

With big musical acts like the Black Crows, the Black Keys, Widespread Panic, and Zappa Plays Zappa descending upon Louisville this weekend, it is easy to forget that the 8th Annual Forecastle Festival is also about Art and Activism. JK McKnight, founder of the popular young event, remains dedicated, however, to introducing his hometown to the best new visual artists in the country. In addition to national acts like The Sustainable Living Roadshow, McKnight has brought several local artists into the Forecastle spotlight. Sculptors Brad White and Mike Ratterman are among the Kentuckiana regional artists included in this year's event. The art from these talented young artists will surely make this Forecastle as interesting to the eye as it is to the ear.

Among the homegrown works of art at this year's event is an earth-based sculpture that flows melodically across the Belvedere lawn. It is a composition of wood, water, glass, and color that visually captures the musical activism that Forecastle hopes to promote. In this piece, wooden structures resemble musical notes. These wooden structures support glass vessels containing water drawn from Kentucky's natural resources. In its entirety, the work is titled *The Green Grass is a Looking-Glass Whereon their Traits are Found*. The name is taken from the poem "Behaviors" by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Individually, the sculptures are entitled *Sheath Shelving* since the wooden supports are surrealistic shelving units that contain packets of native seeds. The site-specific installation consists of seven sculptures that stand together like pairs of musical notes within this visual symphony orchestrated by Rebecca Norton. The native Louisvillian has returned to her homeland to organize this visual effort from the state of California where she is working on her MFA at the Art Center College of Design. The installation is far from a solo effort, however. Like a performance or miniature festival in its own right, Norton has brought many of Kentucky's finest artists and activists together in the creation of this impressive work. Woodworker Nathan Morgan assisted Norton with the assembly of the wooden supports, while Lori Beck and her associates from the Ohio Valley Creative Energy (OVCE) stitched Norton's handmade paper together to make seed packets that now rest upon the rows of shelving contained within the wooden structure. Local glass legend Jonathan Swanz worked with Norton's specifications to create containers for the water she collected from the eastern portion of the state. She worked with University of Kentucky environmental scientists to locate polluted streams whose contents have been analyzed for toxins and bacteria.

In its assembled form, the massive sculpture acknowledges its own dependency: The wood supports the water, and the seeds await their chance to grow. The seven individual pieces are held together as a single entity by their physical relationship to one another upon the Belvedere Lawn. They speak to each other like musicians in a band. They seem to listen to one another before respond with all the harmonics of a waterfall or a bubbling stream.

In addition, a map drawn by Los Angeles artist Rachael Kessler unites the pieces according to their relationship to the state of Kentucky. Upon this map, the water sources from which Norton drew are depicted. In this way, the piece topologically connects the sculptures with the physical region they represent. Overtly, the display illustrates the effects of contemporary human life upon the state's waterways. Subtly, it reminds the audience that modern conveniences are not achieved without a price.

Most of the water contained within the glass vessels was collected by Norton in Pike County, Kentucky. Researchers at the University of Kentucky have revealed traces of *E. coli*, mercury, lead and other pollutants in the water. Most of this contamination, Norton claims, is due to the coal mining industry in the eastern part of the state. Since the energy supply in the cities of Louisville, Frankfort, and Lexington is fed by places like Pike County, Norton's piece illustrates how all Kentuckians are affected by industry waste. The installation is concerned with the effect of humans on the environment, specifically Kentucky.

In her statement, Rebecca Norton reveals a hope that this sculpture will unite people with their own poetry such that they can see themselves within expressions of nature. Reminiscent of the 19th century Existentialist ideal, Norton's reminds the audience that their union with the Earth cannot be broken. Within this installation, Norton and her collaborators clearly hope to avoid dogmatic ideals of right and wrong, good and bad. Instead, they work towards a new, almost Randian environmental movement that focuses not on the Earth as an external problem but on the individual as an internal solution.

To reiterate this point, Norton's piece is literally alive with its own inner suggestions for planetary recovery. Each unit of Sheath Shelving holds a packet of paper made from recycled junk mail that contains the seeds of Kentucky native plants including River Oats (*Chasmanthium Latifolium*), Maximilla Sunflower (*Helianthus Maximiliani*), and Illinois Bundleflower (*Desmanthus Illinoensis*). In addition to the colorful flowers they contain, these envelopes, hand-sewn by Lori Beck and other volunteers from OVCE, are beautiful within themselves. It is Norton's expectation that these delicate packets will eventually fall like leaves from the sculpture into the surrounding landscape. As the seeds are then implanted in the ground and the plants slowly begin to grow, the sculptures literally become the environment they represent.

Rebecca Norton's installation for this year's Forecastle Festival avoids the dogmatic tone of environmentalism and prefers that the audience discover their own solution for a problem they have helped create. Unlike other environmentally focused works of art, Norton's piece contains no preachy message about caring for the Earth nor fundamentalist belief in sustainability as the ultimate solution. Instead, Sheath Shelving provides a framework for recognizing the relationship of the human to the physical world of which they are a part. With this artwork, environmentalism is presented less as a noble deed and more as a self-serving activity. The piece is not so much about saving the Earth as preserving one's place within it. With this new philosophy, Norton has stumbled upon something that the contemporary environmental movement seems to lack: a sense of personal emergency