Midwestern Voices and Visions
In 2006, 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.

The Midwestern Voices and Visions Awards celebrate, support, and promote the work of highly talented yet under-recognized artists of color and broaden awareness and support for the opportunities available at Midwestern residency programs for artists of all 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, former Program Officer for The Joyce Foundation.

This project was modeled after Visions from the New California—an initiative of the Alliance of Artists Communities and funded by 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 further the careers of the seven 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.

Selected artists receive a one-month residency at one of seven residency centers in the Midwest, a $4000 grant, and inclusion in the Midwestern Voices and Visions exhibition, curated by Elizabeth Chodos and hosted by Chicago Artists Coalition in October 2011.

The selection of the seven 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, Indiana, 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 three distinguished arts professionals with strong ties to diverse communities in the region:

Esther Grimm, Executive Director, 3Arts / Chicago, IL
Robert Karimi, artist / educator / playwright / Minneapolis, MN
Thomas B. Schorgl, President and CEO, Community Partnership for Arts & Culture / Cleveland, OH

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, seven artists were selected by the participating residency programs to be awarded the 2010 Midwestern Voices and Visions award.

www.midwestvoiceandvisions.org
THATARTISTSANDTHEIRVISIONS

The following pages introduce these artists through their work and their Midwestern Voices and Visions residency experiences.

**Willy Chyr**
a sculptor and installation artist from Chicago, Illinois

The potential of balloons to form shapes and structures is an often overlooked source for artist creation. Though my sculptures are inspired by entities in nature, they are not representations of them. Rather, they become beings in their own universe of light and balloons—balluminescence—and the space around them becomes a window into their world.

**Ibrahima “IBé” Kaba**
a spoken-word poet from Minneapolis, Minnesota

I have been a writer all my life. Though by birth I couldn’t be a griot (poet of my people), I have always loved telling stories. As a young boy in Guinea I would listen to our griots and mimic their style of telling stories about our ancestors. When I came to America, I brought this love with me.

**Patrick Earl Hammie**
a painter from Champaign, Illinois

I explore the tension between power and vulnerability and examine how male artists have historically represented themselves and the male nude. Coming of age in a generation that is post-Civil Rights and post-Second Wave Feminism, I situate myself in the discourse of contemporary art that investigates constructions of identity, gender politics, and race.

**May Lee-Yang**
a writer and playwright from St. Paul, Minnesota

As a Hmong-American artist, I’m very cognizant of the irony that I am a writer. It wasn’t until the 1950s that the Hmong had a written language—developed by French missionaries, no less. The Hmong literary movement began in my lifetime, in 1994, when the first Hmong literary magazine was created in Minnesota. I want to grow myself as an artist, as well as contribute to the larger landscape of artistic voices in Asian-American, people of color, and—yes—even mainstream communities.

**Mitchell Squire**
an installation, sculpture, and mixed-media artist from Ames, Iowa

While Iowa did not give birth to me, it did to my practice. My practice is a consequence of situation in a geographical and cultural condition with an established relevancy to histories that extend far beyond its borders. This is a place wherein my work resides and out of which it intends to arise to be positioned among the most sophisticated produced by contemporary black artists.

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Innovation and the forefront of new ideas

New ways of thinking about and reflecting upon 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, and nurturing the creativity of artists representing a wide range of aesthetics, backgrounds, and approaches to their work. By providing today’s visionaries with the 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 the 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 are 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 do 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.
Willy’s path to the arts has been a circuitous one. He graduated from the University of Chicago with a double B.A. in Economics and Physics and while at school he worked as a research technician in various science laboratories—including the National Institute of Nuclear Physics in Italy. He also performed as a juggler and a magician with the student-run Le Vorris and Vox Circus. It was during his experience with the circus that he learned how to twist balloons, which became the building blocks of his sculptures and installations.

“The potential of balloons to form shapes and structures is an often overlooked source for artistic creation. In my sculptures, I make use of this potential to express the beauty that I see in nature. From bioluminescence to consciousness, the natural world is full of the most incredible and mind-boggling phenomena. Each sculpture stems from the principles behind these phenomena and the enigmatic laws that govern them.”

Willy arrived at Bemis Center as a young college graduate unsure of the role that the arts played in his life. His residency not only provided him with a creative outlet, but also gave him time to contemplate his artistic leanings and how they related to his life decisions. “For me, the residency confirmed my desire to work in a creative capacity, or at least have it be an important aspect of my life. As someone who just graduated from college, much of this past year has been spent figuring out what direction I want to take in life. While I had always enjoyed creative work, my time as an artist-in-residence made me realize that it is something I’m truly passionate about, and want to seriously pursue.”

Bemis opened new artistic horizons for Willy by introducing him to other artists at various stages in their development. “It was very helpful to meet other resident artists who were much farther along in their career and who were much more familiar with the art scene,” recalls Willy. “As an emerging artist, and...
someone who is very new to the art world, it was very enlightening to hear about their experiences and the challenges they’ve faced and overcome.”

“While there were not any mandatory activities to facilitate interactions, the layout of the studios and the events that the Bemis Center organized really encouraged interaction. The resident artists went out a number of times for meals and also got together to socialize after various Bemis events. Additionally, all the artists propped their studio doors open during the day so it was easy to stop by and chat.”

Heather Johnson, Bemis’ residency program manager, recalls that, in addition to Willy’s ambitious studio practice, he also found time to engage with the greater Omaha community. “Willy is an enthusiastic and amiable artist and his past experiences as a performer attributed to his popularity with tour groups and following his Art Talk presentation. Interaction with other Artists-in-Residence was an important aspect of Willy’s time. Working next to artists prolific in animation was particularly influential as Willy was experimenting with time-based media. He took full advantage of the Bemis Center’s abundance of open spaces by experimenting with ephemeral site-specific installations and investigations into time and space.”

The positive impact of Willy’s residency stay will resonate with him for many years to come. It affirmed his artistic impulses and instilled within him a deeper understanding of the artistic process: “A major change to my practice is that now I set aside time every day to simply experiment and explore. Prior to my residency I worked on a project-to-project basis – every time I sat down to create, I was working towards a final result, and not thinking about the creative process itself. At Bemis, I had time to play and experiment without the pressure of having to produce something. I realized that a lot of great ideas and thoughts arise out of this process. I’ve embraced this procedure and have made it a part of my daily routine.”
Patrick Earl Hammie

Painting

http://patrickearlhammie.com

Patrick is both an artist and an arts-educator; he serves as an assistant professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. As a painter, his current work often incorporates monumental portraits to investigate and remix ideal beauty and heroic nudity. During his stay at Kohler’s Arts/Industry residency, he continued his explorations but did so by utilizing a new medium—ceramics. “I worked with cast parts of my body and other symbolic objects to investigate themes of duality, death, and rebirth. These explorations culminated in the creation of a life size self-portrait bust, a pair of legs that connect with my painted series Oedipus, and a bouquet of calla lilies.”

Working within a new medium required that Patrick cultivate a different process and approach to his art making. “Over the course of the residency, my relationship to making was challenged. In painting, one prepares a substrate and then there is a cycle of painting and reflection that occurs over several sittings. There is a distance during the reflection period that allows for a recollection of ideas and affords time to develop new strategies to address the changing surface of the canvas. In casting, that type of gratification was less available to me. I found myself following a labor-intense plan that left me blind to the object’s progress for large periods of time. I had to trust the alchemy and had very little time to synthesize the strengths or weaknesses of my efforts.”

Cara Camp, Arts/Industry assistant at Kohler, observed that “During Patrick’s time in the Arts/Industry Residency, he was challenged to think and see differently as an artist. By working sculpturally with slip-cast vitreous China at Kohler Co., he was able to create objects that conceptualized the work he has done in...”
the past with painting. It was inspiring to watch the strength of his ideas show through his hand at a new material. Patrick also had the opportunity to launch a new series of work in the third dimension that he will later translate back into the medium of painting. Patrick left the residency equipped with a new dialogue between two mediums that will add additional voices to the conversation he creates with his work.

An important component of the Kohler residency is access to the expertise of its technical and factory staff. “The Arts/Industry technician, Shari McWilliams, was very knowledgeable on how to utilize and maximize the factory’s facilities to best achieve my established goals. She ushered me through the industrial complex and acted as a liaison to Kohler Co. and the Art Center.” He also found that the other artists-in-residence were a useful source of knowledge and quick to offer a helping hand when asked to do so. “My residency-mate Jeremy Hatch is a master mold maker and I learned various strategies for making functional molds from him. There were also many mealtimes when we would discuss plans for the week, life as artists and educators, and art in general. Those conversations helped me to organize ideas and forge a relationship that will continue beyond the residency.”

Looking back on his experience, Patrick realizes how invaluable the residency was in affording him an opportunity to challenge himself in a supportive environment. It expanded his perception of his own art making and enriched both his artistic and educational processes. “I’m interested in projects that will change the way I see and challenge me beyond my comfort zones. I came into this residency with very limited ceramics experience and wanted to take this opportunity to learn more about the medium and processes, and surround myself with new problems to solve. This undertaking challenged my relationship to making and forced me to reposition myself as maker, student, and educator. That is the most valuable experience I am taking with me.”
Ibrahima “IBé” Kaba

Spoken-word Poetry

www.atlanticrock.com

“I am a poet, a writer who’s made the experiences of Africans in America the backbone of his work. They are my subjects, my clients, and my muse. To understand them in America, I came to realize, one must first know them in Africa.” Ibrahima—IBé for short—was born in Guinea and came to the U.S. when he was fourteen from Sierra Leone. Though his formal education is in computer science, he has also nurtured a passion for writing and telling stories. The chance to participate in a residency afforded him a rare chance to delve completely into his art.

“The opportunity to step away from my day job and my responsibilities as a parent allowed me to be a full-time writer for the very first time in my life. And I seriously believe there was no other way to do what I did here. The large stretch of time this residency gave me was exactly what I needed to travel back to Guinea and remember the paths, stories, and feelings I had when I was there last year…before it was too late.”

Connecting with the other artists-in-residence helped broaden IBé’s knowledge of the arts as well as the craft of writing. Ideas were exchanged, collaborations formed, and a sense of informal camaraderie developed among them. “There was enough time for interaction with other artists. We created time for each other. There was no structure—and that was the best structure. We even had an evening where we shared our work with each other. How fantastic is that! Dinner times were always filled with great conversations.”

IBé also took advantage of opportunities to connect with the local community outside the residency. Robert Hedin, director of Anderson Center, recalls how “IBé was pleased to present a performance of his work to an enthralled and packed audience at our Summer Celebration of the Arts. His performance was truly amazing, brought the language to life, and dealt with his journey from his homeland and the tensions of being American with roots in another culture. He was a most ideal resident, who took an avid interest in the work of his artistic and scholarly colleagues and helped to create a supportive and collegial atmosphere.”

During his residency stay, IBé found a re-awakened interest in other genres of writing. “I used to write short stories before I found spoken word. However, since finding spoken word, it’s become almost impossible for me to write prose. I thought I’d lost that talent. This residency helped me retrieve this style of writing again.” It also challenged him to experiment with his creative process and explore new approaches to making art. “I usually build poems in my head before sitting down to write them. This residency required that I do the opposite. It was not a raving success, but it turned out far better than I expected.”

Upon returning to his home and family, IBé found that keeping a balance between attending to life’s demands and devoting himself to art was a challenge: “After my residency at the Anderson Center, it was back to business as usual. That is, back to parenthood, back to my 9-to-5, back to the hustle and bustle of forging art in all the small spaces reality allows you. Two days later, my family and I welcomed a new addition: a beautiful baby girl we named Zayna Acy-Jaka Kaba. In other words, this could have easily been a little overwhelming, giving way to days with little to no writing. However, my time at the Anderson Center taught me a valuable skill: the ability to make great use of any little time I have.”

Civilization

We have not always been on the outside of its definition
Absent from worldly negotiations
G8 summits without representation

We have not always been Third
No, we have not always been at the receiving end
Of strings-attached aids
The barrel of triggers pulled by our own
Donated by agents in faraway lands

We have not always been today’s ancient ruins
No, we have not always been
The withered leaves of a has-been tree
Cocoa farmers dying for a taste of chocolate

We have not always been least
No, our faces have not always been those used
To illicit false compassion
Blackmail guilt into duty
Framed as backdrop to exotic deviations

Our spirits have not always been this bowed
No, we have not always been relay hands
Anxiously awaiting our turn
To turn our backs on our mother
For a jazebel’s promises of gold
“Consequently in all the craziness that is sometimes my life, I have been writing: in the morning before the kids wake up, at night after they go to bed, during the day on the train to work, etc. I’m still working on the project I started at the Anderson Center, though I’m at a point where I feel I need to take another trip back to Guinea to take better note of some details. But all in all, it is coming along just fine. My time at Anderson Center was valuable not only in the precious time it afforded me, but it also taught me skills I know will always be with me as I travel down these two roads I walk…hoping one day they converge.”

FINDING HOME

Home
Is it where the head lays?
Or where the feet land
Where the arms reach
Or where the heart yearns
Is it there
Or is it here
Without
Or locked in a safe
Behind flesh and bones
Is it in the light
Or in the dark
Is that by choice
Or where you find it safe
Is it in the nostalgia of yesteryears
Or the hopes of a better tomorrow
Is it with your brothers and sisters
Or with your sons and daughters
Where they call you by your given name
Or the one you proclaim
And if those two are the same
Is it where they say it right
Or strain to get it right
Is it where they love you
Or where they welcome you
Because a black sheep knows
Some would love you and forsake you
Other would welcome you even if they don’t know you
Forgive you after they know you
Is it where they feed you
Or where they teach you
Where your new stories are old
Or where your old stories are new
Is it where you are the moon
Or a star above a lake in the middle of nowhere
Where the midwives brew
Or the angels weep
Maybe it’s all that
And nothing is new
May Lee-Yang

Literature and Theater

www.lazyhmongwoman.com

May is a playwright, poet, prose writer, and performance artist. She has a B.A. in English but considers herself to be a self-taught artist. “So much of what I know of writing and performing comes from doing,” she explains. “As a performer, I got my first acting gig when I was 18, touring in a show called Hmong Tapestry: Voices from the Cloth around the Midwest. I then went on to perform my poems and stories at open mics, publication celebrations, and venues that invited me.”

She envisioned her residency experience as a time to delve deeper into her multiple identities as an artist and an individual: “Because of all the identities I carry with me—Hmong, woman, Asian-American, refugee, etc.—I sometimes feel as if I am expected to produce works about identity politics and adjusting to life in the U.S. While these are themes that frequently do emerge in my work, I wanted this time to explore another part of myself as an artist.”

While at Art Farm in Nebraska, May spent “a good chunk of my time researching and writing my show Ten Reasons Why I’d Be a Bad Porn Star. Specifically, I looked into Asian male sexuality, explored women and desire, and considered the temptations of doing porn to make ends meet as a struggling artist.” She came to appreciate the residency for its “isolation and its community of artists. I found that the residency gave me a chance to do research and really live and breathe my script versus creating quickly in short spurts of time. I came to a better understanding of my script—that it is not just a campy show about sex, but an excavation of what desire means to me and perhaps to other women.”

She found a diverse and nurturing community of artists at Art Farm and fondly remembers “road trips in search of ethnic goods, our sojourn through the...”
Nebraska plains, and the skills other artists taught me. I am not a very kinesthetic person, yet I learned how to build benches, a table, use carpentry tools, and helped to put up drywall for a room. I was challenged to step outside my own boundaries.”

She also learned first-hand how fickle and unpredictable the Nebraska weather can be. Ed Dadey, Art Farm’s director, recalls that “May Lee’s residency was one of scheduling, promotion and finishing, refining and editing work in progress. But it was a severe storm dumping eight inches of rain one night—for a few brief hours making Art Farm an island with accommodations featuring indoor lakes—that brought to May the Art Farm experience. In addition to storm trauma, she left the residency as a knowledgeable drywall installer.”

Upon completing her residency, May realized four important insights: “Firstly, time and space are such precious gifts for me as an artist. Secondly, in-depth research greatly enhances my work. Thirdly, I need to continuously challenge myself to move beyond boundaries I’ve set for myself. Lastly, new places and new people are great opportunities to re-discover and uncover my potential as an artist.”

“One of the things I treasure from my residency is the importance of honoring time. Too often, I work in a frazzled state, trying to make deadlines and not making enough time to sit, reflect, play, and explore the possibilities within the questions I ask myself. The residency offered an opportunity for me to not only be physically removed from the everyday life that distracts my art. It also provided me with an opportunity to psychologically remove myself from the outside world and just work as an artist. I don’t know if I will ever find a good balance for art, administration, community work, and family in my everyday life. But at least I know that I want and need sabbaticals to focus on my work. Even more than knowing this, I have already consciously put aside time this coming year to honor my creative process.”
Kansas City artist Adolfo Martinez is best known for his large-scale paintings of living room sofas incorporating Mexican cultural motifs, two of which reside in the collection of the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art. He explains that the idea “has to do with the starving artist sale. Sofa-size paintings for $19.99! I saw that and that’s where the idea came from. As a starving artist, I couldn’t compete with that — $19.99 wouldn’t even cover the cost of the canvas. So I came up with the idea of painting sofa-size paintings of sofas.”

His distinct artistic style applies humor, wry self-deprecation, and an appreciation for pop culture to an investigation of personal and cultural identity. Motifs and themes from his heritage as a first-generation Mexican-American regularly appear in his artwork. In addition to his sofa paintings, other recent works include “Pancho Villa Tortilla Apparition,” “What Would Zapata Do?,” “La Familia,” “The Metro Chronicles,” and “Day of the Dead.”

For Adolfo, 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 circle of friends was something he feels “helped to establish a new community… and has given me a new perspective on my art.”

Prairie Center provided Adolpho with several tables and easels on which to work, allowing him to greatly increase his workflow and tackle several projects at once. With many of his daily needs were attended to, Adolpho was free to focus more intently on his art work: “I spent most of my time painting and working on a new series called ‘Don’t Cry Like a Woman’ that
will show in Kansas City. I also began working on illustrations for a bilingual children’s book that we hope to publish soon."

Joe and Michele Richey, founders of Prairie Center, remember how “Adolfo set up his materials in his studio and immediately began to produce work. Anticipating an exhibition at the Mattie Rhodes Art Center back in Kansas City in September, he worked diligently on developing a complete body of work. He also found time to develop a series of children’s books with a collaborator in Kansas City. The residency artists were abuzz with comments about his progress and our local art critic interviewed Adolfo with a resulting spread in the local newspaper. Adolfo provided a gallery talk on his work for the locals and met a number of Bradley University faculty and students, exchanged artwork with Peoria artists, and left a painting of Peoria’s St. Mary’s Cathedral for the Prairie Center collection.”

The greatest impact from Adolfo’s residency is how the experience has shaped his self-perception as an artist. It has instilled within him a heightened sense of importance and motivation: “The time spent here has allowed me to reflect on myself being an artist. If anything, it has made me feel like I am a real artist and I will continue to work knowing that people do value me as an artist.” Adolfo plans to seek out additional residency experiences and he emerged from Prairie Center a great believer in the transformative power of residencies on the artist and artistic process: “It has encouraged me to apply for other residencies and to encourage other Latino artists in Kansas City to apply.”
Linda Rodriguez
Poetry and Literature
www.lindarodriguezwrites.blogspot.com

Linda is a founding member of the Latino Writers Collective, the Kansas City Women Writers Series, and The Writers Place—having shared its grants, fundraising, and program committees. Prior to receiving the Midwestern Voices and Visions award, Linda found that—between the time spent on her freelance work and her work in the community—there was little time left over for her own creative endeavors. In particular, Linda wanted to create a book of poetry that would focus on the natural world and a personal exploration of emotion, society, and identity.

Linda hoped a residency would give her an opportunity to “work on this book as a whole in the light of the vision I have for it, rather than piecemeal.” Her experience at Ragdale exceeded her expectations: “I spent the first week editing a novel manuscript that an editor wanted. After sending that off, I spent the rest of my residency writing my next poetry book, titled Dark Sister. I had thought I would get much of it written, but never expected to finish the entire book.”

She found an environment at Ragdale that nurtured creativity. The proximity to nature inspired her writing: “Much of this book was concerned with the natural world and the workspace I had offered a big double-window on the prairie in front of me as I sat at my desk. This was tremendously inspiring and helpful. The sense of space and the silence were so conducive to creativity. The whole atmosphere of Ragdale House seemed permeated with respect for art and a history of art creation of all kinds. The spirits were very supportive.”

Regin Igloria, director of artists-in-residence at Ragdale, was impressed by Linda’s dedication to her work and art: “I developed a real respect for her work and what she does for the Latino and writing communities in Kansas City. She did a remarkable reading for us, and I know that the other residents felt similarly.”

As with many residencies, the influence of the other residents is undeniable. Ragdale provided Linda with a chance to interact with a diverse community of artists. Camaradeine developed among the residents fueling the creative process and opening new artistic possibilities: “We have established a new community and are already letting each other know about opportunities we encounter. Conversations that were helpful for my own work, in both poetry and fiction, abounded. The possibility of collaborations is being explored in several cases.”

Since the completion of Linda’s residency, new opportunities for exchange and exhibition have opened up: “I was accepted to give a reading on a panel at the Association of Writers and Writing Programs’ national conference in Denver, Colorado. At the conference, I was able to meet all kinds of editors and was offered wonderful opportunities, especially the chance to guest-edit a Latino-themed issue of a major national literary magazine. I was asked to submit poems, reviews, and essays to excellent magazines and made an agreement to co-edit with another well-known mixed-blood writer a collection of creative essays by mixed-blood Native American women writers.”

“Currently, I am traveling to give paid readings of my work (another direct result of this award), and I am doing the slow preliminary work on developing a new novel and a book of poetry triggered by my stay at Ragdale, which will look at women and violence through the lens of my mother’s life. My life as a writer has expanded and blossomed because I received the Midwestern Voices and Visions Award, and I would like to thank the Alliance and The Joyce Foundation with my whole heart for the investment it has made in me as an artist.”

Excerpt from the book Heart’s Migration

DARK SISTER

I am the dark sister, the one with scars, broken and mended.

I am the dream sister, trailing shreds of night, a herald foreshadowing.

I am the witch sister, singing to the winds, conjuring a storm.

I am the crow sister, the disgraced one, free of owners.

I am that sister, stripped of layers of pride and shame, become glowing cinder in the palm of a hand.
THROUGH THE BODY

Sometimes the way to milk and honey is through the body.
— Linda Hogan

Stop surrounding yourself with mirrors.
Turn them into windows.
Sink into a warm tub of lavender-scented water.
Count the creamy cups of magnolia blossoms.
Walk through a windy, crashing spring storm
that flashes light across the night sky
before every boom and blast of thunder.
Pick lemon balm and bruise the leaves
to fill the air with that quick, brisk scent.
Dip into homemade ice cream on a summer day
and let the rich, smooth chill slide down your throat.

We have been given all we need—
the tinkling of wind chimes brushed by a breeze,
a blue heron hunting in the shallows of a river bend pool,
spring air heavy with the sharp scent of rain to come as dark falls,
the salt of a lover’s skin,
the lightest silk sliding across the breast,
the chorus of chirps and whistles that fills the trees
as birds greet the slow color of the dawn,
the sun-warmed sweetness of wild berries,
a loved hand rubbing kinks from back or neck,
the licorice air above a patch of fennel,
the shadows of old trees that wrap around the body
like a comforting shawl.

There was never any fall.
It was only a rumor.
Daily we walk, insensible,
through the garden.
Mitchell Squire

Sculpture, Installation Art, Mixed-media

http://mitchellsquire.com

Mitchell came to Ox-Bow from the very heart of the Midwest: “My art practice is located in Ames, Iowa, a geographical center of the Midwest region. In 2007, Iowa ranked 45th in the country for investments in the arts per capita; but, ironically, it provides a distinct and highly engaged cultural landscape for the practice of art.” Mitchell believes receiving the Midwestern Voices and Visions award is not just a matter of advancing his own artistic career, but also those of his contemporaries in Iowa: “What it has done for Iowa, in terms of its history of nurturing a quietly provocative but steadfast artist, is simply long overdue.”

Mitchell’s residency has had a tremendous impact on his self-perception and his work: “The residency was effective for changing the nature of my artistic production in the sense that the works were entered into with a greater degree of immediacy, forcing me to be not so precious with it. As a consequence, I think the work is more mature, for it emerged from a place of opportunity and in a way that taught me how to manage contingency. I didn’t have to know everything about what I wanted to do, nor hold on to the process so tight that the life was choked out of the finished product.”

Shanna Shearer, Ox-Bow’s campus Coordinator, remembers Mitchell as “a great addition to our community. His time at Ox-Bow seemed focused and productive and he was an integral part of the fall residency. Mitchell also took advantage of Ox-Bow’s remarkable landscape. He spent time canoeing the Ox-Bow lagoon, hiking the dune, and enjoying Ox-Bow’s open meadow and evening bonfires.”

For Mitchell, the unstructured and generous amount of free time “was tremendously fruitful in not only artistic productivity, but also in creative reflection—and debate with fellow residents—on the history and
The Alliance of Artists Communities is the service organization for the field of artists’ communities and residency programs—places that provide artists of any discipline with dedicated time, space, and support for creative work. 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, to advance the endeavors of artists. The Alliance strives for a society that values creative people and process, as well as products; 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 an estimated 500 artist residency programs in the US and more than 1,000 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. 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 furthers our culture’s progress.

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

Looking back at his residency experience, Mitchell acknowledges the deep impact that it has had on his professional practice. “The role of a residency in an artist’s career is something I hadn’t thought about until I was inside the experience. It is perhaps only secondary to one’s formal education in terms of its value. I come from an education and practice in the discipline of design, so the residency is, in effect, a kind of crash independent study that I view as constituting a significant portion of my ‘education’ in art.”

current trajectory of my art practice. Typically for me, such contemplation and conversation is usually either squeezed between other important matters I’m responsible for attending to or they fall within the domain of some scheduled program or event, but here they were entered into within the natural ebb and flow that marks resident life.”

“Being asked at dinner what you worked on during the day allows the process of making sense of what one is doing to happen quickly on the heels of a creative act. Likewise, being asked at breakfast what was my plan for the day also provided greater purpose to my being there and the cognizance to make the most out of the opportunity. The new environment and new faces kept things fresh and prompted me the agency and resources to think in alternative ways about art making.”

PARTICIPATING RESIDENCY PROGRAMS

Still from video “The Annunciation” 2010, 2-channel, non-synchronized continuous loop
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. 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 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.

Anderson Center for Interdisciplinary Studies
Red Wing, Minnesota
www.andersoncenter.org

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.

Art Farm
Marquette, Nebraska
www.artfarmnebraska.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 bemsUNDERSnake, 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. 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.
At Prairie Center of the Arts, artists and other creative people will find both a contemplative rural retreat and access to an industrial environment, equipment, and new technologies not readily available. “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 two weeks 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. Studios are housed in an urban, industrial environment near the Illinois River. The main facility is a historic rope factory, while Warehouse Gallery One is a 6,000-square-foot space used for meetings, exhibitions, and installations. The Prairie Center home in Germantown Hills sits on 50 wooded acres and serves as the residency retreat, housing guests twenty minutes from the studio facilities.

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 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.

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

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

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To our esteemed selection panelists—**Esther Grimm**, **Robert Karimi**, and **Thomas Schorgl**—who took on the difficult task of selecting only a few artists from a large pool of excellent nominees with thoughtful inquiry and true passion for the artists: we could not have hoped for a better crew.

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To the Alliance Board of Trustees and Honorary Board, for ceaseless advocacy on behalf of today’s most promising artists.

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