

Skowhegan landfill gets art

Gift benefits art school students and town

By ANNA FREEMAN

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SKOWHEGAN — Last spring when Skowhegan Town Manager Patricia Dickey spoke with Barbara Lapcek, executive director of the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, about art for the Skowhegan landfill she had no idea of the magnitude of the gift she would receive.

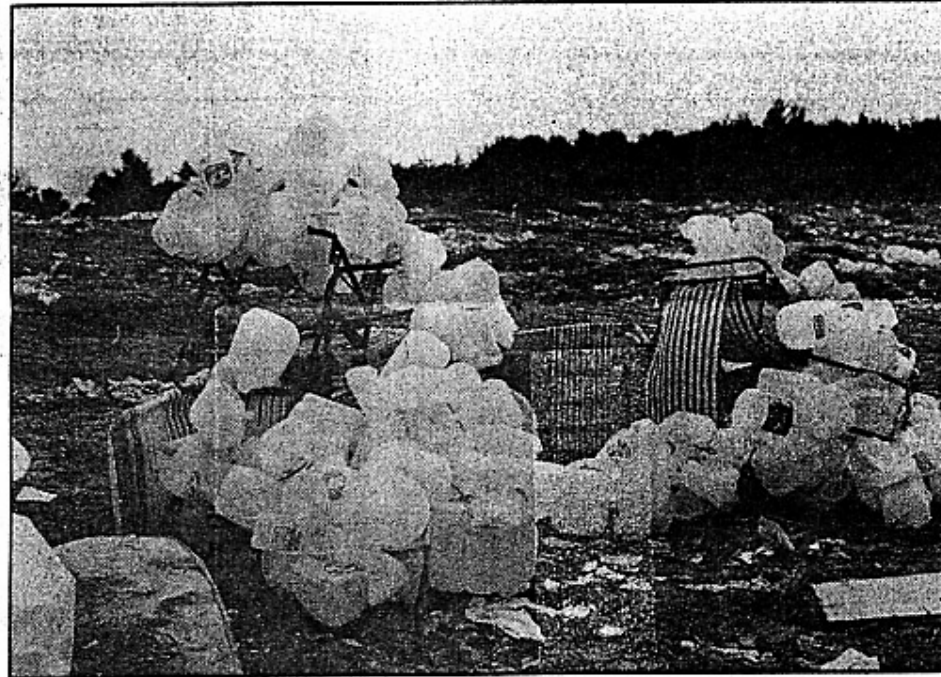
It was a gift that went both ways. For Skowhegan, it meant the acquisition of a permanent collection of art, albeit at a landfill, and for the school, it meant participating in the life of the Central Maine community.

"Last spring we were looking for something to decorate the area around the new recycling facility. We were looking at landscaping and all. And then I thought about the school," Dickey said.

According to Dickey, the art students have always been welcome to take materials out of the landfill for their projects. "We've always been real flexible with them. We've always been willing to work with the school. So I was happy to see they wanted to do something."

Central to the theme of environment, all the sculptures that were either constructed or installed at the landfill are of natural or recycled materials. Besides the obvious statement about waste, by having these pieces of art in a place very unlikely to be considered aesthetic, the artists hope to call attention to the abundance of visual imagery on view daily at the landfill. It will also, they hope, help to reduce the division between high art and everyday experience.

"It's wonderful," says Lapcek, who is particularly happy about the school's participation with the Maine community this summer. "This year there's been a lot of activity outside of the school and I love it. I feel it's a great way to give something to



Anna Freeman photo

Environmental art, a collaboration of Hillary Shames and Christy Rupp, artists from the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, can be seen against the skyline at the Skowhegan Solid Waste Management Facility.

our community up here in Maine." Besides the donation of work to the landfill and other local sites, some of the students participated in a huge collaboration at the Maine Festival.

The Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, founded in 1946 by Willard Cummings, enrolls 65 young artists every summer from everywhere in the United States, and as far away as Lithuania. At the end of the session in late August, works completed during the summer often have to be dismantled or left behind. Sometimes it is dif-

ficult to decide what to do with a piece, especially when transporting it home or elsewhere presents a problem.

This was particularly true of Hillary Shames, who attends the University of Michigan and who lives in the Midwest. Made from dysfunctional machines, wood, steel, and sometimes even concrete, her works are incredibly heavy. Large in proportion, her pieces recall deceptively crude primitive structures as well as representing a reinvented use of industrial materials.

Needless to say, the idea of sending her sculpture pieces home posed a problem. "I didn't want to abandon them just like that, so I was looking for people who had land, a place to put them. Maybe one day I'll have my own land. But for now, I want to see my work at least out there."

Shames got what she wanted. In large trucks that bustled back and forth between destinations, Shames' work was distributed. Not just to the landfill, but also to the Skowhegan Area High School, and to the Madison Paper Mill. According to Lapcek, Shames's contribution is "a major gift to the people."

Another landfill contributor is artist Christy Rupp, who has an international reputation as an environmental artist. A faculty member at the Skowhegan School, Rupp lives in New York City and has exhibited in galleries throughout the United States and Europe, most recently in Los Angeles, Seattle, and Germany.

For the landfill project, Rupp and Shames collaborated on a work together. It consists of a large fossilized form constructed out of discarded lawn chairs, garden hose and garbage bags.

With burgeoning waste disposal restrictions, town-operated landfills like the one in Skowhegan are becoming a type of endangered species. The Shames/Rupp piece is meant to mark a transition between different eras of waste management as the facility faces restructuring in the coming months.

In addition to Shames and Rupp, other artists represented at the landfill are Annetta Kapon and Katie Grinnan. Kapon's work "Indoor," is a conceptual installation of a door that is simultaneously both open and closed. It creates an ambiguity between indoor and outdoor space. Grinnan's installation, a colorful three-dimensional assemblage that seeks to create a garden environment, is composed of plastic resins and household objects.