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RAW founders honored with MassART degrees

By David Liscio / The Daily Item

LYNN - Twenty years ago, when Mary Flannery and Kit Jenkins first immersed themselves in creating and growing the Raw Art Works studio for at-risk kids in downtown Lynn, they had no idea their venture would become so successful that MassART - the nation's only public art college - would one day present them with honorary degrees.

But that's exactly what happened.

Flannery, who founded RAW in 1988, and Jenkins, who came on board a year later and became its executive director in 1999, were among the graduates in cap and gown when the Massachusetts College of Art and Design in Boston held its commencement exercises last May. As if that honor were not enough for the professional art therapists, the prestigious Boston institution offered to host an exhibit of their work.

It was an interesting proposal, given that both women are talented artists who spend the bulk of their days helping others create art and discover themselves.

An exhibition of nearly 100 pieces of art is open at MassART's Arnheim Gallery, on the first floor of the South Building, 621 Huntington Ave. in Boston from Oct. 13-31. On view Monday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., it includes about 60 individual works by Flannery and Jenkins in a variety of mediums, from painting and sculpture to video and photography. Another 40 pieces of art in the exhibit are the work of 12 RAW alumni, among them award-winning artist Corey Corcoran, who today has a studio in Boston's Fort Point Channel art colony and whose paintings receive national attention.

A reception for the artists will be held at the gallery on Wednesday, Oct. 22 from 5-7 p.m.

"It has been a big year for us," said Flannery, noting that RAW was able to purchase the four-story brick building at 37 Central Square and completely renovate its gallery, work and administrative spaces. "The building, the auction, the honor from MassART and, most of all, seeing the kids from our program who have gone on to do great things. Kit and I are just filled with pride that the only state art school in the country would award us with honorary degrees."

MassART President Kay Sloan, along with MassART Class of 2007 graduate Corcoran, and fellow RAW alumni Chrissy Jackson, bestowed the two artists and mentors with their diplomas.



Mary Flannery and Kit Jenkins, founders of the Lynn-based RAW Art Works studio for at-risk children, recently received honorary degrees from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design in Boston (MassART). From left are Jenkins, MassART President Kay Sloan and Flannery at the graduation ceremony.

"It's overwhelming to try and encapsulate the ways in which Mary, Kit, the RAW staff, and fellow RAW artists have contributed to my life, but if I had to select a gift that I am especially grateful for it would be RAW's helping me think like a serious artist so early on," Corcoran said.

Sloan, too, praised both artists and art program.

"RAW's efforts to guide students to both learn visual skills, and to explore their own personal content for creative expression have been exceptional and profound," said Sloan. "RAW students who apply and are accepted to MassART arrive with confidence, well-rounded art-making skills, and creative and critical thinking skills. Because of their history of success at MassART, our admissions office looks very favorably on these applications each year.

RAW's Central Square studio, known as RAW Space, is the culmination of what began with Flannery and Jenkins as an after-school art program for 16 high school students. At last count, RAW had more than 1,000 students annually enrolled in its programs.

For more about RAW or to make a donation, go online to www.rawart.org or call Alex Rogers Pittman at 781-593-5515, ext. 216.

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