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Fall 2005

The Artist, the Farmer, and Social Change

Rebecca Bearden Welsh

At the summer graduation ceremonies of USM's Stonecoast MFA in Creative Writing Program this past July, the speakers all emphasized the responsibility of writers in particular, but artists of all kinds, to use our craft to effect social change. It is an enormous responsibility, knowing that when I send my words out into the world, they can affect the thoughts of people I will never meet. It makes me take my job as a writer very seriously.

An article I read around the same time in the Portland Press Herald caught my attention and illustrated to me again the importance and the power of the arts in society. The article, "Palestinian Poet backs artist freedom," reported that "gunmen broke up the concert of a popular West Bank singer after he refused to limit his repertoire to political songs." The article went on to report that, "Palestinian national poet Mahmoud Darwish is striking back, saying fanatics have no right to deprive Palestinians of beauty in their lives."

The role of the artist in the community is to provoke that public discourse, to heighten awareness of what is important and to start conversations surrounding that awareness, about issues of concern to the community.

All art is essentially political. It has the power, indeed, it has the mandate, to add to the public discourse of thoughts and ideas.

An active community of artists also helps raise the aspirations of all members of the community.

The intersection between community issues and art occurs

at the precise point where the artist enters the public discourse by producing a work of art. This can be in the form of literature, visual art, dance, music or any other mode of creative expression.

During the 1930s and 1940s, so-called industrial art came to prominence as a way to help people understand the environment

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The Art of Eating Well

"The Art of Eating Well" is the name of a juried poster contest recently launched in Western Maine, and a \$1000 first prize cash award is only part of the incentive the promoters hope will encourage many Maine artists to participate.

"Eating well," in this context, means eating as much fresh, locally grown, natural, unprocessed, unadulterated food as possible, as opposed to the over-processed, road-weary variety we have become accustomed to, according to Paula Day of the Maine Alternative Agriculture Association. The art contest will launch an ambitious new

project to bring local farm products to local consumers in the

"We are asking for the help of the most creative people in our community to help make the connection we need with local consumers," says Day, "The project needs a face."

Farmington and Skowhegan areas. "Support from the artists is critical to us, we need a striking iconic image to make people think local when they are food shopping," said Day.

Funded by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan, Western Mountains Alliance has developed the concept of a vital local food system for Franklin and Somerset Counties. The idea is to encourage the local agricultural community to produce for the local community and to encourage local consumers to spend their food dollars on those local products. A farm-to-school push is also a part of the plan.

Hired by the Alliance to implement the project, Day explains that the idea to bring Maine artists into the project came even before the details of how to create a viable local food system began to be worked out. The technical difficulties involved in developing a serious, year round local food supply is a matter of long-term coordinated efforts by farmers, agricultural experts and advisors, supermarket and institutional purchasing agents, and regional distributors, to name a few. The effort fails without the support, encouragement, faith and goodwill of the public.

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Mission Statement

The Western Mountains Alliance strives to improve the quality of life and to strengthen the regional identity of Maine, while honoring rural values and the environment, and supporting sustainable community development. We provide a forum to bring together many voices and many communities to find common ground through regional dialogue, bold thinking, and capacity building. We serve as an energetic advocate for the western mountains region.

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Here at the Alliance — *by Kathleen Beauregard, Projects, Grants and Communications Coordinator*

Celebration of Regional Leadership

An evening of regional music and song will be the backdrop for the 5th Biennial King Cummings Leadership Award, which will be presented to one western Maine organization that exemplifies the mission of the Alliance, founded by King Cummings in 1987. The selected organization will receive a \$500 gift and a plaque honoring their work to improve the quality of life and strengthen the regional identity of western Maine. Come join the friends of Western Mountains Alliance for a concert celebration featuring David Mallet with friends Susan Crippen and Mike Burd of Piscataquis and Franklin counties. Nordica Auditorium, University of Maine at Farmington, November 26, 2005 at 7:00PM. Tickets (\$10/\$7) will be available at the door or call the Western Mountains Alliance.

Lead Western Maine Accepting Applications

The local leadership program supports community projects by building capacity and connecting leaders. Participants benefit through technical support to move their project along; relevant skill training by expert guest presenters; connections to regional leaders, grantors and mentors; and the opportunity to strengthen western Maine! A few alumni projects include North New Portland church revitalization, Norridgewock and Skowhegan Chambers of Commerce, diabetes education program in Rumford, River Valley Farmer's Market, Bethel's Creative Community Education Initiative, and the Strong Area Business and Civic Alliance.

Applications can be found on the Alliance's website and are being accepted through early November. Groups should be from Somerset, Franklin, Piscataquis, Northern Androscoggin or Oxford county and comprised of two to four individuals working on a common project or initiative. Lead Western Maine includes six monthly training sessions offered at different locations throughout the region. The first session will focus on leadership and will be facilitated by Craig Freshley of Policy

Development, Inc. Participants will determine content and locations for subsequent sessions. Topics may include: relationship building with community groups; facilitation skills; grant writing; developing project plans; or recruitment of volunteers. Program tuition is \$250 per person and less for groups of 3 or 4 persons. Scholarship support is available. Contact Kathleen Beauregard at the Alliance.

Western Maine Farm Fund Seen as a Model for Sustainable Agriculture

The Alliance's program, Western Maine Farm Fund, which helps farmers in the western Maine region to strengthen their business outlook through low interest guaranteed loans is being looked at as a model resource that is responsive to the credit needs of farmers. The Carrot Project of Massachusetts is designing a program to bridge gaps in the financial services marketplace that prohibits small and medium sized sustainable farm enterprises from beginning and then thriving as mature enterprises. Together with the Carrot Project, the Alliance is reaching out to farmers who have benefited from the guaranteed loans to learn how the program has helped their farm business and in what ways the loan program could be improved and expanded to help more agricultural entrepreneurs in the region.

Sharing Tools and Linking Networks

Over the summer the Alliance entered a partnership with The Board Network to sponsor workshops on the Core Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards for the first time in western Maine. The Board Network training covers the financial, legal and risk management responsibilities of boards and the real life joys and challenges of board membership. The first session was held on September 22 at the University of Maine at Farmington. The second session will be held in Somerset County in April.

The Alliance provided technical assistance on communications and planning to Maurer

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Roots - Democracy Lives In Us

Democracy has roots and a home in literature. It lives in our voice and our active participation in society.

Then Rare editions of literary works that were instrumental in shaping history and democracy are currently on display at Mantor Library at the University of Maine at Farmington. The *Magna Carta* set precedent for laws and democratic practices, such as trial by jury, representative government, and women's rights. Alexis DeTocqueville's *Democracy in America* evokes the importance of civic and associational life, reminding us to be part of the debate and the solution.

If you come during public viewing hours (1-3 PM weekdays) you can literally hold in your hands a circa 1350 illuminated manuscript of the *Magna Carta* and more than 40 rare books and documents: Aristotle's *Politics and Economics*, *Constitutions of Several Independent States*, *Declaration of Independence*, *Emancipation Proclamation*, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, Alexis DeTocqueville's *Democracy in America*, Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and more. Lecturers are on hand to deepen both our knowledge and appreciation of the gifts that these books possess – they capture the emerging thinking about the value that people place on a fair and just society. For more information call Mantor Library at University of Maine at Farmington 207-778-3410 or see the website http://hua.umf.maine.edu/Reading_Revolutions/index

Now Legislators are expected to make decisions on a wide variety of issues. You can help your legislators and policy makers by sharing your knowledge and providing accurate information about common concerns. The Western Maine Legislative Caucus began its partnership in 1995 and includes MSAD #9, University of Maine at Farmington, Western Maine Community Action, Franklin Community Health Network, Mission at the Eastward and Western Mountains Alliance. This year the Western Maine Legislative Caucus will host three public forums on issues of importance to the people of western Maine: Emergency Preparedness in Franklin County; Maine's State Health Plan; and Meet the Political Candidates. The vision of the caucus is that state legislators and citizens of western Maine will collectively problem solve and develop strategies that will work *for the people* of western Maine. Face-to-face contact with legislators is the most useful way for citizens to communicate their positions. Talking to town officials or legislators is not something to be left to the "experts" or professional lobbyists.

To learn about current and pending legislation and how to contact representatives and senators, see the useful website www.state.me.us/legis. Do not be intimidated by the legislative process; legislators want to hear from their constituents – they want to hear the concerns and positions *of the people*. The Western Maine Legislative Caucus invites all citizens to attend the three forums, the first on Emergency Preparedness to be held on November 2, 2005, 7:00-9:00am at UMF's Olsen Student Center, North Dining Hall. Come share your voice!

Here at the Alliance

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Meals (see p. 6) and assisted the Children's Network of greater Franklin County with organizational and network building strategies. The Children's Network is emerging from several sets of child/youth-focused collaboratives that have worked well together in Franklin County for durations of five to thirty years. The invested organizations support the optimal development and well being of children and youth. The Children's Network is broadening its sphere of influence by associating with the Western Mountains Alliance, a regional organization that supports sustainable community development and capacity building.

Summer is a great time to meet and thank our supporters. The Alliance recently hosted a visit from the program staff of our newest funder, the W.K Kellogg Founda-

tion (see p. 1). The Kellogg Foundation funds more than \$31 million annually in rural development grants - more than 3 times any other U.S. foundation. We spent a glorious summer day visiting western Maine farms and farmers and conversing with leaders in the agriculture policy and program arenas in Maine. Among the most colorful highlights was the picnic luncheon of locally grown chickens and vegetables prepared by Paula Day and friends.

Supporting Innovation

The Alliance is a proud sponsor of a report recently published by Maine Businesses for Social Responsibility, titled "Ten Reasons Why Maine's Homegrown Economy Matters and 50 Things You Can Do To Revive It." Author Stacy Mitchell

is from the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, a national organization providing research, analysis and innovative policy solutions for building strong local economies and sustainable communities.

The Investors Fair, sponsored by the Western Maine Sustainable Development Collaborative on September 13th at Kawahnee Inn in Weld, Maine, hosted presentations by ten diverse and enthusiastic community organizations seeking support from potential investors. The morning was filled with articulate accounts of the challenges facing western Maine's economy, environment and cultural community, yet offered widely innovative proposals for a positive future. Many thanks to all who attended and who made the event a success through their efforts.

The Artist, the Farmer, and Social Change

Continued from page 1

of the worker. The bold colors and robust figures that characterized many paintings of the era were not always what had been considered “pretty,” but they were impossible to ignore. That school of art changed perceptions of what was acceptably considered “art,” and added to the legacy of art that we have today. The power of the images jump-started society’s conversations about labor and worker’s conditions. The art changed the way we viewed work.

The Western Mountains Alliance has taken the bold step of inviting artists to use their art to reach members of the community in an attempt to improve the region’s eating habits and, at the same time, to heighten awareness of local food producers and increase the market for their products.

It’s an exciting challenge: to engage artists in creating a visual identity for a campaign that will try to change people’s relationship to food, that will attempt to help people to see eating well as an artistic endeavor as well as an activity of physical pleasure.

It might seem odd, to think of asking an artist to create an image that translates the work of the farmer to something that is understandable by the public. The Alliance is challenging artists to consider the farmer’s aesthetics as well as their own in this project. I think of the colors of a vegetable garden, the arrangement of plants that is aesthetically pleasing in addition to being agriculturally necessary. I think of the breathtaking beauty of a French vegetable market with the artful arrangement of produce that gives full attention to shape, color, and texture. The farmer is no less an artist than the painter; his medium is just different.

This project provides the opportunity for the artist and the farmer to engage in a dialogue that deepens understanding of each other’s work and perceptions.

The Art of Eating Well

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Besides the first place prize of \$1000 for the winning image, the promoters are planning a series of exhibits of the best of the submissions to stimulate interest in the project. Art galleries and coffee houses have agreed to show the works and the plan is to also exhibit them in schools, supermarkets and other retail establishments, and, it is hoped, at the State House in Augusta.

Submission guidelines are available on the web at www.westernmountainsalliance.org, or by calling Tricia Cook at the Alliance at 778-7274.

The community stands to gain a clearer understanding not only of the physical, health benefits of eating well, but also of the local economic and social benefits that accrue from supporting local businesses, farms, and consuming products that are produced locally. In addition, by involving artists in the project, the community gains a heightened awareness of the creative assets in the region.

Rebecca Welsh is a writer who lives in Rumford. She writes a weekly column, “Arts in the Valley,” in the Rumford Falls Times, and is the founder of the Pennacook Writers Workshop. Rebecca is a member of the Board of Directors for Western Mountains Alliance and was recently appointed by the Governor to the Maine Arts Commission.

Maurer Meals

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People will get to know each other better and with any luck at all new friendships will develop.”

Building on Justin’s vision, his father Gary has developed a regional collaboration of restaurateurs and community organizations to encourage local businesses to offer healthy menu choices prepared from locally grown foods, to heighten awareness of health through personal food choice, and to bring vitality to local agriculture.

The expertise of the five in preparing menus of culinary excellence plus the support of organizations such as the Western Mountains Alliance, the Healthy Communities Coalition, Healthy Androscoggin, and the University of Maine at Farmington has made this a very enjoyable project,” said Gary Maurer.

Maurer is hoping that sustainable relationships will be built between local restaurants and local farms. The distribution, storage and processing systems necessary to better service restaurants and institutions are needed and now developing in the region, and it seems the time may be right for a new partnership. October 15th at The Homestead Bakery, The Granary, Eli’s, Davinci’s Eatery and The Boiler Room is a great time and place to sample the Maine harvest and support both the Justin A. Maurer Memorial Scholarship fund and local farmers. For reservations, call a participating restaurant; for information about the scholarship contact Pat Carpenter, UMF 207-778-7091, and for information about the Maurer Meals Project contact Gary Maurer at 207-524-2060.



'Round the Western Mountains...

is an effort to highlight and celebrate some of the innovative and/or collaborative activities being undertaken by individuals, organizations, and towns in Oxford, Franklin, Somerset, and Piscataquis county. The information has been gleaned from newspapers and newsletters in the region. For a more complete and updated listing, check WMA's website.

Rumford: Rumford selectman voted to submit a letter of support for Mahoosuc Land Trust's efforts to protect the future use of Rumford Whitecap. Marcel Polak, consultant to the Mahoosuc Land Trust, said that before the land could become publicly funded, public hearings would be held regarding Whitecap. In the November referendum, voters statewide will decide whether to raise money for public lands. Whitecap was sold recently by MeadWestvaco, along with 600,000 acres of forested land, to Bayrroot, LLC, in partnership with Wagner Forest Management. To date, 41,000 acres of land have been sold, and the intent is to sell all the land, including Rumford Whitecap, according to Polak. *Bruce Farrin, Rumford Falls Times, 8/24/05*

Dover-Foxcroft: The Maine Humanities Council has awarded a \$1,000 grant to the Cultural, Heritage and Eco-tourism (CHET) committee of the Piscataquis County Economic Development Council (PCEDC) to fund an exhibit of historic Northwoods photography by Albert Call (1865-1966). Albert Call lived in Dexter and was an avid photographer of the Northwoods. In the late 19th and early 20th century, he traveled extensively throughout the northern forests of Piscataquis County. "His photographs can show us not only what has changed in the wild areas of Maine, but also what has remained basically unchanged over the past 100 years," Patrick Myers, Cultural Heritage Director for the CHET committee, said about the exhibit. *Moosehead Messenger, 5/3/05*

Bingham-Solon-Embden: One of the most picturesque bike rides in western Maine is a seven-mile section of the Bingham-Solon-Embden (BSE) Rail Trail that parallels the Kennebec River between Solon and Bingham. This converted railroad bed was formerly part of the Somerset Railroad, and the ride is scenic from beginning to end. The trail is nearly flat, offering riding opportunities for all skill levels. The BSE rail trail area is rich with history. The Kennebec was a primary thoroughfare for the Abenaki Indian tribes that lived along the river, and just a couple of miles downriver of the trail head, ancient Native American petroglyphs can be found on a rock ledge. In more recent times, the river was used to float logs and pulp to their markets, and some of the old logging booms are still visible from the trail. *Ron Chase, Sun Journal, 6/19/05*

Jay: Directors of the paper industry museum, the first in Maine, launched a capital campaign July 26 to raise more than \$100,000. The group plans to buy a building to house a collection that captures the history of the paper industry along the Androscoggin River and the people who made it happen. Directors met at the Otis Federal Credit Union, where the walls featured photos showing workers, giant rolls of paper, some of the first paper mills, log drives along the river and Hugh Chisholm, the man who was instrumental in building several mills. The displays were only a quarter of what has been collected for the Western Maine Paper & Heritage Museum, a grass-roots project that emerged in 2002. Donna M. Perry, *Sun Journal, 7/27/05*

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Thank you for joining with others who care deeply about a more prosperous future for the western mountains of Maine. Western Mountains Alliance is a non-profit tax-exempt organization under 501(c)(3) of the tax code.



WESTERN MOUNTAINS ALLIANCE

232 Main Street - Thomas House
University of Maine at Farmington
P.O. Box 29
Farmington, ME 04938

Phone (207) 778-7274 • Fax (207) 778-7247
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In Collaboration: Maurer Meals

Five area restaurants will participate in the first annual Maurer Meals, offering a menu of alternative specials using locally grown foods focusing on the organic and all natural. For one night, October 15, 2005, these individually owned businesses plan to raise money for the Justin A. Maurer Memorial Scholarship Fund and support local agriculture.

“The scholarship is for a third or fourth-year University of Maine at Farmington (UMF) student in the Community Health Program,” said Justin’s father, Gary Maurer of Leeds. “Justin died in a motorcycle accident shortly after graduating and he had become such a supporter of the small farm in Maine, and the whole approach of producing food without poisoning the earth and preparing and eating it without poisoning the body, that we

thought this might be a good way to carry on his beliefs.”

Justin’s senior project involved working with three other students to develop and publicize a series of raised bed organic demonstration gardens built next to the campus. His self-designed internship at the biodynamic Fare Share Farm and Bakery in Canton exposed him to many new things, including helping to develop farmer’s markets in Dixfield and Mexico. He felt it was important to make healthy food choices as available to people as the popular and unhealthy choices. In a draft of a paper written to summarize his internship he wrote: “I feel as though I am truly working toward creating better health in these nearby communities. Next year more people will go to the two farmer’s markets as word of them spreads, and soon the community will



“The Boiler Room in Wilton and Davinci’s in Lewiston were former employers of Justin,” Maurer said, “and they were eager to help perpetuate his memory and raise money for his scholarship. Rick Mealey of the Boiler Room was instrumental in developing a concept that would be viable in the restaurant business. Eli’s in Turner, The Homestead Bakery and The Granary in Farmington joined as participants without hesitation.

be eating fresh locally grown produce while supporting local agriculture. Hopefully as the idea catches on, people will look more to the community’s resources, keeping money in the community and in Maine, rather than in the large national corporations.

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