

# ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

## Carl Beihl



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Artist, Student, Instructor, former Board Member and Chair, Carl Beihl knows the Art Center better than most and from more perspectives. It has been his artistic home for more than 40 years.

The desire to repair a leaded glass window for his father-in-law first brought Carl to the Minnetonka Center for the Arts, but it was the Ceramics Studio that drew him in. Carl signed up for pottery classes two times a week and hasn't stopped since.

Community is the reason he's chosen Minnetonka Center for the Arts for his artistic journey. Most of the classes begin first to build community before art. "In order to learn art, you need to be working in a safe place so you can feel comfortable making mistakes and learning out in the open. And in my experience, this is the best place in town for that," says Carl.

Now, using ceramics as a weekly meditation and centering exercise, Carl starts his week on an even keel with Bob Bowman's *Beginning and Continuing with Clay* class on Monday mornings. Midweek, he shifts from student to Artist-Instructor teaching intermediate through advanced *Digital Photography*. Friday mornings belong to a new interest, *Abstract Painting* with Ellen Richman.

As a "right-brained person doing left-brain work," art was the balancing force during Carl's successful career with American Express and later with his own business. Ceramics was the art form he chose as an adult, but his artistic inclination began as a child. Carl began taking photographs at age 8 and did sports photography and other photos for the school paper and yearbook — "whatever I could do to take photos," he says. When asked why he chose to teach photography, he said, "I want to help people find inspiration and creativity in their lives." Referring to *Outliers: The Story of Success* author Malcolm Gladwell's definition of Mastery, "It's photography where I've put in most of my 10,000 hours."

Carl is a fine arts photographer. "Why? I get to make the photographs I want to

make. Light, color, line, shape, contrast, all in interesting combination." Photography is an ongoing process, learning to *see*. "The best advice I can give anyone on how to become a great photographer, is to learn to see by looking at the images of other photographers, the great photographers of the early twentieth century, the pictures around you. Develop your own visual language," he says. "Then, look around. Fill your frame with good light, a good moment, a good story. You just really need to build up the practice."

In the last 10 years, much of Carl's work has been abstract photography, less about objects or people and more about color, motion and gesture. He has traveled to Canada, Maine, Mexico, Europe, Japan and China to work with excellent contemporary photographers such as Mark Edward Harris, Peter Turnley, Moose Peterson, Freeman Patterson, David duChemin, Alison Shaw, Brenda Tharp and others. It was Canadian Photographer Freeman Patterson and Martha's Vineyard Photographer Alison Shaw who drew Carl into abstract fine art photography. Studying with them, "They freely gave me their thinking and processes. I began to see how I could use the new digital technologies to change how my own work was presented and perceived."

This year he began another journey. "I want to learn how to make big, colorful 21st-century abstract paintings. I've been at it for just more than a year, and I love it," says Carl. "It's draining. It takes a lot out of you, but it's exhausting in a good way."

His mother, Naomi, was his first inspiration. She could make art from whatever she had. "She could put a song in the air around us and make a small sculpture from clay she found while weeding the garden," he says. His father, Bill, taught Carl how to look inside. "He gave me meditation and showed me how to trust my own thoughts and feelings." Today, Carl gets much of



his inspiration from the magic being made here at the Art Center everyday. "Next time Summer Arts Camp starts, walk the halls for a couple of days and absorb all that energy," he says. "That's what it's really about."

During a pivotal time of growth for the Art Center, Carl was serving on the board of directors. He chaired the board when Roxanne

Heaton was hired as Executive Director and was very involved in the strategic planning behind the development of this facility. He still has his eye on the future. "What we do is here is important. We need to sustain this effort and this place," he says. "I would like to say just come and try us. Take one of our very basic, simple classes so you get to see the whole process and see how it works."

