

parrasch heijnen

The New York Times

Looking at, and Questioning, Nature

BY ALISON BOWEN

MAY 1, 2010 4:58 PM May 1, 2010 4:58 pm



Photographs by Suzanne DeChillo/The New York Times Zena Verda Pesta, an artist in the show opening Sunday at Socrates Sculpture Park, building a work called “Smack Dab in the Middle” out of 1,000 ceramic bags and bottles filled with pink gravel and plastic flowers.

A new show focusing on nature in an urban environment, “[Cityscape: Surveying the Urban Biotope](#),” opens Sunday, May 2, at [Socrates Sculpture Park](#) in Long Island City, featuring work by 11 artists. The other day, as some of them were building their works on site, City Room dropped by. This is what we saw.

Stabbing the ground with a shovel, Katherine McLeod explained how she would bury a camera in the dirt.

“I don’t know the ins and outs of what earthworms do all day,” said Ms. McLeod, her New York Aquarium shirt betraying her previous life as a scientist and aquarium worker. “I want to know.”



Katherine McLeod, digging a hole to install a camera intended to surveil the lives of earthworms.

To find out, she was digging a hole. The buried camera will broadcast creepy-crawly images to park visitors on a monitor. Ms. McLeod has bolted another camera to a rock and sunk it in the East River, which runs along the border of the park.

Ms. McLeod is from a scientific family and considered lab work herself, she said, before realizing, “It’s much more fun if you can make your own scientific rules.”

As Ms. McLeod dug, another artist, Mark Lawrence Stafford, conducted an excavation of his own nearby, clearing a hole for a giant uprooted tree made of PVC pipe and 150 pounds of cords he had collected and braided through the years.

“We don’t really think of the end-of-life cycle, which is all the time faster and faster and faster,” he said.

Sitting near three 24-foot-long plywood pieces, Christine Howard Sandoval, described a rectangle-shaped structure, with cutouts stenciled from photos of demolished buildings.

parrasch heijnen

Inside the walls, viewers will see images of local forest plants, like oaks, maples and ferns.

Ester Partegàs was cutting and welding steel for her sculpture, fashioned as a giant barcode with beams pushing into the sky, chunks of steel in between “as if they were trees.”

Nearby, Lillian Gerson sat on a green workman’s table, puzzling over measurements for a mock visitor information office, where she’ll sit as “Connie,” a park ranger dispensing information, which will be sometimes factual, sometimes not.

“I really like wondering what’s true and what’s not true and wondering why you’re even wondering that,” she said.

[“Cityscape: Surveying the Urban Biotope”](#) opens Sunday, May 2, from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. at Socrates Sculpture Park, 32-01 Vernon Blvd., Long Island City, Queens. The show will be up through August 1.