

Exploring nature and art

Waterloo Region Record

WATERLOO — It appears increasingly obvious that nature is under attack and in a state of high anxiety, if not red alert.

Whether because of environmental degradation caused by the pressures of urbanization, industrialization and population, there is mounting evidence the planet is not only suffering, but rebelling.

The evolutionary gloves are off.

Locally, we have the extremes of record rainfall followed by drought.

Globally, we have floods and wildfires, tornadoes and earthquakes, volcano eruptions and tsunamis.

The edifices of civilization are reduced to rubble, food production is compromised and people die in shocking and despairing numbers.

Visual artists have always drawn on nature and landscape for material, content and form, not to mention inspiration.

Similarly, visual artists have always responded to crises — whether social, political, historical, geographical, cultural, psychological or spiritual — to bear witness and document, caution and instruct, mourn and preach and inspire.

On view at the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery through Oct. 2, the aptly titled *Reflective Natures and Transparent Landscapes* showcases the work of nine eco-artists from across North America who evocatively reinterpret traditional views of nature and landscape.

Waterloo artist Catherine Paleczny is one of four Ontario artists represented, along with George Whitney, of London, and Alfred Engerer and Benjamin Kikkert, both of Toronto.

The other artists are Sadashi Inuzuka, of British Columbia, Claire Brunet and Andre Fournelle, both of Quebec, and Joan Brigham and Jennifer Bueno, both from the U.S.

Paleczny's sculptural installations consist of objects that seem organic rather than manufactured. Similarly, the objects inhabit space organically, whether placed on the floor or mounted on the wall.

Wei Shing

consists of shards of white porcelain that swim randomly against a grey background on the wall. Although the shards are meant as shark fins and are reminiscent of schools of fish, they also resemble birds in flight. Some of the fins contain black markings that depict images of a Chinese fishing village.

Char

is made from irregularly shaped stoneware pieces. Although they are intended as dorsal fins of sharks, they form a path on the floor, suggesting ancient stone markers showing the way to we know not where.

Whitney's

Untitled

cast glass pieces (frosted, clear, yellow, pink) resemble cut blocks of ice, suggesting a dynamic tension between hot and cold, liquid and solid.

Engerer's

Archaeology

is made of blown and cast glass pieces that bring to mind shells and crustaceans.

Kikkert's mixed-media sculptural pieces —

Slivered and Tied, Float Line, Trap of the Past



Benjamin Kikkert, *Float Line*.



Cast Crystal.



Hot sculpted Glass, etched, oil paint, steel, wood

Catherine Paleczny *Char* 2010-2011 Stoneware.

Andre Fournelle, *Salt, Fire and Light Between the Line of Age*, 2011. Spirals and circles are forms prevalent in nature.

Sadashi Inuzuka, *Dubium* 2011 Slip, wood, steel, video projection.

Jennifer Bueno, *Mammatus (What We See)* 2011 Silver blown glass wire, ceramic, paint.

— draw their inspiration from nautical themes as barnacle-like molten glass is attached to found glass objects resembling buoys.

Inuzuka's

Dubium

encapsulates the threatened planet by representing a circular remnant of hot, parched, dry earth.

Brunet's illuminated, wall relief

Bark Landscape

is thickly textured, resembling tree bark. The work embodies and enacts the process of nature imprinting itself on art.

Brigham's mixed-media pieces

Glass Grass

and

Sinewaves

are metaphoric, kinetic sculptures that evoke the harnessing of nature to create energy, whether hydro-electric and nuclear.

Buenos' mixed-media

Great Barrier Reef

features oblong, sculpted balls mounted on shelves. The colours evoke the South Seas under sunny skies with their intense blue, aqua and turquoise.

Fournelle's

Salt, Fire & Light

acts as the exhibition's centrepiece.

A site specific work that inhabits one of the gallery's circular exhibition spaces, it pays homage to Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty, a monumental earthwork he completed at Great Salt Lake, in Utah.

Salt, Fire & Light

It consists of a circular bed of coarse salt. Concentric circles of white and green neon light come on and off in coordination with a projected image of a fire ring that appears and disappears.

The circle is a richly evocative symbol with associations to nature and the psyche, to spirituality and mythology.

Gallery curator Christian Bernard Singer is batting two for two with respect to consecutive exhibitions of high quality.

Following on the heels of

Swounds

, featuring work by Julie Oakes,

Reflective Natures and Transparent Landscapes

is an evocative, beautiful, engaging and thought-provoking exhibition.

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Transparent Landscapes

Reflective Natures and Transparent Landscapes

Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery

On view through Oct. 2

Information and gallery hours available online at www.theclayandglass.ca