Flint and Steel: Cross-disciplinary Combustion
2015 - 2017 Artist Residencies
A Studio in the Woods
In Loving Memory of Lucianne Bond Carmichael
1931 - 2016

Long have I understood that artwork exists because our language is limited in its ability to express the depth, intricacies and subtleties of human thought and feeling.

-Lucianne Bond Carmichael, January 2, 1985
in a letter to Lin Emery

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Cover Photo: Suzanne Bennett, Mississippi, 2011, oil on paper
back cover: Bernard Williams, Ghost Trails, 2011, mixed media and performance
opposite page: Roy Staab, Pondburst, 2011, found bamboo
Flint and Steel Residencies were designed to allow artists to join forces with invested academic partners. Each artist was paired with a Tulane or Xavier University faculty member to inspire each other in the development of new work, to excite the public, and to fuel social change. These collaborations empowered the artistic practice with scholarship, student manpower and academic resources. Artists were asked to describe in detail how the opportunity would affect their work, to propose a public component to their residency and to suggest ways in which they would engage with the local community.

A Studio in the Woods, a program of Tulane University’s ByWater Institute located on 8 acres on the Mississippi River, is dedicated to forest preservation, science-inspired art education and providing a peaceful retreat for artists and scholars who are interested in tackling challenging issues with imagination, power and resourcefulness. Our mission is to protect and preserve our Mississippi River bottomland hardwood forest and to provide a tranquil haven where artists can reconnect with universal creative energy and work uninterrupted within this natural sanctuary.
The flash of insight. The thrill of discovery. 
The excitement of the chase, and the search for answers.

The confidence in trusted methods, and the intrigue of new tools—and eventually, after hours and weeks at the task, the pride in the finished project.

These experiences—do they come from the artist laboring in his studio, immersed in canvas or steel or clay? Or from the researcher, mind at play in her archives or her field site? The answer bears little surprise: to feel that prick of inquiry, that pulse that lies somewhere between mind and heart saying this, this is interesting is shared by both shapers of forms and shapers of knowledge.

Consider the artist, shoulders squared against the work. For weeks he has been turning the idea over in his head, weighing what is novel about this piece against what he has attempted before, reviewing the tools and approaches that are best suited now. Such mental inventory includes the litany of his previous works, the nature of each material brought to bear, the significance of those pieces that first inspired him to take up the chisel, the horn, the pen. All of this occupies his mind as he sets to work, and it all informs his decisions along the way. For him, such investigation into what is proven and what is possible is intuitive, natural, a second wordless language that he speaks.

Just as it is with the researcher—up late at night in the lab, attacking the newest stack of data, or first inside the library in the morning, rifling through the next folder of files. For her, the quest for knowledge and understanding is intrinsically creative, combining the passion for her subject with the joy of the contribution, offering a new perspective that can finally untangle the knot. Or the secret thrill at noticing something that has escaped all other eyes to date: a pattern, or an aberration, an outlier that makes no sense. She works the problem with as much care and skill as the potter does his clay, and when her findings are finally presented, what she learns changes not just her but all of us.

When they come together, the base of knowledge that the researcher brings establishes the ground on which the artist now creates. She offers background and context; he discerns what remains to be said. She explains the hidden history of a place or an organism; he reveals this history and makes it tactile and alive. She provides the outlines for the map; he inks and colors them in. She collects the threads of a story from a region, a language, or a people; he takes those threads and weaves them into a tapestry that details the experience of a world in a single glance.

This belief in the consonance of these two fields is what has driven the work of A Studio in the Woods for the past three years, pairing artists and researchers to pursue common projects
equipped with the best of both their disciplines. The pages that follow offer the fruits of these collaborations, undertaken by sixteen artists and sixteen researchers with one common sentiment behind them: that this hunger—to learn, to discover, to make, to create—is ancient and deep and insatiable, and sleeps but an instant before rising again to stalk our minds in the night.

-Benjamin Morris, PhD

2015 - 2017 Artist Residencies
A Studio in the Woods

2015
Pippin Frisbie-Calder with Tim McLean, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Tulane University
Maria Möller with Richard Campanella, School of Architecture, Tulane University
Jessica Levine with Jordan Karubian, Professor, and Renata Ribeiro, Professor of the Practice, Department of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology, Tulane University
Anna Fitzgerald with Felicia Rabito, School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, Tulane University
Shay Nichols with Thomas W. Sherry, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and the Phyllis M. Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking, Tulane University
Matt Wright with Vicki Mayer, Department of Communication, School of Liberal Arts, Tulane University

2016
Christy George with Laura Murphy, School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, Phyllis M. Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking, Tulane University
Jan Mun with Howard W. Mielke, Pharmacology, School of Medicine, Tulane University
E. Oscar Maynard with Randy J. Sparks, Department of History, Tulane University Jebney Lewis with Rick Snow, Department of Music, Tulane University
Donna Cooper Hurt with Donata Henry, Department Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Tulane University
Jacqueline Ehle Inglefield with Mark Gstohl, Department of Theology, Xavier University

2017
Byron Asher with Sharlene Sinegal DeCuir, Department of History, Xavier University
Rachel Wallis with Blakeslee Gilpin, Department of History, Tulane University
Esther Solondz with Claudia Riegel, School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, Tulane University
Sarah Dahnke with Stephen F. Ostertag, Ph.D. Department of Sociology, Tulane University
Working with Tim McLean, Pippin Frisbie-Calder rendered microscopic phytoplankton in large-scale prints and real-time projections to demonstrate their importance and build awareness of wetland microorganisms in our ecology. Spending hours canoeing and collecting phytoplankton together, the two discovered their mutual passion for these complex organisms. Pippin then delved into new media, making four large-scale silk-screen prints using phosphorescent paint to indicate where the microorganisms photosynthesize and four illuminated resin sculptures that were on view for the Wetlands Art Tour. Pippin and Tim continue to present their work together publicly.

“I gained new perspectives in how to view, question, and relate to the scientific material and organisms that I have been studying throughout my career.”

—Tim McLean
“My work is often rooted in some collaboration or research but often in a less direct back and forth relationship than was proposed by A Studio in the Woods. Flint and Steel brought direct access to both established and unreleased research as well as the individuals responsible for compiling and publishing.” — Pippin Frisbie-Calder

this page: The artist at work. Detail, Tangled Web, 2011.

Maria Möller collaborated with geographer Richard Campanella, and members of New Orleans Chinese American community to symbolically excavate the city’s forgotten and demolished Chinatown. Oral histories, photography and map-making combined to create temporary installations on sites in the Central Business District where the largest Chinatown in the Southeastern United States stood until the late 1930s. These installations asked passersby to contemplate the layers of lived experience that form the bedrock of a city and the ways that the urban planning decisions of one decade impact the subsequent city.

“...My collaboration with artist Maria Möller helped bring the history and geography of New Orleans’ Chinatown to new light and new audiences.” —Richard Campanella
Using Campanella’s research as a guide, Moller created Lunar New Year installations on sites that were once part of Chinatown. The installations and the photographs created of them reference the layers of lived experience that form the bedrock of a city: a unique cultural enclave, urban development, urban decay, and then urban development once again. The exhibit’s opening reception included a standing room only presentation by Möller and Campanella and a short walking tour of the places that once were part of NOLA’s Chinatown. More than 150 attended the presentations, approximately one-third from the Chinese community. The crowd was delighted by the stories of a 93-year old resident from the original Chinatown.

“As an artist who usually works in cities and with people, it can be hard to find an artist residency that allows me access to that which informs my practice while also giving me the quiet, contemplative space that all artists need from time to time. A Studio in the Woods’ Flint and Steel residency did just that for me.

—Maria Möller
Jessica Levine, in collaboration with Renata Ribeiro and Jordan Karubian, created an interactive, mixed media visual art installation to bring the study titled “Does lead in New Orleans have mockingbirds singing the blues?” to public attention. The installation was designed as an impromptu art spectacle within a 10 x 10 foot pop-up tent, staged where people gather: festivals, parks, farmers markets, and schools and universities. The installation enrolled city dwellers in citizen science as it engaged the viewer and celebrated the mockingbird as a beloved New Orleans icon of resilience, musicality, and thriving urban nature.

“**There is a certain synergy that occurs when art and science comes together. In the best of cases, it helps practitioners in both fields, as well as the general public, to view the world through a new lens and to gain novel insights into relationships and possibilities.**” —Jordan Karubian
"I am enlivened at the prospect of creating an art installation that is integrated with a scientific study and has important resonance with a pressing public health issue in New Orleans." — Jessica Levine
In collaboration with epidemiologist Felicia Rabito and her lab at the Tulane School of Public Health, Anna Fitzgerald created a puppet-based performance for and with children with asthma. Together, they created characters with objects like inhalers to tell a story relevant to the children’s daily lives. Meeting regularly with youth from the Sojourner Truth Community Center, they explored puppetry and objects in workshops, and then Anna built a performance about asthma, air, and breathing to perform for them. With these children, Anna explored the personal side of asthma, how it is a part of you, and how to live with it.

“My collaboration with the Flint and Steel Residency program was interesting and fun. It was a unique experience to see the epidemiology of asthma depicted through a puppet show. The children (and adults) really enjoyed it and I think it was an impactful and novel health education approach.” — Felicia Rabito
“Everything here is inspiration. The beams in the house, the stained glass, the driftwood that has been made into the handle on the door [...] the woods, the sounds that change from the morning to the dark, dark evening. The space is magical.” —Anna Fitzgerald
Composer Shay Nichols and faculty partner Tom Sherry created nature-based compositions with local musicians and led public listening excursions to discover the beauty and power found in the "chorus" of the Southern Louisiana natural environment. Inspired by the residency, Shay created The Natural Music Institute bringing together groups of local musicians, scientists, and environmental activists to listen to threatened ecosystems, finding ways of working together and synergizing their work, and inspiring environmental awareness and reconnection through the power of listening.

“Shay inspires me, the scientist, with her emotional calmness, her deep reverence for nature and life, and her growing passion about climate change and the need for activism. I bring to our relationship my systematic, scientific and natural history training and thinking, and my own passion about acting on understanding and acting on climate change.” — Thomas Sherry
Something has taken root. Just as plants grow in soil, artists grow with the right amount of support, freedom, and inspiration. What we say, sing, or express depends on if we feel that we are honored. I feel that beautiful reciprocity here, I am heard and I am listening.” —Shay Nichols
Sign painter Matt Wright photographed the city's historically significant signage and with faculty partner Vicki Mayer they collected stories about existing signs from neighbors and sign painters to be included in Vicki’s Media NOLA project, an online portal for cultural history and production in New Orleans from 1500 to the present. Drawing on his 20 years experience as a sign painter, Matt created new hand-painted signs based on the New Orleans vernacular and turned the studio into an installation of his tongue in cheek advertisements that have since been a part of an exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

“The Flint and Steel program allowed me to learn about [Matt’s] craft and those who have preceded him in the region. I learned so much and I think the feeling was mutual.” —Vicki Mayer
“Coming from the hustle of everyday city life to A Studio in the Woods was a welcome change. I got the time and space to work at my own pace on exactly what I wanted to. Getting time to take photos of old NOLA signs, interview NOLA sign painters, and work on my own art during my stay here has been invaluable.” —Matt Wright
During her residency, environmental journalist Christy George continued work on her creative non-fiction book Vanishing Hometowns, and with faculty partner Laura Murphy hosted conversations across generations and geography - bringing together people along the bayous endangered by rising seas with people who face the legacy of Katrina and are adapting to the impacts of climate change. They held an intimate conversation with members of the Pointe-au-Chiens Indian Tribe, discussing their struggles with federal recognition and what that means in terms of storm protection. In partnership with Monique Verdin's Land Memory Bank, Los Isleños Society and WWNO's Coastal Desk they hosted hundreds for a Sunday Dancehall, coastal climate conversation, live music and a locally caught and harvested meal.

“Together, we hosted wonderful meals and dances and sparked thought-provoking interactions about how we see our climate changing around us in specific ways [...] With an exceedingly anti-science, anti-environment, anti-truth tone of leadership—we must connect authentically over a good meal, find the facts, create some art and spark meaningful action.” —Laura Murphy
“I came to the woods to write about climate change and how that challenges values and changes culture. Places change whether we like it or not. The test is how we face it: whether we go with the flow, or cling to the old ways. Or fight to save what matters most—that need for identity and continuity through all the changes.” —Christy George
Jan Mun is a media artist that creates social sculptures working with digital and living media. The landscape has become her framework to unfold stories about others and herself by using a combination of artistic and scientific processes that manifest in the form of interactive installations, photography, performance, and bio-art. Jan creates interfaces to elicit participation as a reflection and critique of our political and social systems.

Jan Mun collaborated with Howard Mielke and his Lead Lab to revision and activate best practices for lead testing and soil remediation through a site-specific installation. Neighborhood leaders helped identify a community garden with a high lead content that Jan remediated with the assistance of community members. Jan used her stipend to underwrite clean soil and provide free cap and cover landscape fabric to residents whose soil tested high for lead toxicity if they would come out to help in a day of service at the community garden. Howard and Jan plan to continue their work together with projects in New York, Minnesota, and Washington.

“The low-lead soil looks much like the contaminated soil so the message is subtle, but the meaning was made very clear to the community of gardeners and her enthusiasm will continue to inspire the ground swell of change to begin to make the Earth whole again.”—Howard Mielke
“I was supported not only with **time** and **space** but dedicated individual attention by the staff to help realize my project goals, which would have been impossible otherwise. Through regular **open dialogue** they were able to make suggestions about opportunities or connect me to people I may find helpful during the entire project process.”

— Jan Mun
With input from faculty collaborator and religious studies expert Randy Sparks, E. Oscar Maynard created an ongoing community-based art project that uses the idea of Tent Revivals to explore the ways we stray from our own power, and the ways we go dormant and then come back to life, or revive. Just as Evangelical congregants are asked to handle snakes to test their faith, many of us are asked to hold poisons close to our bodies as a measure of our faith in various ideas and people. Through interviews, listening, and portraiture, Oscar is helping people to tell the stories of the poisons they are asked to hold to prove their faith.

“I was excited to collaborate with Oscar Maynard, a wonderfully talented artist with Southern roots, whose work explored the complexities surrounding Southern religion, gender, race and sexuality [...] Such an opportunity would never have come my way without Studio in the Woods and your Flint and Steel initiative – it’s a creative, dynamic, and rewarding program.” — Randy Sparks
“My faculty collaborator was so very supportive. The reading recommendations he made changed how I thought about Revivals, their history, the radical undertones I never knew they had and who the participants were.” —E. Oscar Maynard
Jebney Lewis worked with faculty collaborator Rick Snow, New Orleans youth, and Tulane students to build a map of the city made from sonified steel plates and repurposed brass instruments. The pair also partnered with local writer Christopher Staudinger to conduct writing and field recording workshops where over 60 area high-school writers gathered neighborhood sounds that evoke a unique sense of place. The map functions as a sound art instrument - its freeway system playable by musicians, while field recordings resonate through its other materials. In addition to its exhibition at CANO's Creative Space at the Myrtle Banks Building, the artists commissioned local composer Jeff Albert to write new work on the map and perform it on the piece during its public exhibition at the Contemporary Art Center.

“[Jebney’s] work pushed me to consider my own working methods and sensibilities from new technical and also social perspectives. I remain thankful that I was able to contribute to such a uniquely socially aware artistic project.” —Rick Snow

Jebney Lewis is a sculptor, community artist, and musician. He works with neighbors, youth, and other artists to re-interpret local sites and histories through the lens of the visual and performing arts. Past projects have included a vocal requiem for Philadelphia trains performed from a hand-built railway pump-car; a roadside collection of Kuomoni folk sayings gathered with children in the Central Himalayas, and a 28 foot tall “Super Creature of Energy and Power,” made with over 100 youth and erected in one day as part of a community arts festival.
Songs of Home Songs of Change is a cartographic audio installation piece featuring recordings, and the writings that accompany them, that were gathered and written by high-school students in response to the prompt: “What does home sound like, and what are the sounds of its changing?”

“I believe that successful projects here in New Orleans must both grapple with the extant massive body of folkloric artistic tradition, and push that same cannon to expand the way it represents and defines itself through contemporary modalities. There’s no blank slate here.”

—Jebney Lewis
Donna Cooper Hurt is a visual and community engaged artist living in Charleston, SC. She holds a Master of Fine Art from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Donna incorporates photography, sculpture, video, and performance in her practice to address the intersection of place, memory, history, and the body.

Donna Cooper Hurt created site-specific installations that address place and the human relationship to the environment. In a day-long workshop with youth from the Jefferson Parish Department of Juvenile Services, Donna and Donata Henry shared their work and processes and helped guide participants to form a personal connection to the outdoors. The youth became storytellers, explorers, sculpture builders and photographers – holding and documenting birds, creating artistic interventions in nature, and photographing their findings.

“\textit{The Flint and Steel Residency program provides unique opportunities for artists and scientists to collaborate and communicate their work to a broad audience. [...] The collaboration enables us to integrate our ideas and expertise in such a way that we are more relatable.}” – Donata Henry
“I was afforded the quiet to begin listening to the sounds of the woods in ways I had not heard before. The bark of a kit fox, the hoots of barred owls and the singing frogs, all culminated in a sensory opening I will carry with me after I leave.” —Donna Cooper Hurt
Jacqueline Ehle Inglefield in collaboration with Mark Gstohl, built a shrine to the bottomland hardwood forest to reignite a reverence for nature. Referencing religious scriptures and past spiritual practices, the shrine encourages contemplation of the global impact of habitual consumption and waste and how our spiritual relationship with the natural world may influence our individual acts and determine our collective impact on our environment. Mark’s students researched and prepared posters about the ecological teachings of major religions that they presented alongside the shrine at our annual FORESTival: A Celebration of Art and Nature.

“...My collaboration with Jackie Ehle Inglefield was an exceptional learning experience for all involved. [...] Jackie’s creativity and enthusiasm helped us all to realize how much our relationship with creation can inspire us to working for a better world.” —Mark Gstohl
“Dr. Gstohl and I began our journey of cross combustion as a conversation. We spoke of why humans can “look the other way” when it comes to our waste. We talked of insurmountable garbage and how the 5 major religions deal with the issue of garbage, and sustainability of the planet.” —Jacqueline Ehle Inglefield
Byron Asher composed Skrontch Music, a major piece of music for clarinet and large ensemble that explores and is in service to the New Orleanian Creole traditions of clarinet virtuosity and Black radicalism in the Jim Crow era. His writing process was aided by deep research, including an oral history project of collaborative design with faculty partner, Sharlene Sinegal DeCuir, which documented the experiences of the older generation of New Orleans clarinetists still performing today. The piece was performed at our annual FORESTival, the New Orleans Jazz Museum at the Old U.S. Mint, and Xavier University, where it was followed by a panel discussion featuring Sharlene, Kidd Jordan, Tim Turner, and Benjamin Morris.

“Working with the Flint Steel Residency series was an eye-opening and fulfilling experience. My collaboration with Byron produced an amazing project that we were both very proud of.” — Sharlene Sinegal-DeCuir
“What a great privilege it is to be here for this short period of time, far enough away from home to get serious work done, but close enough to know where I am and why it is such a crucial institution for New Orleans and its artistic community.”
—Byron Asher
Rachel Wallis is a self-taught crafter, artist and activist. She is interested in transgressing the lines between fine art and craft, and engaging in questions of identity, labor and value when it comes to the creation and appreciation of art. Her current work focuses on collaborative community quilting projects.

Blakeslee Gilpin assisted Rachel Wallis with research and mapping to inform a community-quilting project exploring the links between textiles and the historic and current global slave economy. Rachel worked with high school students from New Orleans Center for Creative Arts who helped her design and map the slave and trade routes to be incorporated into the quilt. Participants in three public quilting circles embroidered these routes onto the quilt while hearing from guest speakers. Gilpin spoke about connections between the slave trade and textile production. Master quilter Cecelia "Cely" Tapplette-Pedescleaux spoke about the ways in which African American craftswomen used quilting as historical transmission, wayfinding, and resistance. Journalist Stephanie Hepburn presented on contemporary issues around human trafficking, labor exploitation, and working conditions in the textile industry.

“Rachel’s community quilting project is a fascinating expression of the diverse and multifaceted history of cotton that flowed in and through New Orleans. Aside from the obvious graphical representations and material connection inherent in a quilt, I believe that the historical potential of her project, that of a scholarly informed community document, is truly intriguing.” —Blakeslee Gilpin
"I am only beginning to understand the impact that this residency will have on me moving forward. I feel so much more confident about my abilities as an artist and organizer, and better equipped to work outside of my home communities."
—Rachel Wallis
Esther Solondz designed and installed a Bee Palace, a beautiful sculpture that also functions as a nesting site for wild solitary bee pollinators at The Audubon Zoo. Faculty partner and Director of the New Orleans Mosquito Board Claudia Riegel, provided information about bee behavior and habitat. Through the dozens of volunteers that assisted in its fabrication and the piece's permanent installation at the Zoo, the project serves as an educational tool to communities about dwindling bee populations worldwide.

“Esther Solondz has a history of creating sculptures that compliment nature and The Bee Palace provides awareness and tells the importance of solitary bees in the environment, providing thousands of hollow stems for the bees to inhabit. These bees are incredibly important pollinators and are important for a healthy environment. Esther was able to create piece of art with an important function for New Orleans.” — Claudia Riegel
“I was struck by how few people were aware of the existence of wild solitary bees. Proportionally they make up such a huge segment of the bee kingdom and the broader public is unaware of the integral role they play in pollination. By building the Bee Palace I hoped to encourage the local bee populations to nest and pollinate in the areas around the sculpture. By situating it in a public space, I also hoped to increase people’s awareness and perhaps encourage them to create their own nesting boxes and habitats at home.” —Esther Solondz
Sarah Dahnke's *Dances for Solidarity* is an ongoing, community-based performance choreographed by incarcerated people in solitary confinement, built from the personal narratives of 50 people in prison in Texas and Louisiana. The New Orleans iteration of the project was performed by a group from the National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls at the landmark site where Homer Plessy was arrested in 1892, the Newcomb Museum, and Cafe Reconcile. Faculty partner Stephen Ostertag contributed a wealth of knowledge around the history of incarceration in the state of Louisiana.

“I was amazed at how such a simple act can be so meaningful and bring so much joy to both the performers and those in solitary confinement who wrote the dance.” —Stephen F. Ostertag, Ph.D.
“Dances for Solidarity was never meant to be a singular performance but is rather a container for many types of performances both behind bars and on the outside. I am grateful for this time to plant so many seeds [...] and to create a blueprint for potential community collaboration in other locations.” —Sarah Dahnke
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