

Barbara Westfall

*Root Awakening*, 2005

Commonwealth Gallery, Madison, WI

Aspen roots, branches, grapevine, faux fur, feathers, paint, and pastel

Scale: 25' wide x 20' deep x 9' tall

*"Root Awakening"*, is a mixed media ecological art installation made from colorful, hand painted aspen roots and branches, which are suspended together in segments from the ceiling, creating a small world of floating sculptural expression. The individual trees from this odd enchanted forest sway back and forth as viewers walk through its narrow passageways. The microcosm of trees are surrounded by three walls of the gallery, where long, twisted segments of a grapevine create a wall relief interlaced with drawings of vine, made using brightly colored pastels. Written on the wall in chalk are poems about nature, statistics about the loss of species habitat and messages by the artist about the need for meaningful connections with nature.

The installation explores the fecundity of nature and the abstraction of it, inspiring symbolism and beauty. The aspen root balls and branches came from trees grown by Michael Stevens, a graduate student of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Department of Forest Ecology. The roots were grown in pots on the UW campus as part of Steven's research on aspen-insect interaction. His research looked at the relationship and behavior of aspen trees (*populus tremuloides*) and aspen-feeding insects including the gypsy moth, forest tent caterpillar, white marked tussock moth, and tiger swallowtail.

Barbara Westfall's interdisciplinary approach to integrated art and ecology, have provided her with the opportunity to work with a diverse population of professionally active faculty, scholars, artists, universities, city, county and government organizations. The eco art installation raised awareness about the beauty and fragile state of aspen forests and helped broaden a better understanding of the relationship between aspen feeding insects and their habitats.