

ARTIST OPPORTUNITIES

A FORT WORDEN RESIDENCY CROSSES WITH A CULTURAL CONGRESS

By Carolyn Law

Ahhh... life was so good for me. A first time opportunity had presented itself – one month of uninterrupted time to think about and discuss with public artists and art professionals the nature of creativity and also to make art while engaged with such a fundamental issue. All this offered through the Centrum Foundation in the glorious setting of Fort Worden in Port Townsend.

Then more came my way to expand the opportunity in even more interesting ways. Donovan Gray graciously asked me to take advantage of the Cultural Congress that would be taking place at Fort Worden at the beginning of my residency. He knowingly suggested that my residency topic and the Congress might mesh nicely. I don't think even Donovan could have imagined how provocative the meshing would be for me.

Thus I arrived with a car full of books and artmaking tools, to plunge into this long moment with few extraneous work demands – no family/kids, and no intention of going back to Seattle before the month was out.

I got settled and figured out how to be alone again. The Congress began and I attended the keynote address by Bill Cleveland. Immediately my brain crackled. I understood that the thrust of his address contained strands that I would weave through my own discussions about creativity. While Cleveland was concerned more directly with bringing the creative process, as held in the knowledgeable hands of artists and advocates, out from the margins and consistently into the mainstream in order to deal with the changing landscape of what constitutes our lives, I was concerned with if and how established public artists personally define, understand and actively work with creativity outside the controlled environment of a studio. We were both walking around on similar ground with complementary concerns.

As well, in his three linked workshops, I heard Cleveland stress the need for creative people to be ever aware and thoughtful in their planning and subsequent interactions with the larger world, because the creative process and its potential is as powerful as it is needed. I believe this idea is what drives the most sincerely engaged public artists. And yet with the demands and relative isolation from peers of this type of work, there is little time and perhaps, inclination, to stop and periodically check the creative barometer to make sure that you are using the process well and to full advantage in the situations you find yourself in.

During my residency, my interest was in provoking some proactive discussion and awareness of this critical subject with a range of professionals to see what I/we would find. I was profoundly moved and inspired to pursue this with increased commitment and vigor after sharing ideas at the Cultural Congress. I found that as I proceeded with my one-on-one or two discussions scattered over a two-week period, I did weave in the strands from Cleveland as well as the new-to-me method of Open Space meeting.

In the end, as I packed up what I had brought and what I had transformed into artwork, I stood amazed at the beauty and calm of the place juxtaposed next to the vigor and complexity of the thoughts and discussions that were had. The calm had allowed the thoughts to crystallize.

I left knowing that an artist cannot accomplish as much out in the world if they do not have a deep and on-going link to the essential nature of their activity. Just as Cleveland described the clear need to understand who you are partnering with, or who you will be broaching ideas to, or who you will be working with and what potential the creative process has to impact their lives – I felt so should an artist or those involved in the arts spend time mucking around in the allusive world of defining what creativity is and how you personally understand it, use it, apply it, and keep it sprightly. And finally how to apply the creative process and what your goals are if you are engaged in the world at large. Engaging in this line of questioning is humbling in the best understanding of that word.

Carolyn Law attended Centrum's Artist in Residency Program from April 20 - May 20, 1998.



Drawing by Carolyn Law