

Beneath the Surface: Selected Works Exhibit Launch Friday, November 24, 5pm

Thanks to artist Deborah Payne for this week's guest column. Deborah is a Saint John textile and mixed media artist who participated in a five-day artist residency at Fundy National Park – Deborah's work is part of our upcoming exhibit, called Beneath the Surface: Selected Works. This exhibit is on loan to AX from Craft NB and features a number of contemporary New Brunswick artists, including local artists Alyson Brown, Peter Powning, Jamie Brown, and Joe Pach.

The exhibit launches at AX on Friday, November 24, at 5pm. The public is invited to attend the launch and help us celebrate our latest exhibit.

What happens when you spend five days in a park? Lots, if it involves 19 artists, one curator, 3 organizers, a group of national park interpreters, guest speakers, and workshop leaders.

This past June, the artist residency “Beneath the Surface” was held in Fundy National Park. The participants were craftspeople who ranged in ages, experience, and media: wood, ceramics, metal, fibre, paint, stone.

Unlike many artist residencies, this one required no work to be created on site. Rather, the five days were a retreat – allowing the artists to take a break from their daily routines and studios so they could work with other artists, and explore, discover, and be inspired by the park.

And inspired we were. Yes, I was one of the artists and I loved this experience organized by Craft NB. The five days were a unique blend of structured and unstructured activities, some announced beforehand, others not. We had guided outings with park interpreters. We learned about trees, bogs, rocks, the history of Pointe Wolfe, fish and insects, life cycles.... We asked questions. The answers led to more questions. We were hooked.

We also had workshops about the creative process, the history of craft in New Brunswick and how craft education here began in Fundy National Park. Quiet walks and campfire conversations added to the camaraderie that formed over those five days.

Then, back to our studios for two months to let those inspirations transform themselves into artwork that became the group exhibition “Beneath the Surface”. Two group meetings meant receiving invaluable feedback that pushed us further.

September came quickly. Show time. What resulted from those five days in the park is diverse. Magnified basket-woven spruce cones, paper-woven archival photographs of a community that once was, the translucent husk of moulting dragonflies, copper swirlings of the tide are some of what came from the imaginations of these artists.

Five months after the residency, the impact continues. Jamie Brown, a local metalsmith, says “this experience has given me the opportunity to communicate science and conservation through art.”

For textile artist Allison Green, “What has stayed with me is an interest in asking questions about every little plant and animal I see, and a sense of wonder at the quantity of organisms in an ecosystem.”

Metalsmith Patty Goodine relishes “learning from other artists [resulting in] some changes in how I approach things.”

Steve Jones, who works with wood from used skateboards and trees, adds, “This project has made me think and self-reflect more than I have before. As an artist who focused on doing production, this residency was a stepping stone” to create one-of-a-kind exhibition pieces.

From deep beneath the surface has emerged a deeper sense of community with this group of artists and with nature. A new openness in working together, for feedback and collaborations.

What happens when a group of artists spend five days in a park? Come see for yourselves. The exhibition “Beneath the Surface: Selected Works” opens at the AX arts and culture centre on Friday, November 24, 5:00 pm.