

## ***ArtSpeak: Mildred Johnson***

For anyone with a creative impulse, sparks fly upon walking into Mildred Johnson's studio in Fort Andross overlooking the Androscoggin River. There is something for everyone in Mildred's luminous space; the collector, the organizer, the treasure hunter, the yard sale fanatic, and the aspiring artist will each find inspiration in her buffet of carefully organized raw materials.



Trained as an architect at a time when most of her peers were men, Mildred freelanced for several years in New York and San Francisco before marrying and moving to Massachusetts where she gave birth to her daughter. She chose to be a full time mom but began to paint. Over the years Mildred built her repertoire quite on her own, to include weaving, collage, papermaking, bookmaking, and most recently assemblage. Despite her wide variety of media the core sensibilities of an architect remain; Structure is pervasive in her work, like a quiet rhythm, whether it appears an abstract color study in collage, a wooden and metal assemblage, or her extensively organized storage systems. However, her process has changed. Mildred does not structure her creative flow and declares: "I don't plan. I don't sit down and sketch an idea first." It is the unknown that seems to inspire her now, not something with a forgone conclusion. The materials and process tell her what to do, and there seems to be no lack of ideas or stimulation. The Maine landscape speaks to her but "I am easily inspired by a pile of dirty dishes".

Both humble and welcoming, Mildred opens her doors to visitors during Brunswick's Friday Art Walks, yet her process is a relatively private one. Driven by the journey, Mildred prefers to work "to please myself". Commissions and exhibition schedules create an uncomfortable pressure in an otherwise idyllic creative environment. Recently, the sheer pressure of making a piece for a 2-year long traveling exhibit: "Re-imagining the Distaff Toolkit" caused her to want to drop out of the project, but the curator would not have it. For this show Mildred is working on an assemblage featuring an elegant shredding of the Joy of Cooking, ready to be served up on a giant slotted spoon.

Spending time with this humble yet amazingly prolific self taught artist is a treat. She is one of the cultural riches --though imported --that this region can boast of. "I'd like to retire from cooking, but never from art making. Artists never retire".