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CENTER FOR MAINE CRAFT
(located in the West Gardiner Service Plaza)
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Presents

Teapots from Watershed,
A potters, painters and film-makers collaboration
Nov 2nd – Nov 30th

Created by:

Potters: Nancy Bruno; Carole Ann Fer; Jemma Gascoine; Adam Ledford; Paige Pride; Austin P. Smith; Jina Stuckenschneider; Simon van der Ven; Nate Willever

Filmmakers: Jule Belami; Nina Chernik;

Painters: Katia Ancona; John Bozin; Jessica Cropper-Alt; James Fangbone; Em Gift; Jonty Sale; Abby Shahn; Todd Watts

Nine potters, eight painters and two writer/filmmakers worked on the 'Teapots from Watershed' exhibition. It opens at the Center for Maine Craft on November 2nd where there will be a small reception from 3-5pm to meet some of the artists. Teapots will be on display that were created during a two week Artist-Invites-Artists Residency at Watershed Center for Ceramic Arts. A short film that was made during the residency is part of the exhibit. The show will run to November 30th.

The A-I-A residency followed by an exhibition and film was the idea of Jemma Gascoine of Blanchard, Piscataquis County. Having curated two teapot shows in 2010 & 2011, she wanted to try the same theme again but at a more focal venue. The 2011 'Teapot II' at Lake Hebron Artisans in Monson initiated a great article in the Bangor Daily News by Aislinn Sarnacki who titled it 'Teapots are tough - an ancient design continues to challenge Maine potters'. Sarnacki quoted Simon van der Ven, one of the potters, as saying "I didn't start doing clay until I was actually teaching it... I did handwork for a long time, and it took me a while to learn how to throw, but once I learned how to throw, a teapot was one of those challenges I couldn't deny."

Gascoine has been a member of the Maine Crafts Association, which runs the Center for Maine Craft, since 2007, so presenting the fruits of a Watershed Residency there, was an obvious choice since Watershed is also an MCA member. Gascoine invited Simon van der Ven first, a mid-coast potter with a passion for craftsmanship. Next she invited Portland-based potter Paige Pride who had shown her work in both of the teapot shows Gascoine organized in 2010 & 11. She is a graduate of Mecca and a MCA member. Then Gascoine invited the filmmakers Nina Chernik from New York City and Jule Belami from London. They knew each other but had never worked together before. Van der Ven recommended Austin. P. Smith a mid-coast artist and mould-maker, and then Van der Ven and Smith suggested Carole Ann Fer of Deer Isle as the last member of the group. Fer, a well-respected potter in Maine, works at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts and runs Dowstudio Gallery.

All of the invited potters work on potter's wheels and are very familiar with functional work. They come from the length and breadth of Maine. Four out of five have partners who are also artists but work in a different medium to them. Gascoine felt therefore, that they would be adept at embracing cross-artform ideas. Potters Nancy Bruno (NY), Adam Ledford (who had a kiln-god scholarship) (PA), Jessica Cropper-Alt (NY) and Jina Stuckenschneider (MO) also signed up for the residency.

Gascoine thought that the common goal of a teapot exhibition would be a unifying factor for the group. She knew from personal experience that artists often work alone and that collaborating would take practice. She was curious whether working alongside different artforms such as film and painting, would open everyone up to a fountain of inspiration therefore allowing a new look at their own process. Her interest in collaboration began when she worked at the Collaborative Arts Department of the Arts Council of England. She learnt there that interesting tensions and connections can occur through multi or inter-disciplinary work.

Nancy Bruno observed that 'the first collaborative assignment that was agreed upon was having each artist create three teapot bodies. One body would continuously be shared amongst the group, as each person added a component to complete it (lid, handle and spout). The remaining two bodies were for another artist to respond to its form, and finish all the components. This assignment was a great warm up and introduction to teapots as well as an icebreaker... It was interesting to see each other's response to the bodies they picked, as some altered the body to their style and others responded to the body itself. When I received my three bodies I did not wish to alter them but rather study them and add components that I felt best suited them, ... the many different forms that were created allowed myself, as an artist, to think about a teapot with more depth'.

A farm surrounds Watershed, which is a very pleasant backdrop for creative work. All meals are provided and the resident chefs utilize locally sourced fresh food. It is a great place to allow artists the concentration-time to move forward in their work. Paige Pride was delighted by 'residing at a wonderful factory like Watershed' which enabled her to 'experiment in ways I don't normally, like coil building and non-functional work'. Pride also highlighted the importance of the 'quiet moments, observing others ways and techniques.'

Gascoine invited filmmakers Jule Belami and Nina Chernik to the project partly with an eye on the marketing potential of the film. With nothing prescribed, she hoped that material would emerge from the daily meetings, the clay work and the farm setting. They later expressed that they felt the project was 'meaty'. They certainly challenged with their line of questioning in their filmed interviews. Gascoine found that it was trickier than she predicted, 'to have a camera thrust at your fingers whilst struggling over a technical issue on the wheel and answering questions about those difficulties at the same time'. Belami did assert how very much he appreciated 'the privilege of watching potters and ceramic artists at work and being permitted to question them' about their work. Pride felt that the process of making the film should have been more collaborative.

The residency wasn't a totally smooth ride. At first everyone was pretty generous with their time and suggestions and commitment to helping the project move forward. The second week saw more concern with firings, glazing and packing work up because there was the opportunity for the potters to use Watershed's facilities, such as the raku and salt kilns, facilities that they didn't normally have access to at their own studios. Austin Smith noted that 'there was some confusion as to the definition of collaboration, and a shared feeling of being rushed or pressured to collaborate. Perhaps ... more communication and structure at the start would have helped?' There were comments that the painters, who arrived for a one-day visit from a distance, should have been better introduced, and perhaps better integrated.

Nancy Bruno asserted that she would participate in a collaborative workshop again 'especially if there are other medias involved. Nina was correct when she stated "we work in our own isolated space." When an artist isolates themselves it does not lead to a positive creative environment and I feel hinders' us.

Jina Stuckenschneider summed up the residency with 'I felt new motivations and more aspirations towards my work. It was challenging to try and collaborate on a piece of artwork with another artist.' Smith stated 'I believe I learned something from just about everyone I met and worked with at Watershed, whether large or small, even if that something happened to be about myself.'