

Richard Watts
Crowe River Studios

Crowe River Studios is a developing environmental art centre, located on a wooded acreage with a converted barn on the edge of the Canadian Shield, beside the Crowe (Deer) River halfway between Toronto, and Ottawa. Member artists pursue painting, sculpture, performance, installation, photography, and new media. The barn and woods are a working studio combining creation, exhibition, and education in an environmental context.

Richard Watts is an American/Canadian artist, originally from a Kansas Mennonite farm. He lived and studied in Chicago and from there moved to Toronto in 1987. His work and projects have been shown in Canada and the United States and often refer to environmental issues between the two countries.

Recent projects include the site-specific “Ark”, a 30’ altered mahogany fishing boat from Georgian Bay, which showed under the Manhattan Bridge (2007), and commissions and projects in Kelowna B.C., Edmonton, Alberta, and Peterborough, Ontario. A project called “Water/Line” to suspend altered boat sculptures along the 1812 Lake Ontario Shoreline beneath the Gardiner Expressway in Toronto was approved by Toronto Temporary Projects and Fort York in 2007 and is in development. These projects work with altered boat forms to tell stories related to ancient myths about climate change. Crowe River Studios itself is like an overturned Ark. In it are water meter ‘animals’ made from old Toronto watermain valves, reminiscent of an aging Rust Belt around the Great Lakes. In the woods is a developing altered oil tank installation called Nomads.

A recent series involves a process using vulcanized latex—natural rubber tree sap-- and gauze to “embalm” the earth in the face of climate change. The material is layered on rock faces, trees, abandoned farmhouse walls, old barns, and wooden boats. The process is like weaving a tapestry; the resultant pieces become lightworks which glow like the sun when backlit. Drawings are embedded in the tapestries with porcupine quills, leaves, insects, and other materials. When lit, the drawings become striking shadow patterns. A recent work, “Pine Skin Dress”, will be included in a group show about the environment at the Textile Museum in Washington D.C. in 2011. Other interested venues include the Canadian Embassy, in Japan.

The “Earth Skins” are brought to the city as a way of connecting urban life, to the land around it. They relate to the Group of Seven and the Canadian landscape painting tradition but are about the land revealing itself, not human projection.

They are also like our own skins, which as we grow older, thin and shine through to our souls, and like the skin of the earth, which is Gaia.

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