

ART PAPERS

MAGAZINE

SEATTLE

The Center on Contemporary Art's summer project, "Land/Use/Action" (June 12–July 31), consisted of four groups of local and national artists interpreting human interaction with the landscape of Washington State.

For **Here and There**, 10 Seattle artists—all women—created work that explores the dynamics of non-commercial art encountered in the public realm rather than in traditionally recognized venues. Seeking to address such community oriented issues as homelessness and hunger, disability, gender identity, urban sprawl and the natural environment within city limits, each artist initiated a two-part project: an off-site installation in a public setting with conceptual origins in daily activities or social interactions, and an installation in the CoCA galleries.

Each artist focused on a particular neighborhood, working for several weeks alongside community members to create works of art, either permanent or temporary, that integrate art, community and some form of social commentary. Some of the projects represent grassroots style activism and community outreach: Colleen Hayward gathered ivy plants and cuttings cleared by citizens from the trails in the small greenbelt known as the Madrona Woods, creating two organic sculptures in the shape of a "lemniscate" (or infinity symbol) representing renewal, growth patterns and paths, and the impact we, as stewards, have on plant and animal life in our neighborhoods; Ingrid Lahti worked with art students at Cleveland High School to create a glass mosaic for a hallway skylight in the school, using the culturally diverse 9th through 12th graders' ideas and artwork as the inspiration for a floor mosaic at CoCA; Rosemary Barile's project brought her to an assisted living facility, Ida Culver House, where she made beautiful and suggestive prints of the mundane objects of daily activities, food primarily, on silk.

The most straightforward documentary-style piece was Heather Dew Oaxen's powerful project, *Video Portraits*, a series of audio/visual portraits which focus on the lives of 10 juvenile offenders during their incarceration at a maximum-security juvenile correction facility and during the four years following their release.

With two media installations, one public (broadcast to the street) and one more private (in the CoCA galleries), Oaxen explores the differences between intimate confrontation with these young people's troubled lives through their photographs, letters and voices and confrontation with them on the street, on video, "in your face and larger than life."

More playful were the projects of Harriet Sanderson and Deborah Lawrence. The visual impact of their works is dynamic and inviting. Sanderson's project, *RE-VAMPed*, seeks to bridge the cultural separation that exists between disabled people and the able-bodied. By transforming discarded thrift-store wheelchairs into fully-functional works of art—beautiful, elegant and clever wheelchairs, Sanderson undermines the often negative stigma associated with those typically generic and undecorated clinical devices. For "Here and There," Contemporary Medical Equipment of Seattle will display Sanderson's "easy chair" model wheelchair among the traditional wheelchairs in the showroom, as luring the art crowd into a store bridges another gap in community awareness. A "chaise lounge" style wheelchair was available for test riding in the CoCA gallery.

Lawrence continued the adventures of Dee-Dee Lorenzo, a fictitious character who appears, in Lawrence's delicate and beautiful collage and mixed-media sculptural pieces, to figure prominently in myriad political causes and events in the Puget Sound area. A champion of free speech, religious tolerance, rights for oppressed people and the environment, Dee-Dee's fanciful biographical/archival pieces were also on display for "Here and There" at New Freeway Hall in Columbia City (home of Radical Woman in Seattle).

Only the most dedicated follower of the art world managed to visit all of the sites scattered around the city for "Here and There." Indeed, that was the only drawback to this concept, but in some ways, that is the point, as many of the remote sites were to be found in neighborhoods not regularly frequented by the well-to-do gallery hopper. Viewers were forced to penetrate the community which exists in Seattle beyond their everyday lives, forced to park and get out of their cars where normally they would just keep driving through, making the concepts of "here" and "there" resonate more deeply with those of "we" and "other."

Another part of CoCA's "Land/Use/Action" project was **Marilyn Arsem's** performance titled *recent: remote*, a piece commissioned by CoCA that took place (July 24–25) at a defunct Nike missile base in the wilderness outside of Seattle. The two-hour performance was designed to examine the ways in which history is constructed by personal perception and experience. Playing with the audience's perceptions of fabricated military artifacts and staged traces of the cold war, Arsem led her audience on a treasure hunt in an otherwise empty field which was presented as an archaeological dig. Audience members were given instructions to log all objects observed on the site in an investigation into possible human habitation of this abandoned government property.

Arsem has long been fascinated with the properties unique to live performance, and she creates situation performances in which the possibility of direct interaction between performer and audience is explored, often engaging the audience's senses of taste, touch and smell. Arsem builds on the notion that the experience is temporal and is only retained in memory. In *recent: remote*, she also explores the ideas of collective memory of the cold war and of each audience member's individual experience as being utterly unique. (The highly interactive performance was followed up a week later by a "debriefing" session at which participants discussed their reactions to the experience and compared notes. Needless to say, no two audience members' experiences were alike.)

Arsem's performance required mental and physical undertaking by the observer, as one became part of the spectacle by acting out the scenes of what slowly manifested itself as a loosely plotted drama. Indeed, the performers interacted with visitors in an ad-lib fashion, as audience members found themselves participating in a sort of role-playing game—such as being interrogated by a camouflaged uniform-clad man with a German Shepherd. The effect of all of this, this process of searching, slightly bewildered, for "artifacts" and interacting with the players in the performance, lead one to construct one's own story to explain the situation at hand beyond the loosely presented performance description. Inevitably, observers supplied military and cold war-based explanations for otherwise benign objects because the seed had been planted; we saw in everyday objects the traces of military violence that we associate with the cold war. The question remained: were we manipulated by the performance itself, or rather by the cold war and our long-term indoctrination as participants in world history of the last several decades?