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Art is what you make of it.

Art on the Plains

Art Farm near Marquette showcases creations of artists making use of open spaces on a Nebraska farmstead

By Mike Bockoven

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MARQUETTE -- The intricate spider webs spun throughout the fields and houses of rural Nebraska inspired Mary Ivy Martin, an artist from New York. It wasn't until she started working with the concept that she realized it inspired Kiriko Shirobayashi, another New York artist, too.

"I was on the top floor working on my room and I went downstairs and Kiriko was just starting," Martin said. "We hadn't talked to each other beforehand. It was something we both started working on."

What they both came up with was a concept to spread string out through a room of an old, drafty house, although the results were quite different. Shirobayashi's work looked a lot like a web, made of wire, that had "caught" pieces of cottonwood. Martin's, which took an entire room, was more a mesh of string flying from place to place, overwhelming those who view the installation.

The power to be inspired and the space to manifest that inspiration in any way you can is what Art Farm, a national art residency program outside of Marquette, is all about. Last weekend, the

public was invited onto the campus to see the work, big and small, of four artists.

Along with Martin and Shirobayashi, Bruce Campbell from Massachusetts and Louisa Conrad from Vermont were both represented in the public display. Conrad was no longer on the grounds, though.

The works from the four artists include some colorful pieces that stand out in sharp contrast to the earth tones of the Nebraska prairie in the fall. There's a tree with a bright red cloth tied to it, flapping in the wind, and another tree that features hundreds of small bright ribbons, each with a wish written on it.

The whole point of Art Farm is to broaden experiences, and Martin said that's exactly what ends up happening, both in the positive and the negative. On one hand, she spends most of her time in New York painting, trying to meet specific academic goals. Art Farm,



Audrey and Richard Kauders of Kearney look at 'Little House,' an art installation at the Art Farm Sculpture Prairie near Marquette, during the farm's annual Art Harvest Saturday. 'Little House' is an adobe and wood structure created by Beili Liu of China, who is a former Art Farm artist-in-residence.

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she said, freed her not only from specific criteria for her art, but also from the safety of knowing the media and how something was going to come out.

"You can't help but play with some of what you see," Martin said. "I've never been able to do anything like this, outside. I figured, 'Why not?' It was all an experiment."

Art Farm, itself, is also in the middle of an experiment of sorts. The campus consists of several buildings you might find on a farm: barns, a farmhouse, sheds and the like. But Ed Dadey, director of the facility, said plans are in the works to make Art Farm less a farm

atmosphere, and more a place where current artists can work and past residents' art can have a permanent home.

"For some of these pieces, you need a space dedicated to it," Dadey said. "You worry about art being stored and never seen."



The plan is to raise funds over the next several years and build a permanent gallery, office space and other facilities that are needed. Dadey said there is currently a barn on the facility

'Untitled (It's Complicated)' is a room with a mattress surrounded by a web of string intersecting the space in random directions. It was created by a current Art Farm artist-in-residence, Mary Ivy Martin of New York.
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that would make an excellent space for an artist couple to work on projects, though it would take some time and money to make it usable.

In the meantime, Martin said she had a good experience at Art Farm, and she will take a sense of what she learned back home with her. How it will apply to her work, she isn't sure, but she's eager to find out.

"It's nice to have a place where it's OK to experiment," she said. "Once I get back (to New York), I think I'll take a lot of these ideas with me."