

A close-up portrait of Jesmyn Ward, a Black woman with curly hair, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. She is wearing a dark turtleneck sweater over a patterned garment.

MOSS
ARTS
CENTER

Wednesday, November 10, 2021, 7:30 PM

AN EVENING WITH JESMYN WARD

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AN EVENING WITH JESMYN WARD

This performance is supported in part by a gift from
Ms. Ann Goette.

Presented in partnership with the
Department of English Visiting Writer Series

Faculty Essay

Part of the series of writings by Virginia Tech faculty, staff, and community members that contextualize Moss Arts Center visiting artist performances

I come from a line of extraordinary people—a mother who waited tables while dreaming of being the first person in our family to go to college, a grandmother who raised an entire community of little ones in poverty and hope, and a great-grandmother who wore only the dresses she sewed. My father worked long hours in the textile mills until chemicals and exploited labor disabled his body. The weariness of racism, past-due bills, and being sick and tired never showed on their stern, proud faces. Sometimes I heard it at night when the whole nest was quiet except for a single sniffle quickly followed by three more. The courage, strength, and resilience of Black people have been whispered about behind closed doors, caricatured in pop culture media, and sometimes belted out in a soulful tune. Black people have been at the forefront of major social and political movements all over the world. Our warrior foremothers like Queen Nzinga Mbande and Yaa Asantewaa fearlessly defended their homelands against European colonial armies. The skillful tactics of Harriet Tubman led hundreds of our people to freedom. In 1963 Fannie Lou Hamer was jailed and beaten for organizing sit-ins and encouraging people to vote. Winnie Mandela lost everything in the fight against apartheid—her land, her home, her husband, her freedom, her health, her life. The price tag for asserting our humanity has certainly been high but never beyond our means. Freedom was not handed to us by benevolent people or institutions. It was born of struggle and secured with the blood, sweat, and tears of our mothers and grandmothers, our fathers and our brothers. The life force in us won't let us quit.

Much like the characters in Jesmyn Ward's novels, we are complex people molded from myriad experiences. We have suffered and sacrificed, but we have also triumphed and thrived. We have made life better for everyone around us through our work and care, our smiles, and our sweet potato pies. We fight hard, but we love harder. Sometimes we cry.

We are fortunate to have such incredibly talented authors and artists carrying forward the tradition of using art and thought to interrogate and transform lives. Ward's short stories examine the nooks and crannies of our existence, simultaneously exposing painful sores and deep wounds while inviting us to celebrate all of life's victories, great and small. Particularly interesting is how she centers the experiences of our youth. Our children are playing hopscotch on school-to prison pipelines. They witness their friends and peers' deaths by the gun-wielding hands of police for even the mildest infractions, criminalized and harassed while bird watching in a public park. The vibrant confidence radiating from youth-led movements is inspiring and reminds me of how much they contribute to our progress. Kwame

Ture was 19 years old when he helped organize Baltimore and Mississippi Freedom rides. Fred Hampton was 18 when he became an internationally recognized leader in the Black Panther Party and just 21 years old when he was assassinated by Chicago police in concert with the FBI.

The ebb and flow of self-determination, liberation, and transcendence is like a kaleidoscope reflecting creativity, passion, and lots of hope-filled Sunday mornings. Church hats swaying in unison echo voices from the streets demanding respect, dignity, and room to breathe. We are constantly struggling for the right to define ourselves and our destinies in whatever way we choose. Our thoughts and ideas matter. Our imaginations and intellect matter. Our dreams and aspirations matter. Black Lives Matter. Black lives matter when we sit in classrooms that only acknowledge us in February. Black lives matter when we are sentenced to 20 years in prison for being addicts. Black lives matter when we are in churches that don't recognize the ways in which western religions have been complicit in colonizing and controlling our souls. Black lives matter when we die disproportionately during a pandemic. Black lives matter when we can't afford to eat, can't find a place to live and sleep, or can't drive our cars on Martin Luther King Jr. Highway without wondering if we'll make it home to our families. Black lives matter when we're at our best, and they matter when we're at our worst.

I love and honor our leadership, our grit, and our commitment to better futures. I celebrate our compassion, our ingenuity, and our wisdom. We have so much work to do, but there is no doubt that we can. Every day is a chance to begin again. Let the circle be unbroken.

Brandy S. Faulkner, the Gloria D. Smith Professor of Black Studies at Virginia Tech, is also a collegiate assistant professor in the Department of Political Science. A member of the Virginia Tech community since 2012, Faulkner's scholarship has focused on constitutional and administrative law, race and public policy, and critical organization theory. Faulkner is an award-winning teacher, inspiring students to exceed their own expectations for learning, intellectual development, and personal growth. She teaches courses in public administration, constitutional law, administrative law, research methods, and the politics of race, ethnicity, and gender.

Biography

JESMYN WARD

Hailed as “the new Toni Morrison” by the American Booksellers Association, MacArthur “Genius” and two-time National Book Award winner Jesmyn Ward is the author of fiction, nonfiction, and memoir that the *New York Times Book Review* called “raw, beautiful and dangerous.” In 2017 she became the first woman and first person of color to win the National Book Award for Fiction twice—joining the ranks of William Faulkner, Saul Bellow, John Cheever, Philip Roth, and John Updike. Ward’s novels, primarily set on Mississippi’s Gulf Coast, are deeply informed by the trauma of Hurricane Katrina. *Salvage the Bones*, winner of the 2011 National Book Award, is a troubling but ultimately empowering tale of familial bonds set amid the chaos of the hurricane. Her memoir, *Men We Reaped*, deals with the loss of five young men in her life—to drugs, accidents, suicide, and the bad luck that follows people who live in poverty. Ward edited the critically acclaimed anthology *The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks About Race*, a *New York Times* bestseller. Her newest novel, the critically acclaimed *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, won the 2017 National Book Award. Named “a searing, urgent read for anyone who thinks the shadows of slavery and Jim Crow have passed” (Celeste Ng), *Sing* was named one of the best books of 2017 by the *New York Times*, *Time*, *The Washington Post*, and *Publisher’s Weekly*. The novel was also nominated for the PEN/Faulkner Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the Aspen Words Literary Prize. Ward’s latest is *Navigate Your Stars*, an adaptation of her 2018 Tulane University commencement speech that champions the value of hard work and the importance of respect for oneself and others. A professor of creative writing at Tulane University and contributing editor to *Vanity Fair*, Ward received the 2016 Strauss Living Award and a 2017 MacArthur Genius Grant, and was named one of *Time*’s 100 most influential people of 2018.

This is Ward’s first appearance at the Moss Arts Center.

Tell Us What You Think!

We'd love your feedback on this performance. If you complete the short survey, you can enter for a chance to win two tickets to Angélique Kidjo on Thursday, January 20, 2022.



bit.ly/ward-feedback

Engagement Events

Wednesday, November 10, 2021

Q&A WITH JESMYN WARD

Jesmyn Ward met privately with students in the Ujima living-learning program, Department of English, and Black Cultural Center for an informal discussion about her work.

Special thanks to Kimberly Clark-Shaw, Dalayna Gardner, Erika Meitner, Khadijah Queen, and Matthew Vollmer

Go Deeper

In a 2018 interview with *The Guardian*, Jesmyn Ward explained why she thinks so many contemporary writers are focusing on the era of slavery in United States history: "Those in power in the U.S. are 'invested in sanitizing and erasing the past.'" How do Ward's writings unearth buried histories and speak back to such "sanitizing" depictions of the past?

In the Galleries

Through Saturday, November 20, 2021

SHEILA PREE BRIGHT: A BEAUTIFUL STRUGGLE

Ruth C. Horton Gallery

"We are a resilient people... We are black and beautiful. This is the beautiful struggle." —Sheila Pree Bright

An exhibition of large-scale photographs by Atlanta-based photographer Sheila Pree Bright that portray in poignant images the Black Lives Matter gatherings of recent years in protest of police violence and sociopolitical inequities, while also calling into question preconceived stereotypes of African Americans and their communities. Curated by Margo Ann Crutchfield.

LARRY FINK: GATHERING: PEARLS AND POLYESTER

Miles C. Horton Jr. Gallery and Sherwood Payne Quillen '71 Reception
Gallery

A selection of photographic prints by Larry Fink spotlight the role of clothing and adornment in celebratory gatherings in two distinct American cultures during the 1970s and '80s: the glamorous high society of New York City and the spirited country life of Martins Creek, Pennsylvania. The exhibition also features garments on loan from the Oris Glisson Historic Textile and Costume Collection evidencing the unique materiality of this era. Curated by graduate assistant Ali Palin.

GALLERY HOURS

Wednesday-Friday, 10 AM-5 PM

Saturday, 10 AM-4 PM

To arrange a group tour or class visit, please contact Meggin Hicklin, exhibitions program manager, at megh79@vt.edu.

Land Acknowledgement

Virginia Tech acknowledges that we live and work on the Tutelo/Monacan People's homeland and we recognize their continued relationships with their lands and waterways. We further acknowledge that legislation and practices like the Morrill Act (1862) enabled the commonwealth of Virginia to finance and found Virginia Tech through the forced removal of Native Nations from their lands, both locally and in western territories.

We understand that honoring Native Peoples without explicit material commitments falls short of our institutional responsibilities. Through sustained, transparent, and meaningful engagement with the Tutelo/Monacan Peoples and other Native Nations, we commit to changing the trajectory of Virginia Tech's history by increasing Indigenous student, staff, and faculty recruitment and retention, diversifying course offerings, and meeting the growing needs of all Virginia tribes and supporting their sovereignty.

We must also recognize that enslaved Black people generated revenue and resources used to establish Virginia Tech and were prohibited from attending until 1953. Through InclusiveVT, the institutional and individual commitment to *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve) in the spirit of community, diversity, and excellence, we commit to advancing a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive community.

Health and Wellness

The Moss Arts Center adheres to the guidelines of the Virginia Department of Health and Virginia Tech in its operations, including protocols for face coverings and cleaning and sanitation. Our status may change according to changes in university operating procedures. Find the most up to date information at artscenter.vt.edu/visit.

We ask patrons to do their part in keeping our community healthy. If you feel unwell, please stay home.

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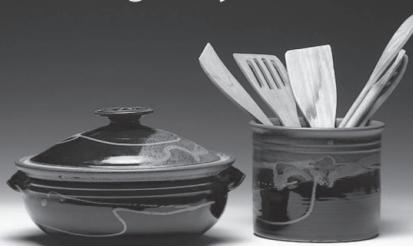
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Nov. 12- Nov. 14, 2021

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Craft & Book Fair Hours

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Sat, Nov 13 from 10am-6pm

Sun, Nov 14 from 1pm-5pm



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Sept 15- Nov 15

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Emily Stuart & the Craft Fair

• In 1970 Emily Stuart became the director of YMCA at VT and began the International Programs and the annual Crafts Fair.

• Stuart founded YMCA programs that continue today while leading the campus Y for 17 years and helped start Christiansburg-based Community Housing Partners.

• 2021 marks our 52nd annual Craft Fair

