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Tryon Creek art show takes a walk on wild side

'Natural Cycles' features works by five artists in a woodsy gallery

BY ERIC BARTELS

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The forest thing is an installation called "Natural Cycles" that opened at Tryon Creek State Park last weekend. It will run for a year. The spooky "Invader" was done by an artist named Brennan Conaway.

ERIC BARTELS / PORTLAND TRIBUNE

Even as the Pacific Northwest turns the corner into the rainy season, there may be enough good days left for contemplative walks in the woods.

At Tryon Creek State Park, a group of Northwest artists has given folks a little more to think about if they do.

"Natural Cycles," an annual showing by five artists that employs the 775-park as its gallery, opened last weekend. The installation will remain in place, for the most part, for an entire year.

"They may fade a little bit," says artist Vicki Wilson of the artworks, "and that would be appropriate."

The projects at Tryon Creek, the lush, sylvan buffer between Lake Oswego and Southwest Portland, are situated along the one third-mile Trillium Trail, a level, paved loop than can easily be completed in half an hour, depending on viewing time.

The five exhibits are designed to provoke consideration of the relationship between the increasingly urban human experience and the natural world.

All employ a sense of whimsy, none more so than Seattle artist Julie Lindell's "Nontrivial Pursuit," a whirlwind of human detritus - a lamp, a ski, a picture frame - snowballed together with a skeleton of tree branches and pierced by gigantic knitting needles.

Brennan Conaway's "Invader" presents non-native plant species — a scourge to indigenous vegetation — as a literal monster. Vicki Wilson's "Fung-US" features glittering cityscapes on the backs of faux fungus, which is affixed to several trees.

Shrinking habitats

Wilson, who lives in Southeast Portland, was inspired by the work of a New York artist who created tiny worlds within the niches left by bricks falling from aging buildings.

She was intrigued by the notion that societies may not be as grand — or as permanent — as we sometimes imagine.

“We haven’t been around that long, really,” she says. “I consider myself someone who lives close to the ground. I’m not prone to being scared by the media, but I am attentive to global warning.”

Wilson’s husband, the artist John Larsen, works with renowned, Scappoose-based puppet designer Michael Curry (Disney, Cirque du Soleil), which has given her access to some quality recyclables for her work.

“I use a lot of Michael Curry’s garbage,” she says. “Actually, he’s got some great garbage. I’ve been collecting it for years.”

Wilson, who once had a job maintaining and restoring public art around Portland, had a feel for the best materials for this particular job. Her “Fung-US” is actually made out of a type of cement.

“I know what things last outside and what don’t,” she says.

An instructor at Portland Community College and the Pacific Northwest College of Art, Wilson says she received an interesting sustainability tip while installing her miniature worlds at Tryon Creek.

“This guy came by. He was walking this tiny, tiny little dog,” she says. “He said ‘There’s an idea. Maybe we could just breed ourselves smaller.’ I thought ‘Yes, that would be an idea.’”

7 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily, (Nature Center) 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily, 11321 S.W. Terwilliger Blvd., 503-636-4398, www.tryonfriends.org, free.