

## Nationally Known Poet, Artists to Speak at Lake McConaughy

Nebraska State Poet Twyla Hansen, and Omaha-based artists Jess Benjamin and Susan Knight will speak about their work this summer at the Lake McConaughy Visitors Center near Ogallala, Nebraska in the first Art at Cedar Point Speaker Series, produced in partnership with the Nebraska Water Center Foundation. Art at Cedar Point is a program of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Department of Art and Art History in partnership with Cedar Point Biological Station.

Art at Cedar Point is an interdisciplinary program that brings artists and scientists together in the unique environment of western Nebraska. Now in its third year of artist residencies and undergraduate field courses at CPBS, Art at Cedar Point has been awarded funding from the Rural Futures Institute at UNL to support and develop those programs while expanding outreach into the surrounding community through a series of artist lectures and workshops, as well as an Art/Science Summer Camp for local kids.

- Twyla Hansen will offer a reading of her poetry and discussion of its connection to landscape at the Lake McConaughy Visitors Center on Wednesday, June 29 at 6 p.m.
- Artists Jess Benjamin and Susan Knight will present and discuss their work about water the following week on Wednesday, July 6, at 6 p.m.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Nebraska Water Center Foundation will host children's activities during both lectures so that families can attend together.

Twyla Hansen was named Nebraska's State Poet in 2013 by Gov. Dave Heineman. She grew up in northeast Nebraska on land farmed by her grandparents, who emigrated from Denmark. Hansen earned a BS in horticulture and an MA in agroecology, both from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and has been a creative writing presenter through Humanities Nebraska for over 20 years and the Nebraska Arts Council since 2013. Recently, she worked as part of a team to establish a new website called Poetry from the Plains: A Nebraska Perspective. Her newest book of poetry, *Rock • Tree • Bird*, will be published by The Backwaters Press in 2017. She has six previous books, including Nebraska Book Award winners *Dirt Songs: A Plains Duet* and *Potato Soup*. Her writing has been published in anthologies, newspapers, a textbook, *The Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, *The Writers Almanac*, film-illustrated by NET Nebraska, transcribed for a women's chorus, commissioned by the National Arbor Day Foundation, and in periodicals such as *Prairie Schooner*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Nebraska Life*, *Neihardt Journal*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Organization & Environment*, *Paddlefish*, *Palo Alto Review*, *Plains Song Review*, *Platte Valley Review*, *South Dakota Review* and many more.

Jess Benjamin was raised in the irrigation ditches created by the Tri-County Canal Project, north of Cozad, NE. Her ceramic artwork focuses on water usage in the Great Plains area, Lake McConaughy, and the Ogallala Aquifer. She received her B.A from Hastings College and moved to Omaha in 2002 to apprentice at the Jun Kaneko Studio. She attended graduate school at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, earning her M.F.A in 2008, and returned to Omaha to

pursue research interests on water usage in the Great Plains. She has taught art part time at both the University of Nebraska at Omaha and Creighton University and is currently the Lied Art Gallery Director at Creighton University.

Benjamin has had solo exhibitions at the Great Plains Art Museum in Lincoln, Hilmer Art Gallery, Fred Simon Gallery, and RNG Gallery in Omaha, and the Museum of Nebraska Art in Kearney, and has been included in juried exhibits at the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena, MT, The Ceramics Center in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the Kokomo Art Gallery in Kokomo, IN, and at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff. She was a recipient of the 2013 Nebraska Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowship Grant and was a resident artist through Art at Cedar Point in 2014. [www.jessbenjamin.com](http://www.jessbenjamin.com)

Susan Knight is a painter, paper and installation artist based in Omaha, Nebraska. She was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan and earned her BFA in art from Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana, also attending The University of Notre Dame, The Glassell School of Art, Houston, and The School of the Chicago Art Institute.

Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally in solo and group shows and installations at the Bank of America Headquarters in Charlotte, NC, Johnson and Johnson Headquarters in New Brunswick, NJ, and Garrison Art Center in Garrison, NY, as well as in China, Ireland, Italy, and Canada. She has twice been featured in Sci Art in America Online Magazine and her work appears in the book Art Inspired by Science: Imagining The Natural Work, by Robert Louis Chianese.

Knight has received a Nebraska Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowship and was chosen by The Colorado Art Ranch and The Nature Conservancy for a "Land/Water" residency at Carpenter Ranch in Hayden, CO as well as artist residencies at Ragdale, Lake Forest, Illinois in 1997 and 2009 and at the International School of Art, Montecastello di Vibio, Italy, in 1999.

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