



The Moonshiners at the (con) temporary gallery, an alternative Artown event put together by several local graffiti artists. (Left to right: Noah Conrath, Nathan Lower and Ali Alonso) Photo courtesy of Jolene Adams

# Project Moonshine's Film Casts A Spotlight on Reno

WRITTEN BY SUSAN M. BOTICH

SINCE 1996, WHEN THE FIRST ARTOWN festival opened, downtown Reno has showcased the artists and artisans who make Reno tick all year round. Downtown Reno captures the voice of the artists in every form including visual/textural art, music, dance, poetry readings and more. Artown 2006 added yet another art form – film.

Michael Albright, teacher and film devotee, wanted to do something really worthwhile after returning from New York where he interned with Albert Maysles, a pioneer of direct cinema (a form of documentary). He saw that film was something missing within the Reno arts community. So, while substitute teaching at Reno High School, Albright got the idea to offer a summer documentary filmmaking course for high school students. What better place to start than Artown?

"I had always heard about Artown," Albright says. "I felt it was an event long enough

to shoot an entire program with enough time to have some educational instruction. It evolved into an educational structure within the context of Artown itself, with the kids filming all of it. It was a great place to start and an opportunity to expose artists to artists – a chance for students to learn about film and interact with artists."

## A Kind of Film Summer-Camp

Students from various high schools were allowed to apply for the program. Sixteen year-old Ali Alonso from Reno High School remembers when she was selected as one of the lucky participants.

"Mike [Albright] was my sub for my drama class," Alonso says. "He told the class about the project. I took him up on it because it sounded really cool. I filled out the app and was chosen!"

A total of seven students were selected, and Project Moonshine became a reality. Albright thought up the name the same day he decid-

ed to start the organization. "Project Moonshine" is meant to evoke a homegrown, grassroots way of getting things done. Instead of going through a large production company, Albright encourages students to make movies their own way. But before the actual filming could take place, some preliminary instruction was a must.

"Before we filmed we would always meet somewhere," Alonso says. "We had a lot of time to get to know one another. Mike gave us some exercises to do, like film a subject of our own choice. We walked downtown and filmed what we wanted. I chose moving objects. We also did interviews of each other to get to know one another."

The project started in June 2006. Filming ran throughout the length of the Artown festival in July. Post-production completed in January 2007.

"I think the students learned that you can actually see something through from start



to finish," Albright says. "It doesn't take going to Hollywood or working for a big production company to do it. You can make it happen on your own. The students learned how to work together. They were actually doing all the filming. They each added something unique of their own."

**"We got to know Reno a lot better through filming it. I had never really explored the downtown area of Reno until last summer. I got to know my city a lot better."**

**All of Artown Gets Into the Picture**

The project didn't just include Albright and his students.

"All of Artown became involved in the project," says Beth Macmillan, executive director of Artown. "We facilitated the communication between Michael and all of the Artown arts partners. It was a great project in many ways. It involved artists in the community, demonstrated that the arts are alive in Reno and involved local students who were learning the art of filmmaking. It made the project and outreach component of the festival."

Once all the filming was done, the next step was to edit the approximately 100 hours of footage into a feature length production, according to Albright. Though the students had a chance to look at their footage and learn basics of the very time-consuming and complicated process of editing, Albright took the helm on that task. You had to know all 100 hours of it," says Albright.

"I do want to participate in the editing next year," says Alonso. "Last summer we got to kind of help him edit. We got to see how he cut the film. But I want to learn more about how to edit. That would be really interesting."

**Students Learn About Reno, Reno Learns About its Students**

"We got to know Reno a lot better through filming it," Alonso says. "I think that was the best part. I had never really explored the

downtown area of Reno until last summer. I got to know my city a lot better."

Macmillan believes the public might learn something valuable by seeing the film. "I think people can see that plethora and variety of events that are happening during Artown and how it takes the whole community to make this event happen," she says.

Artown marketing manager, Natasha Bourlin, really enjoyed working with the Project Moonshine crew.

"Throughout the month of July 2006 we would see Michael and the students with cameras interviewing Artown attendees, staff, artists and performers," she says. "They were terrific to work with, informative with their input and points of view on the festival and events and inspirational in that they were all so driven and amazingly hard-working."

**An Experience to Remember**

"I learned so much about myself," says Alonso. "Last year really molded the person that I am today. I learned lots of things about the camera, like angles and different shots. I see movies differently now. I watch how the scenes were shot. Now I really ap-

preciate what goes into a movie."

Albright has made Project Moonshine an ongoing venture.

"We will be doing something every summer," he says. "I think it's really important to teach film in Reno and to teach people about Reno. Hopefully, in the future, the students will direct and edit and do it all themselves. I will eventually step down and they will take over." **R**

*Susan M. Botich is a freelance writer based in Minden, Nevada. As a writer, poet and musician, the arts are her life's love and passion.*

A sneak preview of the documentary (working title: *Being Here*) was held on May 5, 2007, to a limited audience. The film will be premiered in its entirety to the public at the Artown 2007 festival Thursday, July 5, at 7:00 p.m. and Sunday, July 8, at 1:30 p.m.

For more information about other Project Moonshine productions, visit [www.project-moonshine.org](http://www.project-moonshine.org).



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