

Sandi Howell

www.sandihowell.com/project-intersection.html

Intersections – Co-creation, Co-habitation



June 2016

About the Earth Monastery Project Intersections – Co-creation, Co-habitation

I was accepted as one of six artists for 2016, Earth as Monastery project (Abbey of the Arts <http://abbeyofthearts.com/>). I chose the topic of Intersections as it was the theme of Crescent Fort Rouge United Church's Arts festival 2016 and Art Show where I first showed the collection.

Over and above participating in the festival, I am transfixed by how nature overcomes/takes over human-created things. I have photographed such instances for years. But as an artist I also love engagement processes to co-create art. Although the project ended on 30 June 2016, I consider it to be organic in that it will be publically available and as additional stories and pictures come in they will be added to the collection.

The stories are organized by four themes which emerged:

1. Imposition/Who Dominates?
2. Co-habitation
3. Inspiration
4. Renewal

The collection is available to travel to organizations and groups for discussion opportunities. In addition, it is available for download in various formats @ www.sandihowell.com/project-intersection.html

Contact me directly @ artistshowell@shaw.ca for questions and to add to the collection.

Here are a couple of sections from the original proposal to give you some more info about the project.

"Earth Monastery Project (2015-2016)

Sandi Howell

Intersections – Co-creation, Co-habitation

"Our task must be to free ourselves by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty."

Albert Einstein

Description

I am interested in making art which uses the art as a launching point for a dialogue on a topic and which then leads to the creation of additional art – a rhythmic co-creation cycle resulting from mindful momentum building. I will do this by taking a series of art photographs which will be used to solicit stories from viewers. I will record people's reflections as short stories. In turn, the stories may engender additional photographs, illustrations or paintings, all of which accumulates into a travelling collection.

The topic is about the 'intersection' of nature and humanity. The artwork itself is the engagement point for community and is the device by which we can encourage awareness, deeper understanding, compassion, and moments of awe and reverence for nature. Nature can be our teacher as it tries to be all the time. The art encourages the viewer to 'listen'.

Narrative

The goal of this project is to raise awareness in a viewer/reader of the *intersection* of humans and nature and about a potential of collaboration versus dominance. I want to create a moment wherein people take the time to come to this place of lament and subsequently to new ways of seeing. It is a way to see that nature is all around us even in the heart of a city. It is a way to have people observe more closely as they go throughout their day how the intersection exists in our shared home. It should open the thought of a place of balance and harmony. This is a place for the care of the soul.....



Most surprising was that there was very little lament offered. There were several who objectively noted environmental impacts but often with a endnote of hope or triumph. For the most part there was joyful, deliberate and frequent engagement. What a wonder it all is! It fills me with awe.

Sandi Howell

Imposition/ Who Dominates?

Sandi...

I have taken photographs about Intersection for a number of years. But what really launched this specific undertaking was a moment of awe that I experienced in May 2015 on Kramer Lake in Ontario. It is a small pristine lake with few human inhabitants. We were out canoeing at sunset and there were many beavers warning us off their dams. Not too far across the lake I could see something really bright, and like a shiny metallic object on one of the dams. On closer inspection it appeared to be tin of some sort. But how did it get there? On returning to our host's cabin I asked them about it. Well apparently this beaver is well known for its thieving ways! It loves metal objects and last year stole a metal grate that Natural Resources had inserted somewhere and dragged it up onto its damn. This tin can is its latest decorative addition. I cannot tell you what a moment of awe this is for me!



Carol...

So am I right in hearing that you want some examples of how nature takes over/intersects with human-created things? One I can think of right off the bat is how the fish flies cover everything every summer at Sandy Hook, where our cottage practically disappears in prolific years. That leads me to think of more insect infestations that cover up our human-made sidewalks and roads in the spring in Winnipeg: the cancer worms! Gross. Lichen, moss and rust also come to mind...



Sandi....

I am astonished repeatedly about the many ways that nature seeks to thrive and how it takes over the most seemingly impenetrable human-made objects and surfaces. It leaves me always asking, "Who dominates who?" I really think that the last laugh is on us.





Sandi....

This Robin is quite special to me and to this day fills me with wonder. She chose to nest on top of an electrical outlet on my deck, three short feet away from a door through which the dog and also myself come and go many many times a day. Why there I wondered! It was clear that she perceived us as a threat and would dive bomb us on occasion. There were days when we were clearly in a battleground. But most astonishingly, she chose to come back for a second year. I simply could not believe it! ...and she is back again this year but not for nest building. She just wants to sit on the deck and interact with us. We can see that it is her as she is a very skinny Robin.



Ted...

Earth Day

Perhaps,
dripping with irony,
Maybe,
mocking liberal platitudes,
Possibly,
satirizing incongruity,
Conceivably,
offering heartfelt truth
beleaguered,
oft defeated,
sad
Charlie Brown declared
"I love humanity.
It is people I can't stand."

With similar logic
(but with a twist)
the besieged,
careworn,
groaning
planet
cautions us against
loving of creation
as a whole
without having specific places
that we cherish.

The general
as abstraction
as objectified concept,
as out there idea and
hands-free head trip.

The particular
messier, realer, more in your face
demanding attention,
full of foibles,
hands dirty
and

soul claiming.

So to the river
I call mine
In the backyard
Winter frozen
(giving any mortal the ability to walk on water) spring spilling its banks
flowing fast flowing backwards flowing both ways summer languid and low
autumn draped in finery

Most mornings
I catch myself saying out loud
Hi river
As if a friend
And she is.





Jo...

Aftermath of a Forest Fire

Our home was spared, thank God!. Belongings safe,
The clearing round our home still green; the trees untouched.
But up the lake – what ruinous devastation!.
Charcoal trunks gleamed darkly, stark limbs denuded,
Lush greenery, once home of countless creatures devoid of life,
Amongst the blackened bones of once-proud spruce, the silence was
pervasive -
No bird called; no insect hummed; no deer came down to lap;
Sharp acrid air still choked and burned the throat, though sun shone bright.

Amidst this scene of ravaged desolation a small green shoot fought bravely
for its life-
Purple fireweed, sign of resurrection, dauntless in this fire-ravaged land.

This blossom spoke to me of God's true word:
That from despair comes hope; from mourning joy.

My pain eased somewhat, I went home lighter-hearted.



E&J....

When we saw this statement: "Over and above that, I am transfixed by how nature overcomes/takes over human-created things." (artist's statement), we thought of this guy (Jason deCaires Taylor, whose mailing list I am on and whose work I am following:

<http://www.underwatersculpture.com>



Nature taking over human things with a strong environmental purpose behind the work is pretty much the focus of this guy's life.

I love the work itself and that's what initially attracted me—but his environmental sensibilities are what keeps me interested. The reef protection thing is amazing but when I heard about the oil drilling thing off of the Canary Islands in a Unesco-protected area I actually emailed him and mentioned that this would be a good place for one of his projects as his media attention could maybe focus on this sneaky manoeuvre by a giant Spanish oil company. He emailed me back and told me that it was already in the works.

The company has since stopped their work there citing "not enough oil and gas" there to bother—but I prefer to think that his presence and the resulting interest by world media had a lot to do with their pullout.

Repsol scraps controversial oil exploration off Canary Islands ...
<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jan/19/repsol-scraps-controversial-oil-exploration-off-canary-islands>

BA&K.....

.....a lovely and well-crafted series of layered combs that acted as a wasp nursery for the next generation! We'd uncovered their summer brooding house! No room for bluebirds in this condominium.

These amazing wasp creatures, collect wood fibres in the wild....and mix them with their own saliva to make a durable, weather-proof, windproof, rain-proof house each year. They only last one season. This colony used the bluebird nesting box to reinforce what became their sanctuary.

The paper material was stuck to the exterior of the nesting box...so Kathy had to remove some to get the back door open.

Once the wasps had spun their home....they move inside to begin their age-old careful scaffolding process to create "combs" for colony-creation, egg-laying, larval feeding, larval cooling (they move their wings to create breezes over the larvae when the days of summer are hot), nurturing, and food storage.

Amazing and industrious..... nature at its best!

Yours in nature appreciation and nesting-box stewardship,



Inspiration

Louise.....

I have read your email numerous times, found myself in the website of abby of the arts with a “fluttering” within. I’m really intrigued by your project and am wondering where or if I might have something to offer you.

My place of peace happens on my walks early mornings in the Charleswood forest with Abby (11 year old chocolate lab). I have always been awed with each season – within each season - at each wandering whether taking trails or bushwhacking. Last weekend, the awe came with the red berries still attached to the otherwise bare branches, the flock of robins as they gather for southern flight and the multitude of moss still green and spread over the forest floor. My soul takes flight. How many ways do we see “hanger’s on” in negative light rather than the beauty of “it just is? Or “they just are”. I’m intrigued of late with how we see so much in the light of judgement rather than that it “just is”.



Bev...

Thank you so much for including me in your outreach. I have been walking my dog along the Seine River almost daily and it is one of the most spiritual pathways that I have ever been on. Often the answers that I seek come to me during these walks and I absolutely contribute it to this blessed pathway. The path is comfortably predictable because I know where I am and where I am going....but the journey always provides new insights to the beauty of nature as well as new people and lots of new critters – it is truly my daily gift from God.



Photo by Bev Stuart

Rita.....

One thing I am amazed with are Fall Leaves, I love the way we walk through the changes in the year....I do love when my grandsons play in the leaves and my grand dogs run through them.



Deborah...

I just love going to Fort Whyte. I think we are so blessed to have this treasure right within Winnipeg. It is so joyful for me to see the turtles. They simply amaze me!



From many....

So many comment on the joy of watching the birds right in the middle of the city. This includes our beloved Falcon on the top of the Fairmont Hotel through our Falcon-cam. Isn't it amazing how we just love to co-habitate with them!



Deborah...

Our neighbourhood is full of nature and it fills me with awe, wonder and pure joy. One night I was riding my bike and there were two deer right there on the neighbour's lawn. I got off and started to talk to them as they munched on the grass. They just looked at me as if all of this was the most natural thing to occur! We walked, the three of us across about 10 lawns as they casually snacked on the grass.



Another night we were walking the dog and there was a rabbit that was sitting and looking at a stone rabbit. It then moved to snuggle in beside the stone rabbit which was astonishing. Then another rabbit arrived and sat watching the two of them. Much to our astonishment the third rabbit snuggled in behind the second and there they sat for the longest time!



Sandi....

Every year this grows a little more like a giant skirt. I see it on my daily walks and love it. It is serving as a basis for a sculpture underway.



Co-habitation

Rosemary...

I love these little flowers they always seem to be "greeters" whenever I come across them.

Each time we enter we are greeted by these three lovely pansies, each with its own greeting, for us to take a moment and listen to

...



Photos of pansies by Rosemary Miguez



May your visit be as sunny as you need



May you share both the sunshine of your day as well as the shadows...



May your shadows be lined with touches of sunshine.... know that
we will always be here listening....

Rob...

I had never seen one. I had never heard one. I had seen no signs of one and certainly had not noticed any odour from the output from them. We're on an island after all.

And yet, just hours before my daughter's wedding, there they were. Two large pigs standing in our yard at the cottage, snuffing for food beside the tent. Yes, the tent we were carefully setting up with linens and china, tables for the food and the lemonade (it was a very warm day), a special table for the wedding cake and gifts.



Photo by Rob McLaren

How could this be? We have enjoyed this cottage location for over ten years; had kayaked in the ocean, cycled the nearby roads and trails, developed our gardens, have just lay in the sun, enjoying our little slice of nature, and had never seen them before. Perhaps it was the start of hallucinations, common, for some, with the medications I take. Perhaps it was a prank played by one of our neighbours. More likely it was the all-natural mixture of oils and garlic that was supposed to reduce the

gathering of mosquitoes in our yard this time of year, that I had sprayed around the tent and edge of the shore and woods, a more benign approach than herbicides. It probably had attracted them from their pen, caused them to break out and track down that wonderful scent.

Well here they were. Twice I had to stop my preparations and chase them through the woods and down the lane. I had fears that they would return during the ceremony or meal, disrupting our guests. I also thought that this could be some magical good omen, and shared this anecdote with our guests during my toast to the bride.

As it turns out, it is a good omen, founded in ancient Chinese culture, pigs meaning 'bravely moving forward'.

How perfect, nature's blessing for my daughter and her partner.

Doug....

We have a squirrel, a little red one, who has moved into the roof of our garage. He uses the hanging planter which is attached to the eaves as his way in and out. He is not harming anyone and so we leave him there because we like him. Every day he goes in and out many times. We watch him. He sits on the fence and watches us.



Sandi....

I just love how we humans allow birds to build nests and to stay in the most human-made of places.



Renewal

Uncle Kenneth...

I was thinking about you and your art project in church..... I see man-made change and decay not in terms of a triumph of nature because man and his works are part of nature too like a beaver dam. I am more hopeful that it is trial and error followed by learning by mistake. Perhaps we can call it evolution.

I thought instead that physical change in man's works is a subset of the time's winged chariot. In poetry Ozymandias (You might like to compare Shelley's famous version with Smith's unknown but cogent one) was the example which sprang to mind and I also thought of Grey's Elegy. Then I turned to the cycle of change and thought this:

In the remote hills of Pictou County, Nova Scotia is a 100 acre wood lot which Deborah's Grandfather and I walked once to check the quality of its forest. Unexpectedly we came upon a clearing containing a large hole filled with shrubs, grass and disintegrating boards: the remains of a once prosperous farmhouse.

Later I returned armed with the story of the Scottish settlers who had once lived in these hills. The men were miners by day rising early to catch a train to the mines of Stellerton or Trenton and returning in the evening to farm their plots. Mines, however, run out and rocky soil provides an uncertain livelihood. The families left and the forest had returned to greet me.

That day I was also greeted with images of the family which had lived there, its small but sound homestead, its barns, its cattle. Children ran in the open area before the restored house, chickens scratched the grass and a wash flapped on the clothes line.

However, the trees, the deer and the moose now and for the foreseeable future again have this forest to themselves.

Uncle Kenneth and Aunt Mary...

A stream runs past us: the East Branch of the Don River. We walk out of our back garden into a wooded area and along its treed path for perhaps 3 minutes to a join with the paved walking and bicycle trail along the river. At that point there is shallows in the river and salmon swim there to gather strength before forcing their way through the water covered gravel.

Now the back story: behind us is a conservation area created after Hurricane Hazel in 1954 to prevent building on the flood plain of 100 year monster storms. The Don was once a lovely stream; Ernest Thompson Seaton wrote about its wildlife charms. Then industry came and brought pollution so great the fish were killed. In the last 60 years restoration activities have been successful and the salmon come again.

How marvelous!



Brenda.....

And ...one of my favourite, common and simple expressions of nature over human endeavours is tiny flowers growing out of (or making) cracks in cement and such. And having said that, I am thinking about the holistic concept that humans are part of Nature. And so if a giant tree falls or a forest fire happens or a human builds a sidewalk - it don't make no never mind to the little flower that simple grows wherever it can get a tiny foothold. It is not so much that the organic world overcomes human impact, simply that it does not concern itself with the source of an obstacle ... the tiny plant is not overawed by the human being more important or powerful ... it is just another obstacle. And even that is not really true. A seed drops somewhere and just does its job ... try to grow.

Perhaps this is what most disturbs the questing human... not that Nature is fighting humans, trying to obstruct humans... but that Nature is simply unconcerned with us and does its thing, regardless.

I wrote about that in one of my moon poems ... we can glorify nature but it is totally indifferent to us.







"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."
Albert Einstein