
Nature, pigeons and degradation

Ashley Csanady; Staff Reporter; acsanady@imprint.uwaterloo.ca

Walking into the KW Art Gallery's latest show "Woodlot" is like entering into a twisted reality where trees only exist as a fragment of memory in abstract representation of their former glory.

Small, geometric hills and a silver river reminiscent of Candyland with large trees around the room form the basis of a forest composed of image and sculpture alike. Guest curator Sally McKay chose from over 80 artists and narrowed it down to 14. Her selections, and particularly her arrangement, make the exhibit a unit as opposed to a melee of artists fighting for dominance. Featuring artists who, in the least, have lived and worked in the region, the focus of the show is on the collision of nature and human expansion that is Southern Ontario.

Each wall, every corner holds something interesting. A divider wall, for instance, features a minimalist piece by local artist Andrew Wright. The statement "the length of the path traveled by light in a vacuum in a time interval of 1/299 798 452 of a second" repeated and wrapped around the wall only makes sense once you glance to the title, *Metre*.

Niall Donaghy's large circular Spirograph-inspired pieces are transfixing. They dominate one wall, with the various "trees" in front, and supplement the forest-like atmosphere. Behind the warped and twisted forest, they look like an abstract homage to innumerable stumps left behind by deforestation.

The aforementioned Candyland-inspired mountain range, *How we all could enjoy a tale of curious exploration* by Lauren Hall, seems childlike and innocent at first. The bubblegum-pink and blue mountain ranges, the shiny river and clouds suspended from the wall seem whimsical but then its Disney-like sterility becomes eerie, forcing you to contemplate a world with only fiberglass trees along Lollipop Way.

Carrier pigeons may seem a part of the ancient past, but Annie Dunning's *Air Time* uses them to produce some fascinating art. She takes a small camera and attaches it to the pigeon, literally taking photos from a bird's eye view. The warped suburban sprawl of houses, cars and cement seems tainted next to the majestically skewed shots of the Grand River. The carrier pigeons, remnants from a not-so-distant past juxtaposed against the digital camera mimics the discord of the photographs.

The presence of nature is undeniably strong in the show, but Andrika Dubeck's marvellous embroidered photographs and Ruth Abernethy's gender-bending tools bring something a little more human to the mix. Dubeck's photographs are entrancing. Shiny threads are so tightly wound against the photo that it becomes indistinguishable where the photo lets off and the thread begins. A delicate, creamy white lace hangs off the wall forming a hammer in Abernethy's *Nuptial* #1.

Like almost everything these days, Woodlot has an eco-friendly agenda. This time, however, it's served up subtly and poignantly, without Leo, Cameron and the man who should have been president.

The show is running at the KW Art Gallery, located in the Centre in the Square, until September 9, 2007. For hours, or to view an online version of the catalogue if you can't make it to the show in person, visit www.kwag.on.ca. Try and see it in person though, because winding through McKay's twisted suburban forest is sublime.

Photos by Andrew Abela.