



## Brendan Gill Lecture

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Friday, October 1 • 6:00 PM

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.

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.

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.