

# Carol Bass

## Living a Life of Art *by Hilary Cline*

*Years ago, Carol Bass was flattered when her arts education professor at the University of Georgia complimented her on her artistic talent, but then she was struck when asked the question, "What are you going to do with it?"*

Carol was challenged with this life question that she continued to ask herself for years to follow. Today, Carol is an ever-evolving artist discovering new and old pathways of creativity. Her professor would undoubtedly be proud to know that Carol has achieved something quite inventive with her art.

### Profiles: Arts Education and the Creative Economy

This profile of Carol Bass is the fourth in a series by MAAE that collects stories about the connections between arts education and Maine's Creative Economy. These profiles articulate the ways in which arts education brings people to communities as well as the connections between arts education and creative businesses and employment. We all use what we learn from the arts every day, often without even realizing it. In each issue of this journal, MAAE profiles a person who contributes to Maine's economy by using creativity or other skills developed through arts education. We have drawn from throughout Maine's diverse economy. While those profiled may not be working purely as artists, arts education has contributed in some way to their professional or personal success. If you would like to suggest someone to be profiled (including yourself), email [artseveryday@adelphia.net](mailto:artseveryday@adelphia.net).

In 1988, Carol Bass co-founded Maine Cottage Furniture in Yarmouth. Carol is also the author of three books: *Maine Living*, *The Cottage Book: Living Simple and Easy*, and *Color Your Home*.

Carol's artistic influences began when she was a child in Charleston, South Carolina. She explains that in her town children did not have art classes in grade school, rather students would go over to Mrs. Dot Thraikill's house to paint azaleas after school.

"Everyone in the South painted flowers with watercolor," Carol reminisces. She also remembers a turning point in her psyche when she was nine years old and her mother invited a visiting "Yankee" minister to supper. This minister brought a Stravinsky record which was played while they sat around the dining room table. Carol recalls that listening to "Fire Bird Suite" opened her spirit to a whole new way of feeling and experiencing the world.

In high school, a guidance counselor recognized her artistic ability and encouraged her to study art. After studying painting and sculpture in college, Carol taught art to elementary students in Georgia and later returned to her home town to teach junior-high students.

It was Carol's arts education



*Carol Bass at work in her studio*

that taught her to be open to the element of surprise. Upon her spontaneous move to Maine, she was surprised to discover the state's physical beauty and the character of its people. Carol was struck by a painting she discovered in a local bakery by an art professor from the University of Maine, Farmington. She immediately contacted this painter and started to study with him.

Living in Maine has taught Carol to understand that "art allows us to maintain a gentleness with nature, not a conquering attitude."

Just as nature holds many surprises, she also notes that the creative process reveals infinite surprises. Carol reflects that whether nestled in the woods or

*continued*

## Carol Bass Living a Life of Art *continued*

by the ocean's edge, artists can find inspiration in Maine's stunning landscape and through its authentic people.

While in Maine, Carol was faced with an economic challenge that motivated her to use the skills learned from arts education to meet her financial needs. She relied on her entrepreneurship, comfort with exploration, and ability to think outside the box to create a successful business. Along with a close friend, she created the business of buying and refinishing salvaged pieces of old furniture, and recreating them as brightly colored pieces for summer cottage homes. Carol acknowledges that her love of visiting Meddybemps Lake in Maine and memories of cottage life as a child inspired her to imagine furnishings that could be used to create a year-round cottage environment. It was Carol's ability to break away from convention that allowed her to improvise and recreate furniture as an exciting art form.

After 17 years of devoting her time to Maine Cottage Furniture, Carol is now return-

ing to her origins as an artist. She explains that "in the South, people still know me as a painter. In Maine, I am known as a commercial artist."

So in a sense, Carol is coming full circle. She has successfully bridged the two worlds of art and business. Carol acknowledges that having a business partner has helped her to find balance between artistic success and economic success.

Much as Carol has been defined differently in two different geographic locations, she is often given many titles as an artist. Despite designing furnishings to create well-defined spaces and having authored three books, Carol denies being either an interior designer or writer. But as her home reflects, the line between living space and studio, artist and art, structure and nature are blended together in a uniquely eclectic pattern. Whether she is painting, reading about architecture, exploring digital photography, wanting to rediscover the piano or learning to write poetry, she continues to expand her mind and soul.

To enrich arts education in Maine communities, Carol recommends that towns establish their own non-profit art organizations much like Yarmouth Arts, which brings music into schools, shows films about arts, holds a mini-arts festival for local artists, and provides arts scholarships. As a former community arts educator at Neighborhood House in Northeast Harbor, Carol recognizes the importance of learning about the artists that inspire us and of providing children with the opportunities to experience art. Carol believes arts education teaches children to be more open and capable of discussing a variety of subjects. She also encourages youth pursuing art to find someone whose artistic work they admire, and then find a way to study with that person. She underscores, "Art keeps us human and is vital to life." ■

*Hilary Cline is an Americorps VISTA volunteer working for MAAE this year.*