

2009/10 Worldstudio AIGA Scholarships Kraus Family Foundation Honorable Mention



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Fine Art
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I am a woman who does not play by gender rules. I am influenced by my mother — a Navy veteran who within her 25-year career fought to be treated equally, only to meet discrimination at the advanced levels of her career. At 17, I too stepped into the male world of the military. I joined the Army, where being a female was seen as a disadvantage. I countered this by running faster, carrying more, never saying, “I can’t.” Stationed at Ft. Hood, Texas, where female soldiers are outnumbered 3:1, harassment and advances were common from male soldiers of all ranks.

Entering college, I thought I was through being a minority. While most of the students were women, the ideas were decidedly male. The work of female students was dismissed as dealing with “women’s issues” and “feminist bull” manure.

Two years after college, I went to the Montana Artists Refuge in Basin, Montana, as an artist-in-residence. This set into motion life-changing events. It gave me a rela-



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tionship with the dedicated folk at the Refuge, who have shown me the power of art. I presented a slide show and a workshop for the teen girls at Youth Dynamics, a center for at-risk students. I discussed the role that my gender plays in my own art and identity. I led them in a drawing/collage exercise where they created drawings of themselves and filled them with the labels and expectations of being a woman.

I moved to Montana and began to volunteer with the Refuge. I worked for the Refuge's American Indian Artist Residency (AIAR) program. I recruited new members from the elders and prominent members of the Montana Native American and arts' communities for the guiding committee of the AIAR. I also researched funding opportunities: writing grant proposals and donation request letters.

I have learned that I need to make a difference. I have an active studio practice. I exhibit fairly regularly. I sell sometimes. I used to think that was enough. I realize now that creating art, only to sell it as a commodity, is not what matters. What matters is the way those guarded teenage girls at Youth Dynamics opened up and talked about their experiences — because of art. What matters is to hear the Native American artists who come to AIAR say, "There is healing" because of art.

This is why I am going back to school. I am gaining new skills to pass to others. After my education, I will continue to be an exhibiting artist, but I will also found a non-profit studio that teaches printmaking to at-risk girls. Through art, I will teach them that being female is never a disadvantage.

