

FLOW: The Web of Interconnections, 2010

Artists: Barbara Westfall & Beth Racette

Installation at Overture Center of the Arts, Madison, WI

Media: Grapevine, glass, ceramics, live orchids, copper

90' long x 9' high x 24" deep

Artist Statement

FLOW: The Web of Interconnection, is a collaborative exploration of the interconnectedness of all living beings. Through our evocation of the natural world and its manipulation by human beings, we invite viewers to appreciate and enjoy the beauty, fecundity, and complexity of life on our planet.

The installation flows through the gallery, encompassing land and water which is represented with large segments of twisting grapevine (*vitus*). The fibrous vine is layered, bent and attached to the gallery walls, creating a 90' x 9' wall relief. In the section representing the **ocean**, the vine depicts wetlands and delicate ocean shores. As the density of the vine rises and builds, cresting waves of vine over nine feet high contain live plants, ceramic and glass forms that represent shells, fish and other ocean life forms. Water covers most of our planet, and we are made mostly of water, but clean water is increasingly scarce. The ways in which humans use and exercise power over water is signified by the constriction of the vine into copper pipe. In the **conveyance of water** section, vines flow in and out of copper couplings, faucets and valves, reminiscent of the plumbing in our homes and workplaces. In this section, a small lava lamp containing bubbling, black liquid depicts the gas and oil reserves held under ground.

Flowing out of the water, the installation moves into a landscape of **gardens** that contain a diversity of life forms. The garden section contains lush branches of hand painted leaves, ceramic fruits, flowers and live orchids representing abundant life growing above ground. Underneath the garden, the vine roots below the surface, with sprouting tubers, burrowing larvae and microbes that inhabit the soil. Nearby, an 8' x 6' dense, circular grapevine wreath overlooks the gardens representing **nests**. Nests are homes - a place to rest, be sheltered, rejuvenate. We all need homes, and, in a bigger sense, the earth is home to all of us. The nest section contains feathers, sumac berries, and ceramic forms that call to mind birds, mammals and creatures that make their homes in the woods and grasslands.

Our varied natural and human-made materials - porcelain with encaustic, glass, paint, and copper, as well as other natural materials – highlight the diversity of species on our planet. The ceramics and paintings explore the interrelationships that are the basis of life, from cells to galaxies, in which patterns from microscopic to macroscopic repeat themselves. The grapevine is a native plant to Wisconsin, which we harvested from public and private lands in a sustainable manner, to ensure its future growth and support the life of the surrounding plant communities competing for sunlight and space to grow. We harvested the grapevine using bow saws and climbing trees in a process that was both fun and challenging.

Both of us have explored themes of nature and culture in our previous artistic work, and in this collaborative project we have chosen to expand and deepen our exploration of these themes. Since that time we have worked together to design and create all the other elements of this installation. An intentional investigation of themes of interdependence, our collaboration echoes this exhibition's theme.