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Photo: David Sandell/ The Capital Times

Madison artist Barbara Westfall has attempted to find significance in the passing of 100 aspen trees, which are being removed as part of a prairie restoration project in the UW Arboretum. The aspen have been girdled, or stripped of their bark, by Arboretum staff so they will die from the roots to make way for endangered prairie.)

## Artist's imagination, work, lend beauty to trees' death

**By Mike Ivey**

The Capital Times

At first glance, you might wonder why Madison artist Barbara Westfall would spend months in the University of Wisconsin Arboretum scraping and sanding dying trees.

Then when you glimpse the subtle oranges and browns of the bark, the meaning of Westfall's art becomes clearer. "Other cultures honor their dead," she said. "This is my way of honoring the trees." Westfall's "Daylighting the Woods" highlights some 100 aspen that are being removed for a prairie restoration project.

The aspen have been girdled, a bark-stripping process that causes the trees to die slowly from the roots. If not removed in

this fashion, hearty aspen quickly sprout up again.

But rather than letting the aspen die a lonely death over two years, Westfall has attempted to find significance in their passing.

"I wanted to show nature in conflict," she said, admitting that some may find the effort disturbing. She has removed additional layers of bark to reveal its colors, and sanded some of the areas scraped by Arboretum staff.

Bill Roark hasn't seen Westfall's art or the prairie project. But he questioned the philosophy behind such restoration efforts.

Every time the Arboretum does something like this, I wonder about it," said Roark, who was active in the fight to save Turville Woods trees from a

proposed swimming pool. "It seems these restorations have become a little trendy."

But Westfall said people are realizing they must take an active role in repairing the planet.

"This isn't earth art or environmental art like you had in the '60s. It's about healing," said Westfall, 33, who received a \$2,000 grant from the Madison Committee for the Arts for the project.

The opening for the artwork will be from 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday, with a rain date of Sunday. It will feature music recorded by the Kronos Quartet and images from Madison photographer A.E. Mader. Maps to the site are available in the Arboretum's McKay Center.