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Petra Koppers is University's 2021 Earth Day Keynote Speaker

Address to examine crossroads of environmentalism and disability

APRIL 18, 2021 BY MARY LENNIS BARLOW



Petra Koppers

OXFORD, Miss. – International disability rights activist, poet and environmental advocate Petra Koppers is the **University of Mississippi's** 2021 Earth Day keynote speaker. She will deliver her talk, "Gut Botany: Touching Earth," at 7 p.m. April 22 via Zoom.

Koppers is a professor at the University of Michigan, where she teaches courses on English, women's studies, theater and ecofeminism. She is also the author of a number of books examining disability culture, poetry and community performance.

As a result of her lifelong commitment to and exploration of disability rights, poetry and performance, Koppers has received the American Society for Theater Research's award for Best Dance/Theater Book and the national Women's Caucus for the Arts' Award for Arts and Activism.

Her most recent work, "Gut Botany," which will serve as the focal point of her Earth Day keynote, was named one of the Top 10 U.S. poetry books of 2020 by the New York Public Library. In this book of

experimental poetry, Koppers utilizes a combination of surrealist and situationist techniques to examine her own life, the world around her and her relationship with her body.

The keynote address will "explore healing and the imagination in ecosomatic language touch, in order to invite you, the audience, to engage with your own environments, your home spaces and the nest from which you are watching the Zoom," the poet said.

Environmentalism impels us to examine the world around us and our relationship to it; however, it is impossible to isolate such examination from our physical bodies and the limitations they impose, Koppers said. Thus, a concern of both her courses and books, as well as her upcoming keynote, is unpacking the ways in which disability alters these understandings of the world.

"Disability offers some interesting terrain to these kinds of queries," she said. "Disability activists ask questions about interdependency, moving us away from the notion of the 'environmentalist' as some kind of Indiana Jones figure who breaks a path in untouched terrain and, then, has an epiphany on a cliff at the ocean's edge."

By identifying ways in which disabled persons have been excluded from the environmental movement in the past as well as imagining pathways for accessibility in the future, Koppers said she hopes to encourage a new way of thinking and a more inclusive environmentalism.

"Petra Koppers is a brilliantly imaginative and creative artist, teacher and performer," said Ann Fisher-Wirth, Ole Miss professor of **English** and director of the university's minor program in **environmental studies**.

"She is internationally known for her work with disability studies and sustainability, and she has the most radiant smile of anyone I know. We are so lucky to have her as our 2021 Earth Day speaker at the University of Mississippi."

To participate in this event, [register here](#) to receive a Zoom link. Viewers also can register for the lecture at <http://events.olemiss.edu/>.

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OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi is asking the community to help spread a little joy this holiday season by donating to the 25th annual Books and Bears program. Donations such as toys, books, dolls, bicycles and other children's play items are being accepted through Dec. 14. All donations will be collected and sorted

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Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship Aims to Build Leaders

OXFORD, Miss. – Twenty-five inaugural recipients of the Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship – a program hosted by the University of Mississippi School of Education in partnership with the Mississippi Association of Coaches and the Mississippi High School Activities Association – are expected to increase their impact on student-athletes and their communities. The coaching fellowship

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Clarion-Ledger: New Essay Collection Tells the Story of Meredith's Enrollment

Essays celebrate 60th anniversary of James Meredith's enrollment at University of Mississippi By Lauren Rhoades Oct. 1 marks the 60th anniversary of James Meredith's 1962 enrollment at the University of Mississippi as the school's first African-American student.

“James Meredith: Breaking the Barrier,” a collection of essays edited by UM professor of journalism Kathleen Wickham, honors this historic milestone with

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