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## Nasher show probes man-earth links



'Waldfrau Getarnt,' or 'Forest Woman in Camouflage,' by Paloma Varga Weisz is part of this intriguing exhibition.

*Staff Photo by Harry Lynch*

By **MICHELE NATALE**, Correspondent

"The Forest: Politics, Poetics and Practice," an inaugural exhibition at the new Nasher Museum of Art at Duke, wraps its limbs around the globe to gather an intriguing survey of international contemporary art based on a multifaceted theme.

As visitors walk the path to the entrance, they are greeted by Patrick Dougherty's vertical, cocoonlike sapling sculptures meeting the cantilevered porch of Rafael Vinoly's building -- nature bending to architecture. Dougherty harvested the saplings from the woods around Duke, which feature in several of the pieces found inside.

Curator Kathleen Goncharov focused on video, photography, new media and sculpture when compiling the show, purposely excluding paintings because paintings and nature have been so intimately allied over the centuries. The choice of media gives the show a daring feel, underscored by dominant large-scale photographs.

By approaching the topic from myriad viewpoints, "The Forest" becomes a mirror reflecting wonder and refuge, fear and destruction, a place of questions gathered from many corners of the earth into one remarkable, rather small, gallery. Reverie and safety ultimately reign -- lulling us away from critical questions, raised but unanswered.

Contemplating the poetic, beautiful-but-dangerous aspect of the forest, Petah Coyne's eerie "Paris Blue," a wax Virgin Mary statue covered in blue-black wax-dipped silk flowers, tassels and feathers is juxtaposed with Kiki Smith's ambiguous life-size bronze "Wolf" with a red glove in its mouth.

David Claerbout's "Le Moment," a suspense-filled, slow camera pan of a night forest, builds to a horror-movie crescendo, only to deflect our expectations. Similarly, Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's "Cabin Fever" diorama uses sound to implicate us in a scene of domestic violence deep in its wooded setting.

Addressing the political, "The Forest" explores the idea of deforestation, the destruction of the planet and issues of colonialism, with Simon Starling's "Trinidad Tree House," a series of photographs depicting a landscape clear-cut to accommodate Western building practices.

Joseph Beuys' "Save the Woods" documents a protest against the building of a country club outside

Dusseldorf, Germany. Demonstrators wielded brooms to ritually clear the forest of man's greed and destructive impulses, marking with circles and crosses trees that would be lost.

Inigo Manglano-Ovalle films a lush "rain forest," which is actually Chicago's famous Fern Rooms at Garfield Park Conservatory, in which a Robert Oppenheimer look-alike stares piercingly out at viewers. The pairing of the ersatz rain forest with one of the individuals key to the development of the nuclear bomb conveys the power of the individual.

Turning its eye toward practice, the exhibit features cyber artist Wolfgang Staehle's commissioned work "Hole #9 August 13 2005." From Room 510 of the Washington Duke Inn, he made a 48-hour continuous video, uploaded on the Internet and projected over 24 hours in the gallery -- a succession of 12,559 pictures moving incrementally from dawn to night. Watching for change in the image, a carefully framed vista of golf course sand traps, is a bit like trying to see the minute hand of a clock move -- an exercise in seeing. We must wait patiently, adopt a different scale for time and accept subtle changes of light as a cloud passes over the landscape as a dramatic movement.

Returning to the poetic, viewers should allot the full 29 minutes to savor Yang Fudong's glorious 35mm black-and-white film "Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Grove, Part 1." Referring to a famous group of third-century artists and writers, the film updates its subject, following seven young people on a pilgrimage to China's sacred Yellow Mountain. The misty clouds rolling around wind-tortured pine trees and mountain tops could be taken straight from a Chinese ink painting. The film's deep yet delicate musings reflect a Buddhist philosophy visually echoed in Wim Wenders' over 10-foot tall photograph of a bamboo forest in Nara, Japan, or Hope Sandrow's photographic scroll "Untitled Observations."

So many of the works here, like Rosemary Laing's "Red Piazza #3," a real Victorian carpet improbably placed in an Australian forest, lure us with beauty and implicit danger, as the forest has long done in legend, and in life.

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