Region 2 Arts Council awards this year’s Artist Fellowships to Blair Treuer and Joseph Holt

The Region 2 Arts Council is excited to announce the recipients of the 2021-2022 Artist Fellowship: Bemidji-based textile artist Blair Treuer and singer/songwriter Joseph Holt. These Artist Fellows were selected on October 9, 2021, when a committee consisting of established area artists and our Region 2 Arts Council Board chair convened to review 19 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.

Blair Treuer is a textile artist and storyteller who made an unusual entrance into this craft. She states: “My children’s participation in a traditional Native American ceremony required me to make blankets as a part of their offering. As these blankets were made as a spiritual offering, the process was very spiritual for me. And because it was the only way I could contribute as a non-native woman, I poured everything I had into those offerings. I didn’t just make patchwork quilts like everyone else. My blankets pictorially depicted the Native American names gifted to my children when they were born. After a decade of creating blankets for private spiritual ceremonies, I transitioned to creating portraits for gallery display in 2018.” Treuer wants to inspire a new wave of exploratory work in the field of fiber arts, and in her own words, “be one of the catalysts pushing this medium forward into gallery spaces and in arts education.”

As a self-taught artist, Treuer’s approach is unique and her images are often confused with paintings until viewers experience her work first-hand. “My portraits explore intimate parts of my life and center on the juxtaposition between my white culture and my husband’s traditional Indigenous culture, and have ranged in topics from drug abuse, social ostracization, body image, femininity and masculinity, sexual abuse and exploitation, aging, transitioning from childhood to manhood and womanhood, with spirituality deeply woven into their narratives. My work is vulnerable, honest and personal, but often makes universal connections. Even when my work is dark, it’s filled with hope.”

Treuer plans to use funding from this fellowship to complete a 26-portrait series entitled: “Becoming: from Childhood to Womanhood.” Through this series she seeks to explore the feminine body as sacred, challenging current societal messaging, and examining and celebrating the transition from childhood to womanhood.

Joseph Holt was a public speaker, educator, philosopher, theologian, apprentice architect, church planter (and even a pizza delivery guy!) for years before returning to his first love of...
songwriting. Holt fronts for the regional Americana band Acoustic Smoke, and the studio band Joe and The Reluctant Prophets. Acoustic Smoke was picked up by a talent agency in 2015 and has garnered hundreds of thousands of plays on Spotify for their three albums - One Kind Favor, Leave Better Than You Are, and Hard Winter. Holt is now signed to Merf Music Group in Nashville, Tennessee as a writer. Additionally, Holt sometimes works as a studio singer for other studios. He even did some vocal work for a studio in Australia, where they asked him to sing Hank Williams-style country, which has been one of the more interesting requests to date.

Holt says that when writing he often approaches the song much like a novelist might. He researches his subject matter for story elements, historical detail, facts, colloquialisms and depth. After that he creates a story and “simply” hangs the details on the frame. “Some subjects are easier than others for sure,” he says. “Like, songs about ships, feel like cheating because the language of sailors is already designed to have a cadence and poetry just by the nature of their history.” Other songs are designed to simply convey an emotion or sensation. “Those are much harder I find, but when you can do both in the same song, now that's a winner.”

Holt plans to use his fellowship to support an invitation from his publisher to go to Nashville to network, write and learn from some of the best in the industry while leveraging opportunities for his singer-songwriting career. In Holt’s words, “I have been allowed to follow this passion by an infinitely understanding wife of thirty years (Sarah) and our steadfast children Marshall (25) and Catherine (26).”

The Region 2 Arts Council Board of Directors and Staff would like to thank each of the Artist Fellowship applicants and congratulate Blair Treuer and Joseph Holt as the 2021-2022 Artist Fellows!

_The Region 2 Arts Council Artist Fellowship Award is made possible through the generous support of the McKnight Foundation_