



Residency programs grow inspiration

Karen Maserjian Shan, For the Poughkeepsie Journal 1:14 p.m. EDT November 3, 2016



(Photo: Courtesy photo)

First as a consultant, then as an artist-in-residence, Donna Cleary spent several weeks this summer at the chaNorth artist residency in Pine Plains.



“The setting, I think, is spectacular,” said Cleary, a Brooklyn, Kings County, resident and fine artist of fertility sculptures and fetish objects. “It’s nestled on the edge of the forest and there are the fields and you can see the stars at night. There’s something about getting out of the city that’s very appealing, but also necessary as a human being.”

A program of chashama, a Manhattan-based organization that supports artists, in part, by securing unused space as studio and performance sites, chaNorth provides month-long work and living spaces for five or six artists at a time on a natural, five-acre site in Pine Plains. While there, the artists focus on their work and contribute several hours of farm-related work weekly to the nearby McEnroe Organic Farm in Millerton, which supplies the group with fresh produce during their stay.



During their stay, artist participants of the chaNorth residency in Pine Plains prepared dishes made from organic produce from the McEnroe Organic Farm in Millerton. *(Photo: Courtesy photo)*

Kaetlin Ritchie, executive assistant at chashama, which works with more than 12,000 artists in New York City and about 80 work, performance and show spaces, said the chaNorth artist residency began eight years ago when the Pine Plains site was donated to the organization.



“When we were donated this space in the country, we realized it had the ability to serve a different kind of purpose; a residency away from the city — a different kind of creative energy and connection to the environment,” Ritchie said.

Later, chaNorth formed a partnership with McEnroe Organic Farm’s education program.

“They get to do farming and sometimes they even offer art classes to people who participate in the farm education program,” Ritchie said. “It’s really just a nice relationship; each party has something to offer the other.”

Annie Bossange, education program manager at the McEnroe Organic Farm, said the chaNorth participants help with garden maintenance in the farm’s Discovery Garden, an educational site that includes rows of growing vegetables, a greenhouse and other features.

“For some folks, it’s really an enjoyable way to be a part of the community and be involved with the landscape and be out in an ecosystem, and for some humans, it’s a really inspiring, happy place to be in,” Bossange said.

As well, because many of the residency participants are from the city and haven’t worked on a farm before, contributing to the Discovery Garden exposes them to food and agricultural systems, along with the farm environment.



Artists participating in the chaNorth residency program in Pine Plains have a private studio to work in during their month-long stay. (Photo: Courtesy photo)

“For me, it has a big impact,” Bossange said. “Being outside and connected to landscape has a big impact on my life and a sense of being connected in the world.”

Lauren Smith, chaNorth residency coordinator and a past program participant, said through the partnership with McEnroe Organic Farm, the residency participants eat seasonal vegetables, spend time gardening outdoors and learn about what’s involved in growing the food they are consuming.

“This year, Luigi, a resident from Turin, Italy, made pizza in the kitchen using market ingredients and McEnroe tomatoes,” Smith said via email. “The August residents painted turkey signs for the field, advertising purchasing Thanksgiving turkeys to those driving by.”

Smith also said that while many of the residency’s artists stay in private living quarters and each has his or her own private studio, their shared meals allowed for social interactions.

“Organized communal meals serve as a time for residents to get together, share ideas, update each other on what’s happening in studio, and work with each other to create



delicious meals,” she said. “When artists and curators visited, we would host meals to welcome them. Getting together for a meal was a great way for the residents to get to know the visiting artist and have casual conversation, as opposed to the more formal setting of having a timed studio visit.”

For Cleary, a chance meeting with Smith at another residency program proved fortuitous for both of them.

“She mentioned that she was looking for visiting artists to come up and talk to the residents — to go into the studios and talk to them about their work — and asked me if I wanted to do that,” Cleary said. “So that was my first experience there and it was great for me. I had recently broken my wrist and wasn’t able to make anything, so for me, to be able to get out of the city, first of all, and talk about art was exactly what I needed.”

From there, Cleary took advantage of an opening in the artist residency program the following month, August.

“I actually responded to the space and changed what I was doing while I was there,” she said.

She discovered a variety of herbs on the site, collecting chamomile, goldenrod, Queen Anne’s lace and mugwort. Earlier, she’d attended a ceremony that utilized mugwort, and later found that the herb could help with nerve pain, which she’d been experiencing with her wrist.

“I ended up doing a lot of research about all of the plants that were on the property and gathering a bunch of the plants and making medicinal oils while I was there,” said Cleary, who had experience making herbal antibiotic treatments that she mixed in with skin-care products, all of which linked back to her sculptures, which reference women’s past roles as powerful shaman and medicine women.

“I’m not sure, exactly, how it will play out in the gallery setting, but it’s definitely something that will come into my work in some fashion,” Cleary said. “I’m just sort of going there now, and then how it actually becomes will follow. My path includes having been a mother and a registered nurse. This is all digging into the same issues I’ve been interested in for a long time.”



During her residency, Cleary also contributed to McEnroe Organic Farm by preparing seedlings for transplant. She learned about eating and cooking with seasonal foods, too, and enjoyed cooking and sharing meals with the other residents.

“There’s an energy that you are exposed to and absorb when you’re in the landscape that’s very different from the energy of the city and it’s calming, but it’s also invigorating — it does make you feel connected to the earth in a way that you don’t in the city,” Cleary said.

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Artist residency programs

- For more information on chashama and the chaNorth residency, visit www.chashama.org, www.chashama.org/chanorth