

# communiqué

College of Humanities, Arts & Sciences Alumni Magazine  
University of Northern Iowa



ARTIST RESIDENCY  
GIVES ALUMNA  
PLACE TO CREATE

INCREASING DIVERSITY  
IN STEM FIELDS

UNI, NASA COLLABORATE  
ON CAVE RESEARCH

ON THE HUNT FOR A  
HISTORIC MANUSCRIPT



## A NEW ENDEAVOR PROVIDES LOCAL ARTISTS A DEDICATED STUDIO SPACE, AND CREATIVE COLLABORATION.

Tucked away in the corner of an old, ranch-style home turned art studio, Abby Hedley found her personal oasis – a place to explore and create alongside other local artists.

Hedley, who graduated from the UNI Department of Art last winter, was recently awarded an artist residency at the newly-established Red House Studios – owned and operated by the Hearst Center for the Arts in Cedar Falls. Through a collaborative partnership between the Hearst and the UNI Department of Art, Hedley was awarded a one-year residency at the studio space.

Jeff Byrd, head of the art department, says the partnership is aimed at fostering the local art community, and providing opportunity to young artists. “We really want to build an art community here in Cedar Falls, and especially with young artists, we want to keep them and their talent around here,” he said. “We’ve partnered with the Hearst on different projects in the past, and that’s something we really value. We’re glad to be a part of this, and especially with Abby. She’s very talented, and I think she’s a great fit for this.”

For Hedley, it’s a unique opportunity she never expected. “It’s like one last little gift from the department,” she said. “It shows they still support me and believe in me, even though I’m no longer a student. I don’t know what I was expecting when I graduated, but I wasn’t expecting for them to care this much, and to give me this opportunity. It sounds so simple, to have a place to work, but it’s huge for me and I’m so grateful.”

Since the spring, Hedley has been working in the space alongside three other area artists. “Two of the other artists are actually professors in the department of art,” Hedley said. “I knew them previously from my time in the department, and I absolutely adore their work. It’s definitely a change in dynamic going from being a student in the department to now working alongside them as a peer, but it’s been great.”

For Hedley, the collaborative aspect is what makes the studio space so unique. “It’s so easy to hole yourself up as an artist, but it’s not beneficial to do that,” she said. “You need constant communication and feedback to improve yourself and your art, and that’s one great thing about this place – everyone is willing to help if I ever need anything. COVID has made it a little difficult, but it’s still an incredibly friendly and cooperative environment. It really is a unique opportunity, and something you don’t come across often. Having this space allows me to challenge myself while continuing to push my boundaries. It’s also helped me gain a lot of confidence in myself and my career as an artist.”

Hedley’s background is in sculpture, and as a student at UNI, she was heavily involved in the Public Art Incubator program – something she says was a defining experience in her college career. “I was so lucky to stumble on the [Public Art Incubator program] as a student,” she said. “I worked with the program for four years, and it really helped broaden my perspective of what sculpture can be. I ended up finding a huge appreciation for public art and deepening my passion for sculpture. I also formed some great relationships

### SPACE *to* CREATE

*UNI, Hearst Center for the Arts partner to keep young artists in the community*

Abby Hedley at the Red House Studios

Abby Hedley at the Red House Studios





with two of my biggest mentors [current director Dan Perry] and [former director Tom Stancliffe] through the program. Dan is actually the one that told me about this studio space opportunity.”

Now, Hedley is using her studio space to explore the softer side of her art, through needle felting and creating sculptures out of wool. “It’s funny because I went from working with thousands of pounds of steel [in the Public Art Incubator], to working with a few ounces of wool,” she said. “This space allows me to fully embrace the softer and more delicate side of my art. The environment I’m used to working in is a full-on metal shop, and I love it there, but this is the opposite side of it. It’s my safe haven, and my own cozy little nook where I can experiment with different things.”

Hedley says she counts herself extremely lucky to have the support of UNI, the art department and the Hearst behind her. “Graduating from college in the middle of a pandemic was a little

crazy to say the least,” she said. “It seemed like my plans fell apart, but when this opportunity [to have a sponsored studio space] came up, they fell together again in an even better way. Now I can take a while to focus on my art and figure out the next steps. It’s given me a lot of security, and I’m so grateful for that.”

Heather Skeens, cultural program supervisor at the Hearst, says the center is happy to partner with UNI to provide this opportunity to a young artist like Hedley. “Recent graduates need a landing pad, and time to develop their work when they’re not able to access studios on campus anymore,” she said. “We want them to stay in town, and it helps to give them a place to work. UNI and the art department have been great partners on different projects over the years. This is just one more way we can work together to support the arts in our community, and to keep young talent here in the Cedar Valley.” ■

Above: Hedley works with wool, found objects and other materials to create sculptures of every day items like this jacket

Upper left: The Red House Studios, located next to the Hearst Center for the Arts in Cedar Falls.

Lower left: Hedley working with wool.

Right: One of Hedley’s sculptures, made with felted wool and found metal.

