ELIZABETH GILBERT GIVES BENEFIT READING FOR UCROSS IN HOUSTON

“A Perfectly Wonderful Night On Stage”*

On February 1, 2010, over 800 people turned out for a Ucross Foundation Benefit at Houston’s Alley Theatre, featuring a reading by Elizabeth Gilbert, the #1 bestselling author of Eat, Pray, Love. Gilbert, who had written a draft of Eat, Pray, Love at Ucross, read from her new book, Committed: A Skeptic Makes Peace with Marriage (Viking). She also charmed the audience during an on-stage interview with Houston society writer Shelby Hodge. Prior to the reading, a private donor dinner was hosted in the Alley’s board room and nearly 50 guests had the pleasure of sharing in Elizabeth’s company and conversation.

Thanks to the generous support of Apache Corporation, which served as the event’s underwriter, and the gift of donated space from the Alley Theatre, over $50,000 was raised that night for the Ucross Foundation.

Elizabeth Gilbert was a PEN/Hemingway Fellow at Ucross in 1999, when she wrote The Last American Man, which was nominated for the National Book Award. In 2004, she returned to Ucross and wrote Eat, Pray, Love. “The two books I’ve written at Ucross are the pride of my creative life,” says Gilbert. We are deeply grateful to her for the gift of her appearance at the Houston benefit, and we’re all looking forward to the movie of Eat, Pray, Love, opening nationwide in August.

*Shelby Hodge, Culturemap Houston

PLANS FOR NEW PARK ARE UNDERWAY

Several years ago, Ucross Foundation — with the help of its friends and neighbors — completed the major task of cleaning up the junkyard which was situated at the intersection of Highways 14 and 16 in the heart of Ucross. Wild blue flax now blooms where tires and cars were once piled high. This spring, Ucross has undertaken an exciting new initiative to create a public park near that corner. The park project will also include the construction of a small chapel, benches, walking paths and the planting of a field of flowers, along with many trees.

Trees have a huge beneficial impact on the health of soil, water, wildlife and air. We hope members of the local community will join this effort to enhance the Wyoming environment for generations to come. All donors will be recognized with a plaque located by the trees they have sponsored. We are honored that First Interstate Bank has chosen to be an early supporter of the park project. FIB also plans to involve its employees through the creation of a matching gift opportunity, giving them the chance to participate firsthand in caring for the earth.

For more information on The Park at Ucross, or to make a contribution, contact the Ucross Foundation at (307) 737-2291. A donation form can be found on page four of this newsletter.

Above left to right: Elizabeth Gilbert; Alley Theatre autograph line; field of wild blue flax at Ucross corner.
Left: Elizabeth Gilbert and Raymond Plank; Elizabeth Gilbert
All Alley Theatre event photographs by Anthony Rathbun
BRIGID PASULKA WINS PEN/Hemingway Award

Brigid Pasulka, author of A Long, Long Time Ago and Essentially True (Houghton Mifflin), is the winner of this year’s Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award for First Fiction, presented at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston on March 28th. The judges’ citation for the award said: “In the finest tradition of storytelling, Brigid Pasulka’s novel seamlessly weaves together the stories of two generations of a Polish family… With dexterity and originality, Pasulka paints an illuminating and poignant portrait of a country and her people. It is a dazzling debut, generous of heart and deeply rewarding.”

Pasulka will be a resident at Ucross in August. A graduate of Dartmouth and the Program for Writers at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Pasulka currently teaches at Whitney Young Magnet High School in the Chicago Public Schools. Other PEN/Hemingway Fellows at Ucross in 2010 have included Doug Dorst, whose new collection of stories The Surf Guru will be published by Riverhead in July, and Julia Whitty, whose Deep Blue Home: An Intimate Ecology of our Wild Ocean (Houghton Mifflin) will also be published in July.

ALLEY THEATRE AND UCROSS COLLABORATE

The Alley Theatre in Houston and Ucross have recently established an ongoing, innovative partnership to support playwrights. Each year, the Alley and Ucross will create a residency at Ucross, and a workshop in Houston that involves the playwright and the Alley Theatre artists, to focus on a newly developed play to be presented at the Alley.

Kenneth Lin worked on his play Intelligence-Slave at Ucross in 2009; the play’s world premiere took place in May 2010 at the Alley. This spring, Rajiv Joseph spent time at Ucross writing The Medusa Body, which will premiere at the Alley in May 2011. Founded over sixty years ago, the Alley Theatre has earned national and international recognition, including the Tony Award.

NEW PARTNERSHIP BEGINS WITH DETROIT SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA’S ELAINE LEBENBOM MEMORIAL AWARD

Du Yun, an internationally acclaimed composer, spent time in residence at the Ucross Foundation this spring through a new partnership between Ucross and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra’s Elaine Lebenbom Memorial Award for Female Composers. Du Yun will compose a new work that will receive its world premiere in the DSO’s 2010-2011 classical subscription series. In addition to performances of her work, Du Yun will receive a $10,000 prize from the DSO and a Ucross Foundation residency. The Elaine Lebenbom Award stands alone, internationally, as the only annual symphony-sponsored award competition exclusively for women composers.

Born in Shanghai, China, and now living in New York City, Du Yun is an alumna of the Shanghai Conservatory, Oberlin Conservatory and Harvard University. Since 2006, she has served on the composition faculty at the State University of New York, Purchase. While at Ucross, Du Yun gave a talk at Sheridan College for music students and members of the community. Recent premieres and performances of her compositions have taken place in Switzerland, Finland, Canada, Norway, Argentina, Mexico, Germany, The Netherlands, and China.

2010 Sundance Playwrights Retreat at Ucross

Back row: Sheila Tousey, Heather McDonald, Doug Wright, Winter Miller; Middle Row: Amanda Green, Mame Hunt, Liz Flahive; Front row: Philip Himberg, Janine Nabers; Not pictured: John Bucchino

SPRING 2010 HONORS FOR UCROSS FELLOWS

Ucross Fellows have received the following recognition this spring: Anne Chu, Philipp Meyer, and Monique Truong were awarded John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowships, and New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowships were awarded to Rhona Bitner, Shelley Hirsch and Young Jean Lee. Sarah Ruhl and Rajiv Joseph were finalists for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama; Andrew Lippa and Sarah Ruhl were nominated for Tony Awards; and Colson Whitehead was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award. Stories by Joshua Ferris, Philipp Meyer, ZZ Packer and Karen Russell were selected for The New Yorker’s “Twenty Under Forty” June fiction issue.
A CONVERSATION WITH JUDI KOMAKI (UCROSS FELLOW 1995), A PLAYWRIGHT AND FORMER PROFESSOR AT CUNY’S BARUCH COLLEGE IN NEW YORK CITY, WHO HAS CHOSEN TO INCLUDE THE UCROSS FOUNDATION IN HER ESTATE PLANNING:

At what point in your life, did you recognize that the arts were essential to you?
Growing up in south central LA, I never imagined I’d be a professor or playwright. But there I was, in 1991 in New York City, a professor of psychology. With a contract in hand from the US Army to study leaders in action, I chose to look at stage directors. As I sat through rehearsals, I was struck by the nuances on and off the stage and by what was missing. Nowhere did I see a person like myself — a professional woman of color. I couldn’t help but ask: Where are the successful minorities? Why are the women relegated to the sidelines, sighing or squealing? So . . . I took a dramatic writing course and wrote a play. Nine months later, it was produced Off-Off-Broadway. A lot like giving birth.

Was the play about someone like you?
Definitely the professional part. The couple struggles over whether to leave New York for California when the woman — yep, the woman — received a job offer she couldn’t refuse. But then I read a play about the Vietnam War Memorial. I was jolted to learn that some Vietnam vets were incensed about Maya Lin being the designer. As one vet explained: "It was...the fact that she’s Chinese, she looked like the ones they died fighting." Until that moment, I had never once thought of myself that way. Even as a grad student sitting through hours of Vietnam War footage. Incredible perhaps, but true. This was the kernel for my next play.

What do you remember about your time at Ucross?
Really?! Would you believe the purple sheets, the plump emerald pillows in my room? Or along the creek, the palest plum blossoms?

Really . . .
Well, I had come to work on a play. A love story. Or so I naively thought. Between an Asian-American woman and a Vietnam vet like Tim O’Brien. My initial pull was the man’s story. The man blames himself for his best buddy in Vietnam being “blown into a hedge of bamboo... coming down... in pieces.” What he does not, and indeed cannot, admit is that in the present in making love with the woman, he loses his inhibitions and fears and confines her with his victims in Vietnam, where he was ordered to kill women that looked like her. At first, only the audience knows. But eventually, the woman glimpses the dark, sub-rational atavistic feelings of a man of war. And then she struggles. How much does she really want to know, when she can’t do a damn thing about the color of her skin? When knowing means the end of a relationship with the man she loves.

Night after night, I’d sit in my room at Ucross. Why can’t the woman have what she wants? Just because of the slant of her eyes? Sometimes, all I could do was to stare out into the starry night.

Did you finish the play?
Eventually, thanks to a poet. Over lunch, we’d talk. Piecemeal, I’d let out my angst. He instantly knew. He let me be mad. He let me be sad. And sometimes he’d talk about how utterly painful it was for him too. As a black man. When he received racial slurs, his mother sat him down and told him: “It’s not you. It’s their problem.” At first, I didn’t get it. But eventually I found it comforting. It was tough to know that I couldn’t do anything about how others viewed me, but I didn’t have to accept their image of me. I was just fine. By the end of the month, I had finished a first draft.

Did your time at Ucross have a lasting impact?
Texaco agreed to revamp their faulty evaluation and promotion practices. At the same time, I realized that as a professor of psychology specializing in work settings, I possessed eminently useful skills. And I dove headlong into promoting civil rights.

Why did you decide to include Ucross in your estate planning?
So that other artists will have the same opportunity I did: to experience the largesse of Raymond Plank. To be blessed with the gift of time and space, to learn about themselves, meet other kindred souls, and have the courage to continue.

What is your wish for this gift?
That it be used to support artists who herald activists promoting social justice. Portraying activists such as Thurgood Marshall, Harvey Milk, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali I’m anticipating will encourage more people to step forward. Race and gender are such deep demons for us. We need to see that we can overcome our blind spots. Artists can help. By highlighting movers and shakers, they can craft stories to show us how laws got passed, how organizations changed, and indeed inspired hope.

What do you want your legacy to be?
I’m reminded of Nelson Mandela who issued a gentle warning, borrowing lines from one of Thabo Mbeki’s favorite poets, W.B. Yeats: “I have spread my dreams under your feet. Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.”

Judi Komaki’s play If Truth Be Known was produced Off-Off Broadway in 2006. Her article, “Daring to Dream: Promoting Social and Economic Justice at Work,” was published in Applied Psychology: An International Review in 2007. Judi continues to write plays and is now working pro bono on a project in the military promoting social justice.
Three exhibitions will take place at the Ucross Foundation Art Gallery in 2010, all presenting work by Ucross Fellows. The exhibitions have been supported in part by the Wyoming Arts Council.

*Elemental Nature: David Bungay and Pamela Kendall Schiffer,* will open at the Ucross Foundation Art Gallery on Friday, June 25. A reception for the artists will take place on Saturday, July 3, from 5:00-8:00 p.m. The exhibition will be on view through September 3.

On Saturday, September 11, a new exhibition featuring the work of *Martyl* will open, with a reception that day from 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.

Photographs by *Sara Shoemaker Lind,* *A Mermaid’s View,* were on view from February 27 – June 11. Lind gave a talk at Sheridan College on February 25.

Watch for a forthcoming retrospective of art by Ucross fellows from 1983-2010, to open at the Nicolaysen Art Museum in Casper on October 1, 2010. The exhibition is being curated by Lisa Hatchadoorian of the NIC. The show will travel to the Ucross Foundation Art Gallery in January 2011, to coincide with the beginning of the Foundation’s 30th anniversary year.

“At dawn I flew to my studio on my bike as the light opened up to me on the hills. At night the stars guided me home.”

Olive Ayhens

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**UCROSS FOUNDATION ART GALLERY 2010 Schedule**

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Michael Agresta, Austin, TX
Patricia Albers, Mountain View, CA
Leslee Becker, Fort Collins, CO
Meagan Ciesla, Columbia, MO
Doug Dorst, Austin, TX
Caitlin Doyle, East Hampton, NY
Brian Groh, Lawrenceburg, IN
Sally Keith, Washington, DC
Jesse Lichtenstein, Portland, OR
Leslie Elsasser, Brooklyn, NY
Bora Reed, Berkeley, CA
Sara Rimer, Brookline, MA
Brooke Shaffner, Brooklyn, NY
Julia Whitty, Sebastopol, CA

VISUAL ARTS
Olive Ayhens, Brooklyn, NY
Claire Burbridge, London, UK
Anne Chu, Jackson Heights, NY
Inez deDuegd-McComas, W. Palm Beach, FL

FILM, MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE
Eve Beglarian, New York, NY
John Buccino, New York, NY*
Natalie Draper, Bethesda, MD
Du Yun, New York, NY
Liz Flahive, New York, NY*
Amanda Green, New York, NY*
Lynn Gumer, Hightstown, NJ
Philip Himberg, New York, NY*
Rajiv Joseph, Brooklyn, NY
Daniel Kellogg, Erie, CO
Kristopher Maloy, Edmond, OR
Heather McDonald, Catonsville, MD*
Sean McGowan, Denver, CO
Winter Miller, Greenfield, MA*
Janine Nabers, New York, NY*
Koji Nakano, Boston, MA
Stacey Steers, Boulder, CO
Sheila Tousey, Bowler, WI*
Doug Wright, New York, NY*

* Sundance Participant

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The mission of the Ucross Foundation is to foster fresh and innovative thinking in the visual arts, literature and music by providing residencies, work space, and uninterrupted time to individual artists, writers and composers. The Foundation looks for Residents whose work reflects a depth of creative exploration and the potential for significant future accomplishments. Through its Residency Program, Art Gallery and associated activities, Ucross actively seeks to support an appreciation for vibrant human creativity and aims to cast a reflection into the future from the cultural mirror of our lives and times. The Ucross Foundation is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization and all contributions are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.
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