

UC SANTA BARBARA

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Bill Schlotter

Busy UC Santa Barbara Playwright Honored with Alpert Award in the Arts

Naomi Iizuka, professor of dramatic arts and director of the Playwriting Program at the University of California, Santa Barbara, has been named one of five winners of the prestigious 2005 Alpert Award in the Arts.

Iizuka, who came to UCSB in 2002, joined filmmaker Jem Cohen, composer David Dunn, visual artist Harrell Fletcher, and choreographer Donna Uchizono at ceremonies in New York City May 14 and 15 to receive her prize.

Established in 1994, the Alpert Award in the Arts provides five \$50,000 awards each year, one each in the areas of Dance, Film/Video, Music, Theater, and Visual Arts. The Alpert Award recognizes artists who have demonstrated exceptional talent and commitment to their craft.

In addition, it recognizes those artists particularly responsive to the complex, challenging, and fertile role of the artist in society.

According to Irene Borger, program director, "What Jem, David, Harrell, Naomi, and Donna share is imaginative independence, fierce commitment, and the gift for asking deep questions."

In addition to the cash award, each honoree will be in residence at the California Institute for the Arts (CalArts) in Valencia.

The Alpert Award is the latest in a list of awards for Iizuka, who said she is both pleased and honored to have been selected.

"I am very excited," she said. "And I'm really honored to be part of such a remarkable group of artists."

Iizuka is one of American theater's rising talents.

Among her many previous honors and awards: a Whiting Writers' Award, a Joyce Foundation Award, a Rockefeller Foundation MAP grant, an NEA/TCG Artist-in-Residence grant, and Princeton University's Hodder Fellowship. Her plays, widely produced across the country, include "36 Views"---just produced at the Huntington Theatre Company in Boston---"At the Vanishing Point,"

"Polaroid Stories," "Language of Angels," "Tattoo Girl," and others.

Speaking to AsianWeek magazine in 2003, prominent theater director Jon Jory, founder of the Humana Festival of New American Plays in Louisville, Kentucky, said of Iizuka:

"I have nothing but vast, unending praise for Naomi.

She is one of the most important playwrights now writing."

Iizuka loves and lives her craft. Since departing Yale Law School to become a writer---earning an M.F.A. in playwriting at UC San Diego in 1992---she has become one of the most prolific, most produced, and most recognized playwrights of her generation.

Now 40, Iizuka, has no plans to leave the fast track.

With classes on campus, her second UCSB Summer Theatre Lab on the horizon, a play that will be in production in 2006 and three more under commission from the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, and the California Shakespeare Theatre, her life is a juggling act performed in three time zones.

But it is a lifestyle that suits her, Iizuka says.

"I am very busy," she said. "But it's good. It's great."

Early in the morning, late at night, on airplanes, at home or in hotel rooms, she still finds time each day to write. And as the Alpert Award shows, what she writes keeps turning heads.

As a teacher, Iizuka finds great satisfaction in helping her students express themselves.

"I think in our culture it is very important to encourage students who have a voice and have a desire to write," Iizuka said. "That's one of the reasons why I teach.

"I think the world would be much more humane and interesting place if everyone who wanted to write sat down and wrote what they had inside of them."

The Alpert Foundation - created by popular musician, composer, producer Herb Alpert - has a similar view of the value of art and artists.

"Art propels society," said Foundation President Rona Sebastian. "And a society that supports and nurtures the arts assures the conditions of its own flourishing. We are pleased to play a part in that process, for we believe that artists are vital."

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.