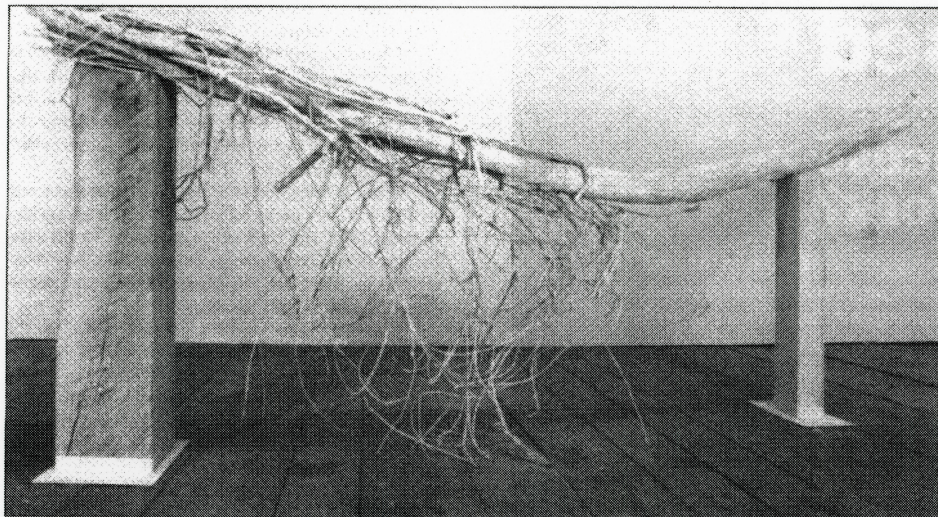


ART / Paul Smart

TERRA opens at Kleinert/James

**Ghost Ship, by Nancy Azara**

The Hudson Valley in general, and Woodstock in particular, has long seen its place in the art world defined by the ways nature seeps into all we do. Even when those creating in our midst slipped into other isms, local artists tended to get drawn back to lessons learned from what surrounds them.

TERRA, the new exhibit opening at the Woodstock Byrdcliffe Guild's Kleinert/James Center for the Arts of this weekend, is an eight-person show subtitled "A group exhibition exploring environmental issues." Curated by the painter Melinda Stickney-Gibson, whose own work matches internal expressionism with natural motifs, it defines its mission with an artist's sense of verbal concision, describing itself as "a visual conversation addressing the environmental and sustainability issues facing today's world community, and the immediate personal responsibility that belongs to each and every one of us."

The artists on view are as diverse in their sense of style, media and methodology as they come to seem conjoined by their deep-felt connections to the natural world they invite into their work, sometimes directly, often obliquely, but always as key components of what makes their art sing.

Malden resident and SUNY Ulster art department chair Jain Machell has filled a wall of what has become the region's most innovative gallery with over twenty black walnut ink drawings of rocks and rivers. There's a large totem-like twig sculpture, "Ghost Ship," by Nancy Azara and an installation of beautifully hand-carved "spoons" by Samm Kuncce, painstakingly made from a fallen ancient lilac bush on her property. Edgar Cardenas, a sustainability artist/scientist, has created large-scale photographs of water on paper and other surfaces. There are a pair of detailed, landscape paintings on large ash log slices by Alison Moritsugu, depicting the subtle

destructive signs of the emerald ash borer and a compelling narrative on the decline of native species. Ian Laughlin of Chichester has created a new project-specific sculpture, while Matthew Fasone brings in a series of small "damaged" books on found wooden ledges. Topping it all is a quirky self-portrait that evokes Northern Renaissance painting by renowned neo-Rococo painter Julie Heffernan.

The creators come from here, the City, and all over the U.S. Yet their mix of works feels endemic to the gnarled forests and various kills and cloves of the Catskills and Hudson Valley, just as pieces by Raoul Hague and Barnett Newman, Milton Avery and Al Held, Martin Puryear and Doris Lee have all found ways of mirroring what surrounds us over the years, albeit with a new sense of thoughtfulness and polemic that mirrors our increasingly worried view of that same nature these days.

And as the Guild is quick to point out, as well, it's all also part of the Kleinert/James's year-round contemporary arts programming "addressing issues of relevance to the Woodstock community and beyond."++

TERRA opens Friday, October 20 and will feature an artists' reception on Saturday, October 21 from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.; it runs through November 26.

For further information visit www.woodstockguild.org, call 679-2079, or visit the gallery at 34 Tinker Street in the center of Woodstock.