

After Hurricane Sandy, visiting artist finds haven in Alfred University studios

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Much of the news coverage of Sandy focused on the loss of lives, neighborhoods, homes, and possessions.

But there are more losses that went unnoticed by the public until the weeks went by and the clean-up got under way in earnest. Those losses include much of the life&s work of artists, who had their pieces in Chelsea galleries or stored in facilities around the city that they never imagined would be susceptible to flooding.

One was Diana Cooper, who was an artist-in-residence in Alfred University&s Institute for Electronic Arts (IEA), School of Art & Design, when she learned “everything I had made” between 1983 and 2007 that was not being exhibited or in collections elsewhere had been destroyed when storm water flooded the basement in which they were stored.

The pieces were “very fragile that was an element of the work,” she said, and none survived the devastation. Work done by her late father, also an artist, was also destroyed.

Her first inkling of what was happening came when she called her husband about 10 p.m. on Monday, Oct. 29, and learned that the flood waters had reached her art storage space in the basement of a building near the intersection of Canal and Greenwich streets in lower Manhattan, just blocks from the waterfront. Just hours before, there had been no sign of the flood waters.

It was not until the following morning, though, that she learned the space had been completely flooded. Her studio, located near the Gowanus Canal, was spared damage, but only because of the controversial construction of a huge Whole Foods store in the neighborhood. The basement excavation site filled with water, becoming a giant retaining pond that kept the flood waters from encroaching in that area.

By the time floodwaters had receded so that people could get to the building to determine what had happened, Cooper said, the work had been immersed in standing water for 72 hours; her works, which incorporated paper and foam core and other fragile elements, had disintegrated, leaving behind a smelly, contaminated mess. Power was out, and access to the building restricted.

What began as a break from her regular work to spend time in the IEA studios in Harder Hall on the Alfred University campus took on new importance for Cooper, who has an exhibition scheduled to open at Postmasters, a Chelsea gallery that is in the forefront of new media, on Jan. 5, 2013. The gallery has created a website to commemorate some of the work that was lost. <http://postmastersgallery...>

She also has a show opening at Memorial Sloane Kettering&s new Infusion Center in March. “Speedway,” a free-standing sculpture that was destroyed in the flooding, was going to be featured in that exhibition, along with a wall of photos, some of which she printed at the IEA during her residency. Work she made in Alfred will now be “a huge part

of the show,” Cooper said.

She extended her stay at Alfred, and intends to return in the spring to offer the talk that was cancelled after the storm. ‘If I had not been here, I don&t know how I would have fared,” said Cooper. “I am so grateful I was able to extend my stay.”

Even before it became literally her haven from the storm, Cooper said she had found “Alfred is an amazing art school.” Working with the facilities and the faculty associated with the IEA “enabled me, as an artist, to work in new ways that would not be possible at another art school. It is such a supportive environment for experimenting and producing art work.”

For more about Alfred University: <http://www.alfred.edu>

For more about the School of Art & Design: <http://art.alfred.edu>

For more about the Institute for Electronic Art:

For more about Diana Cooper: <http://www.dianacooper.ne...>