



ART

Nature in a Networked Age

Technology and nature merge in a provocative exhibit at the Warehouse Gallery

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The term "networking" has assumed many meanings in contemporary life. There are cultural and technical networking, both of which affect our daily lives in profound and lasting ways.

A provocative show, titled "Networked Nature," on view at the Warehouse Gallery through July 14, brings together works by a diverse group of artists to comment on our relationship with nature in this networked age. The artists and artist-collectives engage media as diverse as scientific processes and global positioning systems to explore and reconsider the nature of nature. Together, they continue to push the increasingly vague boundaries surrounding technology, nature and art.



Courtesy of the Warehouse Gallery

PHILIP ROSS CREATES a self-contained survival capsule for a plant in "Junior Return, 2006" (above). The artist references Victorian glass conservatories and cabinets of curiosities as vehicles that distance us from interacting directly with nature. A still from Gail Wight's three-screen video "Creep" (above, right), uses time-lapsed images of dyed slime molds evolving through different states to comment on nature's intrinsic beauty. The pieces are part of the "Networked Nature" show on view at the Warehouse Gallery.



Courtesy of The Warehouse Gallery

The details

What: "Networked Nature."

Where: The Warehouse Gallery, 350 W. Fayette St., Syracuse.

When: Through July 14.

What to expect: A group exhibition exploring the meaning and representation of nature through the manipulations of technology.

Hours: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday to Friday and noon to 6 p.m. Saturday.

Admission: Free.

Info: 443-6450.

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The show premiered at Foxy Production in Manhattan earlier this year, with Marisa Olson curating the exhibition for the artists' collective Rhizome, an affiliate of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City. According to Rhizome, the show's goal is to explore "the representation of nature through the perspective of networked culture."

For me, the show's key idea explored the use of technology as a medium to engage nature — not a new thought, but a worthy one. "Networking," in its various renditions, made appearances in most works; but I considered that a secondary theme to the key idea. For example, in "Junior Return, 2006," San Francisco-based artist Philip Ross creates a self-contained survival capsule for a single living plant by placing it in an electronically controlled hydroponic environment. He immerses the roots of the small plant in a

nutrient-laced vial of water, using battery-powered LED lights to stimulate growth. A puff of oxygen shoots from another cylinder into the vial every 60 seconds. Ross references the Victorian "cabinet of curiosities" of the 19th century using tools of the 21st century.

Modern takes on the triptych figure in works by the San Jose art collective, C5, and Berkeley-based Gail Wight. C5 employs landscape photography, computer-generated renderings of the locations and satellite maps with GPS coordinates to investigate "perfect views" of the American landscape. They asked GPS

aficionados who seek out these "sublime" views — "geo-cachers" — for recommendations and then visited the sites. The group challenges our notions of the landscape genre and how our perceptions of nature can be influenced by technology.

Wight's time-lapse video, "Creep, 2004," raises the slime mold to iconic muse. Three LCD panels display ever-changing color sequences, which Wight created by adding nontoxic dyes to tint the agar (gel made from seaweed extract) upon which the slime mold grew. She presents the three panels in starkly clinical metal frames, hanging them on the wall like X-rays.

Stephen Vitiello, living in Richmond, Va., plays with sound and organic structure to probe contemporary events.

"Hedera (BBB), 2006" employs a pot of ivy twined around a gallery pillar with six 3-inch speakers woven among the vines. We hear the accidentally recorded conversation between Tony Blair and George W. Bush at last year's G-8 meeting advancing and receding through the distorted din of bells and rain. It's disturbing because it eerily bridges issues affecting the natural, technological and geopolitical arenas.

Brooklyn-based Shih Chieh Huang uses dissected household electronic appliances and Tupperware to create three quirky little robots activated by motion

sensors. These seemed to be least on message but were amusing and well-conceived.

Finally, the San Francisco collective Futurefarmers exhibits a three-dimensional "sketch of a possible perpetual motion machine," which is propelled by phototropism — the process by which plants move toward the sun. Two houseplants sit on a wheeled cart with two jacketed water bottles acting as a starting or finishing line. The piece is an astute and deliberate over-realization of one of the most fundamental natural processes, which goes to the heart of many of the works in "Networked Nature."

Katherine Rushworth, of Cazenovia, is a former director of the Michael C. Rockefeller Arts Center (State University College at Fredonia) and of the Central New York Institute for the Arts in Education.