

Environmental Art















Environmental Art

A compendium of student, alumni & professional works of art & design that explore a natural aesthetic.

Works by:

Hope Sandrow, Larry Liddle, Martha Weller,
Kathleen Furey, Deanna Lally and the Students of
EHM 201: Eco-Aesthetics in Art.

Student Activities Center Gallery

Stony Brook University

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Sponsored by the Sustainability Studies Program & the Division of Student Life

Curated by Marc Fasanella • Graphics by Katie Osiecki



Mortal Maypole Bower • Martha Weller with Marc Fasanella

Inspired by the courtship structures of the Bowerbird, a culled spruce tree stands in a bed of cedar clippings littered with carefully placed, brightly colored objects. From a distance, the illusion of an entirely natural construction is upheld, but much like a folly, upon closer inspection, the illusion is revealed as a farce. The objects covering the evergreen floor around the maypole are a mix of natural and man made artifacts that manage to articulate a traditional notion of beauty while deconstructing our uniqueness as a creative species.



Untitled Endangered Species... • Hope Sandrow

Hope Sandrow's work explores ecology, extinction and human activity. A rare white rooster led the artist to discover an abandoned historic home and a prickly pear plant growing out of a deteriorating pool hose. Hope's subsequent research led her to the discovery of the thornless prickly pear developed by Luther Burbank. Ecological diversity loss parallels the loss of our cultural history; prickly pears disappear in advance of the rate that mini-mansions spread, but we can never de-thorn nature.



Mendieta Marsh Dune • Kathleen Furey

Responding to Ana Mendieta's figurative environmental art-work, Kathleen Furey's Mendieta Marsh Dune examines the relationship between the human female body, the earth and art. The rhetoric surrounding environmental art often employs gender-based notions of artistic creation (a male intellectual creativity versus a female creativity rooted in the ability to give birth to life.) This installation works to explore new ways of thinking about the human body, art, gender and the environment.



Vertically Grown • Deanna Lally with Marc Fasanella

Inspired by the work of French Botanist Patrick Blanc this prototype is an experiment in reincorporating vegetative life into urban indoor areas using vertical gardens. Through this reincorporation, the dichotomy between urban and rural that excludes nature from the city is deconstructed. This design works to bring urban residents into direct contact with horticulture. Through interaction with an indoor herb garden, their perception of the relationship between nature and culture is transformed.



Micro-Environment Visual Inventory • Students of EHM 201 Eco-Aesthetics in Art

A close analysis of the environment can make a common scene unfamiliar to the viewer; it, can also reflexively render the otherness of the natural world familiar again. The studies of micro-environments, as presented here, were a method of having students examine a natural scene until it devolved into the abstract in order to study the color, the texture and other sensory information presented by the environment and, in turn, how these factors shape our perception.



An Herbarium of Algae • Larry Liddle

The abstraction of ecological form in a gallery context, pressed algae are displayed using a traditional method of preserving botanical specimens. Larry Liddle's scientific understanding of algae is enhanced by an acute aesthetic perception. His response to the underwater forms of algae is captured by his pressings and, in this way, Herbarium of Algae provides a path for art that rejects the dichotomy between scientific objectivity and aesthetic sensibility.



Martha Weller • Mortal Maypole Bower

Culled Spruce Tree, Cedar Clippings, Felled Oak Logs, Earth and Found Objects

For this work, Ms. Weller and Dr. Fasanella were inspired by the work of the Bowerbird (Ptilonorhynchidae: 20 species in eight genera), native to Australia and New Guinea, and known as the architect of the forest. The male species of this unique bird spends months, sometimes years, building a complex bower from which he attempts to attract a mate. The construction of these Bowers is unique in that no two males decorate their bower the same way. Each surveys the area in which they live looking for objects they find interesting. The bird then painstakingly brings a collection of objects, one piece at a time, to create an array in front of, or around, his bower to attract and stimulate a mate. Bower birds from different areas create different structures such as huts, alleys and maypoles.

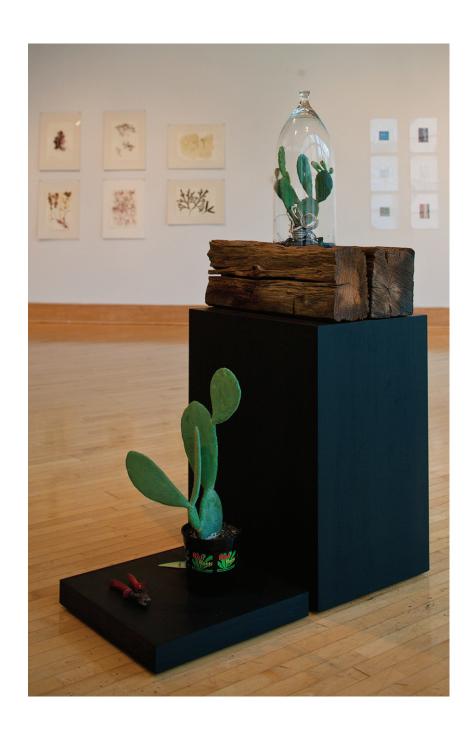
The behavior of the Bowerbird demonstrates that we humans are not the only species with an innate compulsion to modify an environment with our sense of individual visual aesthetic value.

The process of bower construction and decoration provides ecosystem services such as grooming flora. The Mortal Maypole Bower makes use of debris from grooming flora as well. It was constructed from a spruce tree culled from a densely overplanted residential lot where the specimen was shading out trees essential to the survival of the local bird population. Oak logs were taken from a sickly tree riddled with invasive vines and a fortifying cut-back of several cedar trees produced the cedar clippings.

The decorative debris was collected by students from the Fall 2011 Eco-Aesthetics in Art course responding to a challenge to mimic the Bowerbird and to find objects from their environment that they felt would be attractive to a potential mate. The Bower Bird does not differentiate between manmade versus natural items for its bower — it is focused more on its sense of aesthetic value for what may attract a mate. In creating its environment, the bird makes an interesting artistic statement about the surroundings in which it resides.

The original inspiration for this project comes from previous work that Ms. Weller and Dr. Fasanella initiated with NY-based Italian architect Nathalie Pozzi on a project called Meadow Nest.

Photo • Mia Fasanella



Hope Sandrow • Untitled, Endangered Species, The Sky is Falling a Study in Spacetime

Mutinus elegans, a species of fungus in the Phallaceae Family, Elateridae (Click Beetle), Native Indian Prickly Pear (Opuntia) found entangled in deteriorated Pool Hose on the grounds of Gissa Bu, Shinnecock Hills, Bell Jar, Reclaimed Wood Railroad Tie; Cultivar Thornless Prickly Pear (Opuntia) in Hot Plant Pot; Pruning Shears found on the grounds of Gissa Bu.

Hope Sandrow's work explores the relationships between past, present and future. Ms. Sandrow encountered the prickly pear, and the deteriorated pool hose contained inside the bell jar, when a white rooster led her to a property near her home in Shinnecock Hills, NY. Ms. Sandrow discovered not only the prickly pear, the decaying pool hose from which it emanated and, the long neglected pool near where it lay, but also an abandoned historic Arts & Crafts home. The Cohu Estate: Gissa Bu (mystery house) was designed for aviation executive Thorbjorn Bassoe in the 1930s. A moment of happenstance led Ms. Sandrow to create a series of works featured in the exhibits *Shinnecock: godt tegn* at PS1/MOMA and *Recollecting an American's Dream* at the Southampton Historical Museum and Research Center in 2007. These exhibits brought attention to the destruction of habitat that had been reclaimed by nature and galvanized an effort to prevent the creation of a subdivision. Much of the land became preserved as open space, in perpetuity, through a Southampton Town program.

Prickly pear is native to Hope's Long Island home and is endangered because it is not seen as desirable or attractive. Over the past two centuries, prickly pear has been removed from a multitude of sites on Long Island as the development of single family homes continued. Hope's research into prickly pear geneology led to her discovery of the plant that lies at the base of the installation: Thornless Prickly Pear.

The "creation" of Thornless Opuntia by plant breeder Luther Burbank (1849-1926), the author of *How Plants* are *Trained to Work for Man*, was described in 1905 by W.S. Harwood, in his book *New Creations in Plant Life*, "When Burbank turned to the cactus on which he was to spend more than ten years of study, it was in the main, a stubborn, irreconcilable foe to the race; in order to make it a friend of man its whole nature must be changed; it must be re-created."

Thornlessness is, in part, genetically controlled, but it may also be an environmental affection: if Opuntia are under enough stress observations have shown that they will often produce thorns.

The wooden blocks, upon which the bell jar sits, are partially decayed, reclaimed railroad ties. They reference the easterly march of the Long Island Railroad during the nineteenth century when the train cars shuttled summer visitors to Shinnecock Hills and, thus, indirectly influenced the creation of the Arts & Crafts estate Ms. Sandrow encountered.



Kathleen Furey • Mendieta Marsh Dune

Bay Sand, Bay Stones, Beach Grass, Seaweed, Bay Detritus, Water

Ms. Furey's creative inspiration for this work was the earth-body Silueta series of installations created by Cuban-American performance artist, sculptor, painter and video artist Ana Mendieta (1948 – 1985). When Ms. Furey first encountered Mendieta's work, she was struck by the powerful poignancy of the stark, morbid female forms and felt moved to create a series of found object installations of leaves and snow, both on and off campus, in homage to Mendieta and to document them through photography.

Having previously worked as a photographer and filmmaker, Furey's effort toward creating a more permanent installation for this exhibit can perhaps best be explained through Mendieta's words:

"The turning point in my art was... when I realized that my paintings were not real enough for what I want the image to convey and by real I mean I wanted my images to have power, to be magic. It is this sense of magic, knowledge and power, found in primitive art, that influences my... art-making... I have been working out in nature, exploring the relationship between myself, the earth, and art... Through my art, I want to express the immediacy of life and the eternity of nature. I have been carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body (based on my silhouette). I believe this to be a direct result of my having been torn away from my homeland during my adolescence, I am overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast from the womb (nature). My art is the way I re-establish the bonds that tie me to the universe."

The intent of Ms. Furey's installation is to invite the viewer into a pleasant, natural environment, causing them to stop a moment, suspend their everyday thoughts, recognize the human form emerging from the drifted seaweed and question the fragility of existence.

Photo • Katie Osiecki



Deanna Lally • Vertically Grown: A Phyto - Cell Research Project with Dr. Marc Fasanella

Mahogany, Copper Screen, Rockwool, Hydration System, Herbs, Organic Nutrients, Submersible Pump, Fasteners

In this work, Ms. Lally and Dr. Fasanella unveil a patented system, under development, for creating living walls and roof gardens. Inspired by the artfully created living wall systems of French botanist Patrick Blanc (and building on the work of Stony Brook University Environmental Humanities alumnus Kim Tucker) Ms. Lally and Dr. Fasanella are working to create of living walls that utilize only biodegradeable, recycled and inert materials.*

Blanc began experimenting with vertical gardening in the 1970s. While conducting his research in predominantly moist environments, like tropical rain forests, Blanc found "complex layers of plants growing on surfaces typically thought of as inhospitable, including rocks, cliffs, and tree trunks." These vertical areas of vegetation could even be described as 'natural hydroponics,' for much of the water dripping down is saturated with nutrients derived from the erosion of rock or decaying plant matter from higher up." After making this connection, Blanc attempted to recreate this unique growing environment in his own home.

Living walls and vertical gardens also act as bio-filters. A natural way to purify the air, these systems may reduce the need for ventilation and energy-dependent air purification systems. Plants naturally remove carbon dioxide and volatile organic chemicals from the air, filter them through their bare roots and, using beneficial microbes, break them down into benign components. This beneficial use for vertical gardens is growing popular in the commercial sector where large indoor air ventilation systems are required.

When choosing plants for a vertical garden the options are specific to the design. For instance, herbs are a useful plant to have on hand in a vertical kitchen garden. Herbs represent the most drought-tolerant choice for an edible living wall, and many herbs are fragrant in addition to having an appealing texture and color.

To many people, the prominent benefit of a vertical garden is its aesthetic appeal. Plants are living and ever changing sculptures.

Photo • Katie Osiecki

* Supported by an Undergraduate Research Award Grant administered by the Sustainability Studies Program.







highway. I stopped to browse the produce and by a field planted with corn. Sunlight shone on pollen protruding from the top of the plants, illı brown, curling leaves, and casting shadows on tl through their exposed, gnarly root systems, whi me to take a closer look. I approached the field and the sound of crispy leaves blowing and slidi another contrasted with the sounds of passing bright blue without a cloud, was complimented and purple hues of the corn plants. The scene v perfect; yet something was amiss. Upon investig not a single weed, indicating that this was a biocrop. Genetically modified to resist herbicides, v clearly been applied and destroyed the weeds t has been growing there. The ground was compl between plants, allowing their nutrient extractir portive upper roots to be observed. The twistir dulating shapes provided a thought provoking \boldsymbol{c} study a small component of an expansive ecolc

-Lauren Napoli

The inner layers of a tree stump. A violent rains tree snapped at its base, a unique image of whit Located along an entrance path to a park surro by other white ash, grassy fields and concrete. T space is quite. This stump has competed for sun surrounding ash did not succumb to the storm. ent layers as you go further into the tree. The c is familiar looking and healthy. Inward from the c bark there is the white phloem, then yellow-wh bium cell, rich-brown sapwood, and the lighter-theartwood innermost. Each layer uniquely textueach layer shows accumulated years of pulling u and nutrients from the soil. Similar to opening u computer, seeing the inside of a car, things peoplook, if you stop to see what's there, fascinating.

- John Bennett

extends from the steps of a door from the dini grass is kept short but the undergrowth creeps edge of the wood. Buffers of think grasses and ever growing. A path leads into the elder wood dendron and strong, youthful trees sprout up b bling rock walls. Sixty years ago the walls surrou pastureland. Now they are protected by a bed leaves, felled branched, fungi and moss. Humidit neath the dense canopy, tempts the mosses, lich to extend their edges up into the nooks of $\ensuremath{\mathsf{Tre}}$ root meet the trunk. The roots, in their search from bowl shaped areas where collection of de als become inevitable. Not far into the woods, to the edge of the yard to catch afternoon sunl ering hole teemed with beauty. A particular leaf right light, enchanting in its setting against a nex and browns. A leaf displayed on a moss bed. Dr the blur of greens and browns revealed themse evergreens, as if looking over a cover ridge.

Adam Meier







Fall 2010 EHM 201 Eco-Aesthetics in Art • Micro-Environment Visual Inventory

Photomontage. Text, Colored Pencil on Graph paper

In the works shown to the left, students were asked to find a natural environment that caught their attention, focus on a specific area that sustained their interest in some way and hone in on this micro-environment which contains a multitude of visual elements including color, texture and depth. Once a micro-environment was selected, a series of photographic studies from various angles and were generated and assembled into a carefully composed montage to allow a three dimensional understanding of the environment being investigated. A brief essay was drafted describing the location, time, and atmosphere of the micro-environment in a way that might transcend the photographic depiction. The essay was then edited to include only those words essential to communicate the aura of the micro-environment. Each student was then trained in a method of subdividing the photo-montage into pixels to be analyzed individually and to, deconstruct the color, texture and depth of field depicted in the photographs.

Most of the students had little or no advanced formal art training; hence they were introduced to color theory and formal composition by conducting a semi-scientific investigation into what they found to be a compelling natural entity. The goal is to rethink the standard paradigm of training undergraduates in abstract design theory *before* they engage in the practice of depicting a scene from life.

Images • Lauren Napoli / John Bennett / Adam Meier



Larry Liddle • An Herbarium of Algae

Larry Liddle is Professor Emeritus of Marine Science, Southampton College of Long Island University and Visiting Professor at the Institute of Hydrology, Jinan University in Guangzhou, China. He has been engaged in research with macro-algae, or seaweeds, for all of his academic career and has worked in collaboration with colleagues in Germany, France, Thailand, and China.

Professor Liddle is also known for his beautifully delicate seaweed "art," which are prepared by the traditional method of pressing and blotting used in preserving botanical specimens. Such specimens can last for hundreds of years. Professor Liddle's in-depth knowledge of the form and texture of seaweed in underwater conditions, coupled with his ability to painstakingly reconstruct these intricate forms while preparing algae for his collection, make these specimens visually compelling. Since no chemicals are used in the creation of Professor Liddle's work, all of the specimens in his herbarium will serve as a resource, in perpetuity, for DNA sampling.

According to Liddle "There is so much diversity in form, part of my artistic goal is to show the form to its best advantage. I was drawn to study seaweed because algae have complicated life histories and unique strategies for survival."

Liddle's most recent project was a complete inventory of the seaweed of Lake Montauk, for many years the largest lake on Long Island. During the 1920's an inlet was opened into the lake to create a harbor that would allow for the kind of development found in Miami Beach today. Soon after the inlet was created in 1927, salt water and large algae invaded the lake. The Great Depression put an end to speculative plans to expand what was, by then, a recreational marina. Prof. Liddle's work on Lake Montauk consisted of a yearlong survey collecting seaweed at low tide each month, including the coldest day of the year. All of the pressed algae specimens from the Lake Montauk project have been made into high resolution scans and are available to the public via electronic media from the East Hampton Town Natural Resources Department.

Scans • Mark Abramson, Senior Environmental Analyst, East Hampton Town Department of Natural Resources

Polysiphonia • Cutleria • Ahnfeltia & Callithamnion Gratelouplia with Polysiphonia Eipiphyte • Saccarhina • Gloiosiphonia Fucus • Scytosiphon • Sargassum

The Advent of Ecological Art

Art is inherently a product of the epoch in which it is made, not only because of its chronology, but also because an observer can decipher the work's context and much of the meaning by dissecting the components that comprise a work of art. Specific materials and techniques used by artists only appear at particular times in history so the chemical composition of paint, location of the quarry from which a stone was extracted, and the types of marks left behind during the fabrication of the work, etc. reveal the maker and her or his milieu. The most relevant art in any time is work created with the intent of interpretation, documentary, commentary, critique, expansion or advancement of the culture of the living artist. It is only logical that if the cultural conversation turns to the topic of ecology, the eye of the artist will also.

A decade into the 21st century we can no longer ignore the notion of ecological art. The predecessors to Ecological Art — Conceptual Art based Environmental Art (Land Art, Earth Art and Earthwork) find solace in the purity and simplicity of an idea, the sense of order and control in creating a site-specific installation, a setting in which most if not all, aspects of the observer's experience can be controlled. What the observer sees, hears, smells, tastes, and touches can be guided by the conceptual artist. Works produced by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Walter DeMaria, Agnes Denes, Richard Long and Robert Smithson among others often express a simple idea in a vast landscape that alters the observer's understanding of place through manipulation of form, scale, perception, etc. It is within this intellectual framework that the environmental movement and the notion of ecology began to seep into the confines of the Artworld during the latter half of the twentieth century. A pioneering Earthwork by Alan Sonfist may have initiated the notion of Ecological Art. In the late sixties Sonfist took a small parcel of previously paved over land in lower Manhattan and sought to restore it to a condition similar to that in which the area would have been found in prior to the arrival of European colonists. He researched plants indigenous to the Manhattan Island and created a site-specific installation of minerals, stones, rocks, plants, shrubs and trees meant to evolve in perpetuity in much the way they would have in the absence of human intervention.

Ecological Art then is a collection of natural and I or manmade materials that embrace the notion of growth and decay. Unlike most art there is no attempt to suspend, encapsulate or alter the effects of time. The evolutionary nature of the relationship between time and material is embraced. A wall of plants by Patrick Blanc, an enclosure and its results by Andy Goldsworthy, a stone or a tree with a complete ecosystem emanating from it by Jackie Brookner or Mark Dion, an abandoned industrial site partially deconstructed and overtaken by native and invasive plants by Herman Prigann, a coastal zone constructed of reclaimed materials, shore and aquatic plants by Lillian Ball. In each work we are confronted by an ecology-based construct.

Serious attempts at art turn the eye of the viewer to things one might overlook if the artist had not directed our gaze and invited us to reflect upon the world that we inhabit. Art is a thoughtful, meaningful, well-crafted reflection of, and statement upon the society in which the artist lives. Art not only informs us, but also poses questions that increase the scope of our thinking. In the developing genre of Ecological Art the notion of culture and society extends beyond that which is traditionally recognized. Ecological Art embraces, investigates, and employs the dynamic, interconnected functions of the ecosphere that sustains us.

Marc Fasanella • Curator

Landscape and Memory Simon Schama Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1995

Ecological Aesthetics: Art in Environmental Design: Theory and Practice
Heike Strewlow (Editor), Herman Prigann (Editor), Vera David (Editor)
Birkhauser – Publishers for Architecture, Switzerland, 2004

"The Shared Landscape: what does aesthetics have to do with ecology?" Paul H Gobster, Joan I. Nassauer, Terry C. Daniel, Gary Fry Landscape Ecology 22:959-972, 2007

Environmental Art | Social Dynamics

Sustainability is the ability to endure, while remaining diverse and productive over time, a notion derived from ecology. Finding ways of living within environmental limits to provide an equitable, healthy quality of life for humanity requires a deep system change in our ways of thinking and interacting with our environment and each other. Discovering and developing this new approach to our environment requires a fresh understanding of the relationships between people and the environment that sustains them. One approach to reshaping these relationships is praxis. According to Paulo Friere, "Praxis is the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it." This approach (action and reflection) empowers individuals to engage with the impact of how they live and act on that understanding to affect change.

Praxis can be analyzed and understood on the level of exchange; an analysis that can be applied across disciplines. Praxis can be posited as balanced (the exchange is completed in the short term) and generalized (the exchange is completed in the long term) between people and their environment. A structure of positive reciprocity is the foundation of egalitarian relationships. Our current social organization is rooted in negative reciprocity (the exchange is never completed, or the exchange is unequal) a hierarchical relationship. Negative reciprocity requires that for one to win, another must lose, this creates a worldview of justified oppression. Praxis presents a new way of thinking and interacting with our environment at the level of exchange. It differs fundamentally from the way our current interactions with each other and the environment, are structured.

I am convinced that environmental artists and art critics are attempting to move beyond the hierarchical relationship we have had with our environment for much of history. Creating egalitarian relationships between people and their environment is a model for creating egalitarian relationships between people and people. Victor Margolin, editor of Beyond Green: Toward a Sustainable Art, theorized that art in a culture of sustainability would have a trefoil form: object, action and participation. In this form, discourse and object are leveled as the artwork acts upon society and brings viewers into the work as participants; ending the hierarchical structure between art, architecture, design and planning. Though a good place to start, to understand the direction art and culture might be heading, Margolin's theory remains incomplete. He unconsciously reinforces negative reciprocity between people and their environment because action implies action of a subject unto an object, but not vice versa. This structure falls within our current habits of social organization instead of challenging a restructuring of these relationships. In its place I propose a similar trefoil arrangement of object, praxis and participation. Praxis will engage the viewer as participant, leading them to reflect and to act upon their own environment after their experience with the artwork. An interweaving of praxis into the artist's work is a crucial tool for creating, and a reflection of sustainability.

With this in mind, the artists' work presented in this exhibit is geared toward investigating and exposing connections between humans, biology, nature, and culture. They can be understood as contributing to our understanding of what a culture of sustainability might look like. By using praxis as a method of investigation as several of these works do, environmental art can reorganize the relationships between people and their environment. These experiments in environmental art use praxis to create the systemic change we need for a culture of sustainability to emerge.

Megan Harned • Assistant Curator

Pedagogy of the Oppressed
Paulo Friere,
Contunuum Publishing, 2000

Beyond Green: Toward a Sustainable Art
"Reflections on Art and Sustainability", 20-29
Victor Margolin
University of Chicago Press, 2005.



Thank you everyone who helped create Environmental Art

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Thornless Prickley Pear

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Comments

Really beautiful. Thank you so much for bringing nature back. Unique and peaceful. I love it.

What a beautiful serene transformation of this space. Thank you.

Brought many emotions out of me.

Interesting use of both living and nonliving components to say something very significant about today's environment.

The replication is astounding.

Wonderful, thought provoking.

So well done; inspires me to pay more attention to the big and little things I pass everyday outside.













