

Dear

Consider this a **manifesto against the scourge of unrooted cleverness**. And a fundraising letter.

Further, as a response to the befuddling and massive ecological, cultural and economic predicaments we face, consider this an offering:

*You must depend upon
affection, reading, knowledge,
skill—more of each
than you have—inspiration,
work, growing older, patience,
for patience joins time
to eternity.*

These lines are from the aptly titled *How to Be a Poet* by Wendell Berry, a poem that could also be titled *How to Solve Environmental Problems*. It raises the unexpected notion that **some work can only be done well by being insufficient to it**. The idea that we work in ignorance, no matter how skilled we become, is at once troubling and humbling. Yet it aligns with a reality well understood by farmers, artists and ecologists: we can never fully conceive the scope of the labor set before us.

On the other end of the spectrum, **unrooted cleverness** is the all-too-prevalent idea that humans are smart enough, technologically inventive enough and far-sighted enough to solve the massive problems that we've created. Unrooted cleverness takes for granted that, through the urgent application of technology and money, on behalf of people we've briefly met and places we've barely seen, we are capable of solving global problems on a planetary scale.

I disagree.

Instead, **ISLAND works in small places, with a long view, to help communities thrive**. We believe that intelligence is most effective when applied in the context of the economy, culture and ecology that exist in a given place. The rule is **think small and smart**. Here's what that looks like right now:

- ☞ Offering **the Hill House Artist Residency**; a commitment to talented writers, performers and visual artists. ISLAND presents them with a few weeks of solitude in a well-stocked forest cabin, a gift that benefits us all with new works of art and more dedicated artists.
- ☞ Building **three community and school gardens**, connecting folks to nutritious food, outdoor education and essential skills for community self-reliance.



- ☞ Proffering **production partnerships for courageous new art projects** like the multi-media dance performances *American Document* and *Chaotic Harmony*. ISLAND acts as a fiduciary, grant writer and general left-brain logistical partner, helping to ease the process of bringing new art into the world.
- ☞ Hosting **hundreds of workshops and events**, where people gather not just to learn a new skill but to connect with their neighbors.
- ☞ Crafting engaging programs to **support small farmers**, like networking farm tours, a shared chicken-processing trailer and the Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference.
- ☞ Finally, as of October 2011—working with Parkside Arts Council, the Bellaire Historical Society and the Village of Bellaire on a **downtown Bellaire community space**, offering an art gallery, workshop venue and mini-theater for film and music performance; a true community hall!

Rather than big, unrooted cleverness, ISLAND seeks to be diligent, creative and intelligently connected to small places. We are learning to “depend upon affection, reading, knowledge, skill—more of each than you have.” **That means staying small and borrowing from artistic practice to allow for experimentation, risk taking and yes, even failure.**

There is one last advantage to being a purposefully small organization: **your gift makes a big difference.** ISLAND keeps administrative overhead low and uses your dollars to make a deep and direct impact in our programs.

Please support ISLAND this year with a tax-deductible financial contribution. Also, I hope you’ll have the time in 2012 to attend some ISLAND events or participate in one of our larger (but not too big!) projects.

Sincerely,

Brad Kik

Co-Director, Institute for Sustainable Living, Art & Natural Design

P.S. You can visit our website at www.ARTmeetsEARTH.org to find a complete list of ISLAND’s current programs. You’ll also find a list of some of our favorite community partners. We value our partnerships and want to share them with you. **Please contribute, online or by mail, so that ISLAND’s important work can continue.**