

# Nature Calling

## Artists Archives toils in the theme of green

By Joseph Clark

It's safe to say that no major movement toward environmental sustainability will make the agenda of this congressional session, but our culture has never been so aware of humanity's impact on nature — or as intent on softening that blow.

The Artists Archives of the Western Reserve speaks to this consciousness with its new juried exhibition *Seeing Green: Recycled*, the group's second-annual forum for environmental ideas in the visual arts. Perhaps all that is surprising is that no one thought to do it before.

"Cleveland had never had such a show. [There's] very little evidence of shows like this anywhere," says Kenneth Goerg, the Archives' executive director and the mastermind behind *Recycled*.

Though it is only the Archives' second

### *Seeing Green: Recycled*

Presented by the Artists Archives of the Western Reserve through October 28 at 1834 East 123rd St. 216-721-9020 [artistsarchives.org](http://artistsarchives.org)

show on the issue, Goerg already has radically and cleverly reworked the exhibition's character. This time, the theme of sustainability is at once more inclusive and more strictly enforced. Whereas previously pieces needed to speak only to natural concerns, this year artists were free to explore any topic of their choosing, but were required to express it using "[non-toxic], reclaimed, recycled, or otherwise ecologically sound materials and techniques."

Though given free rein within the bounds of eco-friendly materials, many artists chose to take on environmental issues directly.

Margaret Arthur, an archived fellow at the Reserve, submits "Earth Legacy," one of the show's more forbidding pieces. In the painting, a silhouetted bird perches on a skeletal sapling against a sickly yellow-green sky. The bare tree sprouts from a pile of mud littered with round, square, and shapeless objects — a "man-made mass of debris and clutter." A soiled white hand reaches upward from the mess, grasping in desperation.

Mary Stone's "Oil Spill" (pictured) is a meditation on last year's calamity in the Gulf. She uses a canvas of newspaper and magazine pages, and a color palette in which greens, yellows, and browns dominate. A golden cube butts out of the painting's center left, asserting itself over the green- and lemon-yellow-streaked background. Its perfect Euclidian shape brings to mind the unnatural precision of human craft, and its color evokes gold itself ... and by extension, money in general. Out of its lower-right corner flows a three-pronged black blot, whose meaning the title makes clear enough.

Those pieces with less-global leanings turn inward into intense intimacy.



necessitating surgery. The piece "Center of the EYE" presents a rough orb of woven grapevine, with a single branch piercing its center. The question of whether the branch represents a surgical implement or the first ray of light to enter a healed organ is impossible to answer from the sculpture itself, making it at once unsettling and hopeful.

Mixed-media artist Tom Hubbard submitted three pieces from his Broei•kas (Greenhouse) project, undertaken three years ago when he was an uneasy emigrant in the Netherlands. Wandering the Dutch countryside, he was drawn to memories of a childhood farm and its distended greenhouses, which he learned were slated for demolition. The greenhouses became his link to this new country, so he incorporated pieces of them into his tributes. Hubbard took black-and-white photographs of the ghostly buildings, and mounted them on boards from the buildings' roofs or decorated their

frames with window panes or discarded tools and twine. The tangible items from the depicted sites give grounding to the photographed images in a time when digital manipulation has abstracted images' appearances from their reality, and give solidity to the hominess Hubbard imbues them with.

Arguably, the decision to include works without environmental themes and that "just happen" to meet the sustainability standards is the most progressive recruiting choice. Art crafted with an overt ecological theme will do good by the planet in proportion to its ability to inspire guilt, pantheistic adoration, or some combination thereof. But real transformation will not take place until clean materials and processes become standard. Hubbard and Kujawski's works demonstrate that sustainable art need not have sustainability as its central expressed concept.

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True to the participants' cause, the exhibition guide contains a page of advice for artists on how to detoxify and reduce the footprint of their work, offering such suggestions as using vegetable oil in cleanup and collecting leftover strips of canvas.

Mario Kujawski weaves nest-like configurations of grape vines, branches, paper, wasps' nests, and, most poignantly, paper. On the paper (rolled and largely hidden from sight) are prayers for the healing. Kujawski has struggled with cancer and eye problems

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