Midwestern Voices and Visions

An initiative of the Alliance of Artists Communities 2012–2014

Supported by
The Joyce Foundation

The Alliance of Artists Communities
www.artistcommunities.org/mwvv

Consortium of participating residency programs

Anderson Center for Interdisciplinary Studies / Red Wing, Minnesota
Art Farm / Marquette, Nebraska
Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts / Omaha, Nebraska
John Michael Kohler Arts Center / Sheboygan, Wisconsin
Ox-Bow / Saugatuck, Michigan
Prairie Center of the Arts / Peoria, Illinois
Ragdale Foundation / Lake Forest, Illinois

A BOLD INITIATIVE

In 2006, the Alliance of Artists Communities, in partnership with seven artist residency programs and with support from The Joyce Foundation, set out to identify strong voices that represent today’s most promising and provocative talent and that reflect the rich diversity of the Midwest—artists whose work may as yet be unfamiliar but whose compelling visions help define the region and the country.

As we reflect on 9 years of Midwestern Voices & Visions, we are struck by the impact the awards have had on the artists, the participating residency partners, the Alliance of Artists Communities, and the field of artist residencies as a whole. Midwestern Voices & Visions artists from years past often share how the award has transformed their careers, their creative practices, and their identities as artists. The residency partners continue to stretch themselves to reach new artists not already served by their organizations. The Alliance has used this awards program as a model for consortia around the country, bringing new resources to other under-served artists. And residency programs nationwide have taken the valuable lessons learned through Midwestern Voices & Visions to better support their artists.

Most importantly, Midwestern Voices & Visions has touched the lives of artists. Cecil McDonald, a 2007 awardee, reflects, “My residency at the Prairie Center of the Arts through the Midwestern Voices & Visions award gave me an opportunity to lead a team during a production. The residency taught me how to adapt projects and process to anywhere in the world, consequently changing the way I thought about my work. I went from being a Chicago artist to an artist of the world.”

Reflecting The Joyce Foundation’s commitment to encouraging a diverse and thriving culture in the Midwest, the awards aim to further the careers of the selected artists, strengthen the Midwestern residency programs by engaging with artists under-represented in the mainstream, and challenge the field of artist residency programs nationwide to address cultural equity, access, and inclusivity to artists of diverse backgrounds.

The Midwestern Voices & Visions award offers artists more than just a residency: funding is included in the award as well, recognizing the need to invest more fully in artists and remove financial barriers to participation in opportunities for creative development. “Thanks to the Midwestern Voices & Visions grant, I was able to purchase a computer that I produced all of my subsequent works on. All of them. I also produced two installations, purchased materials, and printed works. Funding like that creates a peace of mind that frees up energy and space in the creative mind,” says 2007 awardee Artur Silva.

In addition to a residency at one of seven residency centers in the Midwest and a grant, awardees are also included in the Midwestern Voices & Visions exhibition. The 2014 exhibition, curated by Alix Refshauge and facilitated by Zeb Smith, is hosted by the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit.

The selection of the eight awardees was no small feat. To be eligible, artists from any visual, literary, or performance discipline had to identify as people of color; be permanent residents of Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, or Wisconsin; have not participated in an artist residency previously; and have not received consistent, significant recognition through grants, fellowships, commissions, and other indicators.

The selection panel included four distinguished arts professionals with strong ties to diverse communities in the region:

— Ra Joy, Executive Director, Arts Alliance Illinois | Chicago, Illinois
— Shannon Linker, Director of Artists Services, The Arts Council of Indianapolis | Indianapolis, Indiana
— Mitchell Squire, installation artist, sculptor and performance artist; teacher; previous Midwestern Voices & Visions awardee | Ames, Iowa
— Paul Tyler, Grants Director, Art Council of Metropolitan Kansas City | Kansas City, Missouri

Together these panelists identified a small group of semi-finalists who exhibited the highest quality of work and potential to benefit from the award. From this short list, eight artists were selected by the participating residency programs to be awarded the 2013 Midwestern Voices & Visions award.
MEET THE ARTISTS

Maria Calderon
an interdisciplinary artist from Kansas City, Missouri
Through my installations, costumes, paintings, and performative communal gatherings I strive to promote energetic social exchanges between the viewer and the artist by engaging the senses. My intention is to promote personal reflection of what our life constitutes and to connect to the human soul by creating parallels and associations regarding our ancestry to modernity.

Cristina Correa
a writer from Chicago, Illinois
My writing critiques and reimagines the socio-political situations of women and people of color, particularly in the Midwest, serving as a running commentary on my position in the world as a Latina artist born and raised in Chicago. I am interested in the upsetting beauty of self-destructive, societal-imposed patterns of behavior: archetypes; the stories and paradigms we are fed as children and young adults: folklore; and claiming home despite the unsettled uproar of gentrification and historical displacement.

C.C. Ann Chen
a painter and interdisciplinary artist from Chicago, Illinois
I am interested in subtle disruptions of the conventional and familiar. My work stems from architecture and landscape, and explores perceptual translations and misinterpretations of place, time, memory, and history.

Eric J. Garcia
a mixed media artist from Chicago, Illinois
My art is historically based, humorously charged criticism, with the goal of creating dialogue about complicated issues. I use a variety of media depending on the project, from hand-printed posters, to political cartoons, to sculptural installations, but they all have a common goal of educating and challenging.

LaMont Hamilton
a photographer/visual artist living in Chicago, Illinois
Much like any other artist, I have an incessant need to express what I feel. Portraiture has provided me the space for this, a space to release what I absorb from my subjects—a chance to interpret not only the who but also the what, why, where, and how facets that are often buried within their words, physical presence, and gaze.

Sayaka Kajita Ganz
a sculptor from Fort Wayne, Indiana
Driven by a passion for fitting shapes together and sympathy toward discarded objects, I create animals and natural forms from reclaimed plastics. I believe one of the important tasks of artists in this century is to bring more reminders of the natural world into the cities. Through my work I question our current monetary value system and contemplate possible changes for the future.

Jiieh Hur
a sound artist from Chicago, Illinois
There is a sound that we hear that we don’t hear; there is a sound that we don’t hear that we do hear. By eliminating certain frequencies out from the conceivable spectrum of sound—what I call “soundpots” — induce abstract sound experience. In it, the processed aural remnants create abstract sphere around the head that is blending, adding, and subtracting anything in between, while holding the general shape of the overall soundscape. When we sit to listen we discover a song. The song whirls in our ears and sings inside the ears. I invite you to listen in, like before falling asleep, to the sound that leaves the surface of our perception and sinks deeper away from the surface, with its hard separate facts.

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Over twenty years ago, The MacArthur Foundation advocated for the creation of the Alliance of Artists Communities to “nurture the process of creation… at a time when it is important to reaffirm the essential freedom that is necessary for all creative accomplishment.” “Process” and “freedom” may seem at odds in a world that values products, quick turn-around, and minimization of risk. But the essential freedom that is necessary for all creative accomplishment is more important now than ever — freedom to develop without expectations of outcome, freedom to challenge assumptions, and freedom to take bold turns toward new directions that will shape our world in years to come.

We believe that the cultivation of new art and ideas is essential to human progress. As research-and-development labs for the arts, residency programs support artists through time, space, and community dedicated to the development of new work. Just as importantly, residencies offer artists trust, in the private moments of creative daring when ideas are most fragile, when first pen is put to paper or fingers to keyboard or brush to canvas. Trust in the creative process, without dictating outcome. Trust in an artist’s own best path to creative discovery, without setting the destination. Trust that transformation will come by providing an environment rich in inspiration, engagement with other artists, and the freedom to explore new ideas.

Time and space dedicated for creative work are gifts, for artists who struggle to carve out minutes or hours in their daily lives, who work in the kitchen early in the morning or in the garage late at night, who juggle families and jobs with precious few resources available for art-making itself.

Whether urban, community-engaged studio residencies or isolated, rural artist colonies, in the artist’s backyard or across the globe, artist residencies are not about retreat. They are about advancement, believing that supporting today’s artists in the creation of new work is not a luxury, nor a leisure activity, but a vital and necessary force in society.
Maria Calderon
Interdisciplinary Artist
www.mariacalderon.com

Maria's early work in painting and other two-dimensional media focused on communal folk narrative and social relations in her contemporary community. She drew inspiration from her surroundings and community; included references to textiles, personal objects, and parallel imagery from her Peruvian heritage; and explored themes of social experience, changing infrastructure, spirituality, ritual, and community oneness. As her creative practice evolved, her two-dimensional work translated into a three-dimensional spatial experience and she found herself more focused on creating tangible active experiences for the viewer through communal gatherings, Yogic wisdom and practice, interactive sculpture, costume, video, and photography. By connecting more intimately with the viewer through environmental and sensory-based performance as a cultural experience, Maria encourages the public toward an active art consciousness through direct relational activity. Before visiting Ox-bow, her process had come to rely heavily upon her immediate community, such as using materials from local...
recycling facilities and collaborating with artists in resourceful skill-sharing exchanges, which have helped her develop a more sustainable and educational practice and stronger appreciation for her fellow artists. When applying to Midwestern Voices & Visions, her goal was to further her experimentation with experience-based media by creating an artful space with functional art pieces, costumes, video, painting, sculpture, and participatory photography.

Maria used her time at Ox-Bow to explore a traditional craft used by her Peruvian ancestors using natural dyes in their raw form to create the rainbow on various animal fibers. “My work has been leaning towards fibers over the past few years. It was a huge breakthrough to have a different relationship with fibers and media than I have had in the past. It made me realize the necessity of creating functional housewares and wearable art.” Dying techniques demand a lot of space and ventilation and Ox-Bow provided her with both. Working under the trees and in nature on Ox-Bow’s Saugatuck, Michigan, campus became a significant source of inspiration throughout Maria’s time in residence.

Maria found interactions with other artists-in-residence at Ox-Bow incredibly rewarding. She was particularly inspired by how other artists utilized the landscape, “specifically using the human body to create balance and counterbalance,” says Maria. “It helped clarify performative aspects of my work as well as integration in nature.” Having support from the residency staff to supply her with what she needed, when she needed it, was also a great luxury.

“It’s a dream come true to be supported financially and spatially as an artist — all we want is space, support, and time to make our dreams a reality. The process of learning is essential to expanding and growing, and I’m honored to have received the support from Midwestern Voices & Visions.”
C.C. Ann Chen  
Interdisciplinary Artist  
www.ccannchen.com

Ann is an artist and educator with an interest in subtle disruptions of the conventional and familiar. Her work stems from architecture and landscape, and explores perceptual translations and misinterpretations of place, time, memory, and history. Her goals for a residency opportunity through Midwestern Voices & Visions included: exploring new surroundings (town, environment, land, history) in order to work with the setting; to explore natural versus artificial materials, found versus commercially produced; to utilize studio space, and experiment with installation processes; and to produce a series of drawings and installation-based work. Her time at the Prairie Center of the Arts (PCA) proved to be very productive!

Ann focused her efforts on developing new work and learning about Peoria’s history and local community. “It always takes me a bit of time to get settled into a new studio environment. I was also very curious about Peoria’s history and artist community. I spent the first few weeks reading about the history of Peoria and its landscape. PCA is located in the Warehouse District and close to the Illinois River. Joe Richey (of PCA) gave us a tour of Tri-City Machine and arranged for us to see the oldest steel manufacturing company in Peoria.” It was important to Ann to keep an open mind to new interactions and ideas; because of this she remained flexible to changes in schedule and planning and allowed new ideas to challenge her. The most interesting and unexpected result was that she created a site-specific work after developing an interest in a former rope factory that was also part of PCA’s space. She set up a studio in the space and spent her time developing a site-specific project in the former-factory where she strategically used colored acetate in windows, changing the natural light to artificial colors and transforming the space.
There was a diverse group of artists at PCA during her residency, including visual artists and writers from all over. They held informal group presentations to talk about their work and gathered for weekly dinners to socialize. Learning about other artists, their art practices, and their work/life strategies was all very inspiring.

“Since leaving PCA, I have continued to think about and explore site-specific work. The experience there has encouraged me to experiment further and in new directions I had not considered before. I am continuing to work on drawing, but am working toward how a drawing conceptually becomes an installation, or architecture. And inversely, how an installation/sculpture might be thought of as a drawing.”
Cristina Correa
Poet
www.atlanticrock.com

Cristina’s writing foundationally critiques and examines social and cultural issues affecting women and people of color. Her writing is a running commentary on her position in the world as she learns about it. Through her travels in Europe and Africa, as well as her engagement with subjects like the Black Arts Movement and post-colonial studies, her writing has developed a broad voice that finds correlation between such normative (in some cases controversially so) concepts as the nuclear family, patriarchy, and xenophobia. Her works connect to each other through repeating symbols and themes, including spiders, mountains, faith, and transformation. Cristina’s fiction replicates fairy tales and folklore from her childhood while her poetry is more personal and confessional. Underlining the contradictory beauty of self-destructive, societally-imposed patterns of behavior, she uncovers the layers within archetypes like the wild woman and the damsel in distress.

Cristina arrived at Ragdale a week before the other artists-in-residence and spent the first days adjusting to the loneliness, the weather, and the separation from her personal life. As soon as the other artists arrived she began to find her rhythm, which included the practice of listening and observing. The sounds of animals who live around the property, the music of her neighbors all filled her days. In the Plant Room of the Victorian home’s heating system, and the sounds of the Victorian home’s heating system, she worked on poems by reading them aloud. “I learned something new everyday. Even if it was just to relax and let the poems come.”

Cristina met some wonderful people at Ragdale. “I was amazed by the people I was so lucky to know while I was there. I was simultaneously honored and humbled to be among them. It helped me understand that I am so much at the beginning of my life.”

Thanks to the award’s grant, Cristina felt financially secure enough to leave her full-time job and apply to a graduate program in Latin American and Latino Studies, something she had not even considered when applying for the award. The funding also allowed her to attend the VONA/Voces workshop (by covering her tuition, board, transportation, food), which she attended during the summer after her residency. “It’s amazing how calling a money gift an award can change your perception of its value, along with the fact that it was earned through creative merits, making it absolutely precious.”

"Being appreciated on the many levels I was during that time—through the award, the trust and support of my fellow residents, journals who chose to publish my work, and the workshop that asked me to join them—gave me the confidence I needed to move forward with the very strong knowledge that no matter what I am called I will always be a writer. This is the most gratifying thing an artist can know about herself, because then there is every excuse to keep going.”

* a nice place

an apartment across from the railroad tracks;
where I hummed goodnight, sweetheart under my breath; where he read stories to me in his radio announcer voice; where measurements were the height and thickness of books;
where I was small and beautiful;
where he lived before he died; where I am too afraid to cross the train tracks again; where the collisions were spit and spunk;
where I ran from; where our bodies spoke but our mouths fell deaf; where he told me he’d never take my picture off the fridge; where his fingers were miniature tools and my parts were a clock’s; where the window got busted; where I threw his keys in his face; where he typed the word cunt; where my blood ran;
where I was a foot shorter and a mouth louder.

there is a house next to the railroad tracks where my path crossed with his. Where his freckles looked like dirt on his pale shroud of skin. The house has a porch as wide and round as stargazing.

light filters into the bedroom smooth and hot through black curtains. Next to a knobby-kneed bedframe, leaning over the mattress is where I hummed under my breath. under his bobbed lampshade is where I read aloud in a radio announcer’s voice. There is where I was small and beautiful. There is where he lived before he died. There I was scared to get caught on the tracks. Collisions of spit and spunk there.

I ran away to spill my blood in a white room across the city shrouded in the steam of streetlamps a collection of dust-catching books on the walls a spiderweb where only the gnawings of creation can be heard a place where water runs hot and heavy where my hum ripples off my chest and flutters back into me in the bed thick with feathers and someone else’s deepest breaths when my blood raced to me I ran across town to a white room that awaited me thick with feathers where a wall of dust-casting books was shrouded in streetlight where a spider tapped her song onto the wall as I hummed spiraling wispy nightbreath he slept between me and someone else and I pretended I was asleep and didn’t notice him sleeping between us.

I was running like hot water building up steam from my bowing neck chasing the white walls thirsty for light the curtainless wind ows let in steam from the streetlamps condensation ran a crease of light between walls a lifeline my palm traced to recall how long his had seemed the seams ripping as I ran and became more firm ly attached to myself he was unstitching his legs from the bedsheet running from between us flailing his frayed stumps and I wasn’t in the bed anymore either I was knocking on a white door then being let in I was empty in a hiding room.
On the Table Between Us

Who would hunger at the brink of this feast?
–Lorna Dee Cervantes

Like yolks before a fight,
for weeks I filled

my mouth with flesh
so the apologies wouldn’t slip.

Your depression is a house of why. I can’t live in your love
buried. The weight of old picture albums.
Boxes of dust I carried for you.
Panties I pressed,
piled like sandwiches.

What it meant for you
to eat someone else’s food.
I slid books like fingers

into shelves. What it meant
to spread yourself across
someone else’s furniture.
I’m not in your kitchen,
but I feel the heat.

It travels like water. It swallows like sink.
I have seen the pink
of its tonsils. I have made wishes.
Called them out like slogans.
Stacked them straight like bibles.
To myself I have prayed:
just to stop worrying about clocks that yell,

ewells that dry, eyes that thrust.
To know that so far back must be
so far forward: everything turns,
cul-de-sac. Just. To stop.
Sayaka Kajita Ganz
Sculptor
www.sayakaganz.com

Sayaka spent her early childhood in Japan but grew up in several different countries. Japanese Shinto belief is very influential to her work. One lesson it teaches is that all objects and organisms have spirits; she was told in kindergarten that items discarded before their time weep at night inside the trash bin. This became a vivid image in her mind and inspired her choice of used and discarded materials in her art-making. “My goal is for each object to transcend its origin by being integrated into an animal or organic form that is alive and in motion. This process of reclamation and regeneration is liberating to me as an artist.”

While the work she applied to Midwestern Voices & Visions with included plastic spatulas, spoons, and other kitchen-wares, Sayaka spent a majority of her time at Art Farm exploring new materials. She originally planned to work with light bulbs she brought from home, but was soon inspired by the work of fellow residents to incorporate bicycle tires and tractor inner tubes found on the property. The work she made while in residence was very much influenced by place: she found the surrounding farmland beautiful and fell in love with one tree in particular framed by two pivots against the sky in the middle of a cut-down corn field. The silhouette of this tree became the inspiration for her rubber-tire relief work.

“Building sculptures helps me understand the situations that surround me. It reminds me that even if there is a conflict right now, there is also a solution in which all the pieces can coexist peacefully. Though there are wide gaps in some areas and small holes in others, when seen from the distance there is great beauty and harmony in our community. Through my sculptures I transmit a message of hope.”
Sayaka really enjoyed the people at Art Farm. She connected with her fellow residents and continues to stay in touch with them by exchanging images and comments about new work. “The conversations I had with other residents, our living arrangements, and the interactions with surrounding nature will have a long-lasting impact on my philosophy, both personal and professional.”

Since leaving Art Farm, she has continued to work with some of the new materials she experimented with there. The experience gave her an opportunity to explore, try new things, and push her creativity in exciting ways. Thanks to the award funding she was able to take time away from her job to go to Art Farm and even take a break afterwards. “It has given me the much needed time for reflection and regeneration.”

“All who consider applying for a residency at Art Farm probably do so with idyllic assumptions until they meet nature’s granularity here and find themselves in unexpected immediacy to what seems more trauma-ward challenge than residency,” says Ed Dadey, Art Farm’s Executive Director. “Sayaka may have pondered this when she was breaking down pallets in arctic-like weather conditions or finding the bathroom taps and drains frozen, but it failed to stifle her whimsy and caprice of what I would call her infinitely striking sartorial accessories of bicycle tires and tubes. Art Farm has a lax commitment to the notion of cleaning up and Sayaka took advantage of this, stripping tires and tubes from bicycles lying about for years among the weeds. It’s another point of proof that scrap is contaminated with aesthetic potential. Let the choir of tidiness drone on with its tunes of guilt; Art Farm has a higher calling to perpetuity, for preserving chaos and clutter.”
After graduating from high school in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Eric joined the U.S. Air Force. When his four-year enlistment was completed, he used his GI-Bill to attend college at the University of New Mexico where he earned his BFA with a minor in Chicano Studies. The following year, he pursued an MFA in Painting/ Drawing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he continues to live. Eric is a versatile artist working in a variety of media—from hand-printed posters, to nationally published political cartoons, to large-scale public murals—with a common goal of educating and challenging.

Eric spent his Midwestern Voices & Visions residency at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. As soon as he arrived, he was given a tour of the Kohler factory and the Kohler Art Center where he was shown the archives of work made by past Arts/ Industry residents. He had some ideas about the projects he might do but it wasn’t until he had a better understanding of the facilities, the process, and the potential of what could be made at the Kohler Factory that he really decided what to pursue. Taking full advantage of the unlimited studio access, Eric worked twelve-hour daily shifts and completed four major—and diverse—projects during his residency.

In one project he cast a clay figure—“Cast Zambuigua”—which addresses his ancestral history and references famous sculptures from the three cultures that make Chicanos who they are: a torso from the Venus de Milo (European), legs from the Aztec goddess Coatlicue (Indigenous Mexican heritage), and the head of the Statue of Liberty (born and raised in the United States). Another project involved pre-made objects from the factory line at Kohler. Eric learned the Kohler Factory supplies toilets to prisons and, after finding one discarded for having flaws, he used it to make a political piece about the United States prison system. Using traditional cobalt blue on a white background, he adorned the toilet with names and images of prisoners who have been incarcerated by the US government for their political beliefs, alongside symbolic images of peace and justice being flushed away, a menacing eagle, and razor wire.
Having no prior experience in ceramics, Eric was able to learn a number of new techniques with help from staff and factory workers. “Talking and learning from these workers, not only about technical processes but also about their jobs and lives, was influential to my work. My work almost always deals with social and political issues and after engaging with the workers at the Kohler Factory I wanted to honor these men and women. Although these workers create some of the most essential commodities we use in our daily lives, we never truly take the time to appreciate their labor. I chose to dedicate my last project to the workers who both helped shape my work at Kohler and to acknowledge their work and its impact around the world.”

“Eric was a positive person with our program staff and his fellow artists,” says Kristin Plucar, Kohler’s Arts/Industry Coordinator. “He was eager to talk with factory tour guides and their guests about his work and the Kohler Factory associates who worked with Eric were impressed with his talent and ability to draw. We all respected Eric’s commitment to political, social, and cultural issues, and we enjoyed seeing this come out in the work he produced during his residency.”

“I expected the residency at Kohler to just be a space and time for me to concentrate on my work, but after it was all said and done my experience was much more. Having the space, time, and help to complete my work is an unimaginable situation. Additionally, receiving professional documentation of the artwork I made is an invaluable asset. I was not expecting to meet and be inspired by other artists and the workers who break their backs day in and day out creating things we usually take for granted. The Arts/Industry Residency surpassed anything I could have imagined.”
LaMont Hamilton
Photographer
www.lamonthamilton.com

LaMont is a self-taught photographer with the good fortune of having had many mentors who helped him hone his craft visually and intellectually, including photographers Jamel Shabazz, Barkley Hendricks, Bobby Sengstocke, and Hank Willis Thomas along with painter Kerry James Marshall. Above all, it was a chance encounter with Gordon Parks in 2000 that validated his venture into photography at a critical time. Their conversation was the source of LaMont’s inspiration to capture what his heart and mind saw, despite the daunting odds and hard road to becoming a professional artist. Learning on a vintage Minolta and going through trial and error in a makeshift darkroom, he immersed himself in photography. After street shooting and selling homemade prints, he eventually landed in Chicago, a move that snowballed his career.

When applying for the Midwestern Voices & Visions award, he was in the process of working on a piece titled 75 Portraits in which he travelled around the US creating portraits of prominent Black artists.

LaMont spent three months in residence at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in Omaha. Upon arriving, he and the other residents were given a tour of the city’s downtown and “Old Market” neighborhood. During the tour the artists were warned to stay away from North Omaha – the “dangerous part of town” and home to a predominately African-American community. Naturally, North Omaha was exactly what LaMont wanted to see. Throughout his residency he spent time understanding the cultural layout of the city, conducting meetings with the Urban League, going to the North Omaha neighborhood to meet people and listen to their stories, and overall striving to...
understand the racial divide of the city and the politics behind it. Omaha has endured decades of racial tension and increasing economic disparities have left Black Omahans feeling like invisible citizens. This was the catalyst for LaMont’s *Omaha Portraits*, a series of forty portraits, mostly of Black residents of North Omaha, reflecting a community filled with history and pride. The portraits were displayed in several public venues and have since been donated to the Great Plains Black History Museum in Omaha.

Midwestern Voices & Visions provided LaMont with his first residency experience. While he didn’t know what to expect, he was hoping to complete a body of work. His interactions with other artists during his time at Bemis proved to be an incredible opportunity. “Many of the artists had quite a few residencies under their belt and they all were established artists so the environment was extremely professional and down to business.” They formed a tight community and enjoyed weekly potlucks and spirited debates in local cafes and bars. Local artists participated in social gatherings as well, further enriching the opportunity to connect with the local scene.

“The generous grant combined with the space Bemis provided encouraged me to take risks in exploring ideas.”
Jieh Hur
Sound/Clay/Installation Artist

Jieh attended Otis College of Art and Design and later earned a BFA and MFA from the School of Art Institute of Chicago. Graduate school offered an important opportunity for her to develop her work ethic and combine her interests in sound and clay. “I’m interested in space between time. There are things in this space that are intangible, often invisible and inaudible unless we pay our most acute attention. But once sensed, they can make us feel calm and quiet, and oddly enough, curious. In this space, we can wander around and search for secrets as we did when we were kids. There is no ‘right’ path to our own secret. And they can be shared with no words. Working with science to utilize existing/hidden forces in nature, I make things to build a place where space can be heard, and experience can be composed.”

When applying for the Midwestern Voices & Visions award, her desire was to continue to experiment and make a large installation piece to experience sound. While at Art Farm, Jieh was able to work with machines and tools she’d never had access to before. Ed Dadley, Art Farm’s Executive Director, had a significant influence on her time and experience, helping her learn to work with many of the tools on site. “Jieh used every tool and machine found at Art Farm, some responding to her attention with amazing results after years of neglect,” says Ed. “Watching her explore the capabilities of these machines, I could see an amnesia spread over her, the grip of pragmatic goals forgotten, in exchange for the essential alternative aesthetic progress that comes from useless play, urged on by curiosity, where the subjectively imagined possibilities of her new experience were a closer reality than the
measured objective world surrounding her. Not a bad way to spend time during a residency.” Much of Jieh’s utilized things found or fabricated at Art Farm, including 100-year-old lumber from a department store and old barns Dadey had taken down more than a decade ago, as well as clay dug out from the land. Even the hardware used to hang the artwork was hand-fabricated on a lathe.

“I often walked in the prairies of the farm—an oasis in the middle of cornfields—when I wasn’t working on one of the machines pursuing the ‘perfect cut.’ The grass and the sky, the storms and the moonlight opened up a space in me I cannot yet describe in words. At Art Farm, a general sense of time didn’t seem to work any more. I experimented freely on my own sense of time surrounded by land and air and every tool and material that I needed to make work.”

Art Farm offered an opportunity to take full advantage of uninterrupted studio time. Since returning home, Jieh has reconsidered the best methods of spending time, developing a focus that is especially important for artists at early stages of their careers. Additionally, she’s been working with new materials and tools she was able to purchase with the Midwestern Voices & Visions grant; these have become the new building blocks of her studio practice.
Applying for the Midwestern Voices & Visions award, Diane was longing for an artist community to create within and eager to participate in a residency program. Since completing graduate school at George Washington University in 2008, it had been a challenge to maintain a community of working artists with whom to offer critiques and share ideas. Diane arrived at the Anderson Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in early May and spent the first two weeks absorbing her surroundings, evaluating her then-current body of work, reading and research other artists’ work, and developing technical skills she would use in a future project. The second half of her residency was marked by an artistic breakthrough. After struggling with work she brought from home and an enlightening conversation with a dear friend and fellow artist, she started viewing her work in a different way, challenging herself to let go of emotional attachments in the work and develop more sophisticated concepts. “Because of this experience at Anderson Center, I am no longer hesitant to take the risks necessary to enhance my work.”

Diane’s work appropriates customs passed down by her grandmother. Simplistic in form and craft, its themes are complex, portraying the convoluted natures of loss, memory, and homage. Her work is a series of connections and interruptions, of tributes and escapes, of celebrations and liberations. During her residency, Diane was able to immerse herself in important memories, in part because of the rich family history that exists at Anderson Center. The antiques, old photographs, and doilies on every flat surface, reminder Diane of her grandmother and things she had forgotten. “I could not have imagined a more suitable place to reside, pushing my work forward in a way that I do not believe would have occurred in another place.”

“Diane worked carefully, with extraordinary conscientiousness and deliberation, allowing her work to evolve in all its rightful directions,” says Jackie Anderson, Residency Director at Anderson Center. “She demonstrated the professional discipline and artistic commitment necessary to use her precious fellowship time well. A gracious, soft-spoken individual, she was a most ideal resident, her daily work habits beyond reproach. At the same time, she took avid interest in the work of her colleagues, helping to create a supportive and collegial atmosphere.”

Participating in a residency with another visual artist, a poet, a fiction writer, and a playwright was truly an extraordinary experience for Diane. The artists established regular work schedules for themselves during the day and came together for meals or other outings in the evenings. They shared their experiences, personal stories, work successes and failures, and introduced each other to an array of books, authors, films, and artists.

“I have become more in sync with what my art practice needs to be and how my work needs to progress,” says Diane. “It is evident to me that being immersed in a creative community is essential to sustaining my practice, something I will continue to seek throughout my life.”
The Alliance of Artists Communities is the service organization for the field of artists’ communities and residencies. Believing that the cultivation of new art and ideas is essential to human progress, the Alliance’s mission is to advocate for and support artists’ communities and residency programs, to advance the endeavors of artists. The Alliance strives for a society that values creative people and process, as well as creative output; that encourages experimentation and the exploration of new ideas; and that recognizes the role artists and the creative process can have in achieving this vision.

The Alliance gives a collective voice on behalf of approximately 500 artists’ residency programs in the US and more than 1,500 worldwide, leveraging support for the field as a whole; promoting successful practices in the field; and advocating for creative environments that support the work of today’s artists.

Since 2004, through Midwestern Voices & Visions and other programs, the Alliance has granted more than $2 Million in funds to artists and residency programs around the world.

To learn more, visit our website at
www.artistcommunities.org
Art Farm’s mission is to support artistic and literary vision—vision that is often obscure, impractical, and independent of commercial recognition. To offer visual artists, writers, performers—anyone considering themselves creative—studios, time, and resources, for pursuing their range of expression, for experimenting, and for developing projects, where failing is no less welcomed than succeeding. But most of all, for distilling the promise and potential of their creative enterprise, while working and living in a rural environment.

Art Farm’s physical presence is in its buildings and land. More elusive to describe is the ambiance—the subtle influence of the environment on time and space. The sun and stars measure your time, not clock and calendar. Space is shaped by proximity to sound and silence. The sky: your eyes and ears will fill with the sounds and shapes of an incredible number of birds and bugs. And, like it or not, the weather will always be your collaborator in whatever you do.

Currently, the residency season spans the months of May to November. Every artist-in-residence makes some contribution of labor to improve the general conditions at Art Farm. This labor—ranging from digging sewer trenches to soldering electronics to pouring cement, and all accomplished at the dizzying, blistering speed of continental drift—has sustained Art Farm over its twenty-one years of existence.

In many ways, Art Farm is a work-in-progress being formed from the efforts of its residents, coming from across the globe to a small patch of land filled with grass, trees, and old buildings in Nebraska.

Art Farm is a place far, far away. There are no majestic peaks of sublime grandeur, shining seas, or electric thrill of neon avenues to distract; just endless flat fields of corn, soybeans, and more than enough heat, bugs, and wind.
The spirit and programs of the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts are based on the conviction that exceptional talent deserves to be supported. The Bemis Center’s practical commitment to this belief is achieved by providing well-equipped studio spaces, living accommodations, and a monthly stipend to artists who are awarded residencies. These artists come from around the world to work within a supportive community of like-minded people. The atmosphere and environment offer an ideal situation for creative growth and experimentation and encourage artists to confront new challenges.

Located in two urban warehouses totaling 110,000 square feet, the facilities are designed to foster creativity and the productive exchange of ideas. The Bemis Center has seven live/work studios in which the artists-in-residence reside, an installation room located on the same floor as the artist studios, and a large industrial space used for fabrication. The Bemis Center is open to all visual media including video, installation, and performance art.

In addition to its residency program, Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts is dedicated to providing the community with the absolute best in contemporary art. Bemis Center hosts exhibitions, ArtTalks lectures given by current artists-in-residence, Gallery Talks providing in-depth tours through current exhibitions, and Open Studios inviting visitors to engage the artists in discussions regarding their art. Bemis Center also presents bemisUNDervoUND, an innovative curatorial residency program that provides community-based artists with the rare opportunity to curate exhibitions of their own design.

Founded in 1967, John Michael Kohler Arts Center is a thriving visual and performing arts complex that functions as a center of cultural life in east-central Wisconsin and also attracts thousands of visitors from throughout the Midwest. John Michael Kohler Arts Center celebrated the opening of a major expansion in 1999, creating a 100,000-square-foot facility and transforming an entire city block into a welcoming, spectacular showcase for the arts. The Center has earned national renown for its innovative and challenging exhibitions and for the ambitious scholarly publications developed in conjunction with them. The exhibitions and related programming serve as a forum for the investigation of a wide range of contemporary American art—photography, installation works, craft-related forms, the work of self-taught artists and visionaries, communally transmitted continuing traditions, and other genres of art-making that receive limited exposure.

John Michael Kohler Arts Center is dedicated to working directly with artists and providing opportunities for them in both the visual and performing arts. Arts/Industry is undoubtedly the most unusual ongoing collaboration between art and industry in the US, benefiting hundreds of emerging and established visual artists since its inception in 1974. Artists-in-residence work in the Kohler Co. Foundries (Pottery, Iron, and Brass) and Enamel Shop to develop a wide variety of work in clay, enameled cast iron, and brass, including murals and reliefs, temporary and permanent site-specific installations, and functional and sculptural forms. Participants are exposed to a body of technical knowledge that enables them to explore forms and concepts not possible in their own studios as well as new ways of thinking and working.

The Arts Center is also acclaimed for its exhibition-related residencies, collaborative projects between artists and community residents, Summer Theatre, FOOTLIGHTS performing arts subscription series and related residencies, classes for children and adults, festivals, a second-site exhibition space called Artspace, and a host of other programs.
At Prairie Center of the Arts, artists and other creative people find a quiet contemplative space in the studios and access to an urban environment just a short distance away. “Artist” is defined broadly to include all visual art forms; installation, conceptual, performance, and culinary arts; music; literature and poetry; and architecture. Artists are in-residence at Prairie Center for one month to a year, whether searching for a brief retreat or a transformative immersion in the industrial environment Prairie Center offers.

The Center connects artists to the community by providing opportunities to collaborate with professionals at Tri-City Machine Products, Bradley University, Illinois Central College, and other businesses in the Peoria area. Readings, exhibitions, and installations are encouraged as a means of connecting with local artists and citizens.

The Center is centrally located in the Land of Lincoln and in the magnificent Illinois River Valley, less than three hours from Chicago and St. Louis. The studios, Warehouse Gallery One, and installation space are housed in a historic rope factory. Warehouse Gallery One is a 6,000-square-foot space used for meetings, exhibitions, and installations.

Ox-Bow is a 100-year-old school of art and artists’ residency, affiliated with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Established by two painters looking for an escape from the industrial havoc of Chicago, Ox-Bow’s founders sought an environment that would inspire the artists who lived and worked there, and one that could also foster a supportive community of peers.

Today, Ox-Bow operates in much the same way. With a three-month academic program and two residency cycles per year, over 600 artists make their way annually to the historic 115-acre campus, nestled in the dunes of Lake Michigan. With old growth forests and a closed lagoon, Ox-Bow’s landscape is naturally protective of the artists who come to campus each year—offering an immersive experience that is committed to freedom, focus, and risk-taking.

Because of Ox-Bow’s long history as a school and its commitment to exchange and community, a philosophy of experimentation, collaboration, and mentorship resonate throughout all of its programming. With 24-hour access to studios, artists who come to Ox-Bow can fully commit to their practice, the discussion of art-making in the 21st century, and the development and refinement of new work.
I would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their roles in making Midwestern Voices & Visions a success:

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Lastly, to the participating artists, who took enormous personal and professional leaps of faith throughout this project, and who make our work worthwhile. We can’t wait to see what you do next!

Caitlin Strokosch
Executive Director