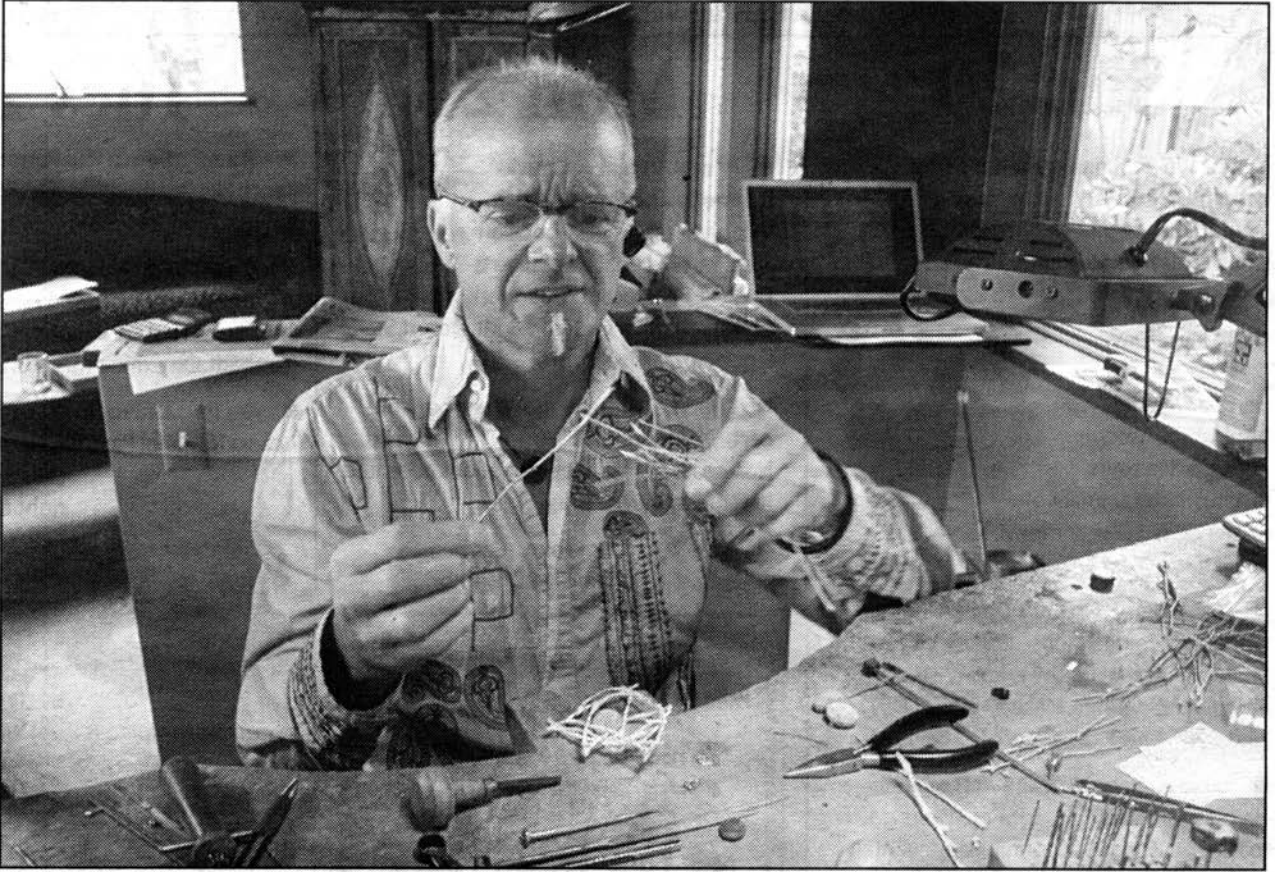


ENCORE



Self-proclaimed “Artistjewellermetalsmith” Sam Shaw works on a silver nest brooch at his design studio and shop in Northeast Harbor. Shaw was recently named this year’s recipient of the Legacy of the Arts’ Acadia Arts Achievement Award. PHOTO BY: LAURIE SCHREIBER

For jeweler Sam Shaw, community is the gem

By Laurie Schreiber
lschreiber@villagesoup.com

MOUNT DESERT — Sam Shaw, who calls himself an “artistjewellermetalsmith” – no spaces – is a man who is devoted both to the arts and the well-being of his community.

Shaw, who owns Shaw Gallery in Northeast Harbor, was recently named this year’s recipient of the Legacy of the Arts’ Acadia Arts Achievement Award. The award will be presented during the Legacy’s opening event, a concert by the Fletcher’s Landing Philharmonic Orchestra on Sunday, June 20, from 7:30 to 9 p.m. at Agamont Park.

“I’ve always admired Sam’s devotion to the arts,” said Sherry Rasmussen, a member of the award’s selection committee.

Rasmussen cited Shaw’s enthusiasm for the arts and the community in his selection for the honor. He was president

of the Maine Crafts Association and served on its board; and was president of The Society of North American Goldsmiths, an international jewelry artists organization with thousands of members worldwide, and served on its board for eight years. He was a trustee of College of the Atlantic for five years. He is on the Southwest Harbor Public Library board of trustees and headed the committee that raised money for the library’s expansion in the late 1990s. He was on the board of LandEscapes and developed the experimental art event’s floating sculpture theme.

She also cited Shaw’s willingness to devote space in his shop to both emerging and established artists, and his push to reinvigorate Northeast Harbor after the 2008 fire that destroyed several Main Street buildings.

On a recent morning, Shaw was found in the design studio at the back of his gallery, creating pieces for his latest collection of jewelry.

Shaw was surrounded by the tools of his trade – pliers, hammers, saws, an engraving tool, a diamond-impregnated awl. A handy tool, he said, is the divider, used for measuring and scribing circles and finding centers. A surface tool with fiberglass bristles is used to clean imperfections and create a satin finish. There’s a soldering tool and flux and a container of sulfuric acid, which all go toward making invisible seams.

And then there are beach stones, the signature material of Shaw’s jewelry for the past 30 years. Although granite ovals are easy to find just about anywhere along Maine’s shore, Shaw and his staff occasionally go on collecting expeditions to find the perfect stones, which have to be symmetrical, colorful and the right size for adornment.

As a creative material, beach stones never fail to speak to Shaw.

“They are perfect little objects that

• SHAW

from page 22

have come out of a chaotic environment," he said. "It's just that they're undervalued. Diamonds are found in the ground, and there's really no difference between finding a diamond or a sapphire or finding a beach stone. They come from the same processes. The beach stone is my diamond."

For the past couple of years, slender twigs made of precious metals have also found their way into Shaw's repertoire. The original twigs come from any old birch tree. In a casting process, they are encased in plaster and heated to 1,800 degrees, which vaporizes the wood and leaves behind a perfect impression of the branch. Molten gold or silver is then injected into the cavity. What results is a perfect reproduction of the branch. The precious twigs can easily be bent to weave, for example, the nest-like brooch that is on this day underway on Shaw's workbench; little granite "bird's eggs" will be affixed in and around the nest.

Shaw currently has

four jewelers in his employ to help him create his collections. They are all highly trained, technically skilled craftspeople.

"We sit down every once in a while and have critiques and talk about the way things are put together," said Shaw. "But I don't need to teach them any technical things. Sometimes I'm learning from them. There's always something to learn, that's for sure."

Shaw's interests go beyond jewelry. For the past 15 years or so, he's supported local artists through his "MDI Open" show, billed as "an annual non-juried exposition of fresh ideas" that features paintings, photographs and sculptures by artists associated with Mount Desert Island.

Acceptance into the show is on a first-come, first-served basis.

"Anybody who wants to be in is in, and their work is handled professionally," he said. "Everything from amateurs to works from seasoned professionals are hung side by side."

For about the same number of years, Shaw has also hosted eighth-grader students from Mount Desert Elementary School, who get to learn jewelry-making from the professionals during the school's annual Arts Week.

"Every year, they walk away with one or two rings they've made," Shaw said. "Hopefully, it will introduce these kids to the possibility of making art, not necessarily professionally, but something

that will give them joy."

Shaw said he appreciates the opportunity to teach during Arts Week, which is organized by the school's art teacher, Carol Shutt.

"I think it's been wildly successful," he said. "And it's a fun week for us because it's joyful."

As a member of the community, Shaw has also been involved in helping the town to recapture the "vibrancy" that has been lost to some degree since the fire of 2008.

"The fire hurt everyone in town," he said. "The summer people, the winter people, the grocery store, the gas station – not just the artists. Although the loss of the Wingspread Gallery and Moss Gallery were particularly devastating to many artists and the reputation of Northeast Harbor as an arts destination."

If anything, he said, the biggest job an artist has is not to make art, but to be a member of the community.

"An artist's role in the community is to stir things up, to present a different way of seeing and a different way of being," he said. "The role of an artist in a community is to be the risk-taker, and to make a fool of oneself whenever possible, or to be perceived as that, to be the merry prankster. The role of the artist in the community is to create objects of beauty and to present them for others to enjoy. The role of the artist in the community is to be a leader in things that are different and not seen before."

I think the role of the artist in the community is to express joy and optimism. The role of an artist in the community is to gather like-minded people and to show that something is not just an isolated, quirky idea but a concept that has legs and can have amplitude. The role of the artist in the community is to bring people along in a different direction and to show that there are possibilities of expression that people haven't thought of before, to look at familiar things in a different way so that we can appreciate the simple things around us."