

Marquette Monthly

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Arts & Humanities

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U.P. artists benefit from 100 Day art project

When the 100 Day Project started January 21, about 165 people began creative projects that would take place, somehow, over the forthcoming 100 days. That daily community project concluded April 30.

While the majority of the participants, called “arters,” lived in the Upper Peninsula, there were some participants from as far away as New Mexico, New York, Texas, Chicago and even Tanzania.

Ann Russ and Catherine Benda, organizers and originators of the project, said the 100 Day Project allowed people to pursue creative activities they had wanted to do for a long time and gave people a better understanding of the creative process. “People are reclaiming creativity that’s been lying dormant for years. The 100



Day Project is a catalyst for people giving themselves permission to experiment, play and make things happen that are important to them and their wellbeing as creative individuals,” said Russ.

There are many ways artists pursued their art each day. Debra Laurie focused on taking thirty minutes each day and working with watercolors, pencil, ink and pastels in order to “capture the colors of winter.”

For Laurie, the project gave her a chance to prioritize her artwork, whether it was finding the time to paint each day or giving herself the freedom to try new things.

“Some days the drive and challenge are not there. I have learned to struggle through times of not doing ‘good’ art, realizing I need to practice every day if I want to become better at

techniques. Allowing myself to ‘play,’ or try new things, without the pressure of creating a piece of art has freed me of self-imposed expectations,” she said.

That permission to be creative is a theme with many people’s projects. Melissa Hronkin, who lives in the Keweenaw, used the opportunity to create one hundred smaller, creative projects out of collage papers, words, photos and drawing and painting materials. Hronkin didn’t put parameters of time on each day’s task; she committed to simply creating each day.

That relates to the advice she would give to someone interested in taking on a 100-day project: “Leave room for flexibility and change and try to keep it relevant and exciting. If you lose interest, change course a bit,” she



said.

Sticking with the project over 100 days is, understandably, challenging. Ann Russ talked about an artist who dropped her project because of family complications; another person stopped because she didn’t feel she was spending enough time working on creating with her hands.

“When projects get dropped, we encourage people to focus on the learning instead of feeling bad about it. Whatever the reason for dropping out, pack up the learning, take it with you, empower yourself and hit the restart button when you’re ready. You can always begin again,” Russ said.

Many people found strength throughout the project in the sense of community that has emerged. There have been support circles throughout the region for people to discuss their processes throughout the 100 days. “We think (the support circles) have brought about more dialogue, awareness and understanding of the creative process. There now exists a community of interest of people who have bonded via their shared



experience which didn't exist before the 100 Day Project,” Russ said.

The project also was beneficial for professional artists. Certainly artists whose career is based around their artwork can find time to make art almost every day, but many used the 100 Day Project to pursue creative endeavors beyond their professional work. Charon Porter makes jewelry and used the 100 days to explore textures on metal.

“I had collected a large box of possible texture-makers which I continued to move around in my studio but never used. I kept using the same hammer marks repeatedly because I didn't know what marks the other tools would leave and I didn't want to ruin the piece on which I was working... The 100 Day Project provided an impetus and structure to finally get started,” Porter said.

Each day Porter applied one of these new textures to a two by three inch piece of copper and then photographed the texture with notes in a journal for future reference. Because of this project, Porter said, new textures have shown up in her jewelry designs and the notebook has acted as a great resource for inspiration.

The project came at a perfect time too, Porter said. It helped her get through the winter, “but now that spring is approaching,” she said, “I will be outside and spending less time in the studio.”

Porter plans to use the technique she pursued the past few months in the future, but now she'll do it as needed.

Though the community project is finished, many of the artists see it as a beginning. Laurie described the experience as “invaluable” and said, “It is hard to believe the time is almost over. It is sad, but I am looking forward to setting other goals and keeping it moving forward.”

There will be a Completion Celebration for artists to share their creative works with the public from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m., Saturday, May 17 at the Ore Dock Brewery.

There also will be a virtual exhibit available through the organization's website,

the100dayproject.com and its Facebook page.

Russ also will receive an award from the city of Marquette honoring her work on the 100 Day project—the “Outstanding Community Arts Activist” award.

Russ and Benda say they will likely host the 100 Day Project again next year.

“We feel honored to be part of such an exciting creativity movement here at home in the Upper Peninsula and in our extended community beyond Michigan’s borders,” Russ said.

—Lucy Hough