

Indepth Arts News: **"One Touch of Nature: An Environmental Artwork Exhibition"**
Gallery 96, Stratford, ON, CA Canada

One Touch of Nature is the first of what the organizers hope will be an annual event. Inspired by Shakespeare's quote "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin," this environmental artwork exhibition is on view on the grounds of the Discovery Centre, the site of the former Normal School, adjacent to the Stratford Festival Theatre. The works provide a number of diverse examples as to the exploration of the relationships possible between people, nature and art. The artists selected for this exciting project are varied in their mediums and techniques. Each contributing artist is well-respected and critically known for their ongoing commitment to the exploration between environment and art.

Some artists have created new work for the site at Stratford, while others adapted previous pieces for this project. The creation, installation and changes (if any!) of these artworks throughout the duration of this project will be documented on video, in photographs and digitally. By doing this, the project becomes accessible to a greater number of people than those who will have the opportunity to visit the site.

The works on view in One Touch of Nature sometimes directly refer to Stratford, Shakespeare, and history as well as to the environment. In doing so, they demonstrate that all of aspects of life and culture can be interrelated and not separate. The works on view in One Touch of Nature help us to reclaim that important connection between art, environment, history and culture.

PARTICIPATING ARTISTS (2002)

Napoleon Brousseau, one of the founding members of the FASTWURMS Collective, has exhibited in prestigious galleries and museums in Canada, the United States and Europe. His work is represented in the permanent collections of institutions such as the National Gallery of Canada, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Canada Council Art Bank, Vancouver Art Gallery, Winnipeg Art Gallery and the Art Gallery of Ontario. Brousseau has created a unique sound sculpture for this exhibition. With speakers placed selectively around the grounds, motion detectors will activate recordings of over sixty one-minute clips. These clips will be recitations of quotes dealing with nature culled from Shakespeare's plays. As one proceeds through the grounds, the trees will seemingly be breathing Shakespeare's words to us ^ reminding us of the importance of the natural world as a source and stimulus of inspiration. The quotes will range from the descriptive to the metaphoric. In creating this work, Brousseau will effectively be bringing both Shakespeare's words and the treed grounds to life. The installation also pays subtle homage to the magical and the mysterious scenes which are found within Shakespeare's works.

Ian Lazarus has been working as a professional artist since 1977. He has exhibited nationally and internationally. He has created large-scale earthworks in Canada, United States, Mexico, Greece, Italy, Ireland and Malaysia. For this project, Lazarus created a unique earthwork which addresses the multi-faceted concept inspired by the layering of histories and erosion over time. The sculpture does not simulate history, but rather reflects trace elements of historical evidence left by time's passage. The transience of time is a recurring theme throughout Lazarus's body of work. The rhythmic movement of his earlier work was revealed through the slicing and phrasing of space. The ebb and flow suggested by this, was further developed through the artist imposing elements of ascent and decline, macro and micro time onto his work. This interplay of time and process is developed through his layering and juxtaposition of materials. The completed earthwork sculpture induces a perceptual shift, alternating our viewpoint seemingly between macrocosm and microcosm, between the real and the simulated.

Colm MacCool creates works that have consistently synthesized dichotomous ideas and philosophies. His seemingly innocuous and/or playful installations often become parodies of xenophobia, militarization and consumerism. He deliberately perverts societal "ideals" to reveal

the implausibility of fantasies such as escape, freedom from persecution, and the possibility of beginning anew in the Wilderness. In doing so, his work calls into question an individual's responsibilities for the state of society as a whole. In recent work, MacCool played with image and perception, creating what look like enormous ruptured tires out of salvaged tree trunks. These highly finished sculptures are purposely subversive, referencing environmental issues, commodification and industrial consumption. A graduate from the B.F.A. programme at York University, Colm MacCool has exhibited in many Toronto galleries as well as at the Viridian Gallery in New York City and was voted Toronto's Best Sculptor in Now Magazine's Readers, Poll (2000). He is employed in the film industry and was nominated for the Art Direction Award at the Yorkton Film Festival in 1998 for his work on "The Cellar" produced by "Incriminating Pictures". His exhibition Black Toys garnered much critical and curatorial acclaim.

Janet Morton graduated from the Visual Arts programme at York University, Toronto, in 1990. Since 1989 she has exhibited extensively in group and solo exhibitions in public galleries and artist-run centres in Canada. These exhibitions include Naked State - A Selected View of Toronto Art, curated by Phillip Monk for the Power Plant, Toronto (1994). A catalogue accompanied her solo exhibition wool work last year at the Museum for Textiles, Toronto. The recipient of numerous grants and artistic awards, Morton is represented by Paul Petro Contemporary Art. Morton frequently creates work which transforms something commonplace into something unique and original. Past examples include a tea cozy which covers a small house on Toronto Island; woolen work socks become dozens of "maple" leaves and in turn these leaves become letters in a poetic language invented by the artist. Morton consistently and continually invests the mundane and the ordinary with an element of transcendence. In keeping with the theme of theatre and Shakespeare, Morton will be "dressing" a tree. In effect she creates a covering, a costume for a large pine tree in order to disguise it as a birch tree. The resulting work will cause the viewer to question his or her perception - what kind of tree is that? What am I seeing? Is this real? It also acts as a gentle reminder that much of the natural world has been transformed or disguised by the industrial urban world built upon it. This kind of installation insists that the viewer actually "look" at what s/he is seeing rather than what one expects to see.

Tina Poplawski attended the Fine Arts programme at York University in the 1990s and the New School of Art in the 1970s. An active artist, Tina Poplawski's work can be found in the collections of Topix Computer Graphics & Animation Inc., Allen Smart Services, Scorpion Minerals and Wirral Manufacturing. She has exhibited in Ontario, Quebec and New York with shows at such galleries as Glenhyrst Art Gallery of Brant, York Quay Centre, The Art Gallery of Mississauga, John B. Aird Gallery, The Ward-Nasse Gallery (New York) and Salle Augustin-Cenier (Quebec). Her work will be featured with Aganetha Dyck in Swarm which takes place at the Tom Thomson Memorial Art Gallery this summer. Poplawski is creating a new work for this project. Titled Cold Comfort Poplawski's work draws upon the themes of her earlier exhibition Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep which dealt with memory and imagination, particularly the preservation of memories of events that were not, or could not be spoken of.

Poplawski's materials often include pulped paper, graphite, wood ash collected from camp sites, botanical matter, beads and other human-made objects in the work, such as Monopoly tokens. Cold Comfort presents the viewer with a veritable waking dream scene with dozens of frozen pink snowflakes cascading down upon a doll's cradle in the middle of the grounds. Like many of Shakespeare's fantastical scenes, Cold Comfort becomes a metaphoric symbol for states of being. Poplawski's work refers to the passage of time. The small cradle represents the hopes and dreams of the child which represent nature and innocence. The frozen snowflakes juxtaposed against the living tree remind us of the progress of time with the passage of seasons. All life must follow the cycle of birth, death and renewal. Cold Comfort is a contemporary exhortation to the viewer to seize the day - carpe diem.