

Environmental Art in Action: LandLab

By Christina Catanese, Director of Environmental Art

Land. Lab. When I think of the Schuylkill Center's mission, these are two words emerge as fundamental to what we do. Using our land as a living laboratory, we seek to inspire meaningful connections with nature through our diverse departments and programs.

This year, we are launching the next generation of our environmental art program at the Schuylkill Center, which touches on both of these key aspects – and that advances the cutting edge of environmental art while deepening the integration of art into the mission of the Center.

LandLab is a unique artist residency program that integrates art, ecological restoration, and education – a trifecta which also mirrors the Center's three key program areas. A joint project of the Schuylkill Center and the Center for Emerging Visual Artists (CFEVA), LandLab offers resources and space at the Center's 340 acres of woods and meadows for artists to engage audiences in ecological stewardship and artistic creation. LandLab residencies will make innovative installations that prevent or remediate environmental damage while raising public awareness about ecology.

The residency asks that art not only respond to the environment, but become an active participant in its setting. Over the decades, envi-

ronmental art has ranged from the inherently ephemeral – works that melt as the sun rises or vanish as the tide comes in – to the enduring – installations designed to provoke thought for years to come. LandLab will push that definition a step farther, with installations that actively work to restore the land while being works of art in their own right. In addition, LandLab artists will involve the public, by creating opportunities for people to participate in art-making and stewardship. Those at the front lines of environmental art increasingly recognize that considering only the artistic component is often not enough – its educational and stewardship potential is key, too.

This spring, we named six Philadelphia artists to the four LandLab residencies. Leslie Birch will investigate stormwater run-off, an issue that our wet spring has brought into brighter light. Jake Beckman will explore the cycle of detritus, forest decay, and regrowth. Artist-botanist duo WE THE WEEDS (Kaitlin Pomerantz and Zya Levy) will remove invasive vines while using them as part of an installation exploring plant and human migration. And Maggie Mills, B. H. Mills, and Marguerita Hagan will construct an installation that fosters the growth of native pollinator-friendly plants. These LandLab projects each answer a pressing question being asked in our region and the world: how can we respond

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LandLab asks art to be an active participant in the land.

Upcoming LandLab Events:

Vines of SCEE with WE THE WEEDS

Saturday, July 12, 10 am – 12 pm | Free

Join the botanical arts team for a hands-on vine identification and harvesting workshop, highlighting the characteristics, uses, and lore surrounding different local and invasive vines. This event is part of a residency creating of a woven artwork exploring plant migration.

Opening Reception & Artist Talk with Resident Artists

Saturday, July 26 | 3:00 – 5:00 pm | Free

Come out for the official unveiling of Maggie Mills, B.H. Mills, and Marguerita Hagan's completed installation. See their garden in full midsummer bloom and their sculpture in full swarm. Artists and scientific experts will speak on plant-pollinator interactions.

Director's Cut Celebrating LandLab

There are so many things that make the Schuylkill Center unique—our large size (340 acres), our age (we turn 50 next year!), our location within Philadelphia (there are surprisingly few nature centers located within large American cities), our wildlife clinic (the only one within a four-county radius), the number of people who support us (you!).

But high on the uniqueness list is our environmental art program. Since 2002, we have been presenting an extraordinary array of artists in indoor and outdoor exhibitions; no other American nature center maintains an art program with the ambition and scope of this one. And the art has spanned a wide range: sculptures powered by the forces of nature, portraits of endangered species, knit-bombed trees along our trails, even artworks that last no more than 24 hours. Our art program has presented innumerable opportunities to incite curiosity and awareness about the natural world and environmental concerns.

So we are thrilled to use this issue of Quill to announce that our environmental art program enters a new chapter with LandLab, our environmental art residency. As Christina Catanese, the program's new director, describes in our cover story, LandLab, generously funded through a coalition of foundations and private donors, brings artists to the Center—and to our property's living laboratory—in long-term residencies that allow them to explore the connections between art and science, to engage with our land and the creatures that live upon it, and to use art to actually improve the functioning of our ecosystem.

This builds upon the work pioneered here by Pennsylvania's own Stacy Levy, one of the country's great environmental artists. Stacy's Rain Yard, located in our courtyard, playfully prevents our building's stormwater from eroding our own steep backyard. Even better, it allows visitors to pour that stormwater over a variety of surfaces to experiment with it. It's interactive, it's colorful, and it lowers our building's own impact on the environment – art and science acting together. That's where our environmental art program is headed.

I invite you to read Christina's story carefully, participate in this summer's LandLab events, meet the artists we are engaging here, and help this new chapter of SCEE's programming artfully unfold.

Happy summer!



Mike Weillbacher
Executive Director

Reach Mike at mike@schuylkillcenter.org or @SCEEMike.



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Aero 2010, Moto Ohtake. This kinetic sculpture, temporarily installed near the Visitor's Center was activated by the wind, giving it an infinite number of movements.



Yellow Zingers, Tim Prentice. This sculpture, which ran along a trail from May – September 2010, was moved and shaped by air currents in the forest.



The Wild Side

Clinic Case Study: Raising a Baby Blue Jay

By Michele Wellard, Assistant Wildlife Rehabilitator

On May 13, this baby blue jay, likely having fallen from his nest, was brought into the Wildlife Clinic. The people who found him couldn't locate the nest to return him, and so they brought him to the clinic. Over the last few weeks, this little blue jay has had many people involved in his care, from dedicated volunteers to our wildlife rehabilitators. Raising a songbird baby can be a real challenge, with a particular diet, a special nest to ensure his legs grow straight, and regular feedings until he's old enough to feed himself. At the clinic we are careful to make sure the blue jay does not become tame or imprinted, so he can be released into the wild once he's old enough.



THESE PHOTOS SHOW THE LITTLE blue jay (left and right), just two or three days old, upon admission to the clinic. Songbirds like him are born naked, blind, and helpless, and with a strong urge to “gape” (i.e. beg for food). How did we know he was a bluejay? There are several clues. His dark skin is different from other baby birds, who are often more pink. He has absolutely no fuzz on him, whereas other songbird hatchlings sometimes do. The color around his beak is pink – many songbird babies have yellow “lips” called the gape flange. The gape flange, together with the beak color inside the bird's mouth indicate to the parents exactly where to deposit the food.



BY THE SECOND WEEK OF his life (right), you can see many changes starting to the blue jay's appearance, as he grows at a rapid rate. He is fed every half an hour from sun up to sundown by clinic staff and volunteers, just as his parents would. He is fed insects, a mush called “songbird diet” and some berries. You'll see that he has become “fuzzy” in places (right), and his wing feathers are starting to develop. At this point they are still “blood feathers” (they have a blood supply to nourish the developing feather) and look like little sticks. Tiny spurts of the beginnings of feathers are beginning to emerge from his head. He has almost doubled in weight and has gotten much bigger.



AFTER THE SECOND WEEK (BELOW), our little patient is starting to look more like a bird, particularly a blue jay. He has gotten some real feathers and is looking distinctively fluffy. He can hold his head upright when at rest, and those blood feathers are starting to sheath of the coating and open up at the tips. He's also starting to get the beginning of that famous jaunty blue jay crest.



BY THE THIRD WEEK, OUR little bird is becoming unmistakably a blue jay. His wing feathers are opening more, showing a variety of white and blue. The feathers on his face are also coming in, creating his distinctive facial markings. At this stage he is still a “nestling,” too young to leave the nest. However, he is starting to have an urge to open his wings and flap a bit. He can't perch yet, but should be doing so soon. Then he will be moved to a small mesh cage, with a training perch to strengthen his feet and leg muscles and give him experience perching and hopping.



ON MAY 29, THE BLUE JAY took his first flight, fluttering for a few seconds before landing on the ground. He's learning to perch in his small mesh indoor aviary. He will go into an outdoor aviary in early June, and be released in late June. ■

We're pleased to report that assistant rehabilitator Michele Wellard, who recently passed a tough exam to earn her license from the state to rehabilitate birds of prey like hawks and owls. This is her second license, complementing the songbird one. Congratulations, Michele!

Environmental art continued from page 1

to environmental degradation?

So far, the last group noted above has broken ground. This trio is building raised hexagonal garden beds that illustrate the structure of the hive, and adding a ceramic installation of a swarm of bees over the garden. They've already installed their beds and planted native flowers and herbs, and have been diligently molding hundreds of clay bees, assisted by our visitors at a bee-making event in June. The completed installation will be unveiled at a special opening on July 26. Monitoring of the garden is crowdsourced – anyone can help track the pollinators visiting their installation.

The other resident artists are deep in their inquiry and investigation phase, taking time to engage with our distinct property. We believe artistic advancement in environmental art requires three opportunities rarely offered to artists: space in an ecologically complex landscape, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and time for nature to respond to the installed work. The opportunity that LandLab provides to work with materials and processes over time is unique and will advance our art program and the field of environmental art.

As both an artist (dance) and scientist (hydrology), I couldn't be more excited about the rich possibilities for collaboration between these two fields. The communication and education challenges faced by scientists are vast, and artists can play a huge role – revealing, connecting, questioning, and providing new avenues into environmental issues. Artists and scientists offer different perspectives and skills; bringing them together, as we are in LandLab, can foster unexpected new solutions.



Mills, Mills, and Hagan are busy creating a swarm of ceramic bees and botanical etchings to pair with their pollinator garden.

Events this summer are just the beginning of LandLab's educational programming that will allow visitors to connect with art, artists, and land. Just as LandLab asks the art to actively participate in the land, it in turn encourages audiences to be more than passive observers. Whether you participate in art-making, assist

with ecological interventions, interact with finished works, or attend programs, LandLab opens the door to creative explorations in the environment. We hope you'll join us for two great events in July; stay tuned for more to come in the coming year.

LandLab allows us all to be a little bit of both scientist and artist, giving a diversity of opportunities to experiment, investigate, and explore nature and develop creative solutions to its most pressing challenges. While no good scientist will speculate on the outcome of an experiment before the data are in, my hypothesis is that LandLab will be a unique learning experience for us all. I invite you to enter the laboratory with us. ■

Support for LandLab is provided by the Knight Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, PECO, the Dolfinger-McMahon Foundation and the William Penn Foundation.

The Center for Emerging Visual Artists Reflects on LandLab

By Ann Peltz, Director, Studio Tours and Exhibitions at CFEVA

The Center for Emerging Visual Artists (CFEVA) is proud to partner with the Schuylkill Center to offer the only artist residency of its kind in the region. As both a service-based and presenting organization, CFEVA provides critical career development resources to thousands of professional artists and offers a wide array of innovative arts programming to the public. We believe visual artists are an integral part of the life and culture of Philadelphia, contributing in a unique way to the region's vitality, identity, and livability.

We are pleased to work with the Schuylkill Center to create a literal and metaphorical space for the LandLab artists to express these values as they play, explore, and problem-solve. Through partnerships like this, CFEVA provides resources to help artists at all stages of their career mature as professionals, educators, and community leaders. Through our research in developing this program and its success so far, CFEVA is excited by the growing enthusiasm for environmental art practices among funders, creative professionals, members of the scientific community, and thought leaders across disciplines. We invite you to be a part of this growing movement by participating in LandLab events and getting to know our artists! ■



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Naturalist's Notebook

Out of Sight: Pollination Frenzy Above Our Heads

By Melissa Nase, Manager of Land Stewardship

Wildflowers are the glamorous stars of nature's springtime performance, capturing the attention of seasoned outdoor adventurers, recreational hikers, and children alike. And why shouldn't they be? With eye-catching colors, organic shapes, wonderful smells, and intricate details, they provide drama that attracts us and sometimes even stop us in our tracks. If at any point we could compare ourselves to pollinators, this would be it: we are so mesmerized that we are convinced sticking our noses in the fragrant, blooming flower is truly our very best, and only option.

The hub of spring activity, wildflowers are where bees, flies, beetles, and even ants have the chance to cross paths in search of nectar and to participate in the magical process of transferring pollen from one plant to another. This efficient and direct method of pollination is the most common among wildflowers and understory trees where calmer, protected conditions make pollen dispersal by wind a challenging task. While all of this activity is happening at ground level, what is going on over our heads?

Trees require pollination, just like wildflowers, to produce seeds and fruit, but it happens out of our view. The black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), a tree that we find throughout our forest, is particularly conspicuous at this time of year with its creamy white plume of flowers. I think of it as a dreamy part of a picturesque landscape, and can imagine staring up at those flower filled tentacles waving in the wind after a nap in its shade. What we don't realize, constrained by our scale, is that this tree is more like a bustling outdoor market than the essence of tranquility we envision – it is alive! There is a no-holds-barred, 24-hour unsupervised party going on, and we weren't invited. What we do know is that the guests to this party include 456 species of butterflies and moths, which translates into many tasty caterpillar snacks for birds. This huge number makes the black cherry one of the most beneficial native trees to wildlife, even without counting the flies, beetles, and numerous bee species that act as its pollinators. And if the numbers of black cherry seedlings I find

in nursery pots are any indication, the pollinators are quite successful in their mission. I'm sure the nearly 50 species of birds who feed

There is a no-holds-barred, 24-hour unsupervised party going on, and we weren't invited.

on the fruit as well as the squirrels, turkeys, mice, and other wildlife, would echo that sentiment.

The challenge we face as humans in this natural system is that we are, at the same time, too big to be aware of most minute insect life, yet too small to understand the systemic complexity that exists within and around even this one tree. From this humble position, we are still able to develop an emotional connection to nature and maintain a mindfulness and appreciation for the unseen interactions happening above our heads, at the tops of the trees. Just remember that even if we aren't invited to the pollinator party, we can always hang out with the wildflowers. ■



Meigs Awards Honor Local Students

By Gail Farmer, Director of Education

Established in 2005, the Henry Meigs Youth Leadership Award is a memorial tribute to Henry Meigs, a founder, longtime trustee, and president of the Schuylkill Center. The award honors students who have shown exceptional leadership and accomplishment in the environmental arena. This year we are pleased to recognize two exceptional students, presenting their awards at the Naturepalooza Festival.



Gail Farmer, trustee Binney Meigs, Derek Stein, and Mike Weillbacher at Naturepalooza!

Duong Lau, a senior at the Saul High School of Agricultural Sciences in Roxborough, is her class's valedictorian, worked in the landscape and floriculture clubs while volunteering with in

community-supported agriculture. Duong interned with the Nature Conservancy and Longwood Gardens, and has been a leader in Zoo Champions for Restoring Endangered Wildlife (Zoo CREW) at the Philadelphia Zoo for the past three years.

Derek Stein, a senior at Folsom's Ridley High School, also volunteers with Zoo CREW, receiving accolades for his dedication and passion. Derek is starting a school club based on education on climate change, has spoken to the school superintendent about district-wide recycling, and assisted in cleaning up a local pond.

We are thrilled to recognize the dedication and drive of these leaders, and look forward to seeing them blossom as they continue these efforts into college and beyond. ■



Enchanted Forest 2014

This year's Enchanted Forest, our most important fundraiser, was held in mid-May, with more than 160 friends and supporters purchasing tickets, more than have participated in years. Everyone enjoyed the food and live jazz while bidding on silent auction items and buying raffle tickets.

The event honored longtime trustee Bill Walkup, who sadly passed away in December. We presented his lovely widow Joan with a black cherry tree to be planted in Bill's memory in Founder's Grove.

Thanks to our sponsors, listed below, and the Yards Brewing Company and its president, Tom Kehoe, for donating the event's beer.



Mike Weilbacher, Joan Walkup, and trustees Kathy Wagner and Binney Meigs dedicate a black cherry in memory of Bill Walkup.

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The 2015 Golden Jubilee: Celebrating 50 Years!

In 2015, we'll be celebrating our 50th anniversary while unveiling a series of special events – stay tuned. Until then, in each issue of *Quill* we'll publish a vintage photo of our history. In December 1972, Philadelphia Mayor Frank Rizzo (center) visits the Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education for a tour with founding executive director Dick James (left). We're unsure who the other two visitors are. The group is standing in the lobby of the Visitors Center, then only 4 years old. Frank Rizzo remains a controversial figure in Philadelphia's history while Dick James continued to serve the Center for another 32 years. ■



This is my Schuylkill Center

Staff share beloved memories & places

Donna Struck, Business Manager, writes, "One of my most special SCEE memories is the first time I visited, for my interview in October 2008. Having only lived in the area a few years, I had no idea of this hidden gem – back in the woods of urban Roxborough. I approached the property and drove down the driveway slowly, with a growing sense of wonder and 'where am I?' Now, here we are five+ years later and I have the pleasure of experiencing that wonder on a regular basis." ■



Claire Morgan, Gift Shop Manager and Volunteer and Gardens Coordinator, has worked at the Schuylkill Center for 12 years, though she first came here as a child when her parents joined the Center, then later for a graduate course with founding executive director Dick James.



Claire notes that "Founders Grove seemed important to me because that's how this all began. A nice thing that I recall about Dick James is that I actually met him when I was just a college student and I took a course here with him. I had been involved with the Schuylkill Center even as a child." ■

Highlights from this Spring

It's been a busy spring – with our Earth Day festival, Naturepalooza, dedicated volunteers lending us their hands, a panel discussion on local food culture, and a Native Plant Sale. Thanks to everyone who joined us!



Volunteers from **PECO** (above) came out in April to help remove invasive weeds from our grounds.

Public Programs Manager Elisabeth Zafiris and chef Aliza Green (right) discuss local food culture at **Food for Thought** on May 8. They were also joined by food consultant Anna Herman, professor Kate Thomas, food writer Emily Teel, and Weavers Way farmer Nina Berryman.



Over our **Native Plant Sale** weekend (left) we saw more than 700 visitors and offered thousands of plants. Mike Weilbacher led a lovely wildflower walk through the spring forest. Come back for more native plants and vegetables at the early summer plants sale on June 28.



Nature Preschool performed (above) in the amphitheatre at the beginning of **Naturepalooza! Earth Day Festival** on April 26.

On April 30, 75 students and educators (below) from five schools gathered for **Envirothon** to test their knowledge of aquatics, soils and land use, wildlife, forestry, and sustainable agriculture.



