

Geraldine Kiefer

“Civil War Art, Contemporary Art, and the Marketing of Artists: Experiments in Community Culture”

“Living Towns 2004: Winchester - Frederick County”

Track 1—Vibrant Community—Festivals, Education and the Arts

SAC panel: “Big Arts, Small Community”

Second presentation: Creative Scholarship Day, Shenandoah University, March 23, 2005

Geraldine Kiefer is an artist, art historian and assistant professor of art history at Shenandoah University. Working also as an image specialist for the SU History and Tourism Center and volunteering as a board member and exhibitions coordinator for the Shenandoah Arts Council, Dr. Kiefer has a vital interest in bringing Winchester's artists, art forms, art supporters and professionals, and historic legacies together in new and exciting syntheses. She has been assembling and interpreting a corpus of Shenandoah Valley Civil War imagery for the past year, while organizing exhibitions for SAC, exhibiting as a cooperative artist at Dancing Fire Gallery, and fostering student art exhibitions. Her presentation will ground her Winchester activities in current and recent community arts movements and strategies.

Winchester as a Cultural Laboratory

I. “Small Community”: From Arts Commitment to Collaboration

Shenandoah Arts Council
Shenandoah University's History and Tourism Center
Dancing Fire Gallery (cooperative)
Various commercial galleries
Shenandoah University main campus

II. “Small Community”: From Arts Creation to Coordination

Art Exhibitions with Art Festivals (SAC/Blossoms and Brushstrokes – Winchester Apple Blossom Festival)

Art Exhibitions Coordinated with University Classes, Lectures, Faculty, and Events

The Knowledge Point/Augusta Savage and Nancy Prophet Exhibition with Theresa Leininger-Miller—Shenandoah University Women's Studies Department/co-sponsor of the event

SAC/Honoring Latino Heritage Month – Shenandoah University Spanish Department and Conservatory/represented in planning for the event

SAC/Shenandoah Photography—New Directions – Shenandoah University Mass Communications Professor Edvard Thorsett and Student Joseph Kelley

Art Exhibitions and Programs Coordinated with Community Education and Programs
SAC/Youth Art Month and African American Art Month – coordinated with Winchester and Frederick County schools

III. “Small Community”: The “Town Artist” Concept, Extended to “Town Arts” Professionals and Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Arts Groups

Key Winchester Artists: Aesthetic Tastemakers, Community Enhancers (Eugene Smith, Wilson Webb, and others)

University and College Art Programs: Links to Expertise and Excellence (Shepherd University; Lord Fairfax College, Shenandoah University)

Culturally and ethnically diverse interest groups: Schools, Performing Arts, Visual Arts

IV. “Big Arts”: Preserving History and Culture: The Civil War in the Valley

Civil War Heritage Art
Civil War Art, History and Education: Tools for New Syntheses

V. “Big Arts: Fostering Contemporary Art with Ties to the Land, its People and Its History

Shenandoah Photography (Jeffrey Harris, Dennis Wise, Karl Mueller, and others): Landscape and Community Cultures
Rosemary Swope: Winchester apple industry workers

VI. Big Arts: Promoting and Marketing Regional Artists

A curatorial approach
A cooperative approach

VII. Big Arts: Confluence: Regional and National Artists; Cultural Coordination and Collaboration; History, Culture, Ecology

Shenandoah University's projected Art and Ecology Festival: “Art in the Valley: Enticing Place from Space”

Conclusion: From Experimentation to Implementation, What Strategies are needed? Vision and Mission, Direction, Goal Setting, Coordination, Collaboration, Team Building, Achieving and Evaluating Milestones

The following points of discussion, concerning town-gown and other “bridge-building opportunities involving communities and the arts, are from William Cleveland, “Bridges, Translations and Change: The Arts as Infrastructure in 21st-Century America,” *Community Arts Network Reading Room*, <http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archive/clevelandbridges58.php>, pp. 10-13

“Strategies: Bridges, Translations and Change”

Bridges

1. Expand the role played by cultural institutions in our communities.
2. Learn from the survivors in other fields
3. Find those in our communities outside of the arts world with whom we have natural [and cultural] affinities.
4. Expand the concept of artists’ residences [projects, assistantships, and volunteer committee work) beyond schools, social institutions.
5. Confound the “special interest” stereotype by building advocacy alliances with non-arts human service providers.
6. Identify those national [state, regional, and local] issues that have a direct bearing on the immediate and long term health of the field.
7. Establish forums for discourse and problem solving between and among artists and scientists, engineers, politicians, economists, philosophers, [performing artists, pharmacists, educators, writers, etc.]

Translations

1. Rewrite the dictionary of American culture. Use language that reflects the dynamic nature of our communities, the country and the world.
2. Conduct research about the state of the arts and artists. Use the results to create a regularly published American Culture Almanac.
3. Take the position that creativity is a basic and powerful human capacity.
4. Learn from our elders.
5. Provide training for artists and arts educators on the wide range of roles art can assume in community life.
6. Map the cultural eco-system. Recognize that there is a cultural ecosystem that we have allowed to operate out of balance.

Change

1. Make the case for the study and practice of the creative processes as a cornerstone of educational reform.
2. Democratize our cultural institutions.
3. Identify ourselves as co-conspirators in our own demise.
4. Topple the hierarchies. Replace the notion of cultural hierarchies with the idea of a cultural continuum.
5. Challenge our missions.
6. Expand the definition of “public art” beyond the realm of the public artifact. Adopt the position that citizen/artist collaboration, integration and activism are necessary components for true community ownership of artistic endeavors.
7. Promote and support the well being of the individual artist.

HOW CAN WE THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX, OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM, AND WITHIN A COMMUNITY NEXUS TO ENHANCE THE STATE OF THE ARTS AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE?