



C L O S E W I N

Notes from the Treetop

Trees are one of the most generous and complex of the earth's resources. They provide oxygen, cool the earth, warm our homes and bestow us with shelter and shade as well as baseball bats, pencils, walnuts and boomerangs. The milling of trees and the related logging industry, pulp mills, de/reforestation and environmental impact that has been created as a result of that industry has caused worldwide controversy. With such a smorgasbord of topical issues, it is only fitting that Islip Art Museum pay homage to the mighty tree, its place in culture, nature and in the health of the planet in this year's exhibition, **Treemendous 2008**.

Melanie Fischer returns the life of the tree to its very origins, bringing it full circle to Gallery 1 by reconstituting the tree itself with some of its own byproducts. In the

gallery center a cardboard form towers upward like a soaring conifer. A cavity in its mid-section holds shards of heavy paper that have been sliced into sheaths or "leaves" on which visitors are invited to doodle or draw with thick lead pencils. A convenient



drawing surface is provided by the crafted tree-stumps that dot the gallery floor. Once completed, the leaves are clipped to a network of strings descending from the ceiling like an intricate system of tree limbs and secondary branches. The unifying effect of this cumulative work is cheerful and invigorating, buoyed by a keen sense of community involvement.

Susan Jennings trips the light fantastic in her installation of jewel-like leftovers that include chandelier crystals, glittering plastic bottles, loops of monofilament and various bits and pieces of everyday life. Jennings clusters the elements into floral shapes, necklace strands or single sparkles, transforming them with light and shadow. As her



projector
beams
shine
through
each
dazzling
bauble, a
dance of icy
reflections
animate the

darkened room as each brilliant contraption spins in the breeze. Like a sort of interstellar hyperspace, shadows flicker across the long white gallery walls as if fueled by refracted light. The effect, at once dreamy and frenzied, is mesmerizing.



For **Nidhi Jalan**, imagery reminiscent of the Mughal Empire provides inspiration for sinewy arms that descend from the spine of wire tree located throughout the stairwell galleries. Graceful and beseeching, the branches stretch down as if reaching for a small child. Looped at the

tips into the shape of a palm, each frond holds the evidence of a moonlit vigil as the drips and dribbles of melted candle wax fall like tears to the ground below. The flowing limbs, like an Empress's curls or the willowy arabesques of Islamic script, seem to be kept aloft by a sixth sense.

Islip Art Museum's own joyful mélange of silver balls, twinkling lights and a festive harvest of artificial fruits

cascade down from above as if falling from the heavens.

The centerpiece, a sky-scraping evergreen that nearly reaches the ceiling, is made of plastic. Embedded among its tight network of pine needles, dazzling bouquets of holiday lights sparkle from top to bottom.

Sumptuous cornucopias of real fruits line the foot of the tree like baskets

of manna appearing in a desert of contemporary artifice.

The actual and the imaginary collide here in a jolt of pure bliss.



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useum



For **Sonja Blesofsky**, the aging structure of the museum itself serves as inspiration for the tenuous Ionic columns that stand in Gallery 3. Made from translucent Vellum, the artist has created replicas of the majestic columnar structures that line the portico of Brookwood Hall. Delicate and meticulous, the structure is so physically precise that it appears flawless in its power to hold up the ceiling. But upon inspection, the diaphanous paper body yields to a sense of the ephemeral and a ghostly passage of time.

Buoyant and bubbly, **Theresa Hackett's** installation

includes a flatbed truck parked in the center of Gallery 5. Overflowing with sapling evergreens and festooned with colorful blankets, wrappings and ribbons, the 100 tiny trees



were offered to visitors as an adoption service designed to reforest the planet. Part of the ecological movement known as "*Plant for the Planet*," adoptive parents were required to sign a contract confirming their intent to plant the conifer in a safe place where it will thrive for

generations to come. Here the artist manages a graceful link between the installation and Brookwood Hall's well-known history as an orphanage.

As visitors weave through the Carriage House galleries fortified by holiday cheer and brisk winter skies, one more surprise awaits them. Behind the velveteen light-blocking curtains that lead to Gallery 6, **Christine Sciulli** has created a captivating 3-D environment of shape-shifting linear parts. After a moment of adjusting to the pitch-dark room, a thin wall of white light careens from behind like a searchlight. Arching over the ceiling and walls, it beams a thin line of light that illuminates the complex system of crisscrossing lines spanning the gallery.



The linear structure, invisible everywhere except where light touches its intersecting planes, is a quiet riot of controlled chaos that ricochets from wall to wall and floor to

ceiling. As the slice of light moves across the room, it exposes an endless array of cross-sections illuminated only briefly by fractions of light. The results are utterly magical, revealing the fleeting internal logic of abstraction. It is exhilarating.

Light and string. Trees and sunshine. Paper and pencil. The artists included in Tremendous 2008 celebrate the splendor of ingenuity, the strength of community and the power of transformation. It's going to be a good year.

—Janet Goleas, December, 2008

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