



Spring 4-4-2024

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Recommended Citation

Francis, Chris, "Celebrated Poet John Keene to Join Joanne Diaz for Poetry Conversation" (2024). *News and Events*. 6486.

<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/6486>

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Celebrated Poet John Keene to Join Joanne Diaz for Poetry Conversation

BY CHRIS FRANCIS | APRIL 04, 2024

NEWS



BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — The Illinois Wesleyan University English Department is teaming up with Illinois State University to bring nationally celebrated poets to Bloomington-Normal and the IWU campus on Wednesday, April 10.

IWU will host a conversation with MacArthur Genius Grant and National Book Award recipient [John Keene](#) alongside Isaac Funk Endowed Professor of English [Joanne Diaz](#) in The Ames Library's Beckman Auditorium at 3 p.m. Diaz will lead the conversation with Keene, encouraging students to participate with their own questions.

This marks the return of the Lucia Getsi Poetry Reading, an event hosted by ISU's [Spoon River Poetry Review \(SRPR\)](#). Keene will join award-winning poet Marissa Davis for a reading at 7 p.m. at The Normal Theatre, followed by a book signing.

Diaz and Robert Harrington Endowed Professor of English and Chair of English Michael Theune helped facilitate the collaboration between the two universities, specifically with Steve Halle, director of publications for ISU's department of English and editor-in-chief of SRPR.

"The groundwork for this kind of collaboration was laid a long time ago," said Theune, who was the review essay editor for SRPR for a decade while Diaz was the poetry editor. "SRPR wanted to have a reading that featured a headliner poet read along with the recipient of the 2023 SRPR Editor's Prize, Marissa Davis... IWU was happy to be asked to partner with them" to provide a venue for John Keene.

"Both poets are incredible and multi-talented literary artists and translators," Halle said. "John Keene is one of the most lauded poets and fiction writers in the U.S. in recent memory." He is currently an associate professor of English, African American studies, and African studies at Rutgers University–Newark.

"Keene is one of today's great U.S. poets," Theune agreed. "Keene is a Black, gay poet who writes frankly and lovingly about the facts and circumstances of his identity and history... Poetry is a way that Keene can recover the past. With poetry, he conveys it and transforms it into living rhythms of lyric. Keene uses poetry to fold time in such a way that he can make the past palpable in the present... He is truly and deeply himself, but he also reaches out."

Keene was also previously a professor at Brown University and Northwestern University, where he was director of the undergraduate creative writing program.

"Collaborating on big events like this helps to make poetry more prominent in Bloomington-Normal and in our respective poetry communities at ISU and IWU, which is part of SRPR's mission—to build community through poetry," said Halle. "I think the community stands to learn a great deal by engaging with contemporary poetry that is truly exceptional and culture-shaping."



Award-winning poet John Keene, left, and Isaac Funk Endowed Professor of English Joanne Diaz, right, will conduct a conversation about the art of poetry at 3 p.m. on Wednesday, April 10, in The Ames Library's Beckman Auditorium.