Midwestern
Voices and Visions
Seven artist residency programs, in concert with the national Alliance of Artists Communities and 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.

Midwestern Voices and Visions celebrates, supports, and promotes the work of highly talented, yet under-recognized artists of color and broadens awareness of and support for the opportunities available at Midwestern residency programs for artists of diverse backgrounds.

“Communities like these are an extremely valuable resource for working artists, giving them time, space, and support to pursue their art. Too often in the past artists of color have not known about or been able to take advantage of such opportunities; we’re delighted to help make the connection,” says Michelle T. Boone, Program Officer for The Joyce Foundation.

This three-year project was modeled after Visions from the New California, a partnership between the Alliance of Artists Communities and The James Irvine Foundation, and reflects The Joyce Foundation’s commitment to encouraging a diverse and thriving culture in the Midwest. The project aims to both further the careers of the seven selected artists and strengthen the Midwestern residency programs by engaging with artists under-represented in the mainstream.

The selection of the seven resident artists was the culmination of an intensive, deliberative, and carefully constructed process. In an effort to identify a broad range of under-recognized artists of color doing outstanding work in the Midwest, we invited over 200 artists and arts professionals to nominate qualified visual artists, performance artists, and writers. The nominators identified 115 artists of color who had no prior residency experience and demonstrated both artistic excellence and a strong commitment to their artistic careers. Invitation letters were sent to the nominees, and 65 applied.

The selection panel was comprised of five distinguished artists and arts professionals with strong ties to diverse communities in the region:

- Kimberly Cridler, Assistant Professor of Art Metals, University of Wisconsin at Madison / Madison, WI
- Quraysh Ali Lansana, Director, The Gwendolyn Brooks Center for Black Literature and Creative Writing, Chicago State University / Chicago, IL
- Gustavo Leone, Director of Composition Studies, Columbia College Chicago / Chicago, IL
- Lia Rivamonte, Executive Director, Banfill-Locke Center for the Arts / Fridley, MN
- Therman Statom, Artist / Omaha, NE

Together these panelists identified seventeen semi-finalists who exhibited the highest quality of work and represented a diversity of backgrounds and art-making approaches. From this short list, seven artists were selected by the participating residency programs to be awarded The Joyce Foundation Midwestern Voices and Visions award and fellowship: a one-month residency at one of the participating programs and a $4,000 stipend to be used at the artist’s discretion.

Through the initiative of the Bemis Center, the project culminated in a three-day Creativity Festival and month-long exhibition in Omaha, Nebraska, featuring the Midwestern Voices and Visions artists.
THE ARTISTS AND THEIR VISIONS

The following pages introduce these artists through their thoughts, their work, and their 2007–2008 Midwestern Voices and Visions residency experiences.

Reginald Baylor
a painter and sculptor from Wauwatosa, Wisconsin
I convert subject matter into simple geometric shapes and animated colors to the point that it becomes almost artificial or dreamlike.... I choose to segregate my colors with clear and divisible lines so that there will be no confusion about one's place and purpose. Colors, repetitious patterns, and definitive lines allow the viewer to interpret the composition as if it were a commercial or a visual sound-byte of information.

Cecil McDonald
a photographer from Chicago, Illinois
The images in [my] work represent an extended look at the moments and relationships that occur within the domestic space.... In order to re-examine the embodiment of the everyday moment, moments that on the surface seem minute and routine. In reconstructing these moments, I seek to add a layer of emotional, psychological, and formal drama to the mundane and everyday activities that make up our lives.

Francisco Aragón
a poet and non-fiction writer from South Bend, Indiana
I was finally able to re-cast and finish a complete draft of a creative non-fiction piece about my father and the role the Spanish language has played in my life and my work. "The Nicaraguan Novel"... may very well be part of a larger work that includes both prose and poetry and deals with my various engagements with my Nicaraguan and American identity.

Robert Farid Karimi
a performance/interdisciplinary artist and activist from Minneapolis, Minnesota
I believe that the artist's responsibility in society is to enable audiences to realize their power to create and choose how they interpret the world, that they are not just idle observers waiting to be told by media or governments how to be, but creators of their own self-constructions because self, culture, and art are fluid and constantly evolving.... My work strives to reveal the issues of the hybrid, the "mutant," the individual who sees himself or herself as a multi-faceted person even though the rest of mainstream society wishes to confine him or her into tiny objective boxes.

Thu Tran
a sculptor and installation and mixed-media artist from Cleveland Heights, Ohio
I make work that explores relationships between organic and inorganic. I strive to achieve visual MSG (a chemically derived spice that opens the pores of the tongue).... For the most part my work draws from pop culture with hopes to become an integral part of it.

Artur Silva
an installation and mixed-media artist from Indianapolis, Indiana
My work explores iconography and social commentary by creating improbable combinations of imagery.... For me, making art is a process that involves allowing myself to stand on unsteady ground. This state of discomfort helps me to push my art forward and address subjects and issues that interest me.
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
The Role of Artist Residency Programs

Innovation and the forefront of new ideas
New ways of thinking about and reflecting on the world are at the core of cultural progress. Residency programs place themselves at the forefront of this progress by serving as research and development labs for the arts, encouraging exploration by and nurturing the creativity of artists representing a wide range of aesthetics, backgrounds, and approaches to their work. By providing today’s visionaries with time, space, and community to create new work, artist residencies actively contribute to the continuing development of culture.

Gifts of time and space
One of the most important gifts an artist can receive is that of time and space to develop and create. While many artists find a way to carve out minutes or hours in their daily life, very few have the ability to dedicate consistent, significant blocks of time to their work. And often this work happens in less than ideal workspaces and in isolation from other individuals engaged in creative work. Residencies offer artists the freedom to create apart from the usual competitors for their attention, in an environment that encourages the artist to stretch his or her creative practice.

Part of a greater whole
Recognition and validation of an artist’s work are often the most crucial forms of support an artist can receive, particularly when that recognition comes from leaders in the field. Artists tell us that the affirmation from having been awarded a residency frequently comes at a critical point in their careers, and offsets in part the marginalization and trivialization of artists in our society with professional acknowledgment and encouragement. Residencies also offer a community of other artists exploring their creative practices, developing new approaches to art-making, and challenging the way we view the world. Joining the ranks of these peers, artists often work more productively and with greater confidence during a residency, steady in the knowledge that they have been recognized for their work.

Exchange across boundaries
Whether boundaries created by artistic discipline, ethnicity or nationality, career stage, religious belief, or any of the other ways we find to distinguish ourselves from others, residencies make a place for crossing boundaries and breaking barriers. Artist residency programs provide uniquely fertile environments for exchange and collaboration where thoughtful, engaged discourse can and does happen regularly. Art is not created in a vacuum, and artists of all disciplines thrive on this mix of solitary time and interaction with other creative individuals that residency programs offer.

Trust in the process
Unlike many other forms of support for artists, residency programs focus primarily, and often solely, on the process of creation rather than the product. Not surprisingly, most artists note that they produce at a much-increased rate during their residencies, without the program imposing an expectation of output. The opportunity to experiment with new techniques, art forms, and ways of thinking and seeing often leads artists in directions never before considered. Support for this type of risk-taking and innovation is rare, and is the benefit of residencies that artists highlight more than any other.

Investment in development
Artists sometimes view residencies as a luxury they can’t afford, within lives already stretched too thin. But dedicated time to work is an essential aspect in developing and creating art. Without investment in experimentation and growth, the artist and the art stagnate. Nurturing the creative life of an artist is an investment in the work itself. An investment in new work is an investment in the forward progression of our culture. And so we come full circle.
Francisco Aragón
Poetry, Non-Fiction Prose
www.franciscoaragon.net

Francisco arrived at Anderson Center with a specific focus on what he wanted to accomplish, and his time there proved especially productive. “I was finally able to re-cast and finish a complete draft of a creative non-fiction piece about my father and the role the Spanish language has played in my life and my work. The piece also includes two poems, which were further worked and revised. It is, therefore, a mixed genre piece! The title ‘The Nicaraguan Novel,’ whose form is inspired by the work of Richard Rodriguez. Creative non-fiction/memoir is an area I’ve been thinking about delving into for quite some time now, and my time at Anderson Center was a breakthrough. ‘The Nicaraguan Novel,’ I think, may very well be part of a larger work that includes both prose and poetry and deals with my various engagements with my Nicaraguan and American identity.”

Francisco is the Founder and Director of Letras Latinas, the literary unit of the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame. This full-time position, working on behalf of other writers, leaves very little time to devote to his own writing. “The residency was a most welcome break from my full-time job as an arts administrator. It jump-started my long-intended foray into non-fiction prose. I also learned that although I very much benefited from having the longer-than-usual stretches of free time, the interaction and fellowship with other artists was very enriching and as important a part of the experience.”

Anderson Center brings together a diverse group of artists and scholars, fostering a dynamic environment for the exchange of ideas. Its beautiful estate setting in rural Minnesota offers a calm place for quiet work. “I will remember the stress-free sensation of being free to work at a pace I saw fit,” says Francisco. “I will remember the bike trail along the Mississippi River that provided needed exercise and fresh air. I will remember the town of Red Wing and the charming and warm cafés. I will remember my fellow residents and the vital and interesting work they are all doing.”

Since completing his residency at Anderson Center, Francisco has actively pursued other residency opportunities and completed “The Nicaraguan Novel: prose with two poems,” currently being considered for publication in a literary journal in the Midwest. He has also served as one of ten poets on the 2008 poetry panel at the National Endowment for the Arts.

Francisco found he benefited as an arts administrator as well, as the residency resulted in the creation of the Letras Latinas Residency Fellowship, a partnership between Anderson Center and Letras Latinas providing emerging Latino/a writers with a one-month residency at Anderson Center and a $1000 stipend. The first recipient completed her residency in June of 2008.

POEM
... it’s that I’m from
Catalonia
he says
his tongue
a loom
weaving
with intricate
pride the sound
of the moon
as in luna
but making it
swell
like they do
mouthing
Catalu-
nya Catalu-
nya
¡Es que soy
de Cataluña!

POEMA
... es que soy de
Cataluña
me dice
su lengua
un telar
tejiendo
con orgullo
intricado sonido
de luna
pero
inflándolo
como lo hacen
ellos
articulando
Catalu-
nya Catalu-
nya
¡Es que soy de
ek Cataluña!
FIRST TIME OUT

White-capped skin of the deepest blue
and the hoisting of Jenny—the lines,
the ropes, the intricate knots—
begins: codes of doing
and undoing, as if this were ritual
unfurling, paying tribute . . .

with gentle
and ungentle swells
never ceasing—what some call
a wonderful wholeness
in motion—this rise
this fall a heaving,
sighing, or merely the Mediterranean
releasing
the breath
that sustains, fulfills

the sail

MI PRIMERA SALIDA

Piel encabrilada de un azul profundo
y el izado de Jenny—las cuerdas,
los cabos, los complicados nudos—
comienza: códigos de hacer
y deshacer, como si esta fuera
un desdoblamiento ritual, tributo . . .

con un suave
y no tan suave oleaje
que no cesa, lo que algunos llaman
maravilloso movimiento
continuo—esta subida
esta bajada: elevarse y descender,
suspirar, o meramente el Mediterraneo
releasing el aliento
que llena, realiza

a la vela
Reginald Baylor
Painting, Sculpture
www.reginaldbaylor.com

“The conditions awarded to participants in residency experiences allow for a distraction-free environment which is very difficult to duplicate in the real world.”

Formally trained as a sculptor, Reginald sought space, materials, and uninterrupted time to work on his ‘sculpted paintings,’ which incorporate multiple two-dimensional paintings into a three-dimensional sculpture. His acrylic paintings—often cityscapes, landscapes, and floral compositions—may be up to 54” x 70” in size. Reginald took full advantage of his time at Ragdale and completed “The Quintessential 1950’s Family Sets the Stage” during his stay. “I’m aggressively moving into figurative work and the residency was a catalyst in launching this direction.” Two additional paintings, “Two Men Taking Place” and “Family Vacation,” followed.

Reginald’s technique includes depicting architectural elements within a natural setting or environment. He converts all subject matter into simple geometric shapes transforming an image using straight edges, animated colors, and repetitious patterns that “allow the viewer to interpret the composition as if it were a commercial or a visual sound-byte of information,” says Reginald.

Through studio visits with other artists and other opportunities to share work, he discovered a sense of community that he had not previously experienced. “In the real world of work and family, paychecks and bills, there are not many opportunities to surround oneself with people who share a similar psychological make-up that significantly magnifies the need to create something under that massive umbrella called art.” Opening his studio to participating artists and visitors also forced a period of self-reflection as he prepared to present his aesthetic approach to painting. This...
“might not have happened without the quiet, lonely, calming, comforting, peaceful, scenic, and engaging days in my studio at Ragdale.”

Prior to the residency, Reginald worked as an independent truck driver to support his family and his art career. He states, “I wasn’t doing either one to my full potential. With that said, spending a dedicated 38 days at the residency helped me realize that art is ultimately my life goal. I am now a full-time artist and have been blessed to have found an 800-square-foot studio space in Milwaukee’s Historic Third Ward district.”

Since the residency, Reginald has worked with the Milwaukee Public School of the Arts on an interactive mural project to raise awareness and funds for a new K-12 art education campus. He states, “If I would choose one word to describe my experience at Ragdale, that word would be ‘fuel.’”
Robert Farid Karimi
Performance / Interdisciplinary Arts and Activism
www.kaoticgood.com
www.merococinero.com

“This residency allows you to get lost in the wilderness of your own imagination and come out the other side understanding the heroic nature of making art.”

Robert had a simple plan for his residency: develop a performance piece and write a non-fiction/poetry book based on his creative technique. “I feel comfortable in a life of chaos, of disparate strings of information all around me. I perceive all this chaos, and I have found a way to negotiate, to harness it.” He calls it Open Source Performance.

Robert visited the Kohler Co. factory before his residency; then everything changed. As the first performance artist to be in residence at the visual arts-based Arts/Industry residency, Robert became excited by the creative possibilities of what was around him. This was no surprise for Robert, whose interdisciplinary creations reflect his belief in sampled consciousness: “Culture is fluid. The world is fluid, and all these inputs are bombarding us, educating us, shaping us. We negotiate this constantly to communicate with one another, to create art.”

As an interdisciplinary artist of Iranian and Guatemalan parents, “I use humor, improv, spoken word, and anything else I can find to explore the funny and not so funny revelations that occur when pop culture, personal history, and politics collide.” He thought his time at Kohler would be a quiet, reflective time, but instead it became “an exhausting, exhilarating, extremely satisfying time.”

Robert dove into the world of ceramics. Swept up by the Kohler factory’s energy, and inspired by the uproar about public footbaths for Muslims in Minnesota and Indiana, Karimi designed and constructed footbaths with poetic, Biblical, and Quranic verse: foot bubblers, he calls them. Robert also created a public installation around his studio for the factory workers and the daily tours, constructing a mural using Pablo Neruda’s From the Foot to Its Child as the foundation. He also partnered with the Art Center’s Connecting Communities program, creating a new episode of his live theatrical cooking show, The Cooking Show con Karimi y Comrades, featuring the progressive chef Mero Cocinero Karimi, which he performed on Green Bay Television and at the Arts Center. After the performances, Karimi worked with area residents to create “Stories That Feed Us”—a performance potluck where participants shared stories, poems, and movement work while the audience ate a potluck dinner. “I got to dream in the factory, and then apply my ideas at the Arts Center. The center’s vision and the staff’s flexibility made this exhausting yet exhilarating creativity possible.”

“I was told by a resident artist who works at the Arts Center that Kohler residencies are very memorable. There are things I will never forget—‘gifts,’ he called them—and I will be unraveling these gifts for a lifetime because of the density of this residency. I only understand his words right now because every day since I have left Kohler, I have another memory, a thought, an idea. The factory is in my head, my skin. My interactions with the people of Sheboygan have left an indelible impression. I can’t wait for more memories to bubble to the surface.”

As a result of his residency, Robert is touring The Cooking Show and is working on episodes and residency components to focus on diabetes in communities of color. His foot bubbler was featured in an installation at the Bemis Center, and Robert is also taking the poems he wrote to create an anthology of Latina/o performance poetry, all the while teaching performance art, directing, and writing.
Cecil McDonald
Cecil McDonald
Photography
www.cecilmcdonald.com

“This body of work represents an effort to extend what we traditionally call domesticity. In a turn-of-the-century factory, I seek to create a magical sense of place; where the subjects have found a space, one that they visit periodically after school and no one knows it. This secret hideout is a place of fantasy and imaginary play, not a home, but they have made it such. The camera—along for the ride, as an unacknowledged observer—interprets, distorts, and relocates the reality of childhood.”

For Cecil, his residency at Prairie Center provided time to create new work, learn new techniques, and expand his network of artists, friends, and collectors. Making connections with artists and administrators outside his usual circle of friends was something he felt was “crucial to the forward momentum needed at this juncture in [his] career.”

Cecil began exploring photography during his last year as a fashion merchandising major at Columbia College Chicago. His initial focus on culturally significant subjects continues today with his Domestic Observations and Occurrences series featuring family members. “The images in this body of work represent an extended look at the moments and relationships that occur within the domestic space. I’ve constructed the photographs as tableau vivants in order to re-examine the embodiment of the everyday moment, moments that on the surface seem minute and routine. In reconstructing these moments, I seek to add a layer of emotional, psychological, and formal drama to the mundane and everyday activities that make up our lives.”
Prairie Center hired two assistants to work with Cecil during his residency, providing critical support for Cecil’s work as well as liaisons to the local community. “The residency allowed me ample time to complete a set of images. I worked with assistants for the first time; I led a crew in the making of photographs. My level of confidence in image-making was greatly enhanced and I learned more about working with children.”

“Because of my work at the Prairie Center of the Arts and the resulting body of work—‘notes from the prairie, imaginary play’—I have begun to think about space, outside of the domestic sphere, and have also begun to investigate how these relationships might manifest themselves in photographs and video.”

Cecil currently works as an adjunct instructor at Columbia College Chicago and a Teaching Artist through Arts Integration Mentorship, a collaboration with the Center for Community Arts Partnership. “Since completing my residency, I have had numerous exhibition opportunities, have received comprehensive reviews, and have participated in several panel discussions with regards to my work or issues connected to the ideas I’m interested in exploring.” Cecil was included in the Chicago Artist Month celebration and was featured as a Chicago “artist to watch” as well. “I believe this opportunity has come from much of the exposure that the body of work created in Peoria has generated; in hindsight, the residency was a launching.”

Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts
October 1–December 31, 2007

Tomiko Pilson

20
Tomiko Pilson

Painting

Tomiko applied for the Midwestern Voices and Visions program at a time when she felt her work would greatly benefit from the focused time a residency provides. She anticipated the benefits of participation with keen accuracy. “An artist residency would be a remarkably effective way to immerse myself fully in my work and spend a significant amount of time engaged in intensive exploration. As I have learned in school, exploration leads to discovery.” She also sought “to push the boundaries of what I am currently doing to create rigorous, challenging, and wildly ambitious newer works.”

Her time at Bemis Center met all of her expectations. The 2,300-square-foot studio led her to explore working on a 10’ x 15’ painting that she would not have considered previously. “From this experience, I learned a tremendous amount about my own personal ability and my limitations.” Tomiko spent 8-14 hours a day conducting research for projects, working on two large paintings, reading, and thinking.

Tomiko’s work is inspired by her multicultural heritage and references her experience as an African-American and Filipino woman. “As a person of mixed heritage, my work has been shaped by my own personal history as well as my experiences in the world as ‘Other.’ I have, therefore, incorporated personal elements from my background into my paintings. My life experience has been colored by a number of factors—the main one being my desire to present an alternative point of view via the lens of art. In response to seeing people of color merely painted into backgrounds as a kind of prop or fauna, I create work that aggressively situates the native as the protagonist in the foreground. My work examines elements of the fake, or rather, where the truth veers down a problematic path and sort of … gets lost.”

Like a Legend That Rises and Falls
2008 (work in progress), acrylic and flashe on canvas, 12’ x 17’
As with many residencies, the influence of the other residents is undeniable. “Bemis Center brings dynamic people together in a very organic way. The studio space, installation space, and galleries are breathtaking. I think the residency attracts wildly ambitious artists. I feel really lucky to have had the opportunity to witness so many large-scale projects being realized. While I assumed I would be spending the bulk of my days alone, I was delighted to have had the opportunity to get to know the other artists. Many of my new ideas have been the result of working in close contact with so many sculptors. All in all, my experience has been extraordinarily valuable and stimulating.”

“The residency enabled me to make a tremendous amount of progress and, consequently, move forward in my artistic career. When I think back to my time at the Bemis Center, I will remember staying up all night working on my paintings. From the residency experience, I will take the knowledge of what, exactly, is needed to be a full-time, professional artist.”
Artur Silva
Installation, Video, Digital Art, Painting
www.artursilva.com

Artur’s month at Ox-Bow gave him the opportunity to further explore photography, video art, and digitally aggregated compositions, which are the current focus of his work. “My work explores iconography and social commentary by creating improbable combinations of imagery.” His process begins with collected images around a specific theme, which are then assembled using Photoshop and printed on wallpaper-sized adhesive paper. Original photography combined with video and digitally transformed appropriated icons and symbols complete his installations.

“For me, making art is a process that involves allowing myself to stand on unsteady ground. This state of discomfort helps me to push my art forward and address subjects and issues that interest me.” Ox-Bow’s 115 acres of pristine natural forests, dunes, a lagoon, and historic buildings provided an unfamiliar environment to further his creativity in yet another direction. “I was surrounded by woods, which has never been a familiar environment to me. Naturally, my work started to be influenced by those surroundings. My work explores the effects of commodities in our society, and being in a natural environment helped me to think about the very opposite, the effect of nature on a society so dependent on commodities. I started manipulating images of trees and leaves as well as water, and including them in my work. I never thought that would be possible.”

“The interaction with other artists was probably the best part of this experience. To learn about their work and their process and at times assist them with a project or with input—just as a colleague—was incredible. I will remember being able to talk about art at any time of the day or night with any of the...
fellows. The exchange of information, opportunities, and technical support will also be memorable. Above all, the camaraderie amongst staff and fellow artists was remarkable.

When asked about the role of a residency, Artur responded, "I think artists who haven’t done a residency yet are missing an important experience in their creative continuum. It is the entire experience that enticed a burst in creativity which I am still enjoying. Being outside my natural environment provided challenges that I believe added to my work. It improved my ability to change my creative process and adapt. Being able to work off-site with other artists improved my sense of community in a profession known for its solitude. The synergy created by the other artists and their activities reflected in my work and my production while there. There is no way to know until you do it, but residencies have already become an integral part of my creative process.”

Since his residency, Artur’s work has been exhibited at the Holland Arts Council in Michigan and he has completed another exhibit, “From Rags to Riches: America’s REM,” shown in Chicago in 2008. The residency transformed how he approaches his work. "I came to understand that a residency is a great way to challenge myself as an artist. Adapting to a new/different environment was important to understanding my limitations and the strengths of my creative process."
Thu Tran
Installation, Mixed Media, Sculpture
www.thutranthutan.com
www.foodparty.tv
www.youtube.com/user/thutranthutan

“Residencies allow freedom to explore materials, space, thoughts, and techniques. I found it great in idea development.” Thu describes her residency at Art Farm as a time to define the focus of her work, finding areas she no longer wished to pursue. The change in location was “a blank piece of paper to start fresh.”

Thu, whose skills include glassworking techniques, drawing, and painting, as well as carpentry, electrical, and plumbing, describes herself as a “visual artist specializing in object-making, simple design solutions, and problem-solving.” Collaborative projects form the bulk of her current work, the most recent being a television children’s cooking show that fuses the format of Pee Wee’s Playhouse with Martha Stewart programming. “For the most part, my work draws from pop culture with hopes to become an integral part of it.”

Food Party, hosted by Thu, is described as: “a (would-be) TV cooking show with a spicy Saigon kitchen-witch as your hostess, a cast of unruly puppets as culinary advisors, and a cavalcade of hip-hop/sports world celebrities as surprise dinner guests.” Set in a technicolor cardboard kitchen, the characters, puppets, and “celebrities” assist or distract from the cooking tasks at hand.

Through a collaboration with friends who are writers, cinematographers, musicians, and puppeteers, the show has completed several episodes, bringing to realization a project started a year and a half prior to her residency. “At Art Farm, I shot a little video, experimented with materials, illustrated books, and wrote. Being alone, I became more clear on my vision for this video project and more aware of my limitations as an individual working alone.” In addition to clarifying her vision for her cooking show, she illustrated a children’s book and took some time to work on inflatable sculpture. Thu also created a recipe book as part of Art Farm’s work exchange.

Her knowledge of diverse materials proved a good fit for an Art Farm residency, where residents participate in a project or work exchange. Artists have access to a variety of equipment for woodworking, metalworking, and ceramics, but bringing a favorite power tool is encouraged, and many artists-in-residence take advantage of Art Farm’s tractor-driving lessons.

Describing her artwork, Thu states, “I make work that explores relationships between organic and inorganic. I strive to achieve visual MSG (a chemically derived spice that opens the pores of the tongue).” In addition to Food Party, Thu also works and teaches in various studios with glassblowers and other artists.
PARTICIPATING RESIDENCY PROGRAMS

Anderson Center’s Tower View estate has been a familiar Minnesota landmark for almost a century, with its distinctive Georgian Revival buildings and water tower (listed on the National Register of Historic Places) and 330 acres of farm and forest land. Since its founding in 1995, it has been the mission of the Center to uphold the unique wealth of the arts in the region; to develop, foster, and promote the creation of works of art and scholarship of all kinds; and to provide leadership and services that help to insure a strong and healthy arts community and a greater recognition of the value of arts in our society.

Anderson Center provides retreats of two to four weeks to enable those of exceptional promise and demonstrated accomplishment to advance works-in-progress. Since the Center opened, scores of visual artists, writers, and scholars from more than 40 states and 25 countries have been in-residence. The Center also engages in artist exchange programs with organizations in Europe and China and has scholarship programs with the University of Notre Dame, Pacific Lutheran University, and the University of Minnesota.

Artists-in-residence are asked to make a substantive contribution to the community in the form of a talk, class, or performance of their work, and each year Center residents reach more than 1,700 people through visits to schools, senior centers, civic organizations, and correctional facilities in the Greater Red Wing area. The Anderson Center also hosts a variety of artistic, educational, and cultural activities, showcasing the work of more than 250 visual artists, writers, and musicians each year, with over 6,000 people from the Upper Midwest attending Center events.

With one of the finest art collections in rural Minnesota, including works by Picasso, Chagall, Dalí, and other 20th-Century masters, as well as one of the region’s largest outdoor sculpture gardens, the Anderson Center is also home to more than a dozen working artists—sculptors, painters, potters, poets, glassblowers, and printmakers—who maintain year-round studio space at the Center.

Alliance of Artists Communities

The Alliance is the national service organization for artists’ communities, colonies, and residency programs—places that provide artists of any discipline with dedicated time, space, and support for creative work. There are more than 250 artists’ communities in the US and an estimated 1,000 worldwide, providing tens of thousands of artists each year with critical resources for the creation of new work. Artists’ communities offer a supportive environment for risk-taking, experimentation, and the exploration of new ideas essential for human progress—they are, in short, research-and-development labs for the arts.

The Alliance believes that creativity must be nurtured, supported, and catalyzed for the continuation and betterment of our society. Artists’ communities are a necessary part of this creative ecology, and the Alliance exists to support and advance the field’s work. The Alliance is one of the few national organizations representing programs that support artists in all disciplines, believing that collaboration and exchange that cross traditional boundaries further our culture’s progress.

To learn more, visit our website at www.artistcommunities.org

Anderson Center for Interdisciplinary Studies
Red Wing, Minnesota
www.andersoncenter.org
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 bemisUNDERGROUND, an innovative curatorial residency program that provides community-based artists with the rare opportunity to curate exhibitions of their own design.

Art Farm’s mission is to support new artistic vision—vision which 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.

Art Farm’s current 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 fifteen years of existence. In many ways, Art Farm is a work-in-progress being formed from the efforts of these artists, coming from all 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.
Ox-Bow is a 98-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 resonates 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.

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. John Michael Kohler Arts 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 to 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. Pottery, Iron and Brass Foundries, 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.

John Michael Kohler Arts Center
Sheboygan, Wisconsin
www.jmkac.org

John Michael Kohler Arts Center
Sheboygan, Wisconsin
www.jmkac.org

Ox-Bow
Saugatuck, Michigan
www.ox-bow.org
Ragdale was founded on the belief that time and space are not luxuries but necessary elements for creating important new work. Ragdale provides these necessities to artists in the form of two- to eight-week residencies. Add eleven other creative individuals to the mix, acres of idyllic prairie, and a family-style dinner each night, and you have Ragdale.

Ragdale artists come from all over the country and around the world to create, write, experiment, research, plan, compose, rejuvenate, brainstorm, and work. The artists’ community now hosts over 200 emerging and established artists of all disciplines each year. The residents’ uninterrupted time at Ragdale is their own. In this community of unique individuals, Ragdale also offers the possibilities of dialogue and connections with other artists.

Located at the historic summer home of Arts and Crafts architect Howard Van Doren Shaw, Ragdale exists in a peaceful setting adjacent to over fifty acres of prairie. Residents occupy live/work spaces in the Ragdale House, Barnhouse, and Friends’ studios. Ragdale is located one mile from downtown Lake Forest, and just thirty miles from downtown Chicago.

Prairie Center of the Arts
Peoria, Illinois
www.prairiecenterofthearts.org

Ragdale was founded on the belief that time and space are not luxuries but necessary elements for creating important new work. Ragdale provides these necessities to artists in the form of two- to eight-week residencies. Add eleven other creative individuals to the mix, acres of idyllic prairie, and a family-style dinner each night, and you have Ragdale.

Ragdale artists come from all over the country and around the world to create, write, experiment, research, plan, compose, rejuvenate, brainstorm, and work. The artists’ community now hosts over 200 emerging and established artists of all disciplines each year. The residents’ uninterrupted time at Ragdale is their own. In this community of unique individuals, Ragdale also offers the possibilities of dialogue and connections with other artists.

Located at the historic summer home of Arts and Crafts architect Howard Van Doren Shaw, Ragdale exists in a peaceful setting adjacent to over fifty acres of prairie. Residents occupy live/work spaces in the Ragdale House, Barnhouse, and Friends’ studios. Ragdale is located one mile from downtown Lake Forest, and just thirty miles from downtown Chicago.

Prairie Center of the Arts
Peoria, Illinois
www.prairiecenterofthearts.org

Ragdale Foundation
Lake Forest, Illinois
www.ragdale.org
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their roles in making Midwestern Voices and Visions a success:

The Joyce Foundation, for the partnership and full support of this project—in particular, Michelle Boone, for her encouragement, collaboration, advocacy, and humor; and Joyce Foundation President Ellen S. Alberding for championing this work.

Our esteemed selection panelists—Kimberly Cridler, Quraysh Ali Lansana, Gustavo Leone, Lia Rivamonte, and Therman Statom—who took on the difficult task of selecting only a few artists from a large pool of excellent nominees.

Our nominators, too numerous to name individually, who helped bring many exceptional artists to the forefront while spreading the word about the opportunities available at residency programs.

The Bemis Center, for organizing the Midwestern Voices and Visions exhibition and Creativity Festival, providing an opportunity for the artists to meet each other, promote their work, and share the importance of residencies with the public.

The Alliance’s former Executive Director, Deborah Obalil, whose work established our partnership with The Joyce Foundation and launched this initiative; the Alliance’s former Development and Special Projects Director, Tonya Langford, who served as the project’s first coordinator; and Carla Wahnnon, the Alliance’s Operations Manager, who served as liaison to the artists and residency directors and managed all the details of the project with incredible patience and grace.

The directors and staff of the participating residency programs—Robert Hedin, Mark Masuoka, Annie Kwak, Cary Tobin, Michele and Joe Richey, Beth Lipman, Amy Horst, Jason Kalajainen, Sarah Workneh, Susan Page Tillett, Regin Igloia, and Ed Dadey—who demonstrated equal parts selfless flexibility for collaborative work and unbending commitment to the greater goals of the project.

Caitlin Strokosch
Executive Director

Portrait photography by David Joel © 2008
Design by Malcolm Grear Designers