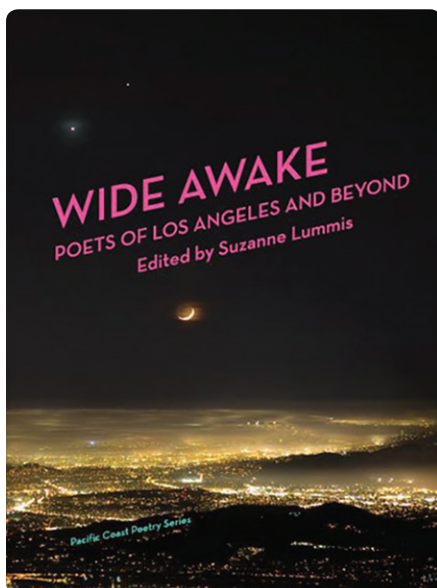
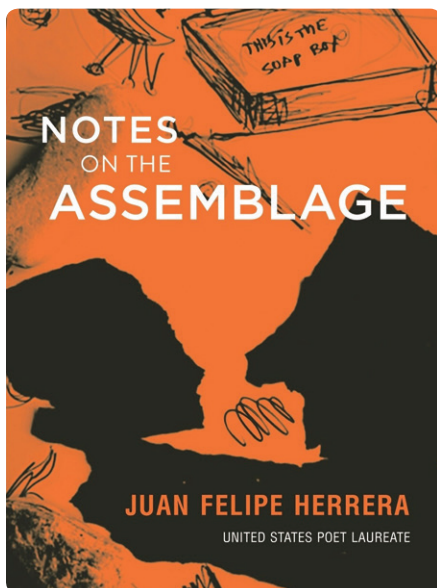
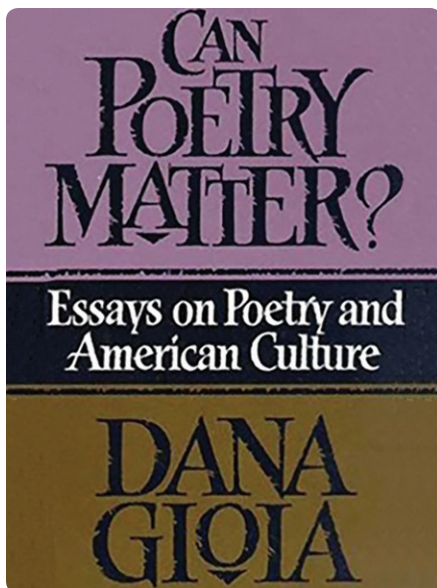
"[The L.A. poet] has always been represented as white, Venice Beach, a little Beat, folks who came here and invested in the very manufactured stereotype of L.A. Much of this work remains disinterested in L.A.'s history of jubilant and tense migrations from all over the world . . . perhaps I'm interested in redefining what 'L.A. poet' means. 'L.A. Poet' for me means people like Wanda Coleman, . . . or the Watts Writers Workshop, or Garret Hongo, Juan Felipe Herrera. It means Samoan poetry and Korean poetry, and the politics of la linea. Of course, almost primarily, it means Mexican and Chicano poetry, Salvadoran poetry, Filipino poetry . . . L.A. is one of the—THE—most diverse cities in the world . . . When people who don't know L.A. and all of the diverse manifestations of blackness that took root here, no one imagines that we grew up dancing to congas on a Saturday morning in the suburbs, my father frying beignet for the kids . . . I grew up with so many blacknesses dancing together in suburban intersections, dancing to rhythms that migrated from all over the Gulf . . . Our schools contained a milieu of Latinos and Asians. It was a Colored Heaven. . . . These things never show up in our projections onto Los Angeles. But that is my Los Angeles, or just the beginning of my Los Angeles. Central Avenue. That's what it means for me to be an L.A. poet."

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- The *New York Times* has described Juan Felipe Herrera's work as "a new hybrid art, part oral, part written, part English, part something else." Where do you see the lines between oral and written poetry, between English and "something else," and how do you think Herrera has crossed or blurred these lines?
- Robin Coste Lewis told the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, "I remain unsure about the machine of publishing, what capitalism can do to art and the artist." What do you think she meant by that?
- Dana Gioia sparked a national conversation with his book *Can Poetry Matter?* What do you think, can it? Does it? Why?

TO LEARN MORE, EXPLORE THESE RESOURCES:

- Local poetry venues, including
Tia Chucha's Centro Cultural, tiachucha.org
Beyond Baroque, beyondbaroque.org
The World Stage, theworldstage.org
- Follow Juan Felipe Herrera on Twitter
twitter.com/cilantroman



- Follow Dana Gioia on Twitter
twitter.com/danagioiapoe
- Follow Robin Coste Lewis on Twitter
twitter.com/thesablevenus
- *California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present*, edited by Dana Gioia, Chryss Yost, and Jack Hicks
- California poetry presses, including the UC Press's New California Poetry Series and USC's own Kaya Press
ucpress.edu/series.php?ser=ncp
kaya.com

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

BARBARA ROBINSON of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about each of the poets laureate featured in tonight's event. Except where a call number is given, these are electronic resources, which you can access through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- Gioia, Dana. *Can Poetry Matter?* St. Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 2002.
DOHENY LIBRARY: PN1031.G52 2002X
- Herrera, Juan Felipe. *Mayan Drifter: Chicano poet in the Lowlands of America*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.
GRAND LIBRARY: PS3558.E74 Z469 1997 (Grand Library is not open to the public; page this book online or at any library circulation desk.)
- Herrera, Juan Felipe. *Notes on the Assemblage*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2015.
DOHENY LIBRARY PS3558.E74 A6 2015 (includes his poem Borderbus)
- Lewis, Robin Coste. *Voyage of the Sable Venus, and other poems*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015.
DOHENY LIBRARY PS3612.E98 A6 2015
- Lummis, Suzanne. *Wide Awake: Poets of Los Angeles and Beyond*. Suzanne Lummis, editor. Venice, CA: Beyond Baroque Books 2015.
LEAVEY LIBRARY PS572.L6 W53 2015 (includes Dana Gioia and Robin Coste Lewis)

DATABASES

- Humanities Full Text (H.W. Wilson)
Contains articles in humanities journals back to 1984, and full text of selected articles back to 1985.
- ProQuest Literature Online (LION)
Source for criticism and reference sources on poetry, poems and full text journals, biographies, reference works, student guides, bibliographies, and Websites.

SELECTED ONLINE VIDEO

- *Festival de Flor y Canto de Aztlán, 1973 and 2010*, The University of Southern California Digital Library (USCDL), USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.
Collection of video and photographs of Juan Felipe Herrera and other major Chicano poets and writers reading from their works at USC.
digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15799coll79
- *The Poet as Citizen*: Robin Coste Lewis and Claudia Rankine in conversation with Maggie Nelson, Oct. 23, 2014, Event video, 1:09:03, Library Foundation of Los Angeles, Los Angeles Public Library, Los Angeles, California.
lfla.org/event/the-poet-as-citizen/