On October 28, 2017, a committee consisting of Region 2 Arts Council board members and established community artists convened to review 8 applications for the Artist Fellowship award. After discussion and review of each applicant’s artistic quality, merit, and project proposal, Basketry artist Shannon Lucas-Westrum of Bemidji and watercolorist and collage artist Kelli Lien of Bemidji were named 2017-2018 Artist Fellows.

Shannon Lucas-Westrum is an artist who specializes in weaving baskets that incorporate natural elements into unique shapes. She has been weaving since 2000, taking traditional weaving styles and merging them to form pieces that are both functional and sculptural. She occasionally teaches beginner workshops in weaving and jewelry making in her Bemidji Studio. Her work can be seen during the annual American Craft Council Show in St. Paul, the First City of Arts Studio Cruise in Bemidji, in regional galleries, and in her home studio by appointment.

As a 2017-2018 Artist Fellow, Shannon has been accepted for an artist residency at Shankill Castle near Kilkenny, Ireland where she plans to work with traditional master basket weavers Joe and Ciaren Hogan. She also plans to spend time working with Alison Fitzgerald, Priory Cottages, The Priory, Benburb, to study more sculptural and whimsical designs. She plans to create contemporary baskets utilizing the traditional techniques and designs she encounters in Ireland made with locally cultivated materials, and plans an exhibition of her new baskets next year.

Kelli Lien has 20 years of experience working in watercolor and is a Signature Member of the Red River Watercolor Society. Her paintings have won top awards at national and regional shows, and her collages have been accepted into juried shows and will be included in the National Collage Society’s Calendar for 2018. Kelli has taught a variety of art-related classes at elementary schools, senior centers, and at the Rapid City fine arts center when she lived in South Dakota. Currently, some of her recent art can be found at Wings’n Willows Art Gallery, in Grand Rapids.

As a 2017-2018 Artist Fellow, Kelli’s plans focus on upgrading her studio, creating a new website to market her art, and producing new work. She wants to explore acrylic painting and abstraction and to have more time to focus on creating new collages and watercolors. She also hopes to connect with the community through teaching workshops, attending arts classes, being more involved in artist groups, and continuing exhibiting throughout the region.

The Region 2 Arts Council Board of Directors and Staff would like to thank each of the Artist Fellowship applicants and congratulate Shannon Lucas-Westrum and Kelli Lien as the 2017-2018 Artist Fellows!