The Region 2 Arts Council is excited to announce the recipients of the 2018-2019 Artist Fellowship, awarded to Bemidji-based painter Paula J. Swenson and Bemidji State University poet and professor, Dr. Carol Ann Russell. These 2018-2019 Artist Fellows were selected on October 27, 2018, when a committee consisting of established community artists and Region 2 Arts Council board members convened to review 12 applications for the Artist Fellowship award. This award is intended for dedicated artists who have created a substantial independent body of work, have received recognition for their work, and whose work has been selected for solo exhibitions, commissions, presentations, readings, or performances.

After graduating from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Paula Swenson struggled to find her own artistic voice. It took her many years, many workshops and many teachers. Around 1991 Swenson found her way to the Women’s Art Registry of Minnesota. There she found support and fellowship and discovered not how to paint but how she paints. After finding a subject, Swenson researches that subject, gathers resource materials and meditates on what it all means. By using symbols and colors and shapes Swenson tells stories or portrays a landscape all the while being mindful of unintended “happy accidents”. Stars turn into birds, trees into creatures, moons into fishing holes. Swenson calls her style Surrealistic for lack of a better term. In Swenson’s words “Mostly I want my paintings to make people happy, including me.”

Dr. Carol Ann Russell is the author of four books of poetry, including The Red Envelope (Florida 1985), Silver Dollar (New Mexico 1995), and Gypsy Taxi (Nebraska 2005). Russell was chosen to receive the 1999 Distinguished Alumni Award by St. Cloud State University, and has taught creative writing at Bemidji State University since 1988, where she is Professor of English.

Russell holds M.A. and M.F.A. degrees from University of Montana, and a Ph.D. from University of Nebraska. Russell’s poetry has been published in over a hundred literary journals, including Poetry International, Missouri Review, Ploughshares, Malahat Review, Quarterly West, Georgia State Review, Columbia, Poetry Northwest, Portland Review, Louisville Review, Sonora Review, Ohio Review, and Hawaii Review. Her poems have been included in more than 13 anthologies representing poets from Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, and the Pacific Northwest. Most recently, Russell’s poetry appeared in The Backwaters Press 20th Anniversary Anthology (2017). Russell has received many grants, awards, and residencies including the Jerome Foundation, the American Academy in Rome and Villa Vergiliana, Italy, the Australian Centre at Melbourne University in Australia, Studium Scholar at St. Benedict’s Monastery, and the Ragdale Foundation. Poet Carol Ann Russell was elected to P.E.N. International in New York City in 1993.

The Region 2 Arts Council Board of Directors and Staff would like to thank each of the Artist Fellowship applicants and congratulate Paula J. Swenson and Dr. Carol Ann Russell as the 2018-2019 Artist Fellows!