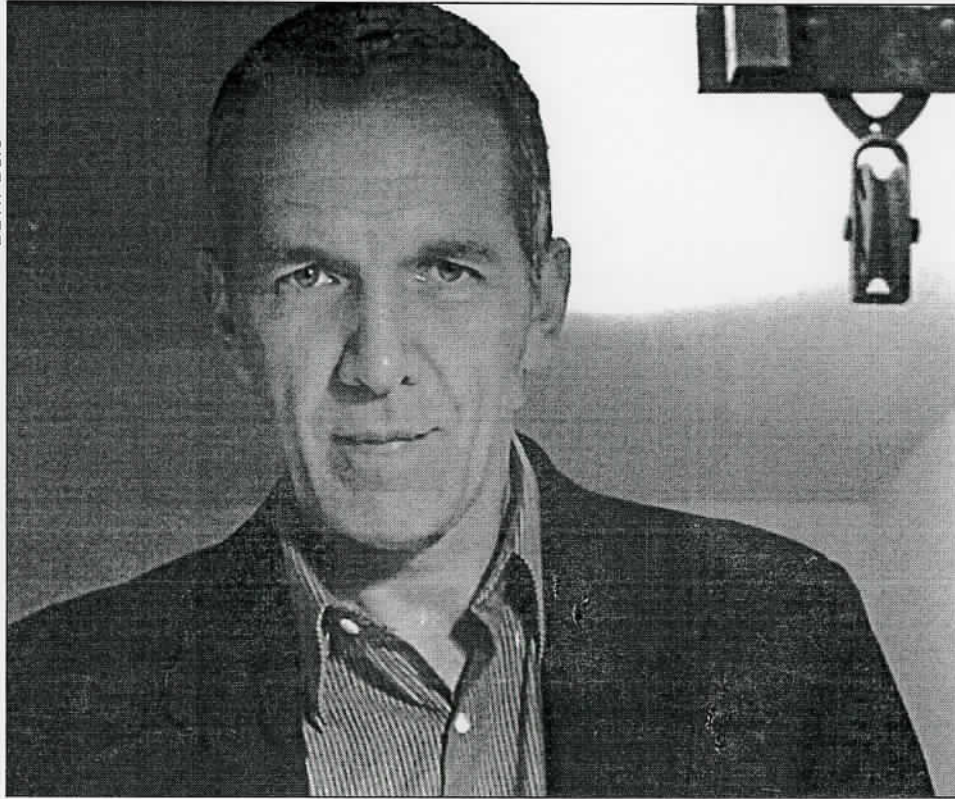


NATURAL REACTIONS

Saugerties artist Iain Machell featured in Williamsburg, Brooklyn exhibit

The question of whether humans and technology can coexist harmoniously with nature is not new. Some would argue that humankind has never attempted to coexist but to subjugate the natural world in order to further its own pursuits. While he does not necessarily answer the question, Saugerties artist Iain Machell does at least attempt to provoke viewers of his work into considering the question, even if they cannot solve it themselves.

BETH BLIS



The artist, Iain Machell.

Some of Machell's work is currently featured in an exhibit entitled "Natural Reaction" at the Tastes Like Chicken gallery in Williamsburg, Brooklyn that runs December 3.

According to exhibit curators Summer Guthery and David Smith, the exhibit seeks to explore humankind's "complex and often volatile relationship with the natural environment." "Natural Reactions" also features 13 other artists who use a myriad of mediums, including drawings, sculpture, photography, video and sound recordings.

The exhibit was a natural fit for Machell's work, which is exactly what the Tastes Like Chicken curator Guthery thought when she saw his flatfile portfolio at the Pierogi gallery, also located in Brooklyn.

"They appealed to her because the topics I deal with in my drawings have to do with conflicts between nature and technology," said Machell, "and in particular, I'm using a lot of a text and diagrams from Homeland Security and warfare, things from the Iraqi conflict from the news, and I combine that information with rubbings of plants."

Machell doesn't just deal with nature versus technology in drawings. He also explores the same themes in his sculptures, which features items in nature juxtaposed with texts pulled from military handbooks, diagrams and security manuals. According to Machell, he began using these two diametrically opposing elements after

the events of 9/11 and the beginning of the Iraq war.

"I remember seeing Colin Powell's presentation to the [United Nations] trying to convince them that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and there were all these great diagrams," he said. "There's a lot of military speak that really misleading, and I just found myself interested in the kind of diagrams that they use."

Machell conceded that the language of the military and military diagrams may not be appealing to most, a fact that he hopes will be evocative.

"Most people want to put that information to one

side," he said. "They don't want to know what's going on, so in a way, I'm trying to use information from sources that we don't really want to know too much about and put it in a different context."

For Machell, using these texts in a natural setting is an effective irony.

"In a way, I'm trying to find somewhere where you'd least expect to find that information," he said. "We live in such a beautiful paradise up here, that if you suddenly came across the text of something that didn't belong there, it makes you think."

The post-9/11 mentality that we are no longer safe in our country, not even in the wilds of the Hudson Valley, plays heavily into Machell's work. In fact, his surroundings are an integral part of what he does. "I revere the landscape, I admire it; I make art that's about that. If you live up in the countryside, how do you reconcile when you wake up in the morning and it's beautiful and then you go to work and you read a newspaper and it's awful.

"I guess you feel about guilty living in paradise," he continued. "I don't have to think about the rest of it. I'm safe. But the news tells us

we're not safe anywhere."

The ultimate crux of the matter is: can humans co-exist peacefully with nature?

"I think I would be lying if I said yes, but also that would be too black and white," he said. "I think there is so much that's good that's going on, there are so many good things we could do. I don't want to see it as this kind of constant battleground and we're never going to win and we should leave nature alone, because that's nearsighted. I guess the short answer is, yes, there has to be a way."

Kandy Harris

Beautiful Music