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GAMM THEATRE LAUNCHES NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE REIMAGINING NON-THEATRICAL WORKS FOR THE STAGE

WARWICK, RI (October 17, 2025) — **The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre** (The Gamm) is excited to announce the creation of a **new play development initiative** focused on transforming existing non-theatrical works—novels, poetry, film, etc.—into new works for the stage. The Gamm will partner with both established and emerging playwrights to explore how storytelling across other artistic forms can find new life in live performance.

A reworking of author **Helen DeWitt's** acclaimed 2022 novella, *The English Understand Wool*, adapted for the stage by **Gamm Artistic Director Tony Estrella**, will launch the program. Made possible by a **founding gift** from philanthropist and Broadway producer **Elizabeth Armstrong**, the project will serve as a pilot for the kind of artistic, exploratory work The Gamm aims to cultivate through this new program.

"There was no better funder to reach out to for this launch," said **Gamm Executive Director Jason Cabral**. "Liz's deep passion for the creative process, belief in the value of an artist's vision and voice, and history of championing new work make her the ideal partner to help us bring this program to life."

A reading of the script in progress and discussion will take place on **November 17 at 7:30pm** at The Gamm Theatre in Warwick. **A limited number of \$20 tickets are on sale now at gammtheatre.org/wool.** A workshop is scheduled for spring 2026 in New York City, with plans to stage a fully realized production during The Gamm's 2026-27 season.

Estrella said he hopes his adaptation will serve as an inspiration for future projects.

"Through this program, we hope to open new avenues for theatrical exploration and expand the formal boundaries of the 'well-made play,'" Estrella said. "*The English Understand Wool*, for example, is compact, narrated by a single voice, and almost anti-theatrical on the page. But it's also a tale of disguise, concealment, deceit, performance, and betrayal; in other words, the very stuff of a great drama! Finding the way in is at the core of the program."

This new initiative builds on The Gamm's long history of adaptation and innovation. Estrella has previously reimagined literary works for the Gamm stage, including **Dylan Thomas' prose poem *A Child's Christmas In Wales*** in 2010, and novelist **Barry Unsworth's** plague-era mystery *Morality Play* in 2015, which premiered at The Gamm to critical acclaim.

Securing the rights to a stage version of *The English Understand Wool* was both serendipitous and the seed of this program, Estrella explained.

"I've been a fan of Helen's work, particularly her extraordinary *The Last Samurai*, which many consider to be among the greatest novels of our time. I had been meaning to pick up *Wool*, when I almost literally ran into it on display at the Providence Athenaeum," Estrella said. "I read it three times in one sitting and immediately contacted Helen about adapting it for the stage. She said yes and the project came together very quickly! I was confident that it would be perfect for our audience, and that Helen's brilliance on the page would be enough to help me guide it to the Gamm stage."

Cabral said the initiative represents an important next chapter in the theater's evolution.

"This program establishes The Gamm as a home for artistic risk-taking," Cabral said. "It gives us an opportunity to explore an innovative model for new play development. This initiative keeps the artist at the center, values collaboration and

experimentation, and connects the creative process directly to our mission and our community. Every artist begins differently. Our goal is to meet them where they are and to support them from that first idea to a fully realized piece for the stage.”

Through this pilot, The Gamm will determine how it plans to identify and cultivate future writers and projects for development, to ensure a consistent and sustainable pipeline for new work in the years ahead.

ABOUT THE ENGLISH UNDERSTAND WOOL

Adapted for the stage by Tony Estrella from the novella by Helen DeWitt

Marguerite, a young woman of 17, has been raised by Maman and Daddy to expect and demand only the best. Above all to avoid *mauvais ton* (“bad taste” almost -- of course, like all things, it loses something in translation). In her world, one should not ask servants to wait on one during Ramadan: They must have paid leave while one spends the holy month abroad. One must play the piano; if staying at Claridge’s, one must regrettably install a Clavinova in the suite, so that the necessary hours of practice will not be inflicted on fellow guests. One should cultivate weavers of tweed in the Outer Hebrides but have the cloth made up in London; one should buy linen in Ireland, but have it made up by a Thai seamstress in Paris. Marguerite has led a rarefied, intercontinental life where to truly *understand* anything -- domestic crafts, the fine arts, sport, cards, business negotiation -- necessitates the most exacting standards. When a sudden reversal of fortune shatters her hermetic existence, Marguerite is forced to fend for herself against forces that play by a very different set of rules.

ABOUT HELEN DEWITT

Helen DeWitt was born in a suburb of Washington, DC. Daughter of American diplomats, she grew up mainly in Latin America, living in Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador. She went to Oxford to study classics for a BA and D.Phil. She left academia to try to write a novel, moving eventually to London and acquiring UK citizenship. She had some 100 fragments of novels when she began work in 1995 on the novel that was published as *The Last Samurai* in 2000. The book caused a sensation at the Frankfurt Bookfair 1999 and was translated into 20 languages. Its reissue in 2016 was hailed by *Vulture Magazine* as The Best Book of the Century. She is also the author of *Lightning Rods*, a Mel Brooksian satire on sexual harassment, and *Some Trick*, a collection of stories. Her soon to be released book titled *Your Name Here* and billed as a “collaborative novel” with Ilya Gridneff, has received early acclaim. DeWitt has been based in Berlin since 2004, but also spends time at a cottage in the woods of Vermont.

ABOUT THE GAMM THEATRE

Founded in 1984, the non-profit Gamm Theatre is proud to tell stories that entertain, provoke, and engage seriously with the most important issues of our time. The Gamm further serves the public with educational programming that enriches the cultural and civic life of our community. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Tony Estrella and Executive Director Jason Cabral, The Gamm is a regionally recognized, award-winning theater and a proud member of New England Area Theatre (NEAT), a bargaining unit of the Actors’ Equity Association.

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