

Alfred University art professor presents ♦Wild Food Cook-Off♦ at Oregon conference
5/17/10



M. Michelle Illuminato, assistant professor of art in the School of Art & Design at Alfred University, hosted a Wild Food Cook-Off May 15, as part of the annual Open Engagement conference and art platform (May 14-17), an initiative of Portland (OR) State University's Art and Social Practice MFA (master of fine arts) program. "The Wild Food Cook-Off challenged Portland cooks to dazzle the public with tasty treats using foraged and gathered foods," said Illuminato. "We'll all win as we experience food sensations like dandelions, wild leeks, mushrooms, morels, fiddle-heads, huckleberries, or even shellfish or trout." The Wild Food Cook-Off invited home cooks, chefs, foragers, and cart owners to submit their best dish using foods available for free from the land, waters, and wilderness of Oregon. The Cook-Off was co-sponsored by Portland Community College and the MFA in visual studies program at Pacific Northwest College of Arts and supported by the Cyan PDX Cultural Residency Program. Visitors attending the event voted for the winning entry. Participants' recipes had to contain at least one gathered, foraged, or wild-caught food. The winner received a hand-made ceramic trophy, a foraging tool, and the right to call him or herself the "Wildest Chef in Portland!" The trophy was created by Angie To, associate professor of art at Alfred University, and Robin Caster Howard, assistant dean of the School of Art & Design at AU. All challengers received a foraging bucket with the logo of the event. Cook-Off recipes will be available online (with the permission of the cooks). The artists involved in "Open Engagement: Making Things, Making Things Better Making Things Worse" challenged traditional ideas of what art is and does. The artists' projects scaled the contemporary frameworks of art as service, as social space, as activism, as interactions, and as relationships, and tackle subject matter ranging from urban planning, alternative pedagogy, play, fiction, sustainability, political conflict, and the social role of the artist. This year's conference participants included more than 100 artists, curators, scholars, writers, farmers, community organizers, filmmakers, and collectives. Illuminato's current art offerings begin with dialogue and develop into listening stations, photo-stories, and public events which explore the relationship between people and places. She is the recipient of numerous awards including Key to the City of Aliquippa (PA) and Best Event in Pennsylvania, and grants from the Pennsylvania Council for the Arts, Puffin Foundation and Pittsburgh Foundation. Her next project, "Ruralscape," invites artists and locals to explore rural Western New York through tours and salon discussions this summer. Exhibiting both nationally and internationally, Illuminato completed a residency at the Cit Internationale des Arts in Paris, France. She earned a master of fine arts degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in sculpture, installation, and public art, and a bachelor of fine arts in sculpture from Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh.