

CORNELL COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS

410 THURSTON AVENUE ITHACA, NY 14850 T: 607.255.7274 F: 607.255.6872 WWW.ARTS.CORNELL.EDU/CCA

PRESS RELEASE



University Photography

Released by Cornell Chronicle and The Ithaca Journal
By Daniel Aloï

Junot Díaz joins alumni authors to celebrate a century of creative writing at Cornell

Jan. 21, 2009
Ithaca, New York

Novelist Junot Díaz, M.F.A. '95, will visit Cornell in February for the first time since winning the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for fiction for "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao."

His two-day visit will kick off "The Centennial Plus Five Celebration of Creative Writing at Cornell," a series of events in 2009 highlighting Cornell writers and their work.

Díaz, a professor of creative writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and fiction editor of Boston Review, will be presented with the Cornell Council for the Arts' annual Eissner Artist of the Year Award and will give a reading Feb. 19 at 4:30 p.m. at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art. A reception and dinner also will be held.

On Feb. 20, he will take part in a Centennial Reading with fellow M.F.A. graduates Melissa Bank '88 ("The Girls' Guide to Hunting and Fishing") and Julie Schumacher '86 ("Black Box," "An Explanation for Chaos") at 7:30 p.m. in Rockefeller Hall's Schwartz Auditorium. A book signing and Q&A session with Díaz are also scheduled.

He also will participate in a Latino Studies Program-sponsored panel on the arts and immigration, Feb. 19 at 2 p.m. at the Johnson Museum. Díaz was part of a graduate student effort in the mid-1990s to improve Latino studies and the Latino experience on campus, which led to the establishment of Cornell's Latino Living Center.

Díaz wrote most of his first collection of short stories (published as "Drown" in 1996) while in the Creative Writing Program at Cornell. "Oscar Wao," his semiautobiographical debut novel about the immigrant experience and much more, focuses on a science fiction- and fantasy-obsessed misfit living with his Dominican-American family in New Jersey. The novel also won the 2007 National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction.

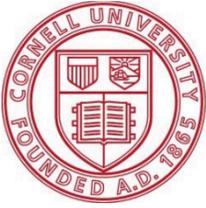
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"This is not just a writing program that develops M.F.A.s," said Creative Writing Program director Helena María Viramontes. "This is a writing program that nurtures incredible talent -- people who engage in the social sciences and engage in politics."

The program sponsors a reading series each semester supported by a gift from two anonymous alumni donors. This year, readings will be tied to the centennial celebration. The readings "have given us the opportunity to bring in these huge names," Viramontes said. "They meet with undergraduate students, and they really enrich and engage and create this ambiance around them."

Centennial Readings on Feb. 26 and April 16 will feature alumni poets and fiction writers, including Emily Rosko and Stewart O'Nan.

Other events include a March 4 "Cornell Scholars on Cornell Writers" panel, discussing the works of A.R. Ammons, Thomas Pynchon, Manuel Muñoz and others; two community readings by more than 40 local writers, March 26 and Oct. 22 at Ithaca's State Theatre; and a publication party April 2 for new books by faculty members J. Robert Lennon, Kenneth McClane, Jonathan Monroe and Lyrae Van Clief-Stefanon. All events will be free and open to the public.

Cornell authors will be featured on Public Radio International's "Selected Shorts" this spring, with their work read by stage actors. A centennial anthology is also being prepared for publication, with an introduction by James McConkey.

Cornell first offered creative writing courses in 1905 as part of the English department curriculum. Since then, the university has counted many literary greats among its faculty and former students, including Pynchon, Ammons, E.B. White, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., Vladimir Nabokov, Lorrie Moore and Susan Choi; Pulitzer Prize winners Díaz and Alison Lurie; and Nobel laureates Toni Morrison and Pearl S. Buck. For a complete list, see <http://www.writers.cornell.edu/>.

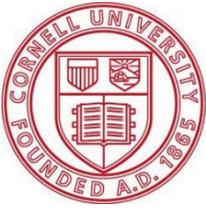
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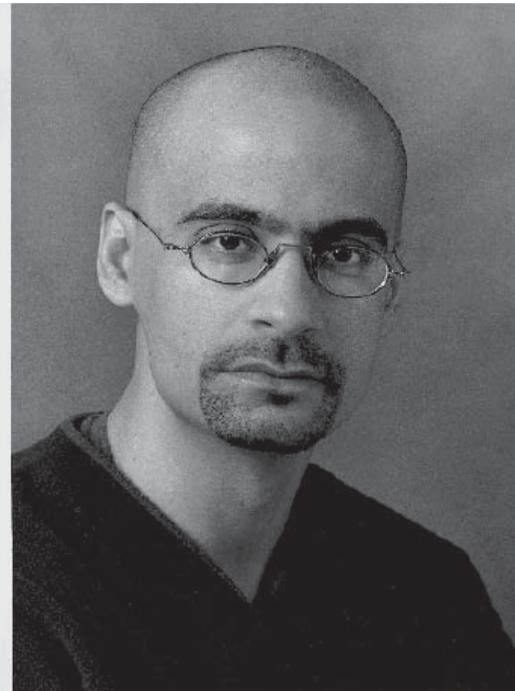
Released by Cornell Chronicle Online

CU in the CITY

January 22, 2009
New York City, NY

Alumni

Junot Diaz, MFA '95, 2008 Pulitzer Prize-winning author of the novel "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao," reads at the 92nd Street Y Jan. 26 at 8 p.m. Information: <http://www.92y.org>.



Nancy Crampton

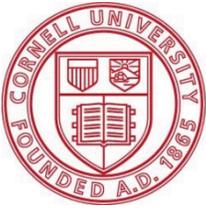
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PRESS RELEASE

Press Relations, Cornell University
Released by Cornell University Media Advisory

Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Junot Díaz joins alumni authors, including Melissa Bank, to celebrate a century of creative writing, Feb. 19-20

Jan. 23, 2009
Ithaca, New York

- * WHAT: Novelists Junot Díaz, Melissa Bank and Julie Schumacher visit Cornell for two days of events
- * WHEN: Feb. 19-20; Díaz public reading, Feb. 19 at 4:30 p.m. at the Johnson Museum
- * WHERE: Events at various locations on the Cornell campus; free and open to the public
- * NOTE: Reporters interested in arranging interviews or wishing to attend any of the events should contact Nicola Pytell (contact information below).

ITHACA, N.Y. -- Novelist Junot Díaz, Cornell M.F.A. '95, will visit Cornell University in February for the first time since winning the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for fiction for "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao."

Díaz's two-day visit will kick off "The Centennial Plus Five Celebration of Creative Writing at Cornell," a series of events highlighting Cornell writers and their work. Find more information at: <http://www.arts.cornell.edu/english/creative/readings/sp09-readings.html>.

Díaz, a professor of creative writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and fiction editor of Boston Review, will be presented with the Cornell University Eissner Artist of the Year Award, an annual citation administered by the Cornell Council for the Arts. And he will give a reading Feb. 19 at 4:30 p.m. at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art on campus.

On Feb. 20, he will take part in a Centennial Reading with fellow Cornell M.F.A. graduates Melissa Bank '88 ("The Girls' Guide to Hunting and Fishing") and Julie Schumacher '86 ("Black Box," "An Explanation for Chaos") at 7:30 p.m. in Rockefeller Hall's Schwartz Auditorium. A book signing and Q&A session with Díaz are also scheduled.

Díaz also will participate in a Cornell Council for the Arts and Latino Studies Program-sponsored panel on the arts and immigration, Feb. 19 at 2 p.m. at the Johnson Museum. Díaz was part of a graduate student effort in the mid-1990s to improve Latino studies and the Latino experience on campus, which led to the

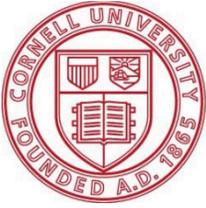
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PRESS RELEASE

Released by Cornell University Media Advisory

Junot Diaz: Eissner Artist of the Year Award and Class of '63 Presentation

February, 2009
Ithaca, New York

Junot Diaz received an MFA from Cornell in 1995 from the Creative Writing Program, and has won prestigious awards, including the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction in 2008 for distinguished fiction by an American author for his work "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao", the National Book Critics Circle Award, the John Sargent Sr. First Novel Prize, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, and the Dayton Library Peace Prize. His fiction has been published in The New Yorker and The Paris Review, and in The Best American Short Stories. His critically praised, bestselling debut book, "Drown", led to his inclusion among Newsweek's "New Faces of 1996" -- the only writer in the group. The New Yorker placed him on a list of the twenty top writers for the twenty-first century.



University Photography

Diaz is the recipient of the 2008-09 Eissner Artist of the Year Award, which is presented annually to an alumna/us who has achieved national or international success in the arts. The award is funded by an endowment from Bruce and Judith Eissner, and is administered by the Cornell Council for the Arts.

This event includes:

2:00pm - Panel Discussion: Arts and the Impact on Immigration - Are the arts poised to address the most pressing issues of immigration, its myths, and its strengths?

With Cornell Faculty: Ernesto Quinonez (Creative Writing), Roberto Sierra (Music), Sofia Villenas (Latino Studies Program), Amy Villarejo (Theatre, Film, & Dance), Junot Diaz (Creative Writing, MIT)

4:30pm - Junot Diaz Reading and Award Presentation

Sponsor	Cornell Council for the Arts, Latino Studies Program
Date	February 19, 2009
Time	2:00PM -to- 5:30PM
Location	Johnson Museum of Art

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International Gateway
Cornell University

Junot Diaz: Eissner Artist of the Year Award and Class of '63 Presentation

February 19th, 2009
Ithaca, New York

Junot Diaz received an MFA from Cornell in 1995 from the Creative Writing Program, and has won prestigious awards, including the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction in 2008 for distinguished fiction by an American author for his work "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao", the National Book Critics Circle Award, the John Sargent Sr. First Novel Prize, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, and the Dayton Library Peace Prize. His fiction has been published in The New Yorker and The Paris Review, and in The Best American Short Stories. His critically praised, bestselling debut book, "Drown", led to his inclusion among Newsweek's "New Faces of 1996" -- the only writer in the group. The New Yorker placed him on a list of the twenty top writers for the twenty-first century.

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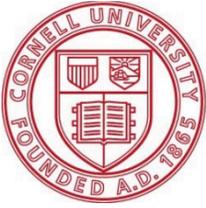
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PRESS RELEASE



Lindsay France/University
Photography

Released by Cornell Daily Sun
By Molly O'Toole

**Author Diaz '95 Returns to Cornell
Audience crowds Johnson Museum
to hear Pulitzer Prize winner speak**

February 20, 2009
Ithaca, New York

While the startling blue of Cayuga Lake could be seen by all those looking out the windows on the top floor of the Johnson Museum yesterday, most of the several dozen people in the conference room were not there for the view. The focus, instead, was to the front where a colorful group, including a composer, a documentary film aficionado, an education expert and a Pulitzer prize-winning author, sat on a panel aptly named "Arts and the Impact on Immigration."

"Whenever I think about arts, I always think about politics," said Prof. Helena Viramontes, director of creative writing, who introduced the panel.

Prof. Sofia Villenas, education and Latino/a Studies Program, Prof. Roberto Sierra, music chair, and Prof. Amy Villarejo, theatre, film and dance chair, lent their perspectives to the uniquely political and artistic discussion sponsored by the Cornell Council for the Arts and co-sponsored by the Latino Studies Program.

"I'm surrounded by chairs," joked moderator Ernesto Quinoñez, creative writing.

At one end of the table sat the one member of the panel not on Cornell's faculty, but an MFA graduate in 1995 — Junot Díaz. He has gone on to be one of the most successful authors of the nearly 105-year history of creative writing at Cornell, joining such literary giants as Vladimir

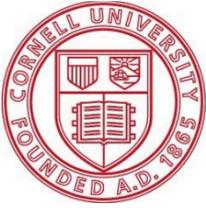
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Nabokov (a professor until 1977), E.B. White '21, and Kurt Vonnegut Jr. '44, to name a few. By many measures of literary success, from the 2008 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction for *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* to his bestselling debut book *Drown*, Díaz is, according to *The New Yorker* one of the top twenty writers of the twenty-first century.

The panel inaugurated the "Centennial Plus Five Celebration," a "year-long festival" that will include readings by alumni poets and writers.

Born in the Dominican Republic, Díaz contributed his personal perspective to the panel, organized to "address the most pressing issues of immigration, its myths and its strengths," according to the CCA. As a student at Cornell, Díaz contributed to an effort in the mid-1990s to improve the Latino studies and experience on campus. As a result of this effort, the University established the Latino Living Center, according to the *Cornell Chronicle*.

Quinoñez began by diving into a question about the potential for a "super Latino" constituency, a united economic and political bloc he called "the sleeping giant."

"We are awake," assured Sierra.

"It's certainly possible," Díaz said, pulling the mic towards him after a few pensive moments. "But the way the current ... narrative identities are constructed in the Americas ... communities being fragmented at the speed of light ... Anything that's going to create a new possibility for a new productive collective is going to require a narrative that currently doesn't exist.

"For me, what I think is happening," he continued, "most of the folks being broken into 25 million pieces aren't the ones being asked to help engineer the solution, aren't part of the narrative that will bring us together ... the only experts we have are the ones we've got downstairs cooking and cleaning."

The diverse set of answers set the tone for the rest of the discussion, focusing on themes of identity, solidarity, multiculturalism, capitalization, education, immigration, the current economic crisis, the fragmentation and dissipation of culture and, in particular, the arts.

Sierra spoke to the current frigid economic climate for the arts.

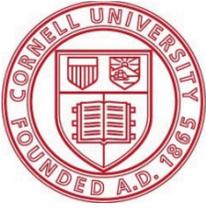
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"Every time I look at a publication, I see yet another cultural institution either falling or in trouble," Sierra said. "As things get tighter economically I tend to think Latinos and minorities in general will be suffering ... more because we are always at the tail end of the line. It has gone deep enough now to have a sense of ... desperation ... the ugly head of racism perking up ... Who is actually legitimate? That will eventually be reflected in what we do."

The panelists expressed a full range of opinion, from frustration, to grimness, to optimism, peppered with moments of the expression of blunt honesty, laughter-inducing humor and hope.

"Jesus, given the forces stacked against humanity," Díaz said, "we're doing a damn good job of keeping art in our lives."

The panelists also took questions from the audience on similar topics broached in the discussion.

Paige Feldman '10 came to the panel for her "love" of Junot Díaz and the Latino Studies program, spoke to the relationship between immigration and the arts.

"All human movement tends to impact the way we think about ourselves and the kind of art we produce," she said.

"I think the arts has a lot to teach us about multiculturalism as content that needs to be included across the curriculum, as a way for students to identify themselves in the teaching and learning process," Villenas said after the panel.

"The vast array of practices that can go under [arts]," added Villarejo, "I am optimistic those will continue to be vital in communities and political tasks as they always have been."

Quinoñez had this message for the Cornell community:

"There's hope," he said. "They've always been cutting arts — it doesn't matter if times are good or bad. But the arts have always been free."

Prof. Cecilia Lawless, romance studies, reminded the audience that the U.S. is "a nation of immigrants," and called for, "find[ing] new strategies, new narratives, push[ing] away from the old strategies, with panels like this. New engagement."

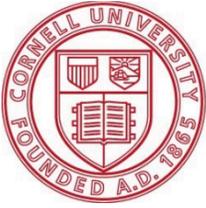
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PRESS RELEASE

"Let's all do that," she said.

Díaz also returned to Cornell to receive the Eisner Artist of the Year Award yesterday. The Committee on the Arts of the University Council and the Cornell Council for the Arts established the honor, given to an alumna or alumnus who has achieved national or international success, in 1997, to present and recognize such artists' work at Cornell.

The celebration continues today when Díaz joins fellow MFA graduates Melissa Bank '88, the best-selling author of *The Girls' Guide to Hunting and Fishing*, and Julie Shumacher '86, author of *Black Box* and *An Explanation for Chaos*, for a 7:30 reading this evening in Schwartz Auditorium in Rockefeller Hall.

Díaz currently teaches creative writing at MIT.

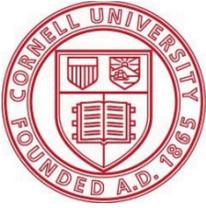
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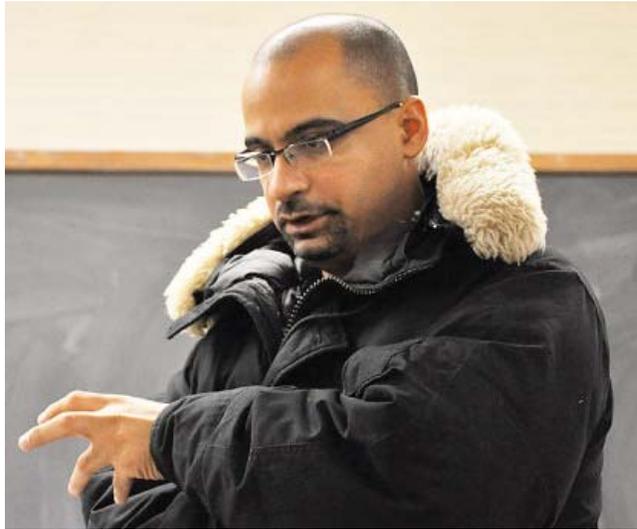
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Released by Cornell Daily Sun

By Seth Shapiro

Cornell Alumni Writers Inspire Students

February 23, 2009

Ithaca, New York

Three well-respected alumni authors drove students to delay the start of their weekend on Friday afternoon and gather for a panel discussion in Kauffman Auditorium. Junot Díaz MFA '95, Julie Schumacher MFA '86 and Melissa Bank MFA '88, three published writers and three graduates of Cornell's MFA program, offered curious listeners and hopeful writers a look into the world of 21st century fiction writing. At the afternoon panel, they fielded questions from the audience, lending advice to eager minds. Later that evening, they held a reading in Rockefeller Hall, sharing their works before a standing-room-only audience.

Nina Zhang '09 attended the panel discussion because she is taking a creative writing class this semester and because she had a question on her mind. She wanted to hear how published, experienced writers know their work will resonate well with people.

Schumacher responded by telling the audience of a letter she had framed. It was written by a young girl who said that reading one of Schumacher's books "reminds me of myself." While Schumacher insisted that this sort of resonance is not something a writer necessarily tries to achieve, it is something they would like to accomplish.

"You never really know how art will be received. [You] can try your best, but you don't really know," Zhang said.

Zhang was touching on the response Díaz gave to her question. He said that authors write for a future readership. He reminded the audience that any immediate response to a piece of writing is only fleeting — "applause or silence" after publication are not necessarily indicative of a future reception.

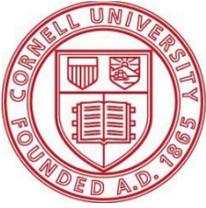
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Zhang appreciated the sincere way each of the authors answered not only her question, but the inquires from all the audiencemembers.

When asked about any changes in writing style after graduating from the MFA program, Bank gave the audience a glimpse of what was going on in her head as she wrote pre—and post—graduation from the MFA. During her time at the MFA, “I was desperate for the other writers to think I was a good writer,” she said. Whenever she wrote, she would think to herself whether or not she could see a particular paragraph being published in *The New Yorker*. She even admitted to trying to imagine some of her writings being typed in *The New Yorker* font. Bank left the program less obsessed with getting that validation.

Even as a Pulitzer Prize winning writer, Díaz told the audience, “I would rather read a page than write a page.” He said that his dreams consisted of him in a bookstore and his nightmares — him behind a desk. While he appreciated the opportunity afforded to him by being in the MFA program at Cornell, he was relieved when it was over because he finally would have time to read.

Schumacher told the audience that she always resorted to paper, because through her writing she could portray an “improved self.” In her family, no one said what was on his mind; no one expressed any emotion. Even to this day, she acknowledged having trouble expressing herself in person. Writing for her was a way of being someone she was not able to be in reality.

While the panelists answered the same questions, they oftentimes had different responses. Bank said for her, writing was like smoking or drinking or any other compulsion. She said it was an “incredible feeling of power,” and that writing allowed her to be so much smarter and funnier than she was in person.

Díaz said that his writing stemmed from a love of reading, but it was not something he felt compelled to do. He described his decision to begin writing with a baseball analogy. He said that if someone loved the game of baseball, eventually he would feel the need to take the leap from the stands and onto the field to start playing it himself.

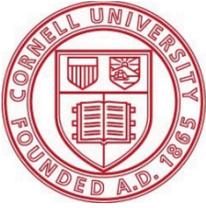
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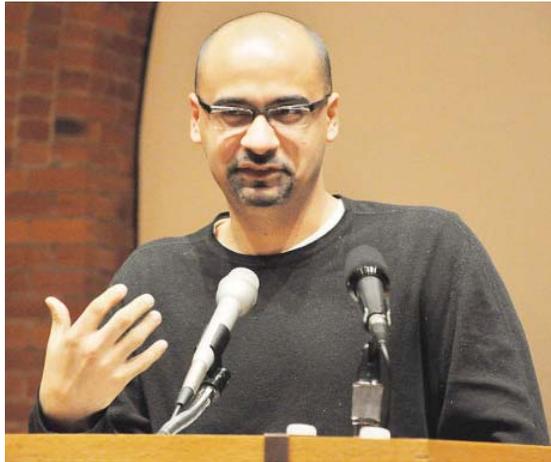
PRESS RELEASE

"Eventually you want to get into the fray," Díaz said.

Prof. Helena Viramontes, creative writing, recommended to her English 2801 class that they attend the discussion panel and the evening reading later that night.

"Valuable exchanges in the panel include inspiration and practical advise. These three writers did not know their future while they were students here at Cornell, but were all committed to writing," Viramontes stated in an e-mail. "Now flash forward 20 years, and you have all of them highly successful, not only as writers, but as mentors who inspire and continue to inspire. It was a delight to see them returning to their literary home."

At the reading, all three authors shared their fiction with the captivated audience, members of which laughed intermittently as the dry-humored works were enjoyed with the crowd. After being introduced by Viramontes and Prof. Stephanie Vaughn, English, the writers took the stage. Vaughn said that the three writers' works can be unified in their exploration of topics like the "lack of misfortune in life," the "frail nature of family and the emotional need to restructure family," and the "generosity of spirit that infiltrates fiction."



University Photography

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PRESS RELEASE

Released by Cornell Daily Sun
By Molly O'Toole

**'Because It Is My Calling'
The Sun Interviews Junot Diaz MFA '95**

February 23, 2009
Ithaca, New York

*If the verbal visionaries of Cornell's nearly 105-year history of writing stood on each other's shoulders; Nabokov as a base, cursing in Russian, Vonnegut next to him, muttering to himself about the absurdity of it, Pynchon above them, with a foot on each deltoid, shakily supporting Morrison, and so on — you'd have a ladder of literary giants to rival the clock tower. Even then, despite this towering tradition, the adrenaline-and-laughter inducing irreverence and innovation of Junot Díaz, MFA '95, displayed to the delight of many in the Cornell community last week, would be enough, sure as Ithaca is cold, to make Uncle Ezra roll over in his grave and call for a pen. The Dominican-born author returned to campus Feb. 19-20th for the first time after receiving the 2008 Pulitzer for fiction for *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* to kick off the "Centennial-Plus Five Celebration" of creative writing (emphasis on the kick). In an empty classroom, *The Sun* sat and he chose to stand, in a heavy black winter coat and jeans, eyes and mouth on the edge of amused behind his square glasses and goatee, as the Schwartz Auditorium in Rockefeller filled to hear him read:*

The Sun: Describe to me Junot Diaz as an MFA student here, close to 15 years ago. What were you like, what was the atmosphere like here?

Junot Diaz: I was like most students — most grad students — I shouldn't say like most undergrads, [it's] different world, you know, you're fuckin' crazy, you don't know what you're doin', you don't know how you fit in ... as an undergraduate it's easy. You roll in, do a lot of work, you fuck around a lot, you have a good time and there's not much confusion. But as a grad student you're like a part of tiny little group. There's a ton of pressure, so I think for a good part of it you're probably not your best self. So I remember being like ... drinking too much. You know, stuff probably wasn't too productive, fucking around too much. I spent a lot of time going home. I really didn't like Ithaca.

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Sun: Where's home for you?

JD: Well, N.J., but by then I was livin in NYC ... It wasn't until my second year that I started getting my rhythm, and I don't know why, but the cold and the darkness of it kind of fucking depressed me man, made me real irritable.

Sun: Common sentiment here.

JD: Yeah, no, but ... when you're an undergraduate, you don't notice the world as much, you're so busy runnin' with your peers ...

Sun: Coming back here after all your recent success, has your perspective changed?

JD: I haven't had a second to look around. The school looks uglier. They've built like a lot uglier buildings. That's one thing. It sucks. Cause this is an incredibly beautiful school.

It's like I said, you get older. You don't think so much about the shit that was wrong or the shit that bothered you or the people you wanted to smack around or how lonely you felt or the cold. What you end up remembering is the friends that you had that you don't see as much. It's weird, it's almost like you get real nostalgic without even wanting to.

Sun: You're MFA-educated here and you're an academy-trained writer who teaches at a university. What do you think was your best classroom – here at Cornell or outside of this bubble?

JD: It's hard to say. Do you know what I mean? How you draw the line between your education and your life? It's kind of hard. I know I learned a tremendous amount while I was here, but I learned a tremendous amount while I was out, you know, in the world. I just think ... that because it's not like ... you can't subdivide yourself so easily. The only thing I know is that they were both in some ways essential ... I think that had I not had any kind of intellectual grounding, or institutional apparatus, I probably would've been a very different writer.

Sun: How do you teach writing?

JD: I teach only undergraduates who don't want to be writers ... I just wanted to say that cause it's a different energy ... the kids ... they're more fun.

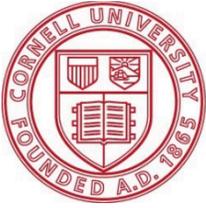
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Writing is for me more of an excuse to make the students critical-minded. You know ... There's really no magic. Half of it is exposure. You expose them to the forms, the grammar of whatever convention you're talking about, whether it's the short story or the novel ... you have the students practice it. The third component is that you really have to have a tremendous amount of compassion. You have to teach the students how to be gentle with themselves, not to be so critical, not to be so incredibly self-eviscerating. The only way you can model that is that if you actually have compassion. I think all three are the components that you tend to end up bringing to the class.

Sun: At your panel, you said in your nightmares you were at a desk, but in your dreams you are at a library or a bookstore. So, I was curious: Why do you write?

JD: It is, for lack of a less absurd term ... my calling. It is the thing that I am called to do and that I do with a certain amount of skill. I don't understand why I'm called to do this. I would be more naturally called to be like just a full time reader ... look, there's a million ways you can avoid what you're called to do, and I think many of us spend our lives ducking it. I think sometimes I do that, sometimes I don't. At least I know what it is, I know the name of it; it's called writing.

Sun: Do you think this love of reading is a diminishing presence in education today? Do you think it's lost in contemporary society?

JD: It's never been a big presence. Literacy has never been a part of global cultural practice, so it's easy to get nostalgic about something, but if we're to get kind of gloomy Jeremiah-esque, [it's] something I don't know has always been a huge presence ... I think for me when you do something you of course want other people to participate in it, to value it, to enjoy it. I mean, sure, it's not most people's cup of tea, I don't know that it's ever been. But at least I don't do musicals, I don't do opera, or anything like that. It all depends on who the hell you are. I don't know of any traditional art that finds itself in a very stable, you know, happy moment.

Sun: How do you feel about being placed into a certain category, [maybe instead] as a Latino writer, as a political writer? How do you feel about being categorized in certain ways?

JD: You grew up in this country, you know the deal ... it's a race, you know? Everyone is trying as fast as possible to stuff you into a box, and you are trying to as vigorously and as imaginatively as possible to escape from those boxes and defining yourself ... I think that it's nothing new. Some categories are useful. My idea of it is, as long as a category doesn't exclude other categories, some

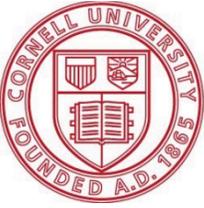
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of them I don't mind. I know I'm a Dominican writer, I know I'm a writer from New Jersey. I don't think these are either of them bad. But if I can only be allowed to be a writer from New Jersey, if I'm only allowed to be a Dominican writer, or an immigrant writer, then I don't want the categories. You know, my idea is: You want to be able to be as many as you think apply to you, not to be in a category to simplify things.

Sun: As Helena Viramontes said yesterday when she was introducing your panel, when she thinks about writing, she thinks about politics. How would you view that interaction in your works?

JD: You know all art, all writing is political ... you just got to remember — and I think this is very important — is that all of it, every artist has some sort of political valence. The difference is that there are some politics which are status quo, so they're utterly transparent, we don't even notice it's a political act. And others are a little ... more transgressive, they're a little bit more radical. But there's no difference ... Both of them are political acts, it's just one bothers us. The other one we've sort of given ... a free pass to.

I'm as much a part of it as anyone else ... what complicates things, is that the novel is a form unlike other types of short stories, explicitly too complicated to follow one political throughway ... some of the most conservative writers have incredibly radical elements to their work and some of the most so called radical writers have deeply conservative ideologies. The novel is so big that interaction means you have to introduce all sorts of disparity, often contradictory elements, so the piece of work itself ... the novel as an artistic object, is often difficult to abstract into any one ideology which adds another layer to what the hell we're talking about. I don't think of myself as a radical writer or as a writer involved in politics, the novel undercuts any attempt that I have to reduce it down to a political program.

Sun: A lot of your books are being translated into Spanish right now. With your [original] works being written in English, obviously with frequent interjections of Spanish, I was wondering how you felt about that translation?

JD: The only way I can make sense of it is that I have never known a world where you don't translate ... I guess that question is a question that I am probably the worst person to answer ... someone who's a monolinguist would have more interesting insights. For me, I always assume that the natural state of language is translation. I don't think of translation as some aberration some mutation or some dysfunction of language, I think purity of language to me seems more the

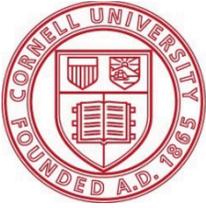
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dysfunction, the mutation.

Sun: Horace Engdahl, who is part of the academy for the Nobel prize for literature, said last year that "the United States is too insular to challenge Europe as the center of the literary world." Would you agree or disagree with that statement?

JD: Look, it's an absurd statement; it's absurd for many different reasons. Horace doesn't know American literature. Does anyone really know American literature? Can you find someone who has read enough of it who can say, "I can do a pretty good gloss of what it is"? He's not aware of what's happening in this country ... that kind of generalization just shows how kind of dumb you are.

That said, what I think is very important, what he lost, is an opportunity to make a good criticism about how little writing in translation is read in the U.S., how few books from across the world are translated into English, how few of those books are actually being consumed or purchased by Americans. I think that he's simultaneously a dumbass, and I think he's simultaneously correct. I think American writers are incredibly narrowed and our sense of the world is shaped and limited, pre-determined by our vast privilege and our sort of you know solopcistic sense of self. But his claim as stated is utterly absurd. Because I think you can make a critique but you can't generalize the entire county. To say that Europeans are less solopcisitic than Americans is such a joke I don't know whether to laugh or cry.

Sun: What is the next step for you, are you currently working on anything?

JD: I don't know.

Sun: Wherever the wind takes you?

JD: No, it's not like that. I will no longer be doing readings, interviews or anything starting May 1st, besides a few scattered ones here or there. Everything ends ... so I can finally get sometime to think.

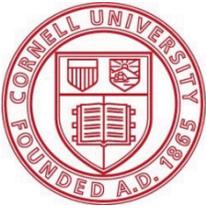
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PRESS RELEASE



Released by Cornell Chronicle
By Daniel Aloï

Lindsay France/University
Photography

Arts and immigration panel considers the 'super Latino'

February 25, 2009
Ithaca, New York

Celebrated novelist Junot Díaz, M.F.A. '95, and four Cornell faculty members discussed the readiness of the arts to address immigration issues at a panel discussion Feb. 19 at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art.

"Anything that's going to create a sort of super-Latino or create a new possibility of larger, more productive, more humane collectives is going to require a narrative that currently doesn't exist," Díaz said. "Right now the forces that are fragmenting people have at their disposal narratives of astonishing power and reach."

Most people subject to that fragmentation "are not the ones who are being asked to take part in a narrative that can help bring us back together," Díaz said. "The people who meet the hammer are never the ones who are asked to help engineer the solutions."

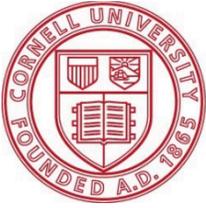
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Moderator Ernesto Quiñonez, assistant professor of English, had posed the question of the growth of a "super Latino" community attaining political, economic and social power in America.

The panel also included Amy Villarejo, chair of the Department of Theatre, Film and Dance; Roberto Sierra, the Old Dominion Professor of Composition; and Sofia Villenas, associate professor of education and Latino/a studies. Villarejo, although not a Latina, said she identifies as one politically.

"I believe there are possibilities for affiliation that are not based on origin or identity, but on political affiliation or solidarity," she said.

Sierra addressed the concern that Latino cultures seemingly "are homogenizing into a singular culture -- but we are not; we all come from different regions. Mexican music is different from Caribbean music," he said.

"Will we lose the aspects of the different cultures that we come from?" he asked. "And the children -- what will they be like?"

Villenas, an education ethnographer, said much of the energy in her studies of Latino immigrant education has been expended on "challenging the deficit perspective that blames the families" and pitting the question of "real" Latino identity against stereotypes.

"That's what's really promising about the work of the artists Junot Díaz and [Cornell professor and novelist] Helena Viramontes," Villenas said. "They're actually situating that question of the real within the histories of oppression. They all situate our lives within histories, and they show us the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, nations, citizenship and how these all work -- and then they play with the notion of, can we really know who Latinos are?"

The panel was co-sponsored by the Latino Studies Program and the Creative Writing Program. The latter also hosted a career panel and a reading by Díaz and alumni authors Melissa Bank '98 and Julie Schumacher '86.

Following the panel discussion, Díaz received the 2008-09 Eissner Artist of the Year Award, administered by the Cornell Council for the Arts (CCA).

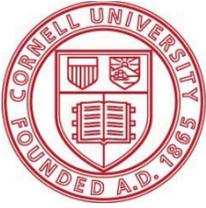
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"He worked as hard on his fiction as anyone who's ever passed through here -- not just on writing his fiction but reimagining his fiction. He is funny, and also ferocious," said Stephanie Vaughn, professor of English, who nominated Díaz for the award. "When he was here, he used to say he wanted to be the most famous man from the Dominican Republic who wasn't a baseball player."

Díaz was selected for the Eissner award a month before he won the Pulitzer Prize for "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao," from which he gave a short reading.

The annual alumni artist award was established in 1997 by the University Council's Committee on the Arts and the CCA; the selection is made by a jury of arts department chairs. The award was renamed in 2007 to recognize Bruce and Judith Eissner's Endowment for the Arts at Cornell.

"Cornell is much stronger in the arts and better in the arts than many people know, and this is a vehicle for celebrating that as well as promoting it," Bruce Eissner said.

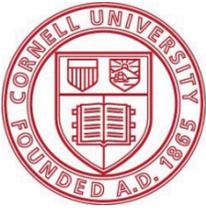
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Cornell Chronicle

by Laura Janka [Laura Janka '09 is a writer intern at the Cornell Chronicle.]

Alumni authors recall their Cornell years in writing program

February 27, 2009

Ithaca, New York

Aspiring authors and fiction fans gathered in Goldwin Smith Hall's Hollis E. Cornell Auditorium Feb. 20 to hear Creative Writing Program alumni Melissa Bank '98, Junot Díaz '95 and Julie Schumacher '86 discuss the M.F.A. program, its influences on their craft and their literary careers following their years at Cornell.

"These writers once sat where you're sitting, in the audience, wondering how to end up sitting here talking about their successful lives as writers," moderator J. Robert Lennon, assistant professor of creative writing, told students during his introduction to the novelists' panel discussion, "Flash Forward: Cornell Writers Return."

Following her father's advice to be a secretary, Schumacher said she worked as a typist for a gynecological journal in New York City before coming to Cornell for graduate school.

"It was like the hand of God reached down and took me out of that life I was leading and brought me here," she said.

Schumacher's work -- including the novels "The Body Is Water" and "Black Box" -- has been translated into multiple languages, and her short fiction has appeared in "The Best American Short Stories 1983" and "The O. Henry Awards."

Schumacher revealed that her early writing was an outlet -- her family "didn't talk about emotions, we didn't talk about our inner selves, and so that's what I do on paper." The focus and support of the writing program changed her life, she said, by fortifying her passion and instilling a sense of discipline.

Díaz agreed, referring to his time on campus as a "three-year holiday" and a "get out of jail free card." Cornell offered him a refuge from his mind-numbing jobs. "At that time, it was two to four years basically writing, being around a bunch of writer nerds," he said.

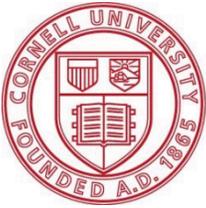
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Born in the Dominican Republic and raised in New Jersey, Díaz has made the cultures of both locations prominent in his work. He wrote most of the short stories in his first collection, "Drown," while at Cornell.

He emphasized that the M.F.A. program was "a stupendous, bold-lined privilege" -- but he joked that "it's almost a passport to grouse. ... We complained about what we didn't have as a way to obscure the enormous privilege of what we did have."

Bank, author of the best-selling "The Girls' Guide to Hunting and Fishing," said her writing "started like any compulsion -- smoking, drinking, eating; then it's hard to stop."

As she became comfortable and perfected her craft, she described feeling empowered to create and destroy with her pen. "Once you start seeing what you could do, you feel like you could be smarter, funnier and better on paper than you could ever be in life," she said.

When she was at Cornell, she admitted, "I didn't really understand how huge a gift it is to be able to think about nothing except your own writing and the other writers you admire."

Bank has published stories in periodicals ranging from Cosmopolitan to Epoch, the Cornell literary journal. She is teaching at Cornell this semester as a visiting writer.



Díaz said being in a writing program provided valuable lessons in other authors' stylistic and narrative strategies, gleaned from their own years of reading. "Your peers' successful strategies as an artist are things always, always to emulate," he advised students.

He also urged student writers to look beyond present accolades and to focus on continual growth and learning.

The afternoon panel and an evening reading by the three writers were the first events in a yearlong celebration of 105 years of creative writing at Cornell.

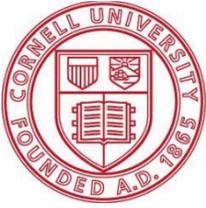
ABOUT THE CORNELL COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS

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PRESS RELEASE



University Photography

Released by Cornell Chronicle
By Daniel Aloï

Junot Diaz's 'The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao' wins Pulitzer Prize for fiction

April 9, 2008
Ithaca, New York

"The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao," the wildly original debut novel by Junot Diaz, MFA '95, has won the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

"Wao" -- the account of a young, lovesick Dominican-American misfit, his family and his native country's violent history -- was published in September 2007 by Riverhead Books. The novel also received the National Book Critics Circle award for fiction in March and the Mercantile Library Center for Fiction's 2007 John Sargent Sr. First Novel Prize. Time magazine called the novel "astoundingly great" and the best novel of 2007.

Diaz was featured in Cornell's Creative Writing Program Reading Series in February 2007. He is scheduled to read again in the series in spring 2009.

"He has this gift for making you laugh and also for making you stare at the unimaginable," said professor of English Stephanie Vaughn, who had Diaz as a student.

"The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao" took 11 years to write. Diaz's first book, the 1996 short-story collection "Drown," was derived from his Cornell MFA thesis, "Negocios," available in Kroch Library. "Drown" earned Diaz wide critical acclaim, and he was later named one of the 20 top writers for the 21st century by The New Yorker.

"His first book was an impressive book," Vaughn said. "Most of the stories in 'Negocios' were subsequently in 'Drown,' and those were beautiful, brilliant stories that were by turns funny and exceptionally brutal, about the capacity of people to do evil to other people. His later work extends that to entire nations."

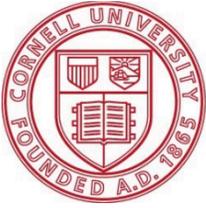
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PRESS RELEASE

Like his fictional protagonist, Diaz, 39, is a Dominican-American whose family emigrated to New Jersey when he was 6. Also like Oscar, Diaz is a fan of popular culture, science fiction and fantasy. With Diaz's literary success, most other similarities end there. Employing Spanglish dialect and footnotes, "Wao" weaves themes of guilt and longing with the challenging and transformative immigrant experience.

Previous winners of the fiction Pulitzer include Toni Morrison, MFA '55, in 1988 for "Beloved"; Cornell emeritus professor of English Alison Lurie, in 1985 for "Foreign Affairs"; and Pearl S. Buck, M.A. '25, in 1932 for "The Good Earth."

Diaz's book was one of three finalists for the 2008 Pulitzer, along with "Shakespeare's Kitchen" by Lore Segal and "Tree of Smoke" by Denis Johnson, a visiting writer at Cornell this year.

"Those two books ['Tree of Smoke' and 'Wao'] are probably the two great books of the last decade, in terms of the effect they will have on other writers," Vaughn said.

Diaz, an associate professor in the Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is currently a literary fellow at the American Academy of Arts and Letters in Rome. He taught at Syracuse University from 1997 to 2002 and received his B.A. from Rutgers University.

Diaz's other honors include the 2002 PEN/Malamud Award, the Eugene McDermott Award and Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Award, and fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, and the National Endowment for the Arts' 2003 U.S.-Japan Creative Artist Fellowship.

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