2008 PARTICIPANT

I was never brave
to work with ideas
enough to touch before.

FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS
BYRON KIM (’86)

Many years ago, the founders of the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture formed two distinct governing bodies that have worked strongly together to make the organization extremely effective. Without the Board of Trustees the whole place would not exist, and without the Board of Governors Skowhegan would not maintain the qualities that make it the most sought after residency program in the U.S. for aspiring visual artists. Members of both boards are unpaid for their services.

My present task is to tell you more about the Governors’ side. The most important task the Governors perform is to choose the incoming participants. In recent years there have been as many as 2,005 applicants for 65 positions. Skowhegan’s Governors continue to insist on examining each application as carefully as possible. We have not cut corners as the numbers have grown. In my experience there is no other arts organization aimed at adult artists that reviews each image submitted by each applicant separately. Two thousand applications, ten images or five minutes of video, a panel of four or five Governors and incoming faculty members considering each image individually. Think about this: the organization with one of the highest application rates in the country puts the most energy and care into each application. I have done these kinds of slide juries for so many foundations and schools over the years, and I haven’t found any to compare to Skowhegan’s.

We are also deeply involved in discussions about all our facilities on campus, and while waiting in line for lobster rolls during July’s Trustees’/Governors’ weekend, I got into an interesting conversation with one of this year’s participants about technology. Skowhegan is in the early planning stages of building a new media lab to accommodate the growing number of artists working in or eager to learn about electronic media. In addition to key equipment, this lab will probably house a number of individual workstations for participants to use their own computers to get online or edit video, etc. I asked this participant how many workstations we should have. I was thinking about one or two dozen. She argued hard for 65. She said that virtually every participant delved into digital media during the summer even if they came in working exclusively in painting. I don’t know about 65 workstations, but it’s Skowhegan’s mission to encourage experimentation and risk-taking. Skowhegan should be the place where a video artist became a sculptor or vice-versa. Conversations like these provide great food for thought as we think about the shape a new media lab should take.

As with our participants, we are committed to diversity among our Governors, and as part of a review of our governance procedures last fall the Governors reaffirmed our commitment to having nationwide representation on the Board. To that end, we are exploring ways to include more of our members who live in the Midwest or on the West Coast in activities like the application review process. The new online application will make this much easier, as we are no longer limited to reviewing images in the office.

Three among our ranks stepped down this year, and we want to thank Tishan Hsu, Glenn Ligon, and Charles Ray for their years of service. Additionally, Bill King, a participant in 1948, 1951, 1952, a Visiting Artist in 1967 and 1975, and a Resident Artist in 1977, 1982, and 1989, had been a Governor since 1972 when he decided to retire from the board this year. In recognition of his near lifetime of involvement with and service to Skowhegan, the Governors established the role of Governor Emeritus for Bill, and we are so pleased that he is still engaged in this way.

As Governors, our partner in tackling issues concerning Skowhegan’s program for the past ten years has been Linda Earle, the School’s Executive Director for Program. It’s hard to put into words how much Linda has done for Skowhegan, because on top of the tangible improvements she has overseen, she has brought so much that is intangible—and invaluable—to the experience of artists during their nine weeks on campus. Linda’s quiet strength and deep knowledge of the contemporary art world have helped guide the Governors as we address issues that affect the participants, from facilities to faculty to scholarships, and she has shepherded hundreds of artists through the always challenging and sometimes difficult experience of discovery that marks a Skowhegan summer. The devotion to Linda of the Governors and of the many artists who have passed through Skowhegan during her tenure is a mark of the impact she has had on this place. She will be missed, but we are reassured by the fact that she leaves the program in a strong position, ready for someone new to build upon what she has accomplished. Thank you, Linda, for all you have brought to Skowhegan, and we wish you every success as you move on to new challenges.