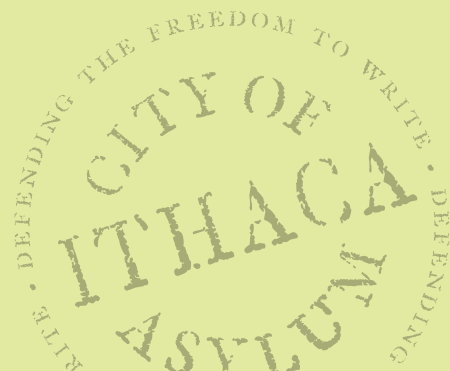


Ithaca City of Asylum

CELEBRATING
TEN YEARS
OF GIVING VOICE
TO FREEDOM

2001-2011





OUR MISSION

Founded in 2001, Ithaca City of Asylum (ICOA) is part of a worldwide network that supports writers whose works are suppressed, whose lives are threatened, whose cultures are vanishing, or whose languages are endangered.

In the face of political repression, our writers have spoken up for freedom of expression in their own countries and continue to do so here. Their two-year ICOA residency provides a haven in which they can live and work peacefully—writing, teaching, and publishing within a supportive and creative community.

In a mutually enriching relationship, ICOA serves as a bridge between our writers-in-residence and the local community, including our university and college partners.

Our work this past decade has been made possible by the generosity of many individuals and institutions—above all Cornell University. These valuable commitments allow us to plan for our next writer in need of asylum and the time, support, and freedom to write.

BARBARA ADAMS *Chair, ICOA;
Associate Professor, Writing, Ithaca College*

ICOA is a project of the Center for Transformative Action, a network of nonprofit community-based social justice projects.



YI PING
2001–2003



REZA DANESHVAR
2004–2006



SARAH MKHONZA
2006–2008



IRAKLI KAKABADZE
2008–2011



Salman Rushdie, whose persecution led to the founding of the international City of Asylum movement, visited Ithaca in 2003. He met with Yi Ping and ICOA board members to share knowledge and provide inspiration for our work.

“ Since Salman Rushdie and writer colleagues started the city of asylum movement in the mid-nineties, there are an increasing number of cities inviting persecuted writers to stay and write in a safe and stimulating environment. Ithaca City of Asylum was among the first U.S. cities taking up the idea. We are deeply impressed with how Ithaca has been running the project, and we are hoping to continue and even extend our cooperation to strengthen our global efforts for freedom of expression in the future. ”

HELGE LUND *Executive Director,
International Cities of Refuge Network*

“ ICOA has expanded Ithaca’s reach both inward and outward. It has added another dimension to the relations between the city and its colleges. It has brought Ithaca further into the world in the process of allowing the world to enter. Through its practice of thoughtful hospitality and attention to endangered speech, it has shown how words and worlds inflect each other in multiple and sometimes hopeful ways. ”

ANNE E. BERGER *Co-founder of ICOA;
Professor, Paris 8 University;
former Professor, Cornell University*

“ I congratulate Ithaca City of Asylum on a decade of bringing extraordinarily talented writers-in-exile to our community. ICOA resident writers have enriched the intellectual life of the Cornell campus, and we have been pleased to support ICOA’s efforts through the Center for Transformative Action and by providing visiting appointments and other assistance to exiled writers and their families. I have no doubt that local support of ICOA and its writers-in-exile over the past ten years has helped make our community a more socially aware and culturally vibrant place, and I extend best wishes to ICOA for continued success. ”

DAVID J. SKORTON *President, Cornell University*

“ The people who founded the Cities of Asylum were counting on informed hearts that had not deserted the barricades of love. In the war between truth and lies, they are on the side of truth. ”

REZA DANESHVAR
ICOA writer-in-residence, 2004–2006

“ The free expression of ideas is not only a value cherished in all democratic societies, it is also the lifeblood of Ithaca. A college town such as ours would not exist were it not for the protection given to thought and written expression. How appropriate, then, that ICOA provides Ithacans a means of giving back, by easing the burden on writers who do not enjoy the protections that make our community possible. ”

THOMAS R. ROCHON *President, Ithaca College*

“ In countless ways, Wells College’s partnership with ICOA enriches our intellectual community and deepens our global understanding. ICOA strengthens our local ties as well as our international ones. We are proud to help ensure a safe haven for those who have risked their lives to express their artistic and political truth, and look forward to the next decade of partnership with ICOA. ”

LISA MARSH RYERSON *President, Wells College*



YI PING

ICOA Writer-in-Residence, 2001–2003

Chinese poet Yi Ping was sent to the countryside as a teenager during the Cultural Revolution and has spent his entire adulthood active in Chinese democracy movements.

For participating in the Tiananmen Square uprising, he was permanently banned from teaching and forbidden to publish his work.

He fled to Poland in 1991 and to the U.S. in 1997, where he received American asylum but struggled to find a way to support his family.

Yi Ping spent his residency in Ithaca writing *Auschwitz*, a book-length poem about his experiences in the cultural revolution and as an exile in Poland. He also wrote many short poems and essays, and taught Chinese language and literature courses at Cornell University. He has now settled in Ithaca and is an editor at the influential website *Human Rights in China*.

Along with local poet Jerry Mirksin, Yi Ping mentored undergraduates in the writing department at Ithaca College in translating *The Speech of Pebbles*, a book of his poems. After his residency ended, he and his wife Lin Zhou (who has a position in the office of Alumni Affairs and Development at Cornell University) served a term on the board of ICOA, wishing to help others as they had been helped.



From Tiananmen to Newfield: Yi Ping and his wife Lin Zhou have settled in Tompkins County, where they now own a home in the Town of Newfield. They appreciate enormously the local climate, culture, and community.



“The translation project was especially meaningful to my students and me because that book represented the first publication of Yi Ping’s work in English. It was a very gratifying and edifying experience for my student writers. I think they felt like they were part of a larger world and that poetry was alive and well. They came to understand poetry as one important way in which we make progress as humans in the existential, social, and political sense.”

JERRY MIRSKIN

Associate Professor, Writing, Ithaca College

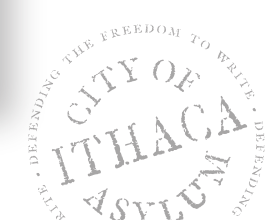
“Yi Ping made a distinctive contribution to our advanced Chinese-language students’ appreciation of contemporary Chinese culture.”

EDWARD GUNN

Professor, Asian Studies, Cornell University

On a cliff, birds flutter
in the language of freedom.
The path of speech
greet the soil, unfrozen,
flows into a collision
of seelight and blue.

from “Spring” by Yi Ping



REZA DANESHVAR

ICOA Writer-in-Residence, 2004–2006

Under the Shah and after the Iranian Revolution, playwright and novelist Reza Daneshvar was censored, arrested, imprisoned, and tortured.

Upon his release in 1982, his life threatened, he fled to Pakistan and then to Paris, France, where he eked out a living driving a taxi.

While in Ithaca, Daneshvar collaborated with local translator Catherine Porter and writer Deborah Tall to create English versions of his surreal short stories “Mahboobeh and Ahl” and “Don’t Go to the Reception with Friends of the Groom!” He also wrote and premiered, with the help of Cornell University director Bruce Levitt, two new plays: *Sandwich Deluxe* and *Alfred*. He taught theater courses at Cornell and helped organize “Translations of Exile: Iranian Literature and Arts in the West,” an academic conference of leading Iranian dissident writers and artists. After his residency, Daneshvar returned to France, where he has asylum and broadcasts on Farsi radio.

“Reza Daneshvar’s presence in our department and at Cornell significantly boosted interest in Persian language and literature. He was a delightful colleague and an inspired teacher and we are forever grateful to him for his efforts.”

ROSS BRANN *M. R. Konvitz Professor of Judeo-Islamic Studies,
Near Eastern Studies, Cornell University*

“Working with Reza Daneshvar was a thrilling experience. His writing was rich and clever and the force of his personality was inestimable. ICOA has had a profound impact on the community as well as the students and faculty at Cornell University whose lives have been enriched by the teaching and mentoring done by the writers in residence. Their personal stories serve as models of integrity for younger minds.”

BRUCE A. LEVITT *Professor, Theatre, Film, and Dance, Cornell University*



Formerly a theatre administrator in one of Iran’s main provinces, Daneshvar made many close friends in the Ithaca writing and theatre communities, including Jeanne Mackin and Bruce Levitt (above) and Patrick Rameau (left).



“Along with the invitation, Yolanda had sent a complicated map showing a winding path that crossed several highways and went through various townships before plunging into the woods. Every change in direction was carefully indicated by little arrows, and, as usual, Yolanda had included some humorous touches: ‘Watch out for the fork! Alas, if only one could live without having to choose!’”

From “Don’t Go to the Reception with Friends of the Groom!” by Reza Daneshvar

SARAH MKHONZA

ICOA Writer-in-Residence, 2006–2008

Sarah Mkhonza, an outspoken voice for women's rights under the monarchical regime of Swaziland, wrote newspaper columns for local papers that told of the daily struggles of Swazi women and children evicted from their land.

As her popularity as a critic of the government's repressive policies grew, she was ordered to stop writing. Her refusal resulted in threats and assaults.

And at the University of Swaziland, where she was professor of linguistics and English, her office was vandalized and her computer destroyed.

She spent her residency in Ithaca writing at a furious pace, publishing *Two Stories*, *Woman in a Tree*, and *Weeding the Flowerbeds*; she also completed the first drafts of a novel and a memoir. She taught Zulu and introductory writing courses in Cornell's Africana Studies and Research Center during her residency and continues in that role today. She also helped organize "Going Global, Going Vernacular," a conference on imperiled languages that attracted scholars from all over the world. ICOA arranged for legal aid and provided financial and personal support for her quest for a green card, which she received during her residency.

“ICOA's gift is how it puts beliefs into action and extends the ages-old notion of hospitality to a new, transnational model. Rather than wait on the sidelines, ICOA reaches out into the world to protect individuals threatened for the most essential human acts—sharing their thoughts, ideas, and dreams. For this, ICOA is a beacon of decency and model for communities everywhere to emulate.”

ROBERT QUINN *Executive Director, Scholars at Risk Network*

“Ten years ago when, as director of our creative writing program, I sat in on a meeting establishing Cornell University's ties to ICOA, I thought: What a wonderful opportunity for our writing students to meet and learn from writers who have risked their lives to speak their minds and practice their art. Writers trained and somewhat insulated in a university need to be exposed to writers who have lacked institutional insulation of any sort. There's craft, which university programs can teach, and then there's that existential current running through a work of art, which university programs can't teach but which persecuted writers give testimony to in the flesh. I still feel that way.”

LAMAR HERRIN *Novelist and Professor Emeritus, Cornell University*



Sarah Mkhonza has especially enjoyed welcoming other writers to Ithaca, including Russell Banks (above) and former Pittsburgh City of Asylum writer Horacio Castellanos Moya (below).



I hold the thing
that makes words loud.

from “Hear Me!”
by Sarah Mkhonza



IRAKLI KAKABADZE

ICOA Writer-in-Residence, 2008–2011

In January 2007, anonymous death threats forced the Georgian writer Irakli Kakabadze and his wife, the human rights lawyer Anna Dolidze, to flee their native country.

The threats were provoked by his newspaper editorial calling on the government to apologize for persecuting the people of western Georgia during the 1992–94 conflict in that region.

While in Ithaca, Kakabadze expanded and published his bilingual manuscript of poems, *Land of Flowers*, and worked with Cornell University director Beth Milles to produce an excerpt of his play *Candidate Jokola*. He taught in the Peace Studies Program at Cornell and also at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. He and his family plan to stay in Ithaca until Dolidze completes her J.S.D. at Cornell Law School. Kakabadze, who continues to teach Peace Studies, is currently a resident fellow at Cornell's Telluride House.

“Irakli’s course on peace-making and the creative arts, his project on peace zones in the Caucasus, and his many performances of poetry and music have enriched our lives. Anna has inspired us with her commitment to human rights, her activism, and her legal scholarship. We feel that we have received back many fold what ICOA has given to them.”

MATTHEW A. EVANGELISTA *President White Professor of History and Political Science and Chair, Government, Cornell University*

“Working with my acting students on Irakli’s play *Candidate Jokola* was exhilarating. We can always reach, as educators and artists, for work that is simultaneously beautiful, relevant, interesting, and intellectually engaging, but rarely do we achieve it. Our experience with Irakli transcended these things and gave us a new insight and approach to the possibilities of art and expression.”

BETH F. MILLES *Associate Professor, Film, Theatre, and Dance, Cornell University*



Look at my tears.
They mean some hope and
not just fear.
My eyes can see the land
of sorrow
but they can feel the rose
tomorrow.
*From “Tears and Joy”
by Irakli Kakabadze*



Kakabadze’s family has benefited greatly from living in Ithaca. His wife Anna (above) is enjoying the J.S.D. program and his son Andro (above) is flourishing. Kakabadze developed close working relationships with many writers in Ithaca, including Kathleen Gemmell (right).



VOICES OF FREEDOM

ICOA has sponsored ten years of arts events and academic conferences highlighting the political power of free speech.

Featured artists—writers, musicians, and directors—at ICOA's many events have included Russell Banks, Bei Dao, Huang Xiang, Ogaga Ifowodo, Reza Baraheni, Abbas Milani, Nahid Mozafferi, Houri Yavari, Shahrnush Parsipur, Assurbanipal Babilla, Sasha Skenderija, Horacio Castellanos Moya, Deborah Tall, Gail Holst-Warhaft, Bruce Levitt, Craig MacDonald, Marilyn Rivchin, Beth Milles, Jerry Mirskin, Greg Bostwick, Samite Mulondo, the Cornell Middle Eastern Music Ensemble, and Los Soneros. In November 2010, eighteen Ithaca writers and visiting Fulbright scholar Kiran Nagarkar joined in reading at our 10th anniversary celebration.

“We at the Kitchen Theatre Company were so pleased to host ICOA's 10th Anniversary Reading. An inspiring group of local writers reading their own words captured every heart and mind in the theater. It was a testament and a reminder that ICOA's work is so critical, because words lift us up, provoke us to consider new possibilities, and remind us how important it is to have words of opposition expressed and read by all.”

RACHEL LAMPERT
Artistic Director,
Kitchen Theatre Company



OUR PARTNERS

Over the years, ICOA has developed partnerships with many local and national organizations, helping strengthen our mission by connecting our writers with existing resources.

Black Mountain Institute
Center for Transformative Action
Community Arts Partnership
Cornell University
Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival
Hobart and William Smith Colleges
International Cities of Refuge Network
International Parliament of Writers
Ithaca College
Kitchen Theatre Company
Las Vegas City of Asylum
Miller Mayer LLP
North American Network of Cities of Asylum
PEN American Center
Pittsburgh City of Asylum
Scholars At Risk Network
Vista Periodista
Wells College

“The Community Arts Partnership has been proud to support ICOA since 2001. By allowing the important voices of oppressed writers to find new ears—and a new home—here in our community, ICOA is a true partner in CAP's vision of making the arts a vital part of everyday life for all citizens of Tompkins County.”

BRETT BOSSARD
Executive Director,
Community Arts Partnership



DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS

ICOA is run completely by a network of talented volunteers who put their ideas into action.

Besides organizing myriad events, our hands-on board and volunteers help our writers and their families find and furnish living accommodations and adapt to the challenges of a new community. This often includes help with English language acquisition, transportation, professional travel, and visa and legal issues. Above all, ICOA assists writers in finding teaching positions and in reading, editing, translating, and publishing their work—as well as networking with other writers.



BOARD MEMBERS

Barbara Adams, <i>Chair</i>	Jan-Martin Meij
Kenny Berkowitz	Catharine O'Neill
Andy Ezergailis	Terry Plater
Kathleen Gemmell	Tina Post
David Guaspari	Ernesto Quiñonez
Lamar Herrin	Kathleen Rourke
Edward Hower	Catherine Taylor
Bridget Meeds	Mark Temelko
	Travis Winter

EMERITUS BOARD MEMBERS

Shaffique Adam	Munira Hyder-Adam
Holly Bailey	Jeanne Mackin
Anne Berger	Lee-Ellen Marvin
Peggy Billings	Kenneth McClane
Miriam Brody	Jenny Mikulski
Cory Brown	Linda Myers
Jami Carlacio	Catherine Porter
Melanie Conroy-Goldman	Andrea Romeo-Hall
Sunny Donenfeld	Sasha Skenderija
Bryna Fireside	Peyi Soyinka-Airewele
Harvey Fireside	Deborah Tall
Anna Geske	Lyrae Van Clief-Stefanon
Stephan Gilchrist	Yi Ping
Paul Hamill	Lin Zhou





SUPPORT

ICOA is deeply grateful to individual donors who have contributed to our work and vision for the past ten years.

M. H. & Ruth Abrams
Hilary Acton
Barbara Adams
Barry & Margaret Adams
Diane Adams
John & Elaine Alexander
Keyhan & Maxine Arjomand
Ingrid Arnensen
Robert Aronson
Mark & Judith Ashton
John & Holly Bailey
Shefford & Julie Baker
Betty Bayer
Helen Bayer
Bruce Bennett
Rose Bethe
Peggy Billings
Jonathan Bishop
Thomas & Ellen Bonn
James K. Boodley
Laura Branca
Ross Brann
Harriet Brittain
Cory Brown
Theresa Alt & Wayles Browne
Priscilla Browning
Susan Buck-Morss
Catherine Burroughs
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Siouxie Easter
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John Hopper
Edward Hower
Sami Husseini
Maya Iwata
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Sylvester & Barbara Johnson
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Alfred Kahn
Patricia M. Karr-Segal
Carol Kaske
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Anne Kenney
Rosalind Kenworthy
Mary Carrer King
Cynthia Koepp
Kumiko Korf
Vic & Nancy Koschmann
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Peter & Patricia Ladley
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Philip & Leslie Lempert
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Bruce & Judith Levitt
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Michelle Berry & Robert Lofthouse
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Katharyn Howd Machan
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Franklin Webber
Leonard & Sylvia Weinstein
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Marissa Weiss
Anke Wessels
Winthrop & Andrea Wetherbee
Gary Hodges & Amy Whitney
Fred Wilcox
Joyce Morgenroth & Gerald Wolfe
Kenneth McClane & Rochelle Woods
Emoretta Yang
Irene Zahava
Leah Zazulyer
Yi Ping & Lin Zhou



A DECADE OF THANKS

When Anne Berger and I first met ten years ago, the idea of Ithaca becoming an international city of asylum for dissident writers seemed bold, amazing, and almost impossible—but yet, it happened, because of you.

Ithaca has become a city of asylum because a city’s worth of people have pitched in—our many angels in our affiliated institutions who opened doors for us; our dedicated volunteer board members who can go seamlessly from a day moving furniture to an evening hosting a cocktail fundraiser with grace and energy; and our many individual donors who have supported us with multiple gifts over the years.

You have sustained our vision, each of you in the way you can best, and you have become part of this incredible project which has changed the lives of us all.

BRIDGET MEEDS
Co-founder of ICOA

STEWARDSHIP

ICOA is indebted to the Center for Transformative Action for ten years of fiscal sponsorship and moral leadership.

“Ithaca City of Asylum brings to our attention the dehumanizing nature of state oppression by drawing us into relationships with authors whose creative expressions are borne directly from it. ICOA invites us to recognize our common humanity in their lives and works, thus softening the barrier we create—often unconsciously—between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ Such empathic understanding is, I believe, the essential foundation to imagining solutions to the pressing social problems confronting us all.”

ANKE WESSELS
Director, Center for Transformative Action

Since 2001, ICOA has raised approximately \$800,000 to support writers in need.

OUR INCOME	
75% PROVIDED BY CORNELL UNIVERSITY	
10% BY INDIVIDUAL DONORS AND EVENTS	
6% BY AN ANONYMOUS FOUNDATION	
5% BY ITHACA COLLEGE	
2% BY WELLS COLLEGE	
2% BY HOBART AND WILLIAM SMITH COLLEGES	
OUR EXPENSES	
92% DIRECT SUPPORT TO THE WRITER	
5.5% FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION	
2.5% EVENTS AND PUBLICATIONS	



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ITHACA CITY OF ASYLUM

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*ICOA writers-in-residence have produced
seven chapbooks and one CD, assisted
by ICOA and Vista Periodista Press.*

