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Eble, associate professor of studio art, completes Artist in Residency

Summary: Eble created eight abstract paintings depicting the St. Croix watershed environment.

(October 4, 2010)-What do you do for three weeks alone in a rustic cabin in the woods with no cell phone, no television, and impossibly slow Internet? Commune with nature, for sure. But if you're Michael Eble, you transform those connections with the natural world into art, turning isolation into a shared visual experience.

Eble, associate professor of studio art and Humanities Fine Arts (HFA) gallery curator, recently completed a three-week Artist at Pine Needles residency, creating a series of eight abstract paintings relating to the St. Croix River. Sponsored by the St. Croix Watershed Research Station, the environmental think tank and research arm of the Science Museum of Minnesota, the competitive summer residencies are awarded to no more than three natural history artists or writers each year.

The residency program is relatively new, having begun in 2002. Artists spend two to four weeks at the James Taylor Dunn Pine Needles Cabin, located along the river just north of the village of Marine on St. Croix. The late Dunn, noted historian of the St. Croix River Valley, left as part of his legacy use of the property as a scholarly and artistic retreat. The structure has been untouched since the Dunn family spent their summers there in the mid-1900s.

The artists enjoy creative and personal flexibility. They can hang out with the scientists at the research station if they wish or go it alone. They are given free reign in process and execution, but their project must relate to the environment.

Funding is not provided beyond use of the cabin and the freedom to work uninterrupted. Eble received UMM Faculty Research Enhancement Funds (FREF) to help pay for his supplies, living expenses, and travel.

Eble spent three weeks of August at the Dunn cabin. It's different from other residencies, he says. "You are all by yourself in total isolation. It's an incredible area of clear, still water, great for canoeing, but it can give new meaning to the term 'cabin fever'." However, an artist can be 100 percent dedicated to their work. "You are able to move through several phases of exploration and working through past ideas to get to a new place in your work."

Eble has a special affinity with waterways. His 2007 series of paintings, *Endangered Landscapes*, aerial landscape paintings of the southeastern Louisiana coastline, generated awareness of coastal erosion and wetland loss. This new series of paintings celebrates an unspoiled environment and determination to preserve it.

In his three-week sojourn Eble produced eight abstract paintings of the St. Croix watershed area. Five of them were exhibited at the Katherine E. Nash Gallery of the University of Minnesota in "Vis/a/Vis, U of M Faculty Show: A collaboration of Art Department Faculty from the Twin Cities, Duluth, and Morris Campuses." And one painting is displayed at the research station, as artists are required to donate an original work produced during the residency to their collection.

Eble is now determined to keep up the momentum begun during the residency and is in pursuit of completing a number of other works to add to this new body of work.

Photo above: a section of Eble's Watershed #1

Photo below: view of St. Croix

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