RULE Alumni Spotlight:
by Susan Bloch, RULE II

Reading the RULE spotlights remind me of my time at RULE II. They bring me closer to the RULE experience and to everyone who has participated. I’m connected to an experience distant in time and place. My memory of our group was that although we were varied individuals, we connected easily and bonded. I’d look forward to going and always felt the weekend sped by too soon. I lived in Towanda, Pennsylvania and moved to northern California in 2004. I was eager to participate although unsure how it would fit into my life as an artist.

RULE helped me develop skills in which I was weak. I built a role in the community and broadened my respect for dedicated leaders. I met wonderful, committed people who I remember fondly, in particular JD who was in my group. She stood out from day one as a true leader. She’s remained a friend, mentor and inspiration. The spark she brought to everything she did, from her introduction to her closing comments, still inspires me. It was no surprise when they chose her to be the director of the program. Chosen over extremely qualified competitors, her natural leadership ability, skills and magnanimous personality made her the obvious choice.

At the time of the program, I was a Commissioned Glass Artist. I continued to develop and exhibit my art, while volunteering on art or culture committees. Recently I’ve started writing poetry. I’m developing ways to combine it with my art as a result of receiving a grant for Poetic Sculpture. RULE gave me strength to seek choices that match my individual aesthetic. In the words of the poet John O’Donohue, RULE gave me the strength to use poetry to, “reach out for the ones we never hear from,” and to, “speak for the excluded ones.”

I’ve worked in many committees for the arts both back East and here in California. Currently I am the chair of the Eureka arts and Culture Commission. The commission is a city organization. We partner with other businesses and other city and arts organizations to provide arts and culture opportunities for our citizens. We work to make our isolated community vibrant, beautiful and enriching. We look for opportunities for artists of all types and make evident the value of the arts and its artists. One project we worked on with Parks and Recreation has become particularly meaningful to me during Covid, and I hope to the extended community. We worked on artist benches with the Parks and Recreation commission. Each selected artist was paid to design and build a sculptural bench. Each bench was connected to a place of interest or historic site along the recently developed 6.3-mile walking/biking trail. Although I’ve walked along this the trail many times and enjoyed the benches; it’s become my favorite place to walk during Covid. It offers space, solace, beautiful views, and fresh air. The imaginative sculptures provide a place for anyone in the community to enjoy the outdoors.

Other projects we worked on during the years can be seen throughout town: many murals, painted recycling bins, creative outdoor restaurant seating. With many stores closed and the downtown relatively empty the beautiful places to walk or sit outdoors for refreshments are restorative.

I work in tandem with arts and city leaders who are dedicated and inspirational. I’ve seen their hard work and patience through changing administrations and economies. I feel lucky to work with them and grateful to have gone through the RULE program. It inspires me to read about each of you, how you live your lives, how the program continues to launch good people with strong values into our communities.

Our country needs true leaders and needs organizations such as RULE dedicated to this.