

Rutland Reader.

Creativity: It's never too 'slate'

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By JOANNA TEBBS YOUNG

Editor's note: January is International Creativity Month. This is the third in a series of articles on the power of creativity and art.

The rural Vermont/New York border is a far cry from the cobbled streets of Montreal or the crush of Boston where artist and curator Serena Kovalosky used to walk to high-powered business meetings in a smart suit and dangerously high heels. But upon returning to her native area, she found it is “home to a rich, vibrant creative community of artists,” and these days she’s far more comfortable in her jeans and flats working in her Whitehall, N.Y., studio or planning a new exhibit over a sandwich in a local café.

With a background in the tourist industry, Kovalosky combines her love of art and travel in her blog “Artful Vagabond,” which she describes as a “creative place for artists, vagabonds and cultural adventurers.” Kovalosky believes everyone is creative and that creativity is the “letting go of everything you think you know so that

you can discover something new.”

Determined to extinguish the term “starving artist” in our culture, she encourages artists and creatives to live their passion and to “stand up and own the fact that we do, indeed, think differently than the majority of the population, and that our way of ‘seeing’ is an asset.”

Although this mindset must begin with the artists themselves, Kovalosky believes art appreciation in the larger community is also key to breaking down these stereotypes.

According to Kovalosky, creativity promotes problem-solving and critical thinking and can “offer life lessons, uncover personal insights and teach us about universal archetypes and symbolism that can help us understand others and the world around us.” For these reasons she considers art vital to our changing world.

“Creative thinking is no longer a luxury, it’s necessary for survival and art appreciation is one of the many ways to enhance (this) right-brain activity,” Kovalosky says.

For this reason, her mission is to bring art to rural communities. She explains that she creates exhibitions in nontraditional venues, “so that people attending an art event for the first time will feel welcome and comfortable rather than intimidated by a more formal gallery setting.”

Along with a deep conviction that personal creativity and art appreciation “can make us better humans,” Kovalosky believes it can be of great help to a community in the form of tax dollars. She explains that cultural tourism brings visitors into regions they might not otherwise visit, increasing tax revenues through the purchase of artwork, restaurant meals, hotel accommodations and gas.

An exceptional artist herself, creating what she calls “contemporary organic sculpture” from such natural materials as gourds, walnuts and seed pods, Kovalosky says she creates from nature to “deepen my understanding of it and, consequently, life.”

It is with this mind that Kovalosky, in partnership with the Slate Valley Museum in Granville, N.Y., is sending out a country-wide call for artists for the “Slate as Muse” project.

The Slate Valley is a region approximately 24 miles long, running from Granville, N.Y., north to Fair Haven, including Poultney, Castleton and Lake Bomoseen. From the mid-1800s to World War II (and beyond) the slate industry was vitally important to the economy of this area and it forever changed its physical and demographic landscape.

Working in collaboration, Kovalosky and Slate Valley Museum Executive Director Kathryn Weller developed the idea of the “Slate as Muse” project. Kovalosky’s deep reverence for nature and the museum’s mission to “demonstrate the geology of slate ... and the quarrying community in the Slate Valley” gave rise to the idea of a juried exhibit in which artists are asked to “think beyond using the slate merely as a canvas.”

“Slate will be the creative muse,” Kovalosky says.

The five-month exhibit, which will open in June 2014, will also include workshops programmed in collaboration with the museum’s assistant director, Amy Mincher, including photography and carving classes and presentations by slate workers and artists.

The call for artists goes out to any artist in the continental U.S., challenging them to “produce works of art that transcend the material.” More information can be found at the following websites:

- Slate as Muse: artfulvagabond.com/artist-opportunities
- Artful Vagabond blog: artfulvagabond.com
- Kovalosky’s artwork: kovalosky.com
- Slate Valley Museum Driving Tour: slatevalleymuseum.org/slate-valley-history.html

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