ACCLAIMED ETHIOPIAN-AMERICAN AUTHOR TO ADDRESS UNIVERSITY AND D.C. COMMUNITY

Washington, DC – The University of the District of Columbia, College of Arts and Sciences, is pleased to present the 2014 “Big Read Lecture Series” featuring acclaimed author and human rights activist, Maaza Mengiste. The Ethiopian-American writer will discuss her debut novel, Beneath the Lion’s Gaze, and read passages from the award-winning book beginning at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, May 7, 2014, in the Theater of the Arts on the University’s Van Ness Campus. Admission is free and will be followed by a public reception and book signing for those in attendance. Seating is on a first-come, first-served basis. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Sponsorship packages are also available for purchase, which includes VIP seating and a pre-event reception with Maaza Mengiste.

Mengiste was born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and lived in Nigeria and Kenya before settling in the United States. She is a Fulbright Scholar and a World Literature Today’s 2013 Puterbaugh Fellow, who holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in creative writing from New York University, and is currently Visiting Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Queens College of the City University of New York and a Lecturer of Creative Writing in the Lewis Center for the Arts at Princeton University.

The insightful author writes on topics dealing with migration, the Ethiopian revolution, and the plight of sub-Saharan immigrants arriving in Europe. Set in 1974, Beneath the Lion’s Gaze is a fictional account of a family’s struggle for freedom on the eve of revolution. The novel was named one of the “10 best contemporary African books” by The Guardian and was a finalist for both an Indies Choice Book-of-the-Year Award and a prestigious NAACP Image Award.

In addition to her literary contributions, Mengiste has an interest in ways that the arts can promote human rights. She serves on the advisory board of Warscapes, an independent online magazine that provides a lens into current conflicts across the world, and she has recently produced a documentary project, GIRL RISING, that focuses on global education for young women and that features the voices of several notable actors, including: Meryl Streep, Anne Hathaway, Alicia Keys, and Cate Blanchett.

“We are absolutely thrilled to present such an important and creative literary voice,” says April Massey, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. “Not only does Mengiste’s insight benefit our students across a wide spectrum of academic disciplines, but her messages also have broad appeal among the District’s diverse political, social, and cultural communities.”

Now in its third year, Massey describes Mengiste’s presentation at the “Big Read Lecture Series” as part of a larger effort to create opportunities for extracurricular student engagement around issues tied to academic outcomes. She says through lectures, films, and conversations, the College of Arts and Sciences’ “Big Series” provides a unique opportunity for students to apply theoretical classroom knowledge to other areas of more practical relevance.
“The ‘Big Series’ is envisioned as a way to continue the liberal arts tradition and enhance the cultural fabric of the University and surrounding community,” she says. “By presenting notable speakers and performances from the arts and humanities, we not only offer learning opportunities for our students, but also get the chance to showcase our programs and facilities and to build relationships with the general public.”

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