



Susan Moldenhauer
Wyoming, 2006
archival inks on Hahnemuhle
Photo Rag
16 x 16 inches



Wendy Lemen Bredehoft
Into the Woods, 2005
pastel
38 x 40 inches



University of Wyoming Art Museum
Director & Chief Curator, Susan
Moldenhauer & Education Curator,
Wendy Bredehoft
Wanxin Zhang: Pit #5 Exhibition, 2006
Wyoming
Photograph courtesy of Wanxin Zhang

I interviewed Susan and Wendy in a noisy hotel lobby on the last day of the Art Basel | Miami Beach in 2007. I was excited to find that they not only visited the fairs each year but brought a group of art students from Wyoming with them. Living in New York, all too often, I take for granted how easy it is for me to access a wide variety of art in the studios, galleries, and museums. I was intrigued to discover how these two artists/administrators kept themselves up-to-date with the art world.

JACKIE: We are talking about the issues artists face when they are not in a huge city that has an established art mechanism. Both of you are practicing artists in rural Wyoming.

WENDY: Susan and I are artists and administrators. I've worked for a variety of art organizations, including the Wyoming Arts Council and the Wyoming Cultural Resource Division. I'm currently the Education Curator for the University of Wyoming and maintain an active studio practice. Part of the reason we bring students to Art Basel | Miami Beach is not only so they can experience the art world, but also so they can begin to place their own art making process within the creative context of the world. They come, respond, and look at the work. They are certainly wowed and overwhelmed by much of the art, but they begin looking with a critical eye and understand that the work they are making is just as important and just as well made. That's an important part for them to discover: they do have a place in the greater realm of the art world, even though they come from Wyoming. In fact, one of the students that we brought last year has come back this year entirely on his own recognizing that it's good for him to be here to mix and mingle and to help inspire him to go back to his studio in Wyoming and continue to create the work that he does.

SUSAN: I'm also a curator and a photographer in addition to my career as an arts administrator.

JACKIE: So, you both wear a few other hats in addition to being artists and have brought a group of students from the University of Wyoming to Art Basel | Miami Beach. What do you hope the students take away from this trip?

SUSAN: Well, when you live in a place like Wyoming, you are far from any kind of urban region that has cultural advantages. The University of Wyoming is the epicenter for art in Wyoming, but we are only one art museum. It was clear to me, when I first started coming to Art Basel | Miami Beach four years ago, that I was the only person in Wyoming that came out here.

JACKIE: You were the sole representative of Wyoming.

SUSAN: No other curators, no other museums, nobody else that I know of. A couple years ago when I hired Wendy, I said, "You need to come with me. We can raise some money to bring students. Here is a chance for them to get out of the bubble created by art departments and art schools for their students and into the larger realm of the art world." We have done that now for two years. It's very rewarding, because you can see that the students are looking around and trying to figure out, "How do I fit into this?" Yesterday, one of our students said, "It's really funny, because I have a jacket on today and people are asking me if I would like to have more information [rather than not paying any attention to him]." They are learning that how they present themselves changes what people think about them. If they walk in looking like a student, they get a different reaction than if they walk in looking like a professional. So, I think all those lessons are things that they can experience, learn, and discover on their own. We can talk about it all we want, but there is no context for them.

JACKIE: It gives them a great snapshot of the art world: The good, bad, and the ugly. Is this discouraging?

SUSAN: I don't think so.

JACKIE: What has come out of your trips to Basel?

SUSAN: Two years ago, we worked with our local community of artists in Laramie and, last year, we held our own hotel art fair.

JACKIE: You organized your own hotel art fair in Wyoming? That's fantastic!

WENDY: Yes. So, I would say that rather than discourage us, Art Basel inspired us.

SUSAN: There are two things that happened. Wendy and I wanted to show our work in Laramie, because we were known as art administrators in Wyoming. Nobody knew that we were artists, we can't show in our museum, and there aren't any galleries in Laramie that offer original art in a professional setting.

JACKIE: No cooperative galleries either?

SUSAN: None. We did a show three years ago called "Touchstone." It was our first show together. We were able to work with our local historic park, transformed a former storage area into a gallery, and had four hundred people at the opening. The exhibit and sale was just for the weekend. The next year we thought, "This was really successful. Maybe we should see if other artists in our community want to join us." We met with two other artists who were well established who also don't show in Laramie but live there. So, the second year, we did a studio style exhibit and sale. Again, it was very successful.

JACKIE: How did you define "successful" for these shows?

WENDY: The number of people in attendance, sales, and response.

SUSAN: The ground rules for these events have remained the same: the work must be new and/or not exhibited before in Laramie. We both work full time, so this was a way to get deadlines in front of us. There were a number of Laramie artists there saying, "Nobody supports us," "poor us," and they were just sitting in their studios waiting to be discovered.

JACKIE: I have a whole chapter just about what you can do on your own to get out of your studio.

SUSAN: And if you don't support your own art, how do you expect somebody else to?

JACKIE: Right! Why would somebody else want to invest in you? There is so much that you can do on your own.

SUSAN: Last year, we invited Laramie artists and we ended up with twenty-six artists. In looking for a location, I started talking about Art Basel | Miami Basel and the satellite art fairs in hotels. I suggested, "Let's see if we can find a hotel that has an interior hallway to the rooms, white walls, and would let us take out the furniture and put nails in the walls." And we found a place. We had a whole wing in a hotel and every artist had a room that they transformed into their own gallery. We sold \$30,000 worth of work in one weekend!

Now the other artists are planning the next exhibition, because we said from the beginning that we'd be the co-chairs for one year, but if they choose to do it again, someone else would have to step up and take it on.

WENDY: We were all involved in the processes of organizing, assembling, installing, and promoting. We talked about pooling our regional mailing list, so that everybody shares it.

JACKIE: Just like what you do for a museum show.

WENDY: Exactly. One of the interesting things was that this was not juried. It was a community exhibition. It was professional. We felt it had to be inclusive. Inclusive doesn't mean that the quality of work diminishes or that it isn't professionally presented. You have to be willing to put up the

money, the time to be there for the weekend, and do everything that has to be done. You're not going to put that much work into something and then just work up on the wall without framing it. There is too much peer pressure. The group just started meeting [to organize] the next exhibit. Two of the co-chairs called a meeting and the first thing I heard was, "We have to have the same caterer." This is from someone who said, "Why can't we just get potato chips and coke?" for the first event. But we had a caterer; we spent the money on it and everyone recognized the value of the professional presentation.

SUSAN: The financial side is pretty interesting, because Wendy and I kept saying, we need to raise money. The artists decided that there needed to be a deposit to guarantee commitment to the project. So, there was a hundred dollar deposit. And I kept saying, "We have to raise more money and whatever we don't raise, the participants share equally." So, at every meeting I would say, "Okay, here is the list [of what we need]. Who is going to ask for this?" That part of it was really hard, because none of them thought they could go out and ask for money.

JACKIE: Or ask for an in-kind donation of services or goods.

SUSAN: Right. But the more money we raised the less we'd have to pay individually. At some point, that becomes an inspiration.

JACKIE: Generally, the second year it's easier to go back to people and say, "Last year we attracted this number of people, so this year we'll probably attract x number of people. We want to donate this year?"

SUSAN: You have to get in there, get dirty, do the work, and that's how you learn. You learn from your mistakes, but you also learn by working with somebody. Wendy and I are administrators and we knew the process, because we come out of the museum world and the non-profit world.

JACKIE: What really impresses me about the two of you, and I have a sense it's because you are artists as well as art administrators, is that you didn't baby the other artists; you expected them to step up.

SUSAN: We didn't have time to baby them.

WENDY: Right. We kept hearing "poor us" and we kept saying "get over it." You need to empower yourself by learning how to do it. The process was set up to be an inclusive one where they could learn by doing or seeing how to put together a poster or a press release to promote the sales.

We made a list for next year that had twelve different things that somebody needs to take charge of like chairing the fundraising. It doesn't mean they go out and do all of it. It means that they are the one in charge of keeping track of how much money is being raised. Somebody else can do the promotion. It gets broken down between different artists, because it's a huge thing for any one person. At this meeting, I told them, "Last year, those of you who participated know what this is

about and know how it works. You are the ones that can help the new artists and need to step up to make the next year happen."

JACKIE: How many artists are doing it this year?

SUSAN: We had twenty-six last time, and I think we'll have close to forty this time.

JACKIE: That's exciting. I want to talk a little bit about the artists in Laramie. You said that there were a few artists that participated in this show who don't show in Laramie. Do they show elsewhere? How does that work? How do they promote themselves? My philosophy is that an artist has to live where they are sustained intellectually and physically for their practice, but the work can go anywhere.

SUSAN: Right.

JACKIE: I believe that more these days than I ever did before. I'm curious about how artists live in Laramie and sustain their practice.

SUSAN: Well, there are two in particular who are regionally well known. Laramie is a place where there is not a professional gallery off campus. If you look at the phonebook, there is something like nineteen galleries, but they are primarily craft galleries or galleries that offer poster or reproduction prints and framing services.

Some artists have put their work in the restaurants. They have been able to get their work out that way, but now we are hearing things like, "I had my work up at this restaurant, but nobody is seeing it." And Wendy and I are saying, "When you go into a restaurant, you go in for dinner." And then they say, "The work is in the public, but nothing's happening. Why?"

JACKIE: Yes, unfortunately we artists think that just exhibiting our work publicly is the answer to our problems, but we forget about the context and how to develop an audience for it.

WENDY: Artists don't think about audience.

JACKIE: And barely know what it means to develop an audience. If I ask visual artists, "who is your audience?" many say, "I don't understand that. What does that mean? I thought it was rich people."

SUSAN: Yes.

JACKIE: Who do you want to talk to? You make the work for yourself, but you also made it to be an intercommunicative process: to communicate to someone outside of yourself.

How do the artists in Laramie get themselves well known within the West?

SUSAN: I think, generally, the process for most artists in the West is to get their work into exhibits. There is a mechanism for Western artists who do the traditional themes of the life of cowboys, Indians, and landscape. So, if you put your work in the kind of context of the western art gallery, not in Laramie necessarily but in Cody and Jackson, there are a number of established galleries. They may have a gallery in Scottsdale or in Santa Fe with a western theme, and if you can tie into that market—

WENDY: But if you don't tie into that or if you expect the market to be in your back yard, then you are not part of that.

JACKIE: What was special about the hotel exhibition experience?

SUSAN: People loved it, because they could go from room to room and it was a different experience than having all of us together in one room would have been. People were fascinated by the idea that artists create bodies of work, because, for most people, they'd only see one or two images or maybe three on a wall in a restaurant or something by these artists. It was really the first time they could finally see the work in a more comprehensive way that talked about the artists and their work.

WENDY: And to be able to have a discussion with the artist about their ideas and how they relate. Another thing: the artists did not handle the sales. We devised a system where we had two people set up in a different room who did all the sales for everybody, so the artists were not worried about dealing with that. We removed the money part from them, so they could just talk about the work in order to make a sale, promote the work, and convey what the work was about.

SUSAN: I think that was really effective.

JACKIE: It's a fabulous model.

SUSAN: It really was great, especially because Laramie is a small community. It's only 27,000 people. Our closest town is 45 miles away and that community is 50,000 people. There is not another community between us, so the isolation factor is pretty huge.

JACKIE: How long have you been in Wyoming?

SUSAN: Since '91.

JACKIE: And did you move there for a job?

SUSAN: I went out as a curator for the Art Museum and became Director almost six years ago.

JACKIE: And Wendy?

WENDY: My husband and I moved in '79 so that he could go back to school and so I got my undergraduate degree from the University of Wyoming. Then we lived in places that were extremely remote. In fact, when I moved to Jeffery City, I had a university professor look at me and say, "Why did you pursue your art career? It's the end of the world for you there. You will never do art again." Jeffery City was about 2,000 people when we moved there and 250 people by the time we left 5 years later. The uranium mining industry ended and the town literally moved away.

JACKIE: How did you sustain your art?

WENDY: Well, it's where I began working with the idea of community and art. I started a local arts council, so that we could have arts in the schools for my kids. I made art using materials that were there, because I couldn't get them in town. The nearest stores were sixty miles away. That is where I began working with a lot of natural fibers. I used red willows and made willow sculptures, so it was a kind of exploration of found materials that were accessible.

JACKIE: Did you feel isolated? Were you able to maintain a dialogue with other artists in any way?

WENDY: In all honesty, that's where I got to know the [Wyoming] State Arts Council people. They were kind of a life line for someone like me.

JACKIE: In what way?

WENDY: Well at that time, they held conferences for individuals and they had individual artist's grants and a newsletter. So, I felt like I was still connected to the state as a whole, because I took advantage of all of those things. I subscribed to as many art magazines as I could afford and, occasionally, I would get out and travel to other places to see art and keep my finger on the pulse of what was going on. You had to make that effort and make that commitment. But, you are in an area of the country where your work becomes truly your own work.

JACKIE: What do you mean by that?

WENDY: When I graduated with my MFA from Vermont College, most of the folks who saw my work at that time said, "Your work has an integrity that we don't see in a lot of other people's work." The way I interpreted that was that we (those of us in remote areas) aren't so influenced by other artists and trends, because we're so isolated. Your artwork is truly your own voice, because you're geographically isolated.

JACKIE: How has the Internet changed that?

WENDY: It depends on the artist.

JACKIE: Are there any artists that make a living off of their studio practice?

SUSAN: There are some.

JACKIE: One of the things that I think happens with mid-career artists is that they lose having that critical edge in the studio. In the book, I talk about how important it is to maintain a critical dialogue about your work, even if you can't necessarily get it from the folks in your community, then with other artists or gallerists.

SUSAN: I am still in touch with my professor from college and there are a couple other photography friends who give me feedback on my personal work, which is very important.

WENDY: It is one of the harder things. In fact, that need for critical response was one of the things that brought us (Susan and me) to work more closely together. We actually had a small group that also included a choreographer/dancer that I had collaborated with earlier. We had an ongoing dialogue with our work where I did work that she responded to with her choreography and I responded to her performances with visual work. The three of us began meeting together just to look at each others' work with a critical eye from different perspectives, which then led to her and Susan collaborating.

JACKIE: As you're the only museum in town. What kind of responsibility does that entail?

SUSAN: Well, the museum was started officially in '74 by an art historian and a studio artist on the art faculty who knew that in order to teach art, the university had to have a collection. They started collecting art. The collection grew and eventually they needed a building. Today the main premise of the museum remains the same as the initial impulse to create a collection: to bring in artwork from outside Wyoming that is qualitative and original. Contemporary art is a primary focus and we exhibit regional work, but it is important that our Wyoming audience has access to what's going on outside the state. They want to know what is going on, so we get art from other cultures and countries. It is very broad. We do about twenty exhibitions a year.

JACKIE: You do twenty exhibitions? How big is your staff?

SUSAN: Nine full time and three a quarter of the time. We have 12,000 square feet of gallery space and nine galleries.

We do a University Art Faculty show every three years and a student show every year. The student show is huge. Last year, we had thirty-eight awards. Student art is being purchased from the exhibition by administrators on campus, so we are populating the campus with student art.

JACKIE: And the students are getting paid for it, which is a good thing.

SUSAN: They are getting paid for their work or they receive cash awards. There is a very supportive climate at the university for art and art students.

Our challenge is to reach statewide audiences. We do this through two outreach programs. One is the Ann Simpson Artmobile Program. It takes original art and a museum educator into schools and

communities around the state. The other program is a touring exhibition service that rotates up to eight exhibitions around the state every month.

JACKIE: How do you decide what traveling shows to bring into the museum?

SUSAN: It really depends on what's out there and what I need to fill out the schedule. That's the main reason that we are here [at Art Basel | Miami Beach] - so that I can scope out prospective artists and exhibitions for the museum. For example, I saw the work of Kaarina Kaikkonen two years ago at a satellite fair. She had a wonderful installation in our museum last year.

JACKIE: So, you must also look at all the satellite fairs in Miami and not just Basel.

SUSAN: We see as much as we can and if there is something interesting or something I am thinking about, I'm inclined to get information and take it back with me. And I have been working to organize contemporary programs that are solo exhibitions that run back to back over two to three year time periods. They've been very successful. We received funding from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the last series of exhibitions by internationally prominent artists.

JACKIE: What kind of personal goals do you two have? Do you have personal goals as an artist?

SUSAN: To keep creating and showing my personal work. I have shown in other places but have little time to devote to promoting the work. It's very tricky when you are museum director.

JACKIE: I understand. I could not promote myself comfortably when I was running the non-profit space.

SUSAN: That's one of the things that inspired Touchstone, since Wendy felt the same way. She had the same issue, because she couldn't show with the organization she was working with—

WENDY: —which was tied with every organization in Wyoming, because I was the head of Cultural Resources in the State of Wyoming at that time.

JACKIE: So, your goal is to organize your time to give yourself lots of time in the summer so you can do some in depth work.

SUSAN: And show the work even if it is local. Being able to share has become an important part of being in that community. I've been willing to give up working beyond that for a couple of years.

JACKIE: How about you Wendy? Do you have any professional goals outside of the job?

WENDY: Yes. As much as Susan hates to hear this, because she brought me in to grow the museum education program in scope and depth—and that keeps me really occupied--my long term goal is to find myself back in my studio full time. So, I tend to keep an eye open for different spaces that I might approach with my artwork. Susan and I look out for each other. We'll come back from

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visiting an art space and we'll say, "I saw this gallery or site that you may want to take a look at for your work."

JACKIE: If someone you cared for was beginning a career as an artist, what three pieces of advice would you give them?

WENDY: Believe in yourself. Value your work. And always be professional.

JACKIE: How about you Susan.

SUSAN: Similar. Stay true to your vision. Make every contact a professional one.

JACKIE: What do you mean by that?

SUSAN: Don't let go of standards that you set for yourself. Be sure that everything you send out and every contact you make represents you and your work.

JACKIE: What's your third piece of advice?

WENDY: Be passionate about it. If you are not passionate about it, then why are you doing it? You should be making what you love, but then you have to look high and low for where it belongs in the world.

SUSAN: That's the other piece. There are so many artists who think, "I just need to get a gallery." But, no! You need to find a gallery that loves your work.

JACKIE: Wendy and Susan, thank you so much for taking time from this three ring circus called Art Basel | Miami Beach to talk with me today.

Susan Moldenhauer

Ms. Moldenhauer has extensive experience in museum programs and administration. At the University of Wyoming Art Museum, she has primary responsibility for overseeing day-to-day operations of the 50,000 sq ft museum: including exhibitions, educational programs, collection acquisition and conservation, personnel supervision, institutional budgeting, development, museum store, and facilities management. She has established a diverse exhibition program that presents contemporary and historic exhibitions from a variety of ethnic, cultural, and aesthetic perspectives and is qualitative and international in scope. She has curated more than 130 exhibitions and overseen the implementation of more than 200 exhibitions and has written and published more than 30 exhibition brochures and catalogs since 1993. She has created and implemented the institutional policies for collection development and management for the museum's 6,500 objects, overseen a strong education program for K-12 through adults, furthered the integration of the art museum into the academic mission of the university, and reinvigorated the art museum's outreach programs. She

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has successfully led the art museum in establishing its 5-year academic plan for 2004-2009, exceeded its 5-year capital campaign goal of \$2.5 million, raised more than \$200,000 in grant funds, and restructured the museum's staff and National Advisory Board.

Moldenhauer was the executive director of Second Street Gallery, Charlottesville, VA (1986-1991), curator of museum programs for the University of Wyoming Art Museum (1991-1996), assistant director & senior curator, University of Wyoming Art Museum (1996-2000), interim director & senior curator, University of Wyoming Art Museum (2000-2002), and director & chief curator, University of Wyoming Art Museum (2002-present).

Moldenhauer is a practicing artist working in the medium of photography. For twenty years, the landscape of the American West has grounded and inspired her photographic explorations. Seeking synchronistic, transformative moments when earth, sky, wind, and human presence are one, she captures images in one exposure from performances with fabrics in the landscape. Her images are captured in color and printed full-frame in black and white and without manipulation. She has exhibited widely and is represented by Braham Contemporary Art, Toronto.

Moldenhauer received an MFA in photography from Penn State University (1982) and a BFA in printmaking/drawing from Northern Illinois University (1972). She has minors in Film History and Art History. She is a member of the American Association of Museums (AAM) and is the Mountain Plains Regional Representative for the Association of College and University Museums and Galleries (ACUMG).

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Wendy Lemen Bredehoff

Wendy Lemen Bredehoff is the Education Curator for the University of Wyoming Art Museum, a working visual artist with a national exhibition record, and consultant on arts, arts education and non-profit organizational issues. Recent clients have included the University of Wyoming's Visual Art Department, the Wyoming Arts Council and Wyoming Alliance for Arts Education, the Western States Arts Federation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Bredehoff was the Director of Cultural Resources for the State of Wyoming from 1999 – 2004, directing five cultural programs: the Arts Council, State Museum, State Historic Preservation, State Archives and State Office of Archaeology. Previously, she managed the Arts in Education program for the Wyoming Arts Council (1988-99). She has served on numerous arts and education boards and review panels and worked as a teacher, lecturer and artist in residence in Wyoming schools and colleges.

Bredehoff's current artwork reflects her interest in developing a visual vocabulary, rooted in color and line, which expresses a personal response to landscape; one that elicits a separate, but similarly personal response in the viewer. Color and texture become the means for communicating something that transcends the compositional elements, and an imaginative documentation of interaction with a particular place and moment in time. Examples can be seen at <http://www.wlbart.com>.

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Susan Moldenhauer, Artist, Director, and Chief Curator, and Wendy Lemen Bredehoft, Artist
and Curator of Education at the University of Wyoming, December 8, 2007

Bredehoft attained an MFA in Visual Arts from Vermont College in 1996, and a BFA in Visual Arts from the University of Wyoming in 1984.