

“Called to Action: Environmental Restoration Projects by Artists”

Lillian Ball, Curator

“*Called to Action*” will be on view at Art Sites, 651 West Main Street (Route 25), Riverhead from May 5 through June 3, 2007. A reception for the artists will be held Sunday, May 6, from 4 to 6 PM. Hours are Thursday –Sunday, 12-5 PM. For more information and additional hours call 631 591 2401.

“Called to Action” exhibits works by artists who not only comment upon environmental issues, but actually intercede to halt degradation and nurture environmental health. They are passionately involved in processes that restore different ecosystems worldwide. They question assumptions about what is possible, and work with scientists, government officials and planners to bring their visions to fruition. These works aim to escape the confines of the “white box” and actually influence policy. Spanning the generations, artists included range from recognized leaders, such as Mel Chin, Newton and Helen Harrison, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles to a younger generation such William Meyer, who is teaming up with Cornell University to work with middle school students. Sometimes the artists’ projects have been commissioned, but more often these interventions spring from an urgent need to address environmental harm.

As an artist working with wetlands issues, Lillian Ball was attracted to the practice of ecological art. Quoting from the ecoartnetwork.org website, it is a way of working which “focuses attention on the web of interrelationships in our environment –the physical, biological, cultural, and historical aspects of ecological systems” . It is related to the principals of “Social Sculpture” established by the artist Joseph Beuys, one of the founders of the Green Party in the 70’s. His ideas about community involvement and activism using art as a vehicle have influenced many of the artists in this exhibition. The emphasis here is on artistic visual manifestations and not simply manifestos or documentation with educational intentions.

Much of the work requires viewer participation to fully appreciate it. Some pieces are technically new media, while others use deceptively simple means to full impact. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, a pioneer in art / community interface, who worked to raise esteem for NYC Sanitation employees in the 70’s, has been artist in residence at the Fresh Kills Landfill on Staten Island for several years. Her 6 channel video piece combines actual footage of the landfill, interviews with city officials and biologists, and her plans for future wetland restoration. The “trigger points” of Aviva Rahmani’s “Ghost Nets”, connect imperiled sites from her dump restoration in Vinalhaven, Maine to Riverhead’s waterfront and on to other areas around the globe. An Argentine collaborative group, Ala Plastica, presents images that address the multi-pronged cleanup of a 1999 oil spill in the Rio de la Plata community.

Other artists included in the exhibition work in ways that encourage outside participation during the full process, from initial research to the finished art piece. Examples are the Harrison’s Santa Fe Drain Basin redesign and Richard Kirk Mills effort to creatively use construction debris from a site he helped conserve. Jackie Brookner and Mel Chin have used of plants to remove toxins from water and soil. Stacy Levy and Julie Bargman use plantings not only help in the restoration of a coal mine, but to show the process and visually note progress. Bob Braine and Leslie Reed will poke fun at golf course landscaping while reintroducing native plants on the grounds of Art

Sites. While photographing a white rooster one day, it lead Hope Sandrow to a Scandanavian Lodge and 13 acre estate that she is now working to preserve. Her time/space photographs record the mystery and light as day turns to night. Reiko Goto and Tim Collins worked with hydrologists, botanists and planners to make an ecological design plan and water quality report that analyzed alternatives. Work this ambitious is truly interactive.

The final component of the exhibition will be a roundtable discussion with architects, planners, landscape designers and scientists from the Eastern Long Island community. The purpose is to raise consciousness of potential alternatives suggested by these artists and to see if there are ways to integrate art with municipal operations. A color brochure will capture the artists' images and intentions in their own words. The ultimate goal is for the ideas in this exhibition to go out into the public domain, to stimulate active involvement and effect change through an envisioning process.

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Exhibition checklist

#	Artist	Project
1	Ala Plastica/ Rafael Santos	<i>Magdalena Oil Spill</i> , 1999, Photo screening/text Argentine collaborative group project addressing oil spill and cleanup in Rio de la Plata
2	Bob Braine + Leslie Reed	Infrared Photos and Invasive Species installation
3	Jackie Brookner	<i>Utterance</i> , plant detoxification water sculpture, 5'x4'x3'
4	Mel Chin-	Archival stakes from " <i>Revival Field</i> ", brownfield remediation in St. Paul, MO.
5	Reiko Goto Collins + Tim Collins	3 Rivers, 2 nd Nature , sand mandala 2005 , prints
6	Newton + Helen Harrison/ Harrison Studio	<i>Santa Fe Drain Basin: Lessons from the Genius of Place</i> , Video projection
7	Stacy Levy and Julie Bargmann	Works from AMD&Art project for Vintondale, Pennsylvania coal mining water treatment , 1997-2005, 25 x 25 x 2”
8	William Meyers III, in collaboration with Robert J. Kent and Margery Daughtrey	<i>Transfer Project</i> , 2007 Local school children identify native species and plant garden
9	Richard Kirk Mills	<i>Concrete Jungle</i> , scale photo of sculpture from Teaneck Creek Conservancy in Northern NJ which he helped conceive and realize, 42 x 36 ”
10	Aviva Ramani	<i>Trigger Points</i> , drawing/photo/sound work about her 10- year wetland dump restoration in Vinalhaven, Maine and its counterpart
11	Hope Sandrow	<i>Shinnecock May 18 commencing 5:40 AM</i> , 2007, oil pigment print , 78 x 44”
12	Mierle Laderman Ukeles	<i>Penetration and Transparency Morphed</i> , 2000-2002, 6 channel video piece from Phase 1 Reconnaissance of her NYC Percent for Art Project about the former Fresh Kills Landfill in Staten Island, NY