



«Kevin O'Dwyer, curator and art director for Blackfoot Pathways: Sculpture in the Wild, discusses the history of sculpture on the landscape and the development of the land art movement.

«Biologist and artist Brandon Ballengee explains the biological processes illuminated by his project "Love Motel for Insects."



»» Sculptor Steven Seagel talks about the concept of time as a fourth dimension that has informed his artwork.

»Kevin O'Dwyer explains why he and Rick Dunkerley opted to bring primarily European artists to Lincoln for the first Sculpture in the Wild International Sculpture Symposium scheduled for Sept. 15 through Oct. 10



MORE OF AN ART THAN A SCIENCE? MAYBE NOT

Seminar takes a look beyond traditional boundaries of the art world

Story and photos by Roger Dey
BYD Editor

Steve Seagel stood in the center of Nature's Playground east of Lincoln and talked through an idea for the sculpture he may do on site when he participates in the Sculpture in the Wild International Sculpture Symposium here in September. As he talked about the concept of the monumental structure he had in mind, tied to Lincoln's logging heritage, it was clear what he was considering was more than just art for art's sake. Seagel also brought bear knowledge of engineering, math, geometry, ecology and climate, as well as his own observations of the landscape, and it illustrated why sculptors that engage with their surroundings can be powerful teaching tools.

Seagel joined Kevin O'Dwyer and biologist/artist Brandon Ballengee in Montana to visit the future home of the Sculpture in the Wild sculpture park and to join them in a seminar called "Art in the land: Beyond the White Cube" at the Holter Art Museum in Helena last Friday.

The seminar, designed to kick start this year's Blackfoot Pathways, Sculpture in the Wild International Sculpture Symposium, provided a look into the land art movement that has taken sculpture beyond the confines of museums and galleries into environments where they are tied to the landscape, history and culture of the area.

Montana Governor Steve Bull-

ock introduced the seminar and reflected on the time he spent at the Gates of the Mountains when he was younger, free from the constraints of his parents and everyday life, allowed to "think a little larger and dream a little bit bigger." He said that freedom found in nature is similar to what can be found in art. "We can get lost in art, we can think a little bit bigger, we can think about ourselves in a different way," he said.

Bullcock said art is a big part of what communities around Montana can offer. "I'm really excited about how Lincoln is dreaming a little bit bigger, thinking about how they contribute not only to this area but to the greater state and also to the appreciation of anybody who passes by," he said.

O'Dwyer, who first proposed the idea of a sculpture park in Lincoln to Rick Dunkerley, led the seminar off with a look at the history of artwork in the landscape, from Neolithic monuments to modern works by conceptual artists who developed the idea of art in the landscape, removed from traditional gallery spaces.

"The artists were not depicting the landscapes, but engaging them. Their art was not simply of the landscape, but in it as well," he said.

In 2002, O'Dwyer found himself at the forefront of a land art movement in Ireland when he proposed Sculpture in the

Parklands, a sculpture park that honored the heritage of the peat industry in the Irish Midlands in an area of cutaway bog that was being reclaimed as parkland.

The project, which became the template for Sculpture in the Wild, has been ongoing for more than a decade and the park has expanded to 40 acres and is home to more than 20 sculptures. O'Dwyer said the open spaces of such parks allow kids who may not be exposed to a museum, but who are very much engaged in their own environment, the opportunity to experience art at an early age. "It's user friendly and they can just enjoy the walk, run, play but can also engage with the pieces."

Although Seagel wasn't one of the artists O'Dwyer worked with at Lough Boora, he was the first artist called when O'Dwyer realized Dunkerley was serious about developing the sculpture park.

Seagel built a reputation using newspaper and other recyclable materials often thought of as trash as sculptural media.

O'Dwyer saw the possibilities for Seagel to crate a piece using newspaper, a wood product, that would honor the town's timber history.

Sporting an unmistakable New York accent and an acerbic wit, Seagel said the western landscape

has been the single most important thing in his development as an artist, talked about seeing landscape in four dimensions,

the fourth being time. His work explores the relationship between the temporary and the permanent and the ecological systems that can turn one material into another over time and its what led him to begin to work with newspaper as a sculptural medium. One of his first attempts led to a "Eureka!" moment when he saw how what was essentially a monumental pile of old newspapers transformed over the winter and in a little over 20 years has transformed and returned to the landscape as trees and vegetation overtook it.

"Trees make paper, paper goes back into the forest, paper makes trees, so it's the full cycle," he said.

Ballengee, the seminar's third artist, also creates work that addresses ecological systems.

"What about this term ecology?" Ballengee asked. He explained that systems are a really important part of ecology, a term first created by artist and scientist Earnst Haeckel in 1866. "Thinking through these connections, when I think of land I think of ecosystems, the environments, the way that things are connected in landscapes and the way that even art in the landscape can somehow, in some cases ... you start to see how this becomes part of a different small ecosystem."

A working biologist with a long-standing love of amphibians, Ballengee was on O'Dwyer's short list of artists he wanted involved in Sculpture in the Wild. Although



Rick Dunkerley talks with Steven Seagel, Kevin O'Dwyer and Brandon Ballengee during their site visit to Nature's playground, the future home of the Blackfoot Pathways: Sculpture in the Wild sculpture park. The artists trudged through frozen, shin deep snow to get the lay of the land and develop a sense of the space where they'll be working.

he won't take part in this fall's symposium, he plans to return to Montana in the spring of 2015 to create a "Love Motel for Insects" in Lincoln.

Ballengee, who worked with O'Dwyer at Sculpture in the Parkland, uses the "Love Motels" as a teaching tool as well as art. A continuing series that has been around the world, it evolved from a simple sheet and a UV light in Costa Rica into more complex forms, often based in the forms of insect wings or by the shape of the insects themselves.

Ballengee said many of the locales where he's created a "Love Motel for Insects" get into the experience by hosting Bug Day celebrations.

At a short panel discussion after the seminar O'Dwyer explained that part of the fun of curating a project like Sculpture in the Wild, which involves international artists who will see things from a different perspective, is its unpredictability. "You never know what you're going to end up with, how they will respond," he said. "It might just be a story. When I bring them for a site visit and I bring them to a pub or something like that, and somebody makes a-

mark, it might get them to start researching an idea that expands into an installation."

Blackfoot Pathways: Sculpture in the Wild is planning to start an online funding effort with Kickstarter on Monday April 14 to help raise \$25,000 to support the project. The campaign will be live for 30 days and anyone who wants to contribute can donate however much they would like.

Anyone interested in helping out can go to the Sculpture in the Wild Facebook page or sculptureinthewild.com for more information.



Jessica DenBoer, Sylvia Johnson, Kathy Shaw and Wendy Gehring view a slide show of the artists work during a meet and greet at the Lincoln Community Hall, Saturday April 5. "I think it's totally awesome," Gehring said. "I'm so proud of Rick and Kevin for coming up with this. Rick is making it happen. He's like a bulldog. He just makes it happen."

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