

## **Maine Arts Teachers Fellowship Takes a Sabbatical**

For the past three years the Maine Community Foundation (MaineCF), the national Surdna Foundation, and the Maine Alliance for Arts Education (MAAE) have partnered to offer a one-of-a-kind opportunity for Maine's public-school arts teachers. The program, the Maine Arts Teachers Fellowship, has provided grants of up to \$5,000 to teachers to support personal artistic development through interactions with top professional artists in their fields and an additional \$1000 to bring this new learning back into the classroom. Because of ongoing economic challenges in Maine, MATF will be suspended for the coming year until local support can be raised to sustain the project.

Over the past three years fellowships have been awarded to twenty-five Maine teachers in a variety of disciplines, including theater, painting, ceramics, textiles, music, printmaking, sculpture, digital art, book-making, and jewelry-making. The fellowship has been a rare opportunity for Maine arts teachers to acquire financial support for their artistic development and personal art making, rather than for developing curricular materials or professional teaching skills.

“This fellowship was designed to inspire and challenge teachers to delve deeper into their artistic disciplines and return to the classroom ready to share that inspiration and new knowledge with their students,” said David Lamon, the program's coordinator. “It has been a real pleasure for me to see the transformation that has taken place in the fellows,” continued Lamon. “It is evident from their presentations at our year-end gathering that this fellowship has really changed people's lives in a big way.”

Having the opportunity to study with leading artists in their respective fields has heightened the fellows' own sense of identity as artists as well as their recognition as artists within their communities. More than 90% of the fellows ranked “increased credibility as an artist and educator” in the eyes of their students and professional colleagues as “high” a year after receiving their fellowship. As one fellow commented, “I have been stunned at the outpouring of support and community pride in my selection for this honor. From announcements in our local newspaper to community members stopping me in the grocery store inquiring about my fellowship travels/studies, the public acknowledgment has been widespread and gratifying.” Another fellowship recipient put it this way, “The greatest effect I feel back at school is that my students, parents, and co-workers view me not only as a teacher, but also as an artist. I feel that students are showing a greater interest in weaving and are excited to learn new techniques. It has expanded their definition of weaving.”

Although interest in the fellowship program remains high (the program had a record number of applicants for 2009), finding funding for the program beyond the initial three-year pilot has proven to be difficult in the current economic downturn. Because of the importance and value of the program to individuals and schools, funding options are being explored. When funding has

been identified, MAAE will announce information for the next round of applications. In the meantime, the program's impact continues through the art created by the 25 teaching fellows and their students.