Artists and the Natural World – Urban Wildlife

October 17, 2000, 3:00 p.m

Moderator: Peter Spooner

0. *Tweed Museum of Art*

Speakers: Karen Mueller

0. *Institutional Support Program Associate, Minnesota State Arts Board*

Barnaby Evans

0. *installation and public artist*

Seitu Jones

0. *sculptor, designer, public artist, and gardener*

Deborah Karasov

0. *public artist*

Godfrey: Hi, I am Marian Godfrey. I am on the board of Grantmakers in the Arts and I am here to welcome you, and to present Karen Mueller.

Mueller: Thanks, Marian. I have had the pleasure to be a part of a planning committee on topics that focus on the work of artists during this conference. I just wanted to say a couple of things and to also introduce our panel moderator. This is part two of a topic area of theconference that began this weekend. I had the pleasure of going with fifteen of your colleagues to three different locations in greater Minnesota for a session that was called "Arts inthe Natural World: Art Making and the Environment."

We stopped at St. John's Pottery and were able to participate in the annual wood firing of the largest wood-fired kiln in the United States under the auspices of artist-in-residence Richard Bresnahan. He let us stoke the fire, which was going on for twelve days.

That was a kick-off to a very high standard of artists working to preserve nature, and comment on nature. He uses all indigenous materials; the kiln itself is a three-chamber, huge facility, etc. It was a great day.

Then we heard from two writers who use the landscape as the central metaphor in their work, and also a composer.

Then we moved on to Moose Lake, Minnesota, which is just south of Lake Superior, to the Blacklock Nature Sanctuary. Since 1996, they have made residencies available to artists and arts administrators from around the country to spend time in a beautiful setting. There are 440 acres of preserved wildlife at Blacklock.

We also thought it was important, and here we are at this session, to hear how artists who live and work in urban areas are involved with the same topic. Today we have a great panel of folks to discuss that: Barnaby Evans from Providence, Rhode Island. He does both museum pieces and public art installations. I saw one of his works that is temporary, yet ongoing, that incorporated fire, and the river, and the outdoors, and sound in Providence, Rhode Island. It is one of the most successful works I have ever seen of public art that brings together people in the civic setting, connects them to community and to nature.

In addition, we have Seitu Jones, a longtime artist in Minnesota, who does a myriad of things. I am anxious to hear what Seitu is doing now. I don't want to steal Peter's thunder of other introductions, but I am glad to have Seitu here and hear what he is doing.

And Deborah Karasov, who is also a public artist and writes insightfully about this fieldtoday.

To introduce Peter Spooner, he is a curator and registrar of the Tweed Museum of Art at the University of Minnesota, Duluth

campus. He has recently organized an exhibition of the work of 58 artists that is touring the nation in ten cities around the country. It is about to open in Chicago at the Chicago Cultural Center, so if you are in Chicago, take a look. The show's title is "Botanica," and it focuses on artists who are involved with this same thing; artists looking to make connections between community and nature, art and city environments. We thought that Peter would be a great person to stimulate conversation. Thank you.

Spooner: Thank you, Karen.

First of all, I would like to thank the conference for inviting us all here, for organizing this panel, and for Karen's work on it. GIA, I think, is very wise to set up a panel with artists because, after all, we are the ones that somehow put that money into action; and curators as well. So I was very honored to be asked and I am very honored to be sitting up here with these wonderful creators.

I am going to introduce each of them, I am going to talk a little bit about what I do and what some of my connections to this theme are, and then each of us will show either slides or video to give a small presentation of our work. Then we have a series of discussion questions that we'd like to address, and then we would like to open it up.

We are flexible, so we can change that order at a drop of a hat. Right, Deborah? No? Okay. We are somewhat flexible.

I would like to introduce Deborah Karasov. I did not realize before this panel was put together that I had actually read things that you had written before. I didn't make the connection that I had been reading *Public Art Review* and seeing your name there and in many other places too. So that is another reason I am especially honored that Deborah was asked to be on this panel.

She is an artist and a designer of public spacesand lives in St. Paul. She is also a writer and a consultant to many projects. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota, a Master of Liberal Arts from Harvard University Graduate School of Design, and a B.A. from McAllisterCollege.

Since 1997 she has been the editor of *Public Art Review,* which is really the only magazine offering a national forum for public art. She is part of an artist design team for environmental projects related to the Mississippi River watershed here in the Twin Cities. She is a consultant to the St. Paul Foundation for a project called "Greening the Great River Park" and also is a project director for the Sagget Park Nature Area collaborative with the St. Paul Boys and Girls Clubs. And that project, by the way, won a national award. It was one of seven chosen from among 1,800 projects to receive an honor from the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Creative Projects Award. A very high honor, Ithink.

She has been the director of Landscape Studies and Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Minnesota and the Head of Adult Programs at the Walker Arts Center; and a consultant to the director of Design Arts Program at the NEA. She has received numerous, numerous grants, and maybe I will let you mention some of those when we do talk about funding.

Seitu Jones, a very well known artist who lives in St. Paul. Seitu creates public art works in collaboration with many community groups as well as creating discrete studio works of his own. He is a graduate of Moorehouse College, University of Minnesota; he also attended the Harvard University Institute in Arts Administration. Most recently, as an outgrowth of his involvement in public art and community gardens, he is a graduate of the Master Gardener Core Course and is working towards a degree in horticulture.

He has facilitated numerous public art works and also worked as a scenic designer for many Twin Cities productions, and has participated in many group and solo exhibitions around the country. He has received fellowships and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Minnesota State Arts Board, the McKnight Foundation, Forecast, Public Art Affairs, the Bush Foundation, St. Paul Companies. And he is a board member of the Jerome Foundation aswell.

Seitu has also written numerous articles including a piece in the book *Critical Issues in Public Art,* which was published in '92 by Harper Collins, a piece called "Public Art that Inspires, Public Art

that Informs."

Last but certainly not least, Barnaby Evans from Providence, Rhode Island. Barnaby's work has been written about and discussed in over 200 venues including newspapers and commercial and public television. He is an independent visual artist and his works include installation works, photography and film, and garden and architectural projects.

He is a graduate of Brown University, where hestudied biology and environmental science. He is the creator of a piece that has received a lot of attention in recent years called "Water Fire," which really has, I think, galvanized the community of Providence, Rhode Island, and pulled people together in a very interesting way there. He will address that piece specifically.

Other recent projects include installations at both Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art and the Rhode Island School of Design Museum. And he has also created a new version of this piece called "Water Fire" for Houston, Texas.

He has received many awards and distinctions for his work including an Aaron Siskind Fellowship in photography; the Renaissance Award from the City of Providence; and honorary Doctorates from both Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design.

So, these people are at the top of their field. Again, I am humbled and honored to be sitting with these folks who have done a lot of creative work and have a lot to recommend them.

We are going to start, I think, by showing slides or videos of work that we have done. My work as a curator has focused a lot on artists who are using the natural world. Using plant forms, using plant materials, using stories around plants, because I am a failed botanist. What else can I say? I became an arts educator, then I became a museum educator, and then I became a curator. That's where I am now and so this idea, this love, for plants and for the earth has kind of followed through what I do. It has been an ongoing desire of mine to look at artists that are using nature, using plant material, and somehow creating interesting works out of that.

The exhibition "Botanica," that Karen mentioned, was a huge undertaking and is currently in the midst of a nationwide tour. There is a catalogue for that exhibition if you are interested in it. I am sorry I don't have copies of it here but my card is on the back table. I want to mention that there are other materials from some of the artists on the back table.

This is not a work that is included in the "Botanica" exhibition, but it is a key work when we are talking about urban public art. This is a work that some of you may be quite familiar with; it was done in St. Paul in 1990 and '91. It's by a wonderful artist by the name of Mel Chin who is now based in North Carolina, although he is constantly on the fly. This is called "Revival Field." It is a work of reclamation or land art. It is patterned after medieval garden designs. The chain-link fence that you see around this piece is there because this is situated on a contaminated soil site, the Pig's Eye Landfill in St. Paul.

Working with a U.S. Department of Agriculture agronomist by the name of Dr. Rufus Chaney, Mel Chin developed plantings of certain plants, called hyper-accumulator plants, that actually suck up heavy metals from the soil. Those plants can then be ashed, in specially designed incinerators, and those metals extracted from the soil. So this is art work at work. It is something that is actually a functional piece; it is also a design piece in the sense that it is based, as I said, on garden designs. It is a community piece. In order to make this piece Mel Chin had to collaborate with a lot of people, including the Walker Arts Center. And there were a lot of people that were behind the development of this piece.

This is a work of Mel Chin's that was developed from "Revival Field;" it is called "Revival Field Study." And it's a particular plant that was used in the field. It is called *Festucia Rubra* or Red Festucia, and it is a hyper-accumulator plant.

What's really interesting about this drawing is that it was done in metal point technique which is an old Renaissance technique for drawing where a sharp point of metal is actually pulled across the paper and it leaves a mark. The drawing was actually created with metal that was pulled out of the soil by that plant. There is a little plug of the metal at the top; it is cadmium and lead. I thought it was a

wonderful, circular statement about the whole process.

This is a work by another artist who has worked a lot with landforms and reclamation projects; this is Meg Webster. This is a design that she did, and I think ten to twelve other artists were asked to do similar designs for a huge, huge abandoned landfill site outside of Tel-Aviv, Israel called the Hierya Landfill. And they are trying to reclaim that land and develop it into land that can actually be utilized. Parts of the land are contaminated, parts of it are just swamp-land over mounds of garbage.

Her design was a series of water gardens, caves, mounds, community gardens, and other functional spaces, as well as a sports field. It occupies a huge area; I think it is something like forty acres that this landfill occupies. It has been used as a garbage dump outside of Tel-Aviv for over 100 years.

This is a project that was developed specifically for "Botanica" by an artist named Todd Bockley who lives in the Twin Cities. He is a former gallerist in the Twin Cities and he is very interested in an idea that the German artist Josef Beuys developed, which is called loosely, "social sculpture." In other words, artists participating in society and making change happen. In his involvement in the "Botanica" exhibition, Todd Bockley came to Duluth and, working with the Tweed Museum of Art and the City of Duluth and the Western Lake Superior Sanitary Department (WLSSD) – which is basically our water/sewage treatment plant – we developed, on this site next to WLSSD, a reclamation project of our own. The land was cleaned up. It is at the site where some creeks run down the Duluth hillside intothe St. Louis Bay which, itself, runs into Lake Superior, where Duluth is. It's very dirty. All kinds of salt runs down the hill; all kinds oftires and debris run down the hillside into this bay and then into the lake. So it was a wonderful site to work with, and a much-needed cleanup.

We were talking to some railroad workers in this area, because the rail lines run right through here, and they say that they see deer down there all the time, there are actually beaver down there – all kinds of wildlife in this very urban, obviously freeway-infested, area. So it is an interesting park. It actually is a city park and there are

trees planted there, and that was part of the project as well.

This is the work of Alan Sonfist who we also asked to contribute a work to the "Botanica" exhibition. Sonfist is an artist who really made his mark in the 1970s with projects in which he traveled around the world and chose different sites to work from. This is a piece called "Jean Bank, Northern Minnesota." What Sonfist did was locate an old-growth forest; it happened to be on the edge of the Boundary Waters Canoe Wilderness Area, on an island called Three-Mile Island. It is a virgin forest that has never been timbered, mainly because it is inaccessible. There are a lot of mosquitoes up there, too.

He developed a series of photographs of the site, working in collaboration with the museum and all of the funders of this exhibition. Then Sonfist collected genetic material from the site that could be used to rebuild a virgin forest if it was decimated. That is another work that is a part of the "Botanica" exhibition.

Deborah Karasov will now give a presentation.

Karasov: Thank you, Peter. I also want to thankthe Grantmakers in the Arts for inviting us. It is quite an honor. I especially thank the conference committee for bringing together art and the environment in this panel – two things that I have struggled for many years to bring together. They did it very easily and verydecisively.

I am going to talk about "The Sagget Park Project," a collaboration with the Boys and Girls Club to reclaim an inner-city nature area. I have to thank my funders. I started the project as a Leadership in the Neighborhoods (LIN) grant from the St. Paul Companies. We also had funding from Unity Avenue Foundation, Metropolitan Regional Arts Commission, Dayton- Hudson Community Giving, the McKnight Foundation, the Bigelow Foundation, and, of course, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company.

I began the project as a LIN recipient and then finished it under the auspices of an institute that I direct with my colleague, Kinji Akagawa. He also is instrumental in conceptualizing the project. We worked with a revolving team of artists through the five years from

1995 to 2000. We consider a five-year project as a temporary project because in the life-span of a tree and a child's life, five years is, in fact, a temporary project. Seitu Jones was also one of the artists who was involved early on. In addition, the Boys and Girls Club staff was involved, and students at the Minneapolis College of Art andDesign.

About the Institute for Public Art and Design – the word "public art" is very difficult and we will all be talking about something called "public art." We at the Institute see it very differently from the traditional notion of a public art object, an art object in a public space. We understand public art really to be about making aesthetic experiences accessible to all people. My colleague actually says "democratizing" aesthetic experiences, although I understand people have various feelings about using that word. But it originally did have a positive spin, to talk about a "democratizing" experience.

One of the aesthetic experiences happens to be "making home." Eighty percent of the children at the Boys and Girls Club are Asian; many of them are refugees from Laos and Cambodia. We feel that "making home" in this society is also making your home on earth. The two have to be connected. That is how we were bringing together this process using the environment and art.

The area that we are talking about, which is adjacent to the Boys and Girls Club of St. Paul, was originally a dump. There was a lot of Asian gang use in the area: there were beatings, there was cited one rape. We turned it into a community space, an open space. We turned it into a place of imagination. We like to talk about the children being mentored by the woods, just like they are being mentored by the counselors at the Boys and Girls Club. It is located adjacent to public and low-income housing.

The interesting thing about this image is that this patch of woods is very nondescript. We are talking about pieces that aren't glorified, beautiful preserves. Yet, in many cities across the country, it is these kind of remnant patches of woods that people are fighting for, and they are actually setting up an interesting partnership between low-income neighborhoods and low-income activists, and the environmental movement because they are the last patches of wilderness. There are some interesting models, and I was fortunate

enough, through the LIN grant, to travel around and look at some of these models.

The structure that we set up to reclaim this nature area was in two terms: reclaim it physically, in terms of cleaning it up, getting out the trash, helping to reintroduce the biodiversity that was there; and reclaiming it socially. It's this social aspect that I think is most interesting and where art had a critical aspect to play. We were changing the perception of the area from a dump – from some place that is frightening, from something that is alien to their lives – and turning it into something that is part of their lives, something that they contribute to. Also changing it on a more profound level, seeing how the natural world is part of their identity. That is, dwelling on the earth, dwelling in their neighborhood, dwelling in the city. All of these perceptual changes were especially the role forart.

The structure that we set up was to have art workshops all year round that were going on atthe same time that we were doing the physical reclamation of the site through volunteers and corporate partners. We also hired some crews, and the children themselves helped with the clean-up and the physical reclamation of thesite.

I will just go through some of the art projects that we did. This was a boardwalk that the kids built themselves. Many of them had never used tools before. We taught them how to use tools: saws, hammers, nails. On top of those posts they developed clay imprints of their hands and signed them. They did mosaic step stones; again, integrating both natural symbols and symbols from home and things that had meaning to them.

There is some of the clean-up that they did, some of the pathways that they helped to widen. It is really quite a diverse area with wetland and you wouldn't imagine that this small, little area of three acres is, in fact, this wonderful microcosm of nature.

We also, as I said, involved students from the Institute for Public Art and Design. They collaborated. They were at a wonderful age to serve as mentors in some ways, because they are eighteen or nineteen and worked with some of the high school students. They worked with that age group in particular, to do some sculptural

things that you might find traditionally in an environmental art project.

This, for example, is carved-out seating. It is actually mushroom seating that you come upon, surprisingly, in different spots in the woods. It's carved from passed-off logs that we found throughout there. Most of the times we tried, with the seating, to work with the things that were onsite.

We also, as I said, worked on a very personal level. We talked to them about artist boxes. And they built these themselves. We had precut pieces of wood but they put them together with nails and screws. Part of collecting these artist boxes was to bring things from home, things from the woods, and to integrate it and get them to think about their identity as a living thing within a web of other living things.

For example, one girl brought from home a pile of fortune cookie strips that she had been collecting for years and years without really understanding why. Suddenly, in putting it together in this artist box with other things, she understood that she was dealing with a lot of cultural stereotypes. These boxes ended up to really be beautiful starting points for a lot of discussion about our identity within society and within the natural world.

Here they are carving blocks; again, working with icons. In this case, most of them are natural. Then we installed these as a whole wall of things inside the Boys and Girls Club. Very simple art tools that we used for a lot of these art activities.

Finally, one of our more ambitious projects was, again, with the collaboration of the Institute for Public Art students. We teamed them up with a couple of the kids. They did signs that they would like to have in the park about how to approach the natural world, not only in a negative way like, "Don't walk off the path."

The students did a lot of drawing with the Boys and Girls Club kids and then they turned the drawings into sand molds and cast them in bronze plaques. Here we brought the Boys and Girls Club to our facilities at the College of Art and Design so they could see pouring,

which they had never seen before. It was just the most amazing thing for them. These bronze plaques were installed on boulders and are throughout the park.

That is just an example of a kind of project that at the Institute we feel is very important because when you are talking about making aesthetic experiences accessible, I believe that you are talking about collaborations with non-art organizations. This has its own kind of problems, which we will get to discuss, but I do want to say that we have that model of the artist-in-residence in schools, but we haven't really developed many other models for working with other kinds of organizations.

Certainly, we at the Institute are not that progressive. There have been many precedents for this. Mel Chin has worked with the scientists at the Department of Agriculture here. Mierle Ukeles is an artist who, for ten years, has been working with the New York City Department of Sanitation. There is a lot of precedent. At the same time, a lot of the artists have struggled to set up because there is a lot of preliminary work before you get to the so-called art. There is a lot of working and establishing of those collaborations and funding that are often a struggle for the artist.

In addition to the collaborations with the non-art organizations, I feel it is very important to move forward in the environmental movement. We have to be very creative, and we should not be afraid of being very bold in intervening in some of these structures and institutions, like our public works, like our schools, like the Boys and Girls Club.

Using the Boys and Girls Club as an example, I never knew that you would have to entice children to go outside. These are kids who really do not have that. You have to get them where they live and you have to try to slowly change the structure. The Boys and Girls Club had been primarily sports oriented, because that was the activity they thought would reach the kids. The Boys and Girls Club now has a part-time Environmental Coordinator. Last year, we took the group camping. The Boys and Girls Club said that would not have worked before because a lot of the families are very remote; many of them don't speak English, but it did work.

You have to go into these institutions like the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Sanitation, the Boys and Girls Club. Go into the institutions that do have an impact on the environment and our environmental education, and the development of our attitudes, and begin to use art. It's an extremely effective mechanism. It's really what brings in the larger world. It invites the people, the children, the participants, into that larger world.

Thank you.

Jones: Thank you, Deborah.

What I want to do is to talk a little bit more about myself, and show you a few slides of a couple projects, and then end up with some ideas or some proposals.

I have been an artist, in one way or another, allof my life. As I became an adult and was stillpracticing art, people in my family, particularly the old folks in my family, would always ask me, over and over again, "Now, tell me what itis you do again?" I was constantly explainingthat.

In the early part of my career, I struggled for ananswer. As I became more grounded in my career, I was able to just blurt out, "Well, I am an artist! I do this and that and I earn an incomefrom it." Because really, that is what they were asking, "Are you okay or do I have tofeedyou?"

But now the generation that preceded me is starting to move on and now I look around at family gatherings and we are the old folks. I have a whole slew of young cousins and nieces and nephews, and even a couple of grandkids that ask me, "Now, what is it that you doagain?"

Here I am, at mid-life or mid-career, struggling for an answer again. Because I have decided to go down another path – not necessarily another path, but to veer to the right on this path that I have been going along. I am not sure where it is going to take me, but I can tell you where I have been.

Artists working in communities are nothing new. There are many programs established to support that good work and many of you all help support that work. But, it is not enough. That is really the subject for another forum – that is right down the hall.

What I want to do is to focus the attention today on my interest in the natural world in the context of community. Hopefully, this new road will give me the tools, just really another set of tools, for my toolbox.

I live and work in my studio in the Frogtown neighborhood of St. Paul. Frogtown's formal name is Thomas-Dale, named after these two intersections that are not too far way from the state capitol. It is in the first ring of neighborhoods that are right outside downtown St. Paul. It is the most diverse neighborhood in all of St. Paul. For the past seven years, I have worked with an association of black clubs in Frogtown and a variety of other organizations to transform these weedy, trash-filled vacant lots into public spaces.

Our initial push was to create a network of public spaces. To create in a way our own small, little park system that would serve as places for quiet meditation, places for family picnics, children's play, or community gatherings. Together, we created four pocket parks, about house-lot sized. Unfortunately, only one survives now. We lost two this summer. All were lost to new housing. That's an issue that I could go on and on about – garden permanence – and will get back to it shortly.

Hunger or food security issues have been something that have driven me to work on these things. Food distribution in inner-city neighborhoods is very critical. The thing that jump-started me into action was seeing this endless parade of people that would go by my studio in Frogtown; people who lacked transportation to quality, fresh food. I would see this parade of people who would walk by to the neighborhood convenience store and walk back with bags of groceries that they paid too much for; and vegetables that were not necessarily the freshest. More and more people have to go further and further for a large selection of quality inexpensive fresh produce. In addition, many potential low-income gardeners don't have access to a yard or to land to garden.

Many residents in neighborhoods like Frogtown have backgrounds in agriculture. A lot of these folks are first generation farmers or, at most, two generations away from growing food. In addition, there is a great deal of knowledge that can be learned from these most recent immigrants, whether they are from Gutbucket, Mississippi or whether they are from Laos, that can help inform some of our agricultural practices. That goes untapped right now.

This is one of the small pieces that we designed. Currently on that site is a Habitat for Humanity house in Frogtown.

I am not sure how many of you know the story of Project Row Houses in the Third Ward of Houston. It began as a vision of a group of artists looking for a space to work, to exhibit their work, and to collaborate with the community. These shotgun houses, believe it or not, were slated for demolition. The artists rallied the neighborhood to save a collection of 21 shotgun houses. These row houses now serve as the focus of an arts center. This arts center invites two groups of artists down every year to create installations inside the houses.

In addition, they have set aside five houses for a program for young single mothers, where the single mothers meet once a week with an advisor or a counselor to help point them to educational resources and other resources in the community. After they have established themselves, then they have to move on and thatspace is opened up for another young singlemother.

The also have four houses that are set aside forart programs for young people in the neighborhood.

About two years ago, I was invited down to Project Row Houses and I was hanging out with their master gardener. His name was Terry, and Terry was my inspiration for becoming a master gardener. He knew everything there was to know about plants. He knew all ofthe Latin names for these things, and that blew me away! And right then I said, "I want to be like that guy when I grow up." That was theimpetus.

He and I collaborated to create a demonstration garden that was inside and outside the shotgun house that I created. Inside the place,

we created a chapel dedicated to the collard green. What you see there is a small pedestal. On top of this lectern is a notebook and in this notebook we collected collard green recipes. In exchange for a recipe, we gave away seeds for collard greens. We packaged our own seeds. These seeds were distributed all over the neighborhood, both intentionally and unintentionally. Some of the kids that were involved in the program began to take the seeds and they just scattered the seeds. I came back about six months later and there were collard greens sprouting all over the neighborhood as a result of this!

But this was just used as a tool, really, to educate folks about the nutritional value of collard greens, as well as all of the different healthy ways of cooking collard greens. It really served as a metaphor, more than anything, to look at this one plant that had been a part of African-American culture for so long. In a way, it was an exercise in ethno-botany as well. At some point, I am going to publish this as a cookbook.

Terry and I found this old furniture; we made these benches. This sofa was sitting out in the dumpster and we covered the whole thing with collard greens. And it was a space, also, for quiet meditation. This was a blend of creating sacred spaces as well as creating a shrine to thecollards.

But in doing this, I am always asked the question and I am always asking myself this question, Is this art? Is this politics? Is this advocacy? You know, I really don't have a definitive answer for any of this stuff and that leads me into this set of proposals – proposals, really for you grantmakers out here. I wear that hat as well.

One is diversity: ensuring that your boards, your staff, your review panels all look like the communities that you are in. That way, it will help ensure that the artists really represent this community, not just in ethnic diversity or cultural diversity, but in economic diversity aswell.

That leads me into the next proposal, as well: to encourage research and collaborations between artists, social scientists, agronomists, ecologists, and neighborhood leaders. To pose questions, develop

hypotheses, and develop a line of research that will, hopefully, improve the urban environment, specifically, and the world in general. Maybe even, now that I have been closer and closer to the university, endow a chair for an artist in some place other than the art department – maybe in transportation studies or maybe even in the School of Agriculture. What this would do is help validate the field and the area that we have begun to explore. Few people will go into a field that they don't know anything at all about. What I am leading to is having artists intervene in these public spaces, or intervene in all aspects of society in one way or another.

Another quick proposal is to invest in artist spaces. Not just contribute in the form of grants to artist housing, or to artists' housing projects, or to artist-led communities, but through PRIs and program-related investments, you can actually invest.

The Jerome Foundation has made a couple of program-related investments. Cindy Gehrig, who is here right now, has done a lot of research and writing on this. In fact, there was an article that she did on program-related investments that was in the *Grantmakers in the Arts Newsletter* not too long ago. You can actually begin to create a loan fund for artists to create in communities.

Garden permanence is an issue that people are dealing with all over the country. As land becomes more attractive and more expensive in inner-city neighborhoods and those neighborhoods that are close to downtown, developers are snatching up those pieces of property. When I began to work in Frogtown seven years ago, there was what we thought was a limitless supply of vacant lots that we could work on. Working with one group of high school kids, we walked the five miles of streets of Frogtown and counted at least sixty vacant lots. Now, there are houses on at least thirty of those lots.

Green space and housing – that is an argument that I have been hesitant to enter. Some of these places we design as place markers, knowing that there is going to be a house on these lots at one time or another.

But the other part of this is that Frogtown, like many other inner-city neighborhoods, has the smallest number of parks in all of St. Paul.

Green space is needed. What's really needed is some sort of land policy that is controlled and decided upon by the neighboring community itself, rather than something that is dictated and driven by zoning issues and development pressure from the outside.

As I go further and further down this path, I figure out more and more what I want to do. I want to be more like Terry when I grow up. I am still asked this question, "Now, what is it you want to do when you grow up?" I hope that, once again, I will be able to just blurt it out, "I want to be an artist!" Folks will, hopefully, understand that it includes all these other studies underneath that hat.

Evans: I am going to talk briefly about "Water Fire" and then show a video of it, and then we will go into a more general discussion.

"Water Fire" is an intervention in a public landscape that is a very urban space, and it falls in between sculpture and installation, performance and site work. It also falls in between a variety of other areas. It's both temporary and an ongoing piece; it happens periodically during the year. This year we will be creating it 25 times.

It deals with issues of sacred space, as Seitu was talking about, and of ritual. It is very much a meditation on the fragility of life and on death. It is also intended to be a piece to create an urban community and to take an urban space that was very, very empty and create an event that would bring tens of thousands of people to it, to enliven that urban public space.

It started as a private project of mine. It is also unusual in how it is funded – it was a private project that I did with limited funding and then brought back a second time with some help from the LEF Foundation.

When I first started to dismantle it, I started getting phone calls from utter strangers saying, "This can't go away! This has to be an ongoing thing." And I said, "You are nuts! We couldn't possibly do this as an ongoing thing."

Eventually, it was run by a 501(c)(3) as a nonprofit and we have been doing it on a large-scale basis since 1996. This is our fifth year.

We created the event five times this year.

"Water Fire" is unusual, also, in that it is not a representation. It is not a faux piece; it is not a copy of something as a photograph or film would be. It is an actual object. It also is not mediated by the environment, it is not mediated by the Internet or something like that. It is a real event that happens in real time in a real place that belongs to the people. It is right in the middle of downtown Providence. As such, it is very accessible and it is intended to be thatway.

It also involves all five of your senses. You see it but you also hear it, and you smell it, and you feel it on your skin, you can taste it. The scent is very, very important. We burn a variety of wood, all salvaged. All of it that is not being used for another source, in New England, is actually usually burnt, anyway, outside of the town limits. So we are just burning it in the middle of downtown.

The other thing that I will say before I play the video is the music that you will hear on the video is actually part of the site-specific artwork. There was music throughout the two-thirds of a mile that the piece goes through downtown Providence. We set up cables and speakers and systems, and we have a soundtrack of music that could be six hours long, that comes from all over the world. It's music from Native America, music from Asia, music from Africa, Icelandic music, as well as contemporary avant-garde music, music we have commissioned from contemporary composers, opera, folk-music. It is a very, very broad range of music. We distribute a free program that lists exactly what we are playing so people can realize that this is a piece from North Africa, this is a piece from Mongolia, this is a piece from a Jewish shtetl in Russia. It says the precise time, so you can look and see exactly what you are hearing.

The music that we play is deliberately relatively unknown but, for the most part, accessible enough that I think people will give it the time to listen to. It's not played so loudly that it is a concert. It is played so that you can hear it or you can speak over it, because it is meant to encourage a dialogue. What happens is, total strangers will start to talk to each other at "Water Fire" and that's a very unusual thing to happen in an American city.

This piece is also produced with hundreds of volunteers. There are something like 780 volunteers that have worked on the project – over a hundred a night.

The last few things are some of the collaborations that we have worked on. We work on lots of collaborations with groups, community groups, and other artists in the community.

This is a navigable, public waterway and there are lots of boats that come through the piece. At some point, the piece became so popular, with as many as 50,000 people on a single night and with three or four hundred canoes and boats on the river, that the Coast Guard closed down all boating during the event. We have been in negotiation to try and figure out a way to get at least the non-motorized boats back on the river.

The fish that you saw going by was a collaboration we did with a local sculptor where we invited whoever wanted to come canoe through the piece as part of the piece. We got permission from the Coast Guard to do that. There are a lot of performances that we do on the water. I like the public going through the piece but the sheer numbers of boats got to be too crazy.

This was very much a piece about trying to reestablish a thoroughly blighted downtown space in a city that, really, not much was happening in. Even now, it can be very, very deserted, and deserted urban spaces are perceived of as dangerous. What you really need to do is to get people out of their cars, and walking and interacting with their fellow citizens, and talking.

Those were some of my issues in designing thepiece.

Spooner: Thank you all so much for those presentations. They were very compelling. They give us a lot of food for discussion here, too, as we go along.

We have a series of questions that I bounced off of the panelists, and they didn't complain about them too much, so we kept them. The first responds to statements that they have all made.

Deborah, for instance, has said we need, urgently, to imagine a range of environments that enrich our cultural life and reshape our link with nature. Barnaby Evans has said about his work that he is concerned with the revitalization of public urban space and the creation of new civic rituals. Seitu Jones has said that one of his missions has been to create art that can be a source of neighborhood pride as well as a tool for social and cultural development.

So my question to the artists is: How does your work reflect and how do you account for this growing attention to, and awareness of, nature? Specifically, of nature in urban public space? What does that mean to use art to reintroduce or reinvigorate spaces using natural entities?

So I will just throw that out. Anybody?

Karasov: To be a little bit of the devil's advocate here, one of the reasons why I said that we need a range of environments that help to reshape our relationship, is because we always have to remember that there are many people in this country who don't have a relationship to nature. I think art plays a critical role in a way to bring that relationship out. It's both sensual, as Barnaby said, it is a matter of reawakening all of the senses: sight, smell, touch. But it's also, I believe, a political issue as well. When you understand that you have a relationship, that relationship also implies responsibility andstewardship.

Historically, the word "landscape" came from the Dutch word *landschaft*. It was also the Dutch who made it seem like it was just an issue of scenic view. But really *landschaft* was part of the idea of farm and its surroundings, and your obligations towards those surroundings. It was your life, it was your home, and it was also your responsibility.

I agree with you that there are a lot of people who, because of the hectic nature of urban life and because of the lack of real sensualness in our life, are seeking nature for that. At the same time, I believe that artists play a role in reshaping people who don't have a relationship withnature.

Jones: I am a child of the 60s and early '70s. Ihad my political maturation during the culturalist-nationalist movement of the period. This was the cultural component to the Black Power movement of that time. One of the tenets of thought at that time was to leave your community more beautiful than you found it. Artists were employed, were pushed, were prodded to go out and, in many ways, beautify their communities by creating murals, by creating these new public sculptures. Doing it whether they had funding or not, with these self-endowed projects; going out and doing it with a bucket of paint. That's really what started the urban mural movement of the late 60s – artists taking that on themselves. Going back and looking at the work from the Mexican muralist movement, from the social-realist movement of the '30s, and on and on, there were all these precedents for artists creating thiswork.

What I've begun to do, and many other artists have now begun to do, is to use that tenet again. But to use natural materials and natural elements in making your community more beautiful than you found it. It can be as simple as just picking up the trash in a vacant lot and organizing that. Where is the art in that? One of the things that I have always encouraged is citizenship among artists, to think about ourselves as full participants in the society – folks who vote, folks who pay taxes, folks who can even run for office. To do whatever it takes to make this community more beautiful because we all benefit from that.

There has been a mound of studies. Specifically, I am thinking of issues coming out of the University of Illinois at Normal regarding "green-lining." They have coined this term "green-lining" to describe the movement of people across the country that are creating these green spaces within their neighborhoods, and the fight and the struggle to maintain them and keep them.

Evans: Slowly, the definition of nature got enlarged as it went across so I am going to enlarge it further.

I think the power of nature for people who live in cities is very, very real and very rare and we need to encourage that. In a sense, I am trying to get people to look at the sunset. "Water Fire" always happens precisely at the time when the sun sets. So our schedules

say things like "6:17" and people always call up and say, "How come it is at 6:17?" We are trying to get an awareness of the natural system to them. Or we will say, "It happens at sunset." And there will be this long pause and they will say, "Well, when is sunset?" People have no conception of when things happen.

What I am trying to do – and I think all artists are doing this – is to try to get a very visceral, emotional connection to people that perhaps we have hardened ourselves to and don't see in regular, everyday life.

I had a man come up to me who was a welder and he was building some skyscraper in downtown. He pulled the boat over, we were working, we're always adjusting things in the river. He said, "You know, I came here two weeks ago to see 'Water Fire' and I brought my wife, and I brought my kids, and I brought my mother-in-law, and I brought my mother-in-law's sister. And we were here all night. We had a great time. We didn't have one fight!" And I said, "That's great!" And he said, "Well, you don't understand. I don't think we have ever, ever done anything where we haven't ended up in a big knock-down, drag-out fight!" And I said, "Well, I am glad that you enjoyed the evening." And then he gave me the sort of compliments that I think artists always like to get, and he said, "You know, it is almost like this is art orsomething."

The reason why I like that so much is it indicates that from his perspective as a blue-collar welder, art was something that he knew existed but he knew it wasn't going to come into his life. It was not going to happen in the downtown of his city, and he wasn't going to be there with his mother-in-law. It just was not going to happen, but somehow something mediated their experience.