

# The New York Times

## WORK IN PROGRESS; Step Right Up and Watch the Artist!

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THE distance between an artist and a museum is typically vast. But a few museums -- not just art museums -- are bridging that divide with artist-in-residence programs. Such programs vary widely in structure and substance, but all seek to bring artists into dialogue with a space they have rarely occupied.

A number of artist-in-residence programs were born in the late 1960's and 70's, a time when people questioned what a museum could and should be. Others have emerged more recently, driven partly by a continuous questioning of authority and interpretation, and a desire to connect more closely with the community.

The Nimoy Foundation, which was created in 2003 by Leonard Nimoy (best known as Commander Spock) and his wife, Susan Bay Nimoy, has given \$950,000 to finance residency programs at 23 organizations, mostly museums. "We want to inspire people who don't have normal access to artists, to give them an opportunity to understand how artists work and how they think," said Katharine DeShaw, the program director.

Generally, artists in residencies do their work in the museum, allowing the public to view them in the process of art-making. As government financing has plummeted for individual artists as well as arts education programs, the Nimoy's have found that museums are the best place to support artists and increase their contact with the public.

Such closeness can help demystify the creative process for museum visitors, while helping artists with time, space and access to technical expertise and connections they would not find in solitude.

Here are four examples:

### FABRIC WORKSHOP AND MUSEUM

The Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia began in 1977 as a place where artists could learn how to work with fabric. Today there are more than 5,500 pieces in the collection.

Residents, who are nominated by a panel of artists, work in close collaboration with the master printers, sewers, welders and other professional craftspeople at the workshop. "We're trying to break the sound barrier every time and be on the cutting edge," said Marion Boulton Stroud, the founder.

Today, the notion of fabric has evolved to include hog guts, fiberglass, spider silk and just about anything else imaginable. The workshop spent two years helping Ann Hamilton sew a 5,000-square-foot carpet of horsehair for a 1993 exhibition at the Dia Center for the Arts in New York.

"It's really a back and forth between you, the artist with ideas, and these people who have spent 20 years making things possible," said Matthew Ritchie, who began a residency in 2001. "You'd say, 'This is interesting.' They'd say, 'We did that in 1971 and (a) it looked terrible and (b) it fell apart.'"

Mr. Ritchie ended up creating a giant rubber floor, called "The God Impersonator," which has already traveled to the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art and will be on view at the Fabric Workshop from April 1 to May 21.

Work spaces are open to museum visitors. "After a few minutes, you just don't think about the crowd of people that shows up," Mr. Ritchie said. "You move into this different realm where a lot of traditional categories -- studio, museum, fabricator, is the work finished or not? -- seem much less important."

#### THE EXPLORATORIUM

The Exploratorium science museum in San Francisco began its artist-in-residence program in 1974. Since then, more than 250 poets, playwrights, installation artists, musicians and sculptors have participated.

Most of the three to six residents invited to the Exploratorium each year work in an enclosed shop in the middle of the exhibition hall. "I'll get people knocking on the windows, who want to know what I'm doing," said Walter Kitundu, a composer who transforms old record players into elaborate stringed instruments he calls phonoharps.

Mr. Kitundu, 31, has been working in the Exploratorium since August 2003. "You see people in a state of wonder," he said. "For me, as a creative person, it's like fuel."

#### THE MUSEUM OF LONDON

The Museum of London's first two artists in residence -- a Finnish-Nigerian printmaker named Timo Lehtonen and a Chinese painter, Mao Wen Biao -- arrived in conjunction with a 1993 exhibition on immigration in London.

The current artist in residence, Marcus Cornish, a sculptor who arrived in January, is literally welcoming visitors into the collection. Each day, he wanders around the galleries and sketches what he sees: a portly and perplexed man confronting the damnable mysteries of his museum audio guide handset; the wonder of an aging couple.

His studio is open to museum visitors, and he has braved questions like, "Did you like puddling around in clay when you were a child?" But Mr. Cornish says that on balance, he has found the experience of being pulled out of his artistic solitude energizing. "One is very close to life here," he said.

#### THE STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM

Helping the careers of artists of African descent, rather than just displaying artwork, has been part of the Studio Museum's mission since its inception.

"At the time, it was a very radical idea," said Thelma Golden, the chief curator. The museum's artist-in-residence program began in 1969, soon after the museum was founded. Each year, it offers three emerging African-American artists studio space, a \$15,000 stipend, a group show and, most important, the museum's imprimatur.

"I don't have to do much" to get attention now, said Michael Queenland, 34, a current artist in residence. "People want to meet with me because I'm at this program."

Elements of the third-floor studios sometimes find their way into the galleries downstairs, and the artists open their studios to museum visitors twice a year. "It was exhausting -- five or six hours of talking to people," said Matthew Cordova, 33, a newly minted graduate of the Yale University School of Art, who came to his residency fresh from a job at Office Depot. "But it was exhilarating, too."

There is a fluid relationship between Mr. Cordova's studio and the neighborhood. He added a bloodied rag, a relic from the previous Sunday, when he got jumped on Lenox Avenue, to a

makeshift shrine. And he has been drawing in old books he has found, adding gold leaf to "Exploring the NonWestern World," which he came across in a Dumpster on Frederick Douglass Boulevard.

Photos: IN PLACE -- Teresita Fernandez, far left, an artist in residence at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia, where another artist, Matthew Ritchie, gets advice from two staff members, Lucy Law, left, and Nami Yamamoto. Marcus Cornish, above, at the Museum of London. (Photo by Jonathan Player for The New York Times); (Photographs by Sabina Louise Pierce for The New York Times)



Jonathan Player for The New York Times



**IN PLACE** Teresita Fernandez, far left, an artist in residence at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia, where another artist, Matthew Ritchie, gets advice from two staff members, Lucy Law, left, and Nami Yamamoto. Marcus Cornish, above, at the Museum of London.

Photographs by Sabina Louise Pierce for The New York Times