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Two MacArthur Fellows Join Playwriting Program in UT's College of Fine Arts

This fall, the Department of Theatre and Dance welcomes McArthur fellows Annie Baker and Branden Jacobs-Jenkins to the playwriting faculty in the College of Fine Arts at The University of Texas at Austin.

"The playwriting program at UT and the Michener Center has a long history of eminent faculty and graduates," said Brant Pope, chair of the Department of Theatre and Dance. "The addition of Annie Baker and Branden Jacobs-Jenkins to the faculty expands that tradition into the next generation American dramatic writers."

Baker and Jacobs-Jenkins had previously worked together at Hunter College of the City University New York, where they served as co-associate directors of the Goldberg M.F.A. Playwriting Program and master artists-in-residence.

Drawing on the resources of both the internationally celebrated Michener Center for Writers and the highly ranked Department of Theatre and Dance, UT's M.F.A. in Playwriting program boasts a diverse faculty that teaches craft and skill with daring vision and experimentation.

"Annie and Branden are re-inventing what theatre can be and say" Associate Professor KJ Sanchez, head of the playwriting and directing program in the Department of Theatre and Dance. "Their work brings a younger audience to the theatre, and they're exactly the right artists for talking about our current culture, race relations, generational questions and what it means to be human today."

Baker and Jacobs-Jenkins will join a faculty that includes Steven Dietz, one of the most-published playwrights in the country; Kirk Lynn, who specializes in devised theatre and is one of the founding members of the Rude Mechanicals; Sanchez, who chronicles contemporary stories through documentary playwriting; Liz Engelman, founder and director of Tofte Lake Center, playwright Patrick Shaw and director/playwright Alex Basset. The playwriting program has produced many successful alumni, including Meghan Kennedy, Abe Koogler, Joanna Garner, George Brant and Andrew Hinderaker. Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Robert Schenkken is also a graduate of the Department of Theatre and Dance.

Baker won the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for her play *The Flick* and was named a 2017 MacArthur fellow. In her work, Baker explores the complexities of human behavior and the ways in which language is often inadequate to build true understanding between

people. Her plays include *The Antipodes* (2017), *John* (2015), *The Aliens* (2010), *Circle Mirror Transformation* (2009) and *Body Awareness* (2008).

Baker received a B.F.A. from New York University and an M.F.A. from Brooklyn College of the City University of New York. Her plays have been produced at the Soho Repertory, Signature Theatre, Playwrights Horizons, Royal Court, National Theatre, numerous regional theaters across the United States and in more than a dozen countries worldwide.

Jacobs-Jenkins, who was named a 2016 MacArthur fellow and has twice been a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, draws from a range of contemporary and historical theatrical genres to expose and examine divisive issues around identity, family, class and race. Many of Jacobs-Jenkins' plays employ historical and anachronistic devices to satirize and comment on modern culture, particularly the ways in which race and class are negotiated in both private and public settings. His plays include *Girls (after Euripides)* (2017), *Everybody* (2017), *Gloria* (2015), *An Octoroon* (2014), *Appropriate* (2014) and *Neighbors* (2010).

Jacobs-Jenkins received a B.A. from Princeton University and an M.A. from New York University, and he is a graduate of the Lila Acheson Wallace American Playwrights Program at Juilliard. His plays have been performed at such venues as Lincoln Center Theatre/LCT3, Soho Rep, the Public Theatre, Yale Repertory Theatre, Actors Theater of Louisville, and Center Theatre Group, among many others.

“We’re thrilled to have these brilliant, young playwrights join the UT faculty. And we’re enormously grateful to UT Provost Maurie McInnis for Texan ambition to nurture and strengthen UT’s extraordinary faculty in the Arts,” said College of Fine Arts Dean Doug Dempster.