

A Creative and Healing Process

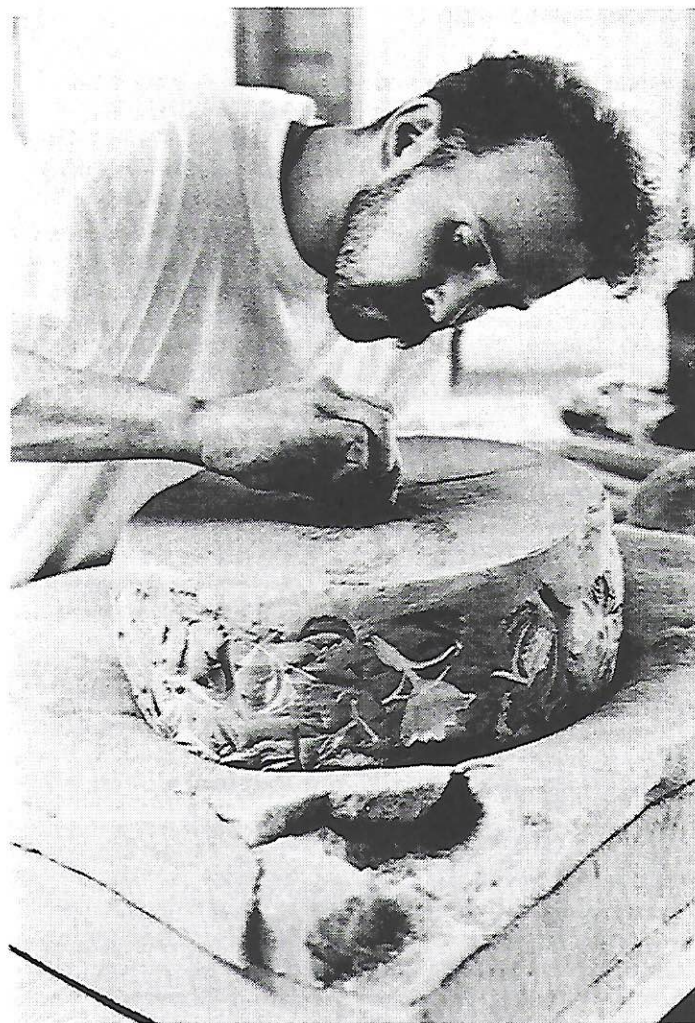
The Watershed Workshop for People with AIDS

by Lynn Duryea

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"I shed many layers of my outer casing during this workshop. I wrote, I painted, I made a few [ceramic] pots. I returned home vulnerable and with humility; more in touch with my being than I thought possible." So said Patrick Clark of his experience at Watershed Center in 1992. Patrick is one of nearly 40 people who have come to Watershed to participate in an innovative and unique program for People with AIDS or who are HIV positive.

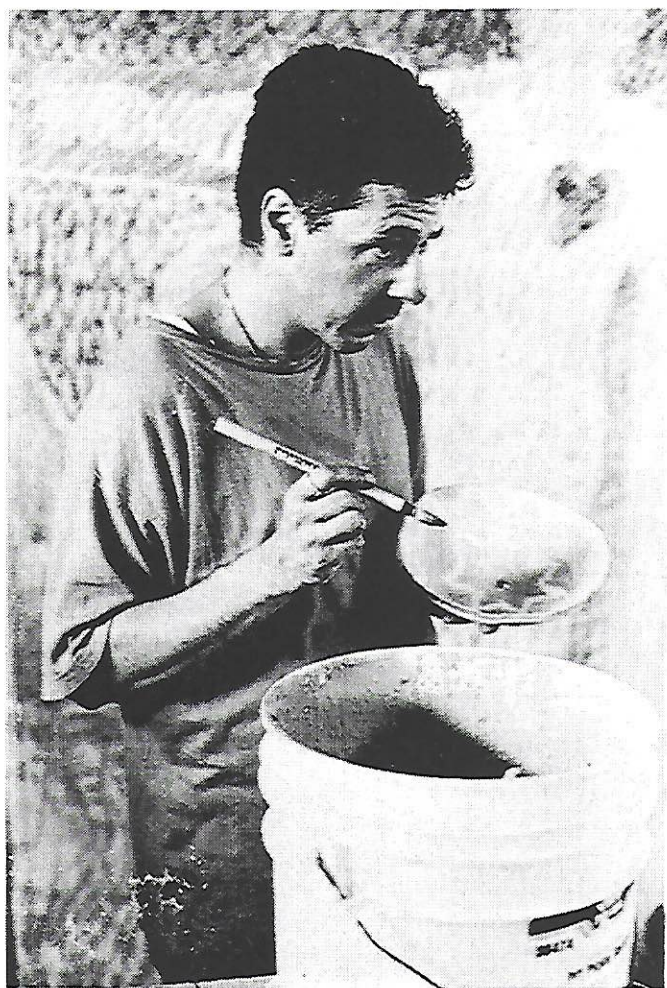
The workshop's focus is on life-affirmation and self-determination, using clay and other materials as a means to create and explore the images of healing in a safe and supportive environment. Other goals of the residency include experiencing the self-empowerment of a life committed to personal decisions. The program



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brochure states that "no prior experience with clay or any other art materials is necessary," but a "demonstrated interest" in some creative work is required--this could include music, gardening, food preparation, or sewing and knitting.

Both the process and the products are important aspects of this experience--the creative and healing process as well as the making of tangible objects that are permanent markers of people's lives. In many cases, these pieces live on after their makers are gone, reminders to family and friends of their creative spirit, evident even in the face of a life-threatening illness. And for the facilitators and staff at Watershed, it is truly inspiring to witness the work of the participants, to see the choices they make about themselves and their lives.



Bill glazing at Watershed Center. (Photos: Martha Mickles)

The pilot program for the seven-day residency program was brought to Watershed in 1991 by Gustavo Gonzalez, an art therapist from New York, and Alexandra Trub, President of Watershed's Board of Directors. Since then, D. Mackenzie Harris, Ph.D, a psychotherapist, and I have coordinated, developed, and expanded the program. Special to this program is that it occurs within the Watershed community, which includes summer residents and staff, most of whom are ceramic artists. Communal meals in the residential facility and adjacent studios in the former brick factory foster communication and inspiration among all involved. In so many places in the lives of People with AIDs, they are treated like sick people. Here they are treated like well people, like creative people.

The weeklong workshop is a special part of Watershed's program. Established in 1986 by a group of ceramic artists, including George Mason and Chris Gustin, Watershed Center is a retreat for artists, particularly ceramic artists. The Center is located in North Edgecomb on 30 acres, surrounded by a neighboring farm, nature conservancy land, and the Sheepscot River. The summer studio is housed in a former brick factory with 20,000 square feet of working space, with gas, electric, and wood-burning kilns. Winter classes and a community outreach program are other aspects of what happens at Watershed.

The growth and popularity of the program for People with AIDS have led to the addition of a second week-long workshop for 1995, one to be held in early June and the second late in August. The fee is \$375, which includes materials, meals, and lodging, and all other



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aspects of the program. Scholarship funds are often available. Attendance is limited to 10 participants per session. For a brochure or further information, please contact me at (207) 767-7113 or write to me at PO Box 7635, Portland, ME 04112.

Lynn Duryea is a ceramic artist and teacher who lives in Portland and Deer Isle. Her work has been exhibited and sold both nationally and internationally.



Greg and his drawing.