Art alert

Ecotopia exhibit's dozen artists examine environmental crisis

Robert Reid, Record staff

KITCHENER — Few concerns worry Canadians more than the threat of environmental degradation on our beleaguered planet.

Many believe the assault on the biosphere puts our very survival at risk. Prime Minister Stephen Harper triggered an onslaught of public outrage when his government bullishly tried to fast-track approval for a pipeline from the Alberta oil sands to the British Columbia coastline after gutting the national environmental review process. Such cautionary controversy makes Ecotopia not only relevant, but urgent.

Lynne Marsh’s film Planterwald (2010), as seen in this production photograph, is part of the Ecotopia exhibit.

Ecotopia

Ecotopia
Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery
On view through Jan. 28
Information and gallery hours available online at www.dwag.ca

Ecotopia assembles work of 12 artists working in a variety of media

Organized and circulated by the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, the multimedia exhibition opened Friday and continues through Jan. 6.

The opening proved timely because it fell a day after Alain Casey visited Waterloo Region as part of the annual One Book, One Community initiative.

Casey’s Governor-General’s Award-winning book, Lakeland, examines environmental issues in the context of the country’s extensive network of freshwater lakes.

Guest curator Amanda Cachia, an Australian-raised, freelance curator pursuing a doctorate at the University of California, assembled a dozen artists who work in a variety of media spanning drawing, painting, sculpture, installation, photography, video and digital imaging.

The exhibition borrows its title from Ecotopian fiction, a literary sub-genre wherein utopian and dystopian themes clash in a wild vortex of dream and nightmare.

The exhibition, which runs through Jan. 6, is shiftily balanced at the other end by a dangling chainsaw.

The installation evokes associations with clear-cut logging which is a metaphor for many forms of destructive resource exploitation encompassing forestry, mining, energy and hydroelectric practices.

Dagmar Genda’s Panorama is a circular, collage-mural suspended from the ceiling.

Viewers are invited to ascend a platform and contemplate the inside of the mural by rotating 360 degrees.

Drawn from various nature books and tourism brochures, the imagery depicts an apocalypse of slaughtered and eviscerated wildlife that raises questions about Canada’s uneasy identification with notions of wilderness which has increasingly become commodified.

For Untitled, Kate Wilson drew directly on the white gallery wall with a black marker.

Her frenzied image evokes a sense of the destructive forces that arise from within the world of nature (tornadoes, hurricanes, tidal waves, floods) as opposed to such forces as urbanization, transportation and industrialization that attack nature from the outside.

The Nurse and Envelope, a couple of meticulously detailed watercolours by Tristam Landesdorne, blur the lines between architecture and landscape by depicting abandoned and dilapidated structures overrun by fecund vegetation.

After closing in Kitchener, Ecotopia will tour across Canada during 2013-14.

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