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Artists Refreshed

by Olivia Covington / Franklin

Every two years, Indianapolis-area artists are given the opportunity to take a break from their daily lives to discover new artistic inspiration and renewal. The Creative Renewal Arts Fellowship program, sponsored by the Arts Council of Indianapolis, gives select art professionals a grant that allows them to take two years to refresh creatively. And now it is time to see what has come of their time of renewal at a special exhibition opening April 12 at The Indianapolis Art Center.

The Creative Renewal program began in 1999 giving 50 artists a grant of \$7,500 each to be used to find creative refreshment; be it through classes, conferences or inspirational trips around the world. Applicants must reside in central Indiana and have 10 years working in the arts, with art being the primary source of income for three of those years. In 2011, the program changed to award 40 artists with \$10,000.

The artistic mediums represented among the 2011 fellows include arts administration, dance, literature, music, theatre and visual art.

Susan Watt Grade, 44, received her first Creative Renewal grant in 2003 and was awarded a second grant for the 2011-2012 round in the visual art category. Her medium is sculpture, although she described herself as a "mixed media" artist and said she also works in drawing and print-making.

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Fingal's Cave in Ireland was artist Susan Watt Grade's main inspiration from her Renewal.

"Art is something I feel like I have to do," Watts Grade said. "It helps me to make decisions, because in art you're forced to make a choice."

Even though she earned her grant because of her visual artwork, Watt Grade chose to spend her sabbatical in Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland improving her writing. She worked as a contributing arts writer for NUVO for five years, so the written word was not foreign to her when she was given the fellowship.

"Writing was my renewal. I was stuck in a rut artistically, and writing was my inspiration," Watt Grade said.

While in Ireland, Watt Grade enrolled herself in a narrative writing class that was taught in an Irish castle. The class allowed her to travel to Irish cultural sites to seek inspiration for her writing. She said during the class she and her fellow writers would walk through Ireland for a while, then stop to write about what they saw.

Watt Grade's mother, who is a nonfiction writer, also went to Ireland for the narrative writing class. Together, the two women travelled to the island of Staffa in Scotland to visit Fingal's Cave, a source of inspiration for much of Watt Grade's mother's work.

Fingal's Cave also serves as the inspiration for Watt Grade's work in the upcoming Creative Renewal Exhibition. The cave is supported by columns of volcanic rock, which she will attempt to recreate using different translucent fabrics. She will be displaying some of her two-dimensional work in the exhibition, as well.

Cynthia Pratt, 53, received her 2011 Creative Renewal grant for dance. Like Watt Grade, Pratt has received two grants, the first of which was given to her in 2003.

Pratt began her dance career by taking ballet classes as a young child. She said by the time she was 11 she knew that her future was in dance, so she began intensive training. Despite the young age at which she began training, Pratt said that she feels like she had a normal childhood and was able to do normal high school activities as she grew up.

Pratt chose to spend her time of renewal at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in Becket, Mass. While at the festival, she watched the performances of other dance companies at the Ted Shawn Theater, which is the oldest theatre in the United States that was built specifically for dance. She also took dance classes during this time.

Although she enjoyed her time at the festival, Pratt said that she didn't view the fellowship as an opportunity to just relax.

"The Creative Renewal is not a vacation," Pratt said. "It was less enjoyment and more replenishing of creative ideas."

She also said that her experience in the 2011–2012 program was much different than her first experience in 2003.

"The first time it was my mission to take everything in. The second time I allowed things to happen. I was more mature," Pratt said.

She describes herself as a contemporary dancer with a specialty in jazz, but her true passion lies in choreography. She said she hopes to have a performance component to her presentation at the exhibition in which two of her dancers perform an excerpt from a piece she choreographed.

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Detroit-native Pete Brown, 34, received his first Creative Renewal fellowship in 2011 for arts administration. He works as the new media and web coordinator at the Eiteljorg Museum in downtown Indianapolis, as well as working as a mixed media artist using stencils and aerosol.

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Brown said he is fascinated with street art, or the graffiti seen on city streets. He spent part of his renewal time travelling and meeting graffiti artists around the Midwest.

He said it was difficult to locate these artists because of the nature of their work. However, once he met the artists, he utilized social media to connect them and has helped them get their work displayed in shows in Indianapolis, Detroit and Flint, Michigan.

In addition to meeting other artists, Brown worked with Bosma Enterprises to create a multi-sensory art exhibit called VisualEyes: Without Your Eyes. The exhibit allowed blind and visually impaired people to experience the art through touch and sound. Brown said a video would describe what the art looked like while the visitors physically felt the work.

"I hear people asking, 'When can I see another [multi-sensory exhibit]?',” Brown said.

Part of this exhibit will be included in Brown's work for the Creative Renewal exhibition. His presentation will also include pictures from his travels and possibly a video.

Although each of these artists comes from a different background and chose to utilize their grants in different ways, each said their grant money was well-spent.

"I did everything and more than what I was hoping to accomplish,” Brown said.

Each artist also said they foresee themselves continuing on the paths they're on right now into the future.

While Watt Grade will continue sculpting and working in other areas of visual art, she is also currently writing a short novel entitled "The Pharmacist's Daughter."

Pratt is a professor of dance at Butler University in Indianapolis and said she plans on continuing in that position.

Brown also intends on continuing his work with museums and multi-media. He also works out of his own studio in Indianapolis.

Watt Grade, Pratt and Brown each agreed that they came away from the program feeling refreshed and inspired.

"[The fellowship program] is invaluable,” Watt Grade said. "It validates that what

you're doing has worth."

The Creative Renewal Exhibition Opening Reception will be on April 12 at 6pm at the Indianapolis Art Center.

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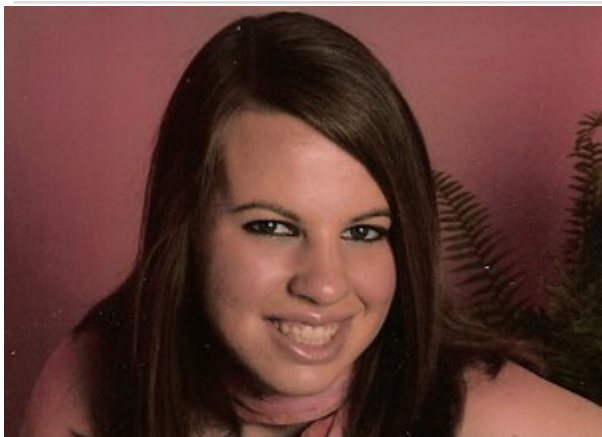
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Olivia Covington is a freshman student at Franklin College. The Indianapolis native is majoring in broadcast and news editorial journalism and minoring in business and French. She hopes to become a multi-media political reporter and foreign correspondent when she graduates from college, as well as going to law... [more](#)

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