

"This Land" exhibit explores the environment

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Although the University Galleries' current exhibition, "This Land," takes its title from Woody Guthrie's famous folk song, the assumptions underlying this show are very different. This is not an exhibition about the American nation or landscape. Instead, the 12 artists featured in this exhibition focus primarily on the environment and the different ways humans interact with and think about nature.

This theme is especially evident in the works of Peter Stern, Eric LoPresti, Gwyneth Scally and Vaughn Bell. Stern's aerial photographs of the Eastern Shore, for example, show how humans have altered the environment: precisely defined roads and canals contrast with the meandering rivers and streams of the marshlands; and large areas have been clear-cut in the forests. Titled "Nentego," the name the Nanticoke Indians originally used to refer to themselves, the series also evokes a time when humans presumably lived in greater harmony with nature.

Eric LoPresti's large-scale paintings, such as "Double Butterfly," show the despoliation of nature at former atomic test sites in Washington state.

Scally's installation of a small iceberg on a bed of sand and her manipulated photographs of icebergs in Arizona can be seen as a warning, at once poetic and surreal, of what she calls humans'



Dan Mills' "Road Map" resembles satellite transmissions.

"skewed relationship with nature," here alluding to a future extreme of global warming.

Each of Vaughn Bell's "pocket biospheres" is a miniature terrarium, enclosed in a globe about 2 inches in diameter.

Described by the artist as a "kind of miniature world" that can be held in one's hand, they are intended to raise our environmental awareness. The biospheres can be "adopted" by visitors, who must sign an agreement to care for them.

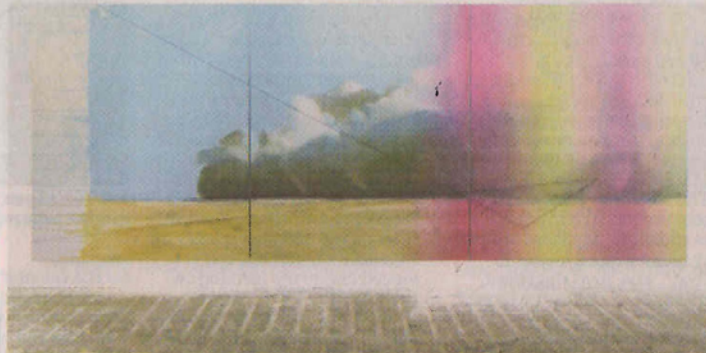
Other artists, such as Mark Nystrom and Megan Cump, collaborate with nature to create art. Nystrom's installation, "Air Current(s)/Salisbury, Maryland," uses weather instruments and custom electronics to capture wind data in real time, translating this information into abstract, constantly changing patterns projected onto a large screen in the University Gallery.

Cump's collaborations take the form of performances, recalling ancient

myths, in which she becomes one with nature. "Roots," for example, is a color photograph that shows the artist's body entangled with the roots of ancient trees along the bank of a swiftly moving river.

Constance Costigan, Kevin Fitzgerald and Claire Sherman also engage nature in intensely personal ways.

Costigan's graphic drawings and acrylic paintings of "landscapes," with their many visible, small marks and subtle gradations of light and dark, have a meditative quality, blurring distinctions between matter and space. Fitzgerald's paintings also inspire contemplation, evoking nature's beauty in a few elemental, often symbolically charged forms and subtle colors that suggest memory images, as opposed to a direct encounter with nature. Sherman's paintings blur the distinction between representation and abstraction. Their large-scale, simplified



Eric LoPresti's "Hairpin," is 15 feet long and depicts the clouds of a great explosion dissolving into bands of color and light.

forms and thickly painted surfaces evoke various natural phenomena as well as the process of art-making.

Dan Mills, Courtney Puckett and Rachel Abrams all incorporate recycled materials in their work.

Mills paints abstract forms over actual maps. In "Road Map," for example, the abstract forms resemble data images transmitted by satellites. Puckett's fabric sculptures of a "Cloud" and a "Bird," both on view at the downtown campus, combine her nature-based images with art-making techniques associated with "women's work" and craft traditions, conflating feminist ideals with the values of sustainability. Abrams' sculptural installations use a wide range of materials, including recycled cast paper, plastic, foam and other artificial materials. The installation, "Allowable Residues, 2013," for example, consists of small, cast paper hemi-



Mark Nystrom's "Air current(s)/Salisbury, Maryland" is a computer-generated drawing depicting wind data. IMAGES COURTESY SALISBURY UNIVERSITY GALLERY

spheres, topped by one or more plastic trees, arranged in several groups of 21 units each. The work conflates cosmic symbols, such as the "world tree" of world mythology with more mundane nature imagery, such as tree farms.

The exhibition is divided between two venues, taking up both the University Gallery in Fulton Hall and Salisbury University's downtown campus, which have somewhat different

IF YOU GO "THIS LAND"

Where: University Gallery, Fulton Hall 109; Salisbury University and downtown campus, 118 N. Division St., Salisbury

When: Through Sept. 20; closing reception that evening from 5-8 p.m. at both venues

Summer Hours: Fulton Hall, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays, noon-4 p.m. Saturdays; Downtown Campus, noon-6 p.m. Wednesdays through Fridays and noon-4 p.m. Saturdays. Regular hours begin after Aug. 25.

Call: 410-548-2547

Web: www.salisbury.edu/universitygalleries

hours. Both galleries deserve a visit, but you might want to call ahead for more precise information about what's on view in each space.