

## 2020 Artists in Residence

**March 2020**

**Vince Montague**

Poetry – Vince is also a potter but will be coming to Pond Farm to write.

<https://vincemontague.com>

### **Work during Residency:**

I came upon Pond Farm Pottery in the early 2000's hiking the East Ridge Trail with my wife. We took a short cut and discovered Pond Farm Pottery. I didn't know who Marguerite Wildenhain was or her importance in ceramic history. Years later, I had the opportunity to visit Pond Farm Pottery when the Art Stream Nomadic Gallery came to the Sonoma Community Center and two original students gave us a tour in 2017.

It was a moving experience to be there on the property and to hear stories and witness first-hand Marguerite Wildenhain's influence on not just her students, but all their students and future students in the Bay Area and beyond. It's an incredible story and I'm so glad that her studio and her vision is being preserved and remembered for the public.

Being a resident at Pond Farm for a month will allow me to write and compose with all that energy around me without having to get my hands in mud. It would be special to sleep and write within the beauty of Armstrong Woods and surrounding trails. Certainly, part of the fuel for Pond Farm is access to the park trails and nature. I am a walker and hiker and I would be honored to get more acquainted with the land that surrounds Pond Farm Pottery.

I live alone in a rural mountain cabin south of Cloverdale. Solitude is part of my daily life. I have been an artist in residence at other residencies around the country. The rare and precious gift of time and the even-rarer lack of everyday distraction will allow me to concentrate, focus and hopefully complete my manuscript.

### **Community Engagement:**

I'd be interested in bringing poetry to the community. I propose teaching a one or two-day workshop at The Guerneville Public Library (or some other location) considering both poetry and pots as vessels of feeling and imagination.

I taught a similar two hour workshop called Writing and Freedom which was for the local community of Carrizozo, New Mexico where I was the artist in residence during March 2019.

Here is a description of the workshop:

#### **Writing and Freedom**

Poetry is a type of freedom where we can work with abstract ideas and turn them into vehicles of feeling and consciousness. We'll analyze some poems and begin a dialogue about how to discuss and look at different poetic forms; we'll generate new writing and discuss how to bring our ideas into shape; we'll read to each other and find ways to build a writing practice that can be explored individually or as a group. Bring a poem or a short sample of your own writing.

**April 2020**

**Melissa Wang**

Acrylic on canvas paintings

<https://www.melissawangart.com>

**Work during Residency:**

I create large abstract paintings that explore bodies and landscapes made vulnerable by cultural politics. I use water as a medium, spontaneous marks and layering to simulate texture. As a critical element for global movements, water is an apt analogy for the dispersal/flow of humans due to large-scale changes (e.g., globalism, climate change, political unrest). What happens when social and legal protections are “swept” away? When these are gone, what symptoms or problems rise to the surface?

Water and paint are spontaneously layered to create texture and depth, reflecting the many literal and figurative states of change. Bright, biomorphic shapes signify vulnerable bodies or landscapes, highlighting what’s at stake. Ultimately, my compositions are meditations on the tenuous connections between humans and manmade events seemingly out of our control - and the weight of one’s responsibility in the modern world.

When I first visited Armstrong, I learned that redwoods intertwine their roots with their neighbors’ to withstand floods or storms. I find this a powerful metaphor for the underlying sociopolitical themes of my work that has, up to this point, primarily been concerned with water. Since I work at the intersection of nature, metaphysical abstraction and human vulnerability, I think of this as site-specific work that will help evolve my next (new) series of work and techniques altogether.

My path to art is nontraditional. After several years in various writing sectors, I pursued a PhD to teach science-fiction through the lens of race and gender before segueing into tech. Creating art allows me to explore the complex path to self-actualization and patterns within that experience that can speak cross global divides.

**Community Engagement:**

The amphitheater (or any open area among trees) would be ideal for an art installation or event with light or sound. Depending on weather/fire conditions, I would like to create a temporary installation specific to the site that ideally can also utilize resources or found objects provided by the local community. I would also create a smaller piece of artwork for an auction fundraiser.

**May 2020**

**Mary Burger**

Felting and Fiber Art

<http://www.maryburger.com>

**Work During Residency:**

I have the great fortune of considering the Guerneville area a second home of sorts. My partner has family roots in Guerneville going back four generations, and I’ve spent many hours over the years exploring the town, the Russian River Valley, and the Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve. In Armstrong Redwoods, I’m especially fond of the narrow, twisting road up to Bullfrog Pond, and the transition from dense forest to open mountaintop. Driving up the road, I’ve always been intrigued by the half-hidden sanctuary of Pond Farm Pottery—the barn with its striking prow and lattice shades, and the traces of a once-active artist colony there.

When I attended a docent-led tour of Pond Farm Pottery, I was thrilled to learn about the legacy of Marguerite Wildenhain and the Pond Farm connections to the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College. As I mentioned in my artist statement, the Bauhaus and Black Mountain are important influences in my own work. I’ve drawn meaningful lessons from those artistic communities, their disciplined experimentation, and their reinvention of creative practices to suit the visions and values of their times. The color theories of Johannes Itten and Josef Albers, the use of line, form, and pattern in the works of Anni Albers and Ruth Asawa, the experiments with chance in the compositions of John Cage, the relationship to place in the poetry of Charles Olson—these among many others have shaped my own artistic development. To work at the site where Marguerite Wildenhain once instructed her students in these very principles feels like the chance to go back in time and meet my heroes.

I'm equally excited by the chance to work in a setting that is grounded in principles of environmental preservation. From the original vision of Colonel Armstrong and his family, to the work of California State Parks and the Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods, Armstrong Redwoods represents a commitment to protect the vanishing legacy of old-growth forests, and, more generally, to preserve our planet's environment for future generations. This commitment mirrors my own effort to take responsibility for my environmental impacts, not just in my artistic practice but in all my life choices. The Russian River area faces increasing threats of fire, flood, and habitat loss, and pressure from expanding development and energy infrastructure. To prevent disastrous consequences for our own communities and for the very forces that sustain life, we all need to become stewards of our environment. To work for a time amidst the Armstrong Redwoods ecosystem would be an ideal chance to develop a deeper sensitivity to natural processes, and perhaps to learn from the cultural legacies of the Pomo, who have been so gracefully in tune with this environment.

### **Community Engagement:**

I'd like to offer a demonstration and artist talk, to introduce visitors to the materials and techniques of felting, and to discuss legacies of the Bauhaus, Black Mountain College, and Pomo that have influenced the Pond Farm community and my own work. If possible, I'd like to invite other area artists and scholars with knowledge of these legacies to take part in the talk. I'd also like to donate a felted piece to the Stewards, in appreciation.

I'll use the demonstration to show visitors the process of wet felting: laying out the loose fiber, saturating it with soapy water, and agitating it to make it cohere into a textile. The process is simple to learn, and fun for those who want hands-on experience. As part of the demonstration, I'll show samples to explain the process of preparing the wool for felting, from shearing to cleaning, carding, and combing. I'd like to invite a local small-scale wool producer to talk about sustainable ranching and the process of preparing wool. I'll also discuss the concept of a "fibershed" (like a watershed), a concept that considers all of the resources required to produce fiber, and encourages the use of locally-sourced textiles.

In discussing the cultural forerunners of Pond Farm, I'd like to invite area experts with knowledge of the Bauhaus, Black Mountain College, and Pomo history. I'm hoping that one of the Stewards docents might be interested in talking about Marguerite Wildenhain's experiences at the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College. I'd also like to find area artists or scholars who are familiar with the works of Anni Albers and Ruth Asawa, and their achievements in breaking down the divide between 'craft' and 'fine art'. There's an important story to be told, of how artists such as these have raised the profile of practices that were once dismissed as 'women's work'.

I also hope to include representatives from nearby Pomo communities, or someone familiar with their practices, to talk about Pomo basket making. The sourcing and preparation of fibers, the construction techniques, the symbolism of ornamental patterns, the practical and ceremonial uses of baskets, the integration of the functional, the aesthetic, and the spiritual, are all important aspects of Pomo practice. I think visitors would enjoy learning about this practice, and I would appreciate the chance to include this significant cultural heritage in a discussion of fiber arts and the Pond Farm legacy.

**June 2020**

**Sarah Rabkin**

Non-fiction writing

<http://www.sarahrabkin.com>

### **Work During Residency:**

The region around Pond Farm has personal significance for me. As a kid growing up in Berkeley in the 1960s and 70s, I had the privilege of a couple of formative sojourns at the city's Cazadero Music Camp, on Austin Creek. Last summer, I traveled back to "Caz," for the first time in several decades, to pick up my ten-year-old grandson from his first week at sleep-away camp and to hear his cohort's end-of-session musical performance. I was surprised and delighted to discover that the place still looks and feels much the same.

West of Cazadero, on Seaview Ridge, lies Chamokome, a 60-acre former sheep ranch (and before that a Pomo Indian village) that was purchased in the 1960s by a bunch of Old- and New-Left activists and intellectuals as a place to spend weekends and holidays together, learning to share, maintain, and preserve a piece of rural land. My

family joined the Chamokome community when I was 14 years old, and I spent countless days there in my teens and twenties, getting to know the place and its inhabitants—including a group of ceramic artists who rented a cabin and studio space in Chamokome’s barn.

All of which is to say that I have a nearly lifelong affection for the redwood forests, rolling hills, and waterways of western Sonoma County, and would feel nourished and embraced by a stay in that landscape. More generally, time alone (or, possibly, accompanied by my poet husband) in a rural setting is exactly what I am seeking in applying to Pond Farm’s residency. At home, I plug away at my book project as devotedly as I can, amid the obligations of my work as a freelance editor and the daily distractions of domestic life. I know from experience that I can accomplish a great deal during a concentrated period of creative focus in a quiet setting away from urban pressures. For this reason, I am deeply grateful for the previous residencies I’ve been granted over the past dozen years—at PLAYA and Sitka Center for Art & Ecology in Oregon; at the H.R. Whiteley Center and the North Cascades Institute in Washington State; at The Mesa Refuge in California.

### **Community Engagement:**

I taught university writing, journalism, and environmental literature courses at UC Santa Cruz for three decades; before that, I spent three years as a high-school science teacher. Since the late 1980s, I have led workshops and retreats on a range of topics related to writing, visual art, natural history, and spirited activism.

Drawing on this experience, I could offer a two-hour, half-day, or full-day workshop on a topic of interest to members of the local community—ideally, to be developed in consultation with Pond Farm affiliates, who know better than I do what would be most likely to fly.

Here are sample titles of workshops and retreats I’ve developed and led recently, some with more detailed descriptions:

- **Make of Yourself a Light: Finding Courage in Dangerous Times**

- **Bringing Back the Light: a restorative retreat for writers, artists, & other creative & contemplative souls**

- **The Writer’s Flight**

When we yearn to fly, birds offer inspiration and vicarious delight. Flight is release, escape, transcendence, chase, play—and writing can animate the avian metaphors that give human lives meaning and solace. Whether you’re a beginner or a seasoned writer, join this workshop and learn new ways to take flight on the page.

- **Writing at the Edge**

All vibrant, worthy writing is writing “at the edge”—at the boundaries of consciousness or propriety, decision or discovery. A series of prompts & invitations will lead you into writing up to and beyond the edges of your own sense of possibility.

- **Field Notes for Natural History Learning**

Hiking without a field guide? Science background slim? No worries. If you pay attention, the bug, the plant, or the bird can teach you a lot. We will practice making informal field notes and sketches to learn about natural phenomena. Discoveries made this way are not easily forgotten, and they complement knowledge from books and classes.

- **A Light on the Path: Writing toward Clarity**

Let go of daily concerns, immerse yourself in a life-giving environment, and spend a day connecting with your own deepest wisdom. In an encouraging atmosphere, we will write to cultivate attentiveness to the larger-than-human world—and, in doing so, shed light on the worlds within ourselves.