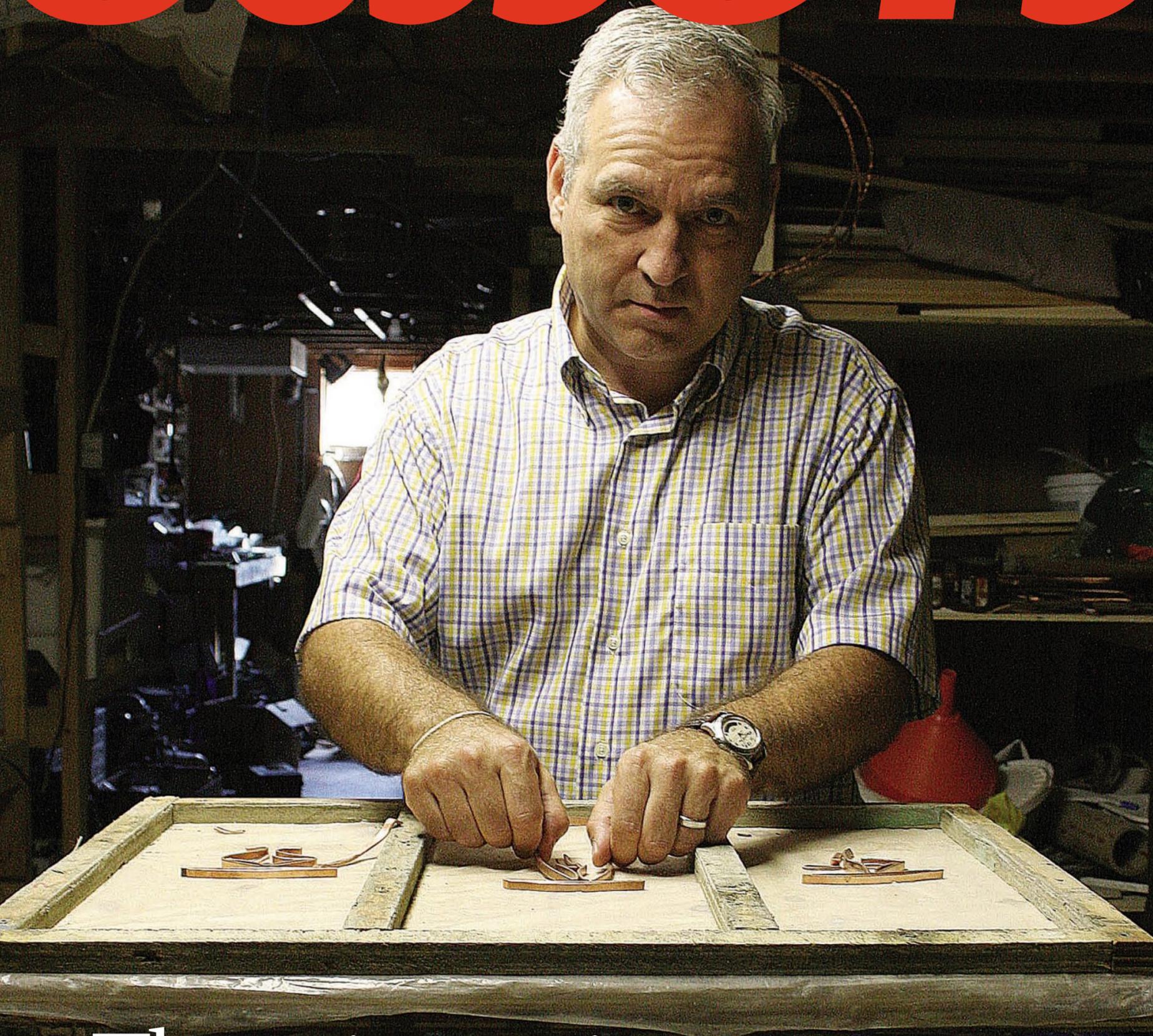


Questionnaire Sackville
musician Shotgun Jimmie **S2**

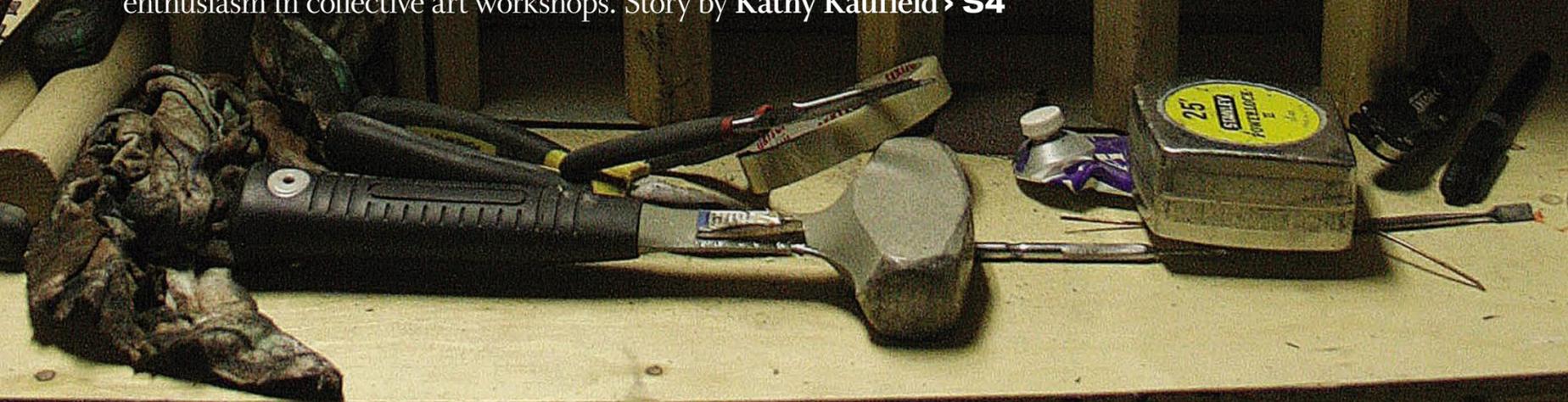
In the galleries Peter Sabat
comes home in new show **S3**

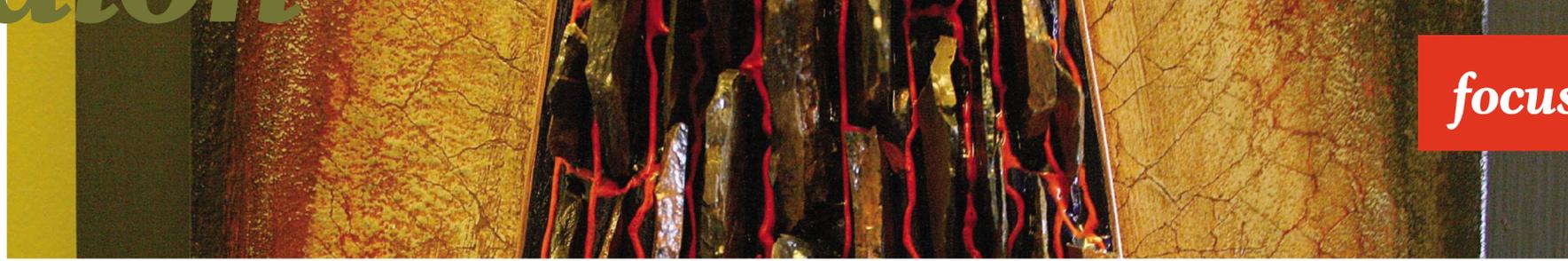
salon



The reinvention of Reg Noël

Depressed and out of work, Reg Noël knew something had to give – but what? At the age of 43, the revelation that he must create made an overnight artist out of the middle-aged husband and father. Now, Noël is sharing his enthusiasm in collective art workshops. Story by Kathy Kaufield > **S4**





focus

Media art gets more screen-time

Faucet Media Arts on the cutting edge technologically as it expands its Sackville facilities and programs. Story by Mike Landry

media art could be linked to our modern culture. "We're becoming more and more comfortable with moving images being part of our lives, when you think about the internet and media culture. It's just so much more integrated now."

Christie, who grew up near Magnetic Hill and originally worked in photography, started working with film after attending Acadie Underground - an annual screening in Moncton of Super 8 films made by Acadian artists. She came to Sackville in 2008 via Halifax, Vancouver and Amsterdam, where she worked as a projectionist and was in residence at the Rotterdam Film Festival.

So she was shocked when she asked the crew of the 2010 Sundance Film Festival critics' documentary darling Last Train Home how they managed to film onboard packed commuter trains in China. They used digital still cameras, she told her. "I was like, 'Oh, my God,'" Christie says. "I was blown away!" She was so impressed by the abilities of DSLR (digital single-lens reflex) cameras, which can film in high definition, that when it came time for the centre to buy a new camera last February they bought a Canon 7D DSLR. Coupled with a shoulder mount with follow focus, HD-capable software and new computer stations, the tiny camera rivals larger, pricier video cameras.

Faucet is looking to move to an even bigger space sometime in the next three years. Given that Mount Allison's fine art department lacks video equipment, Christie says the growth of the centre is really important. Last year, about a dozen students and 40 or so local members used it. "Once you have a centre where people are actively producing work, they look at each other's work, they talk, they drink together and eventually out of that distinct work you get a style that develops that's recognizable."



Amanda Dawn Christie, production supervisor for Sackville's Faucet Media Arts Centre and a self-described film nerd.

Rather than trying to start a new generation of video artists in their thirties, Christie is focusing on local kids. There's been a series of workshops this summer and she has made video installations with local students, installing them in their school.

But galleries and schools aren't enough for Christie. Her dream is to see a dedicated screening facility for media art offer continual support to media artists. Such centres are common in larger Canadian centres, but none exist in this region. The region also lacks a distributor to get local media work out. Distribution and display are both costly, so Christie is trying to form a partnership among production centres in the Atlantic provinces. This dissemination collective would curate exhibitions in the provinces in both gallery and non-gallery spaces.

The move put the centre on the cutting edge nationally. When Christie met with "tech heads and gear geeks" from across Canada in June at the Independent Media Art Alliance conference in Toronto, only one other centre, PAVEDarts in Saskatoon, had a DSLR camera. Soon after the meeting she started getting emails from centres as far away as Whitehorse asking about the pros and cons of the new technology.

"It's pretty cool to be in Sackville and have people from across Canada writing to us asking how this stuff is working out." Such is New Brunswick's role in the changing world of media art in a digital age. And it's not just new equipment. This month Faucet opened its newly expanded facility in Sackville and there was experimental cinema festival, Lumen 4, 3, 2, 1, in Caraquet. Among Acadian artists there's long been a push toward media art by artists such as Stefan St. Laurent and Mario Doucette.

It's also becoming more common to find media art in galleries across the province. In an era of increasing shipping costs and decreased funding, it is an affordable option. Fredericton's Gallery Connexion exhibited media artist Clark Ferguson on last spring and current artist-in-residence Suzanne Caines works in Video. Moncton's Galerie Sans Nom continued its video exhibition series last year.

Interdisciplinary Sackville artist Linda Rae Dornan says media art continues to be misunderstood, not only by the general public but also within the art community. "Most people don't have any understanding of the history of video art. They just pick up a camera and point and shoot, and they're referencing TV, comic strips, things on the internet and movies. They don't understand the difference," Dornan says. "Your average gallery director or curator isn't a video art historian, either."

One description of media art is a mixture of music and visual art. Like a symphony, it doesn't have to have a narrative story; like a painting, it's up to you how long you want to watch it.

Some artists have built a career in media art, while many others, such as Dornan, are using media in tandem with traditional practices. "I bring things from different fields into video and vice-versa, and that creates something else entirely, too ... Those possibilities are exciting and they get people turned up."

"I really love my mind as a 19-year-old moving to a small town," Fauteux says. Fauteux started working in animation at Faucet about five years ago. She just finished her first video project this summer, and says the rise of



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It's still not going to be handed over on a silver platter. It will take work and dedication. But when you love to do what you do, the work and dedication kind of takes care of itself.

Above, top: Detail of Reg Noël's work. Above, a sampling of Noël's work. The self-taught artist works mostly in copper, concrete and acrylic paint. He also sometimes uses stone and other metals, such as aluminum. Right: Reg Noël and a resident of Portage, a treatment centre for people with drug and alcohol addictions, look at the collective art project a group there made recently.

Mid-life crisis gone creative

Moncton's Reg Noël makes works from concrete and copper, but it is his art workshops about the power of passion that give him the greatest sense of satisfaction. Story by Kathy Kaufield

Reg Noël looked a little anxious as the sheet hit the floor and the teenagers swarmed around the artwork on the wall.

They gently nudged each other, pushing forward and straining to get a closer look at the newly unveiled piece that had helped create under the Moncton artist's guidance.

Murmurs of excitement rippled through the group. All of them are residents at Portage Atlantic, a treatment centre in Cassidy Lake for New Brunswick youth with drug and alcohol addictions.

Then, one by one, several of them told Noël how inspired they felt by helping create the piece of art and by hearing his personal story of how he found his life's passion as an artist.

"Man, I gotta say, I didn't think it was going to turn out that great. But this turned out great," said one young man. "If you've got a passion for something, you've just got to go for it."

Added another: "That passion thing you talked about just made me think. It kinda helped me to push toward my goals. Thank you!"

The sincerity of their comments brought tears to Noël's eyes. Just over six years ago, he was an out-of-work, middle-aged husband and father of four who felt a little lost, a little depressed. He had never done anything "artistic" in his entire life.

When he made the decision to change the path he was on. For Noël, the positive comments from these troubled teens was a moment of joy and affirmation, an irrefutable sign his long and sometimes frustrating journey has been worthwhile.

"I needed concrete evidence that what I was doing was good for somebody, and I think I got some proof of that," he said. "That's really all I want to do is to be able to find ways to reach people - kids and adults alike - with a story that will inspire them to give themselves permission to follow their passion."

The career counsellor at the local employment office was blunt in her assessment of Noël's test results. "These are the words she said to me: 'You need to

create like you need to breathe,'" he said. "I understood that. I believe that now. And, in a way, for 43 years, I had been holding my breath."

A huge sense of relief washed over him. This woman sitting on the other side of the desk had just handed him an important piece of his life, one he didn't even know had been missing. He's never forgotten the date of the meeting: Feb. 26, 2004.

Noël was 43 at the time. He spent his life working unhappily in a wide variety of jobs, from a stockbroker to a retail store manager to a cookware salesman. He'd switch careers every two years or so, never finding a role that he was satisfied with.

Then, just before Christmas in 2003, he got fired from his sales job at Maritime Door and Window. He'd been working there for about 90 days and was struggling.

"I worked in a busy, high-traffic area. It was a constant flow of information from several different directions, and I just couldn't handle it," Noël said. "I would literally make mistakes upon mistakes upon mistakes. I couldn't keep up with the mistakes I was making. I was so, so horrible at it."

When he was called into the office and told he was being let go, he was actually relieved. He had never been fired in his life, though, and he began to question why he was never truly happy with any job. After Christmas, he sought career counselling at the local employment office and was offered a variety of career, personality and aptitude tests.

The results were life-changing. The tests showed he has two learning disabilities: dyslexia, which impairs his ability to read; and dysgraphia, which impairs his ability to write. The results also showed he is not a strong multi-tasker and processes information at a lower than average speed.

On the positive side, he had a strong aptitude for math and science, extremely strong visual perception, an average IQ and above-average emotional intelligence.

The counsellor told him he has a tremendous amount of creativity. She expressed surprise that no aspect of his life reflected that.

Despite hearing he had some learning disabilities, Noël was relieved by the results. "I thought, if they tell me there is nothing wrong with me, I think I am going to shoot myself. Because I was so depressed with the way things were going. The worst thing they could tell me is, 'Listen, you are fine, get off you bum and go work,'" he said. "It was so frustrating because I was always willing to work. The work ethic was there. But sometimes the work environment wasn't the one I needed to do my best work the way I am made."

Growing up on the Acadian peninsula and in Moncton, Noël never drew or painted, although he used to whittle chalk figurines during breaks at his job at a textile company and had a flair for putting

great outfits together at the men's store where he used to work.

Looking back, he thinks his artistic side was always trying to surface, he just didn't know it. His mind whirling, he went to bed that night with one thought on his mind.

"I actually gave myself permission to become an artist. I was going to do something different. I had no idea what it was going to be. I had absolutely no clue and no training, of course, of any sort as an artist."

When he woke up on that Friday morning he knew exactly what he wanted to do. He would use concrete and copper to create art.

"The 27th of February, 2004, is, for me, a date that is more important than my own birthday. It's the most important date in my life. I can tell you what that day of the week I was born, but I can tell you when this happened to me ... It was the day the realization came to me I was going to be an artist from this point on."

He has no idea why chose the material he did. "It's still not going to be handed over on a silver platter," he said. "It will take work and dedication. But when you love to do what you do, the work and dedication kind of takes care of itself. It's going to be the best thing you can do for yourself long-term."

His own journey has not been an easy one and still isn't, he said. Crowds didn't flock to his house to pay huge sums for his art as he created it. He spent \$12,000 and 15 months on a graphic design course, which he thought would be a way to use his creativity in a career with a regular paycheck. But after landing a job, he quickly sank in the high-stress, fast-paced work environment. He ended up working full-time at Irving Tissue to pay the bills as he created art and built his reputation.

"I chose to make my art career as my primary focus and my job as a sideline. That's how I looked at it. By making that switch in my mind ... things improved dramatically."

He has also become a proficient public speaker who offers team-building, art-based workshops, leading participants in a collective art project.

He's led workshops for a wide range of corporations and organizations, including Sabian, the Canadian Cancer Society, CFB Gagetown's Military Family Resource Centre, elementary schools, the

Moncton YMCA and the United Way of Moncton. At 17 feet wide, five feet high and weighing 1,000 pounds, his largest collective art project to date was created with the help of 8,313 people at the World Acadian Congress in August 2009. It's on display at the Tracadie-Shellia library.

Noël's main message is simple: Discover your core passion and follow it. "I didn't even want to explore the possibility of becoming an artist because I didn't think it was important. It turns out that it is crucially important for me to do this. It's not an option. It's a necessity for me to do what I do and that's the crux of the story," he said. "You have to find something that you want to do so badly that it's not even a question whether you are getting paid...it's something you work out later on. You have to figure out what you want to do first and then figure out how to make that pay so you can earn a living."

He knows that is easier said than done. "It's still not going to be handed over on a silver platter," he said. "It will take work and dedication. But when you love to do what you do, the work and dedication kind of takes care of itself. It's going to be the best thing you can do for yourself long-term."

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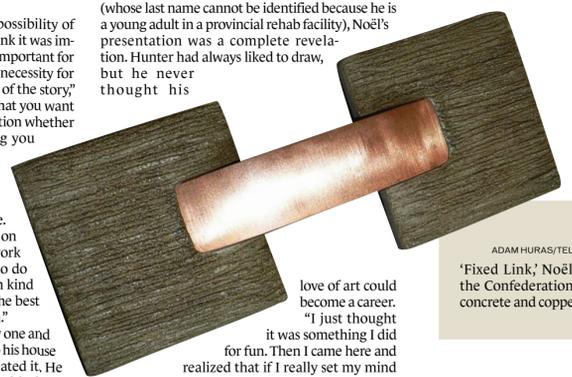
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healthier than I ever was, both physically and mentally. Especially mentally. I don't know what I was heading for, to be honest with you. It wasn't good, I can tell you that much."

After seeing an article about Portage Atlantic in the newspaper, Noël approached management to see if the teens could take part in one of his collective art projects. He thought they could benefit from his message and offered to volunteer his time.

One evening this spring, he spent the evening with the teen residents, urging them to find their passion in life. They twisted the copper, embedding into the wet concrete and Noël took the piece home to finish it.

For one Portage resident, 17-year-old Hunter (whose last name cannot be identified because he is a young adult in a provincial rehab facility), Noël's presentation was a complete revelation. Hunter had always liked to draw, but he never thought his



"Fixed Link," Noël's take on the Confederation Bridge in concrete and copper.

love of art could become a career. "I just thought it was something I did for fun. Then I came here and realized that if I really set my mind to it and really worked hard at it, I could do something with it," he said.

Hunter was skeptical at first about the project, but was blown away by the finished piece. "I think it's incredible. It's really inspiring, just to see something that is that simple, the copper wires and everything coming together to make such a beautiful thing," he said. "I thought it was really good. It inspired me a lot. I think that's when I decided I was going to do something with art in some form. I have a really strong passion for cars, too. If I do something with that, where I can get on the cars and build the cars, then I'd be set for life. I'd have my two passions combined, basically."

Hunter finished the Portage program in June and plans to finish high school and perhaps go on to study graphic design.

"That's exactly, exactly what I wanted to accomplish," Noël said. "I want these kids to be able to understand that if they are really going to move forward from here, they have to make sure they are in tune with what their passions are down deep and not push that aside like I did most of my life."

"That's really what it's all about in the end - to give yourself permission to be happy and to do something that truly makes you happy. Most people don't understand that. They are working for a living and they think that's all there is to life. And there is so much more."

The teens' work is on display in the doorway of Portage's newly-renovated facilities. Noel hopes it inspires every teen who walks through the doors.

"The art is kind of a vehicle to tell people to wake up and realize that if there is something you want to do, just do it," he said. "It's never too late."

Kathy Kaufield is a writer living in Quispamsis.

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