In January of this year, Skowhegan welcomed Sarah Frances Workneh as the new Executive Director for Development & Administration, the first shot at calling my bluff—to be an artist. And so it proved to be.

SHOICHI KAJIMA ('55)

In 1955 I was pondering how I might spend the upcoming summer vacation. At that time I was a graduate student at Harvard Graduate School of Design. A noted Japanese architect, Kiyoshi Seike, who was then in Boston, advised me to take a course in the lake's waters, finding our spots. Workers given an early chance to get our bearings, test things up. We felt we were a privileged band: well-fed and oriented art. A grant to the Japanese collection of painting. Today the Foundation provides financial assistance for research and publication for both western and eastern art. A grant to the Japanese collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston is indicative of our support. In 1989, I sponsored the first Kajima Sculpture Competition as part of our company’s 150th anniversary. It is held every two years under the theme of the intimate relationship between sculpture and architecture. And it has since evolved into an indoor sculpture contest and exhibits considerable interest here and abroad. It may well be one of the outcomes of my time spent studying sculpture at Skowhegan.

In closing, I want to thank the faculty and fellow classmates for my Skowhegan experience. These are memories which I treasure forever.

WILLARD BEEPLE ('63)

Above / Shoichi Kajima with friends on the Skowhegan campus

If I could and I had a Movement to Skowhegan, Lucky me. And what a wild and eye-opening ride it was. In those days fellowship artists came a week or so ahead to help open up, sweeping out the dorms, barns, and studios, painting, raking, moving, and sprucing things up. We left a privileged band: well-fed workers given an early chance to get our bearings, test the lake’s waters, find our spots. And so it proved to be.

Above / Shoichi Kajima with friends on the Skowhegan campus

I imagined Skowhegan was the first shot at calling my bluff—to be an artist. And so it proved to be.
Of course we learned from one another, and that was true at Skowhegan. But for me the greatest revelation was seeing older, more accomplished, already celebrated artists. I hadn’t met many. Like us, they could be generous, phlegmatic, talented, petty, brilliant, overrated, and kind. Above all they were real unvarnished individuals, and they were role models for us. It was — and what not to do — on what is surely an improbable career path.

Looking back, I see that Skowhegan encouraged us to trust both ego and doubt. And the place fueled that kind of spirit, that kind of energy, that kind of drive. It was a pastoral setting, a cliché, but it’s true enough. Students, faculty, visiting artists, celebrities — everyone arrived at Skowhegan expectant and a bit guarded. It was a pastoral setting, which is pretty outgoing and open, I feel at home in the place. A conversation on whether or not artists need to live in New York literally determined how and where fellow students chose to live after the summer. The class before ours had made t-shirts with Loon calls as backdrop to late night discussions. Students to this day still make t-shirts with names on them, which they call “Woodenware.”

In 1984, the sculpture studios were open-air and semi-private. There was another sculptor working on either side of me and a painter whose studio window was my studio wall. I was housed in a triple in the dorm. It was the most communally I’d lived or worked in years and the most exposed I’ve ever been, the most open. That said, the intense interactions were extraordinary from the start, and the conversations and friendships that resulted from them have been Skowhegan’s lasting legacy for me. Barbara Zucer was my sculpture teacher. She was generous with her time, thoughtful and dead-on in her criticism. She had evening seminars where we discussed sculpture, as well as the art world and our place in it. A conversation on whether or not artists needed to live in New York. Really determined, and where fellow students chose to live after the summer. Barbara laid things out for me to think about right off the bat — issues she felt I needed to contend with, like the small sculptures I was prone to make existed in the only world I knew, a limited space of the material and the materials themselves have meaning. These were tough issues to resolve, but also the right place or how to proceed. I was beset by moments of legitimation when you doubt your sanity, and in my case, my well-intentioned sense of sort of Indian responsibility, and rummaged on my own decision to get an MFA as opposed to an MFA.

My Skowhegan experience was exactly what I needed at that point in time. Suddenly, everything seemed immediate and attainable — actually possible. I felt so immediately and attainable, I could see myself as an artist, someone I could be — all the time. I could believe it.

I was inspired and interested by the diverse range of experience and backgrounds of the students, teachers, and visiting artists. Talking to Fabian Marcaccio in his studio about painting and color then later sitting with Tommy Lanigan in his little drawing room discussing the “Pedagogy of the Poor” as he worked on collage/assemblage works with bonding and found objects, participating in Deborah Kass’s spirited and engaging discussion group (“the allergenes”) I experienced following my blissfully transcendent studio visit with Adrian Piper.

When Bill T. Jones spoke to us and said that we were the future of the art world, I could believe it.

Most significant and enduring is my community of artist friends, fellow students from that extraordinary group of people. I could have moved forward and continued to be supportive of each other’s artistic endeavors and continuing successes. Some of these artists include Karen Hage, Alessandra Esposito, Heather Cox, Beth Campbell, Nadine Robinson, Steed Taylor, Max Martinez, and Kristen Biles.

When I submitted my application to Skowhegan a month after I completed my MFA in multimedia art at the University of South Florida in Tampa, I had no idea what was next or how to proceed. I was beset by moments of legitimation when you doubt your sanity, and in my case, my well-intentioned sense of sort of Indian responsibility, and rummaged on my own decision to get an MFA as opposed to an MFA. My Skowhegan experience was exactly what I needed at that point in time. Suddenly, everything seemed immediate and attainable — actually possible. I felt so instantly and attainable, I could see myself as an artist, someone I could be — all the time. I could believe it.

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Critical play.

A summer our egos were tempered a bit, and our self-esteem improved.

Perhaps it was the novelty of experiencing three seasons of artmaking—what is more typically the urban pursuit of artmaking—within the physical space of the viewer and how materials and our studio wall. I was housed in a triple in the dorm. It was the most communally I’d lived or worked in years and a part of me and a painter whose studio window was my side of me and a painter whose studio window was my

Another place to study sculpture was the stonecutting shop. My stonecutting teacher was Barbara. Barbara laid things out for me to think about right off the bat—issues she felt I needed to contend with: how to balance so many competing desires and demands to trust both ego and doubt. And the place fueled a kind of utopian environment, where all my needs were well cared for through the schedule, which was well organized and complete. Actually, Skowhegan felt like a womb with its safe environment, where all my needs were well cared for. I believe it helped me find belief in my own work and in the power in putting my art out in the world.

When Bill T. Jones spoke to us and said that we were the future of the art world, I could believe it.

Most significant and enduring is my community of art friends, fellow participants from that year. We have continued to support each other’s artistic endeavors and continue to be supportive of each other’s artistic endeavors and continuing successes. Some of these artists include Karen Hovey, Alessandra Expósito, Heather Cox, Beth Campbell, Nadine Robinson, Steed Taylor, Max Martinez, and Kristen Bicks.

Like us, they could be generous, phlegmatic, talented, petty, brilliant, overworked, and kind. Above all they were real unvarnished individuals, and they were role models for me—and what not to do—is what is surely an improbable career path.

Looking back, I see that Skowhegan encouraged us to trust both ego and doubt. And there was the kindred feeling that resulted from them have been Skowhegan’s lasting legacy for me.

I submitted my application to Skowhegan a month after completing my MFA in multi-media art at the University of South Florida in Tampa. I had no idea what was next or how to proceed. I was being fed conflicting moments of hesitation when you doubt your sanity, and in my case, my well-intentioned sense of guilt, Indian responsibility, and ruminated on my decision to get an MFA as opposed to an MBA.

My Skowhegan experience was exactly what I needed at that point in time. Suddenly, everything seemed immediate and attainable—actually possible. I felt so at ease in my “skin” as an artist. Everyone was so talented and that’s what I still cherish to have back home.

The all of the staff addressed us by our first name, and that surprise, I immediately was made to feel at home when I arrived in a perfect state ready for through the schedule, which was well organized and complete. Actually, Skowhegan felt like a womb with its safe environment, where all my needs were well cared for. I believe it helped me find belief in my own work and in the power in putting my art out in the world.