



TreeMendous

A Holiday Exhibition at the Carriage House

December 9 - January 6, 2008



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At the Carriage House

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Monica Banks

Barbara Campisi

Sara Hanlon

Hoop

Roni Nicholson

Jason Paradis

with

Joseph Scinto, artist interviews,
and Carriage House Volunteers

Curated by Karen Shaw

TreeMendous



To celebrate the holidays, the Islip Art Museum invited six artists to install projects in the various rooms of our landmark Carriage House on the grounds of Brookwood Hall. We did not ask them to create decorated trees—a seasonal cliché in the art world. Instead, we encouraged them to think of trees in abstract terms: as form, as material, as endangered resource, as timeless symbol. The exuberant results range from an over-the-top Christmas truck bursting with tinsel and toys to a minimalist rendition of a haunting and treeless Manhattan skyline.

To complement our artists' projects, and to anchor the theme of our exhibition, the staff of the Islip Art Museum, their families and friends produced *Where's Waldo's Tree*, a traditional holiday tree with a contemporary twist and contemporary message. Sited in Gallery 4, our towering artificial evergreen has been decorated with more than 1,500 small lights. Dozens of silver ornaments hover like planets above it. At the foot of our homage to winter is a sea of glittering tree-like cones nestled in a blanket of light and fabric. Hidden in our monument to artificiality is a lone Douglas fir seedling—the only natural element in this dazzling plastic construction. Can you find it amidst the seductive artifice? Simple, unadorned and all but invisible, the tiny tree reminds us not to lose sight of what is truly meaningful in this season of joy.

Hoop's Toy Truck in Gallery #5 is the incarnation of every child's dream of Santa's largesse. Known throughout the tri-state area as the founder of "car art," Hoop turns discarded automobiles into wacky collages that subtly comment on society's wasteful ways. Using only discarded objects and obsolete materials, he transforms cars, trucks and hybrids like Italian ice carts into wildly colorful, one-of-a-kind vehicles. On many weekends, he parks his traffic-stopping creations in Chelsea, providing visitors to the nation's art capital with a whimsical bit of street art. For his Carriage House project, Hoop (his professional name) has covered a small farm truck with materials and memorabilia from the 1950's--all of it found in trash cans or second hand shops. Lithographs from games that the Cleaver family might have played cover the truck's side panels and gallery walls; the truck's bay overflows with a collection of abandoned dolls, stuffed animals, figurines and other icons of a bygone era. Ironically, the front of the truck is framed by a wreath of CD's and DVD's—a reminder that today's technology will rapidly become tomorrow's memorabilia, useful only as nostalgic reminders of these soon to become "good old days."



Barbara Campisi has projected the twinkle and glitter of a traditional holiday tree onto the floor in Gallery 5. Like fireflies in summer, or meteor showers in winter, her festive installation captures the magic of the season .

Monica Banks considers the holiday tree from a different angle altogether. She invites visitors to enter Gallery #3 and imagine they are underground, viewing the roots of trees from far below. Her glistening cooper wire sculptures evoke the thick veins and thin tendrils of live, growing conifers as they burrow through the earth.

Roni Nicholson's minimalist work in the stairwell is a tribute to Manhattan's stupendous skyline at different times of day. The artist has illuminated one tableau with blue light, evoking the stillness of moonlight in the winter. A companion installation nearby is bathed in sunshine yellow. Absent from the city's towering architecture are trees; the buildings, with their compelling verticality, have replaced nature with another kind of beauty.

Jason Paradis's installation was inspired by the days he spent camping under the stars, "contemplating the vastness of the universe and wondering about our place in it." He has replaced a window in Gallery 2 with a schematic drawing that conflates the rings of trees with our solar system. The small dots that perforate the drawing appear to be stars in motion, heavenly bodies that—if one looks closely—align as a constellation in the form of a tree. Colored strings that stretch from the drawing's plastic interface to a perpendicular wall form a larger tree, a projection that mimics the way a camera obscura works. Paradis's mix of science, art and human wonder is sheer magic.

In Gallery 1, **Sara Hanlon's** *The Holidays Aren't What They Used To Be* is a wry and bittersweet comment on the way childhood remembrances shrink with passing time. She has placed a dozen ordinary tree skirts on the floor and positioned a large treestand in the center of each of them—the kind built to hold monumental conifers. Balanced in the center of every treestand is a miniature tree, overwhelmed by a container that once held at least the memory of something so much bigger.

In the years to come, we hope that our *Treemendous* exhibit will grow like trees do— aspiring to great heights and branching out in unexpected directions. We thank you for your continued support of our artists and their projects, and we wish you, your family and friends joy for the holidays and peace in the New Year.

Mary Lou Cohalan
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Artists Statements

Monica Banks

Unsung Heroes of the Holiday Season

Balsam, fir, spruce, pine—we love to celebrate the season's trees. Their noble stature and fluffy boughs bring warm feelings of charity and joy to those who walk the surface of the earth. But consider the lowly, gnarly, dirty root. It does much of the work growing the tree, procuring food and water and defying gravity by tirelessly pushing nourishment upwards, always away from the darkness and toward the light. Does anyone ever think about how the root feels? The tree is severed, without warning or compensation, and whisked away into a glamorous home, to stand beside a fireplace or possibly a flickering TV. Dressed in seasonal finery, she remains the center of attention for up to four weeks. People sing to her, make decorations for her, and use her to symbolize all that is right with the December world. The family turns into a swarm of paparazzi, snapping her picture with the lights on, the lights off, posing her with visitors and stashing the much-coveted gifts under her nether regions.

Imagine what goes on beneath the surface of the earth, where the root remains, with no purpose in life and no glory to enjoy. Yes, there is great satisfaction in being the power behind the superstar, but one can tire of behind-the-scenes prowess. I would guess the root would love some colored balls or an angel or just a garland of popcorn once in awhile. Or maybe some tinsel. No one is immune to vanity or the allure of opulence. My installation shines a light on this inequity, and acknowledges the nobility and modesty necessary to cope with worms, mud, irrigation, temperature change and fertilizer. Today, we celebrate the heroic root, without whom the fruits of evergreen photosynthesis could never have become the symbol of holiday cheer.



Monica Banks
Unsung Heroes of the Holiday Season
Woven copper wire

Barbara Campisi

Song from the Sky

In my work, notions of beauty, perception, and our relationship to space and the world are examined through humble, economical means. In transforming simple objects and materials into beautiful and meaningful, sometimes magical objects and spaces, I hope to create a marriage between their inherent beauty and poetic meaning.

Song from the Sky was created with LED lights hung from the ceiling to create intersecting pools of colored lights on the white floor of a blackened room.

The inspiration for *Song from the Sky* came whilst I was walking in the woods, hoping to come up with some idea for this tree-themed exhibition. After many hours I lay down on a bed of moss and looked up at the sky, and the late-day sun was filtering through the leaves, creating a luminescent pattern of dappled sunlight on the ground. It wasn't until I returned to my studio a week later that I discovered that this would be the inspiration for my piece.

Needing a vessel to contain the lights and their batteries, I chose to put them inside mussel shells. In thinking about our perception of light and color, I remembered reading in Goethe about the relationship between the color of the sea and the sky, and our perception of the way colors reflect through water, and it seemed appropriate to put a piece of the sea into this atmosphere of colored lights.

The title comes from a haiku by Basho, about a songbird. Composing the piece in lights did feel very musical in thought and effect, and the inspiration having come from the sky, the title seemed particularly appropriate.

Though LED lights are a new material for me, this piece related formally and conceptually to many of my other pieces, in the way that the viewer is confronted with his relationship to the space and to the piece, and with the question of his perceptions. The overlap of the translucent, brightly-hued circles of color beneath the fireflies of light in an infinite sky produce an overall effect of hushed excitement, a constellation for reflection.



Barbara Campisi
Song from the Sky
LED lights, mixed media

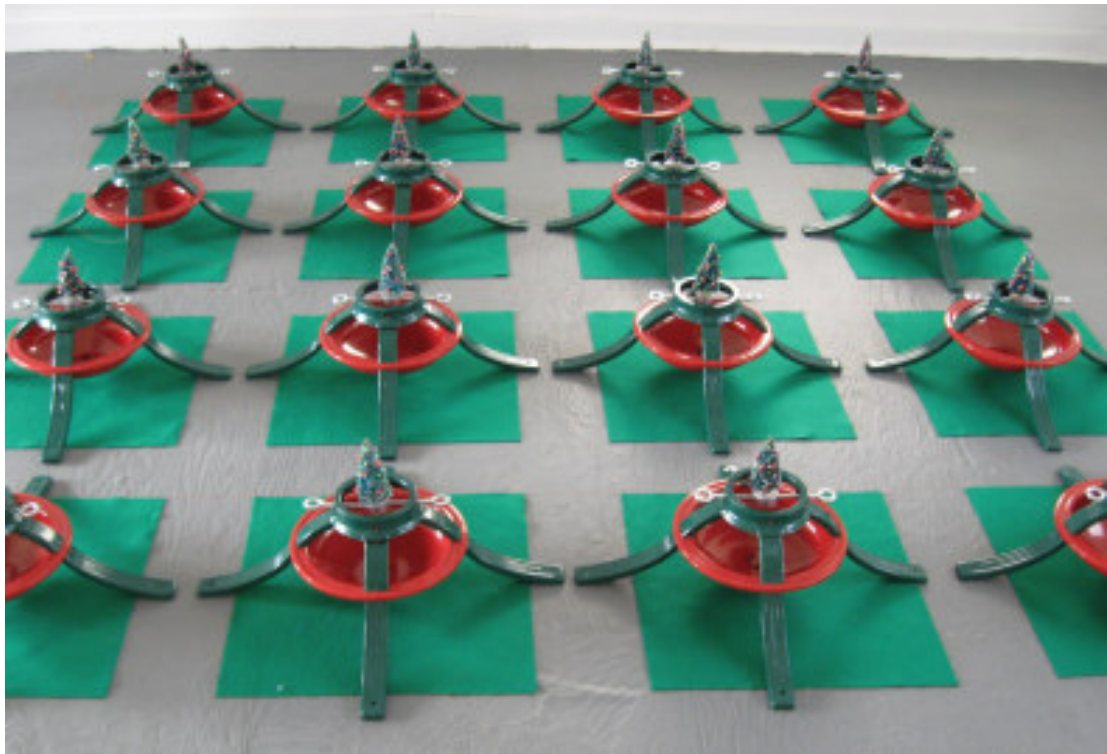
Sara Hanlon

The Holidays Aren't What They Used to

Kids think lots of things are funny. They laugh at everything. But as we get older, we become more negative, tend to laugh less, and see fewer and fewer things as funny.

I've tried to hold the line on this natural progression and retain my sense of humor. As my mother's family was Irish, I am hard-wired to laugh. Whatever happened in her family, good or bad, usually brought forth a laugh or at least a giggle. I fortunately married an Irish-American man with a great sense of humor who makes me laugh all the time. His humor has helped me keep mine turned on and turned up.

This installation is about scale shift within the stylistic framework of minimalism. I've kept it spare and repetitive which equates to beauty in my world. People ruminating over all kinds of change in lifestyle is commonplace. Fretting over how Christmas has changed over the years is usual at this time of year in some quarters. I have riffed on this cliché and turned it back on itself with the dramatic change in scale between two major components of the piece. It's absurd. Like Dr. Seuss and Woody Allen. I love absurdist humor.



Sara Hanlon
The Holidays Aren't What They Used to Be
Mixed media

Hoop

Toy Truck

Hoop's installation introduces visitors to the world of art cars in general and Hoopmobiles in particular. All of the artist's cars are assemblages of garbage—discarded items found in dumps or on the streets. He refers to his materials as Techno Trash because they represent “all the technical transitions we have gone through over the years, from a needle on a record to a laser beam on a record, from bulky refrigerator-sized computers to laptops.”

Steven Hooper, or Hoop as he is known professionally, began creating art cars in the East Village in Manhattan 20 years ago when he worked as a performance artist at clubs and private parties. Thanks largely to his passion, an entire subcategory of outsider art has evolved that now includes dozens of artists who decorate automobiles. He says his motivation is to bring art to the average person on the street, those who are not familiar with contemporary artists or formal galleries. His projects begin with “junkier” cars and trucks, which he decorates to reflect themes. Some of his recent projects have included a VW bus with a hippie theme, a Janis Joplin psychedelic Porsche, a small VW covered with discarded computer parts and first-generation cell phones—and a pastel car transformed into an uncanny, accurate self-portrait. He parks his transformed automobiles in SOHO, near Union Square, as a treat for passersby to ogle.

Hoop currently lives in Clifton, NJ., where he grew up. He has exhibited extensively throughout the country, including prior exhibits at the Islip Art Museum, “though not my cars until now.”



Hoop
Toy Truck
Mixed media

Roni Nicholson

Moonlight/Sunlight

Whenever I cross the Hudson River to New Jersey, I look back and marvel at the beauty of the New York City skyline.

Whether it is moonlight or sunlight, it takes my breath away by its stillness and grandeur.

My use of acrylic for the primary medium is a way to render the skyline's mystery, ambiguity, transparency and even a certain unreality.



Roni Nicholson

Moonlight/Sunlight

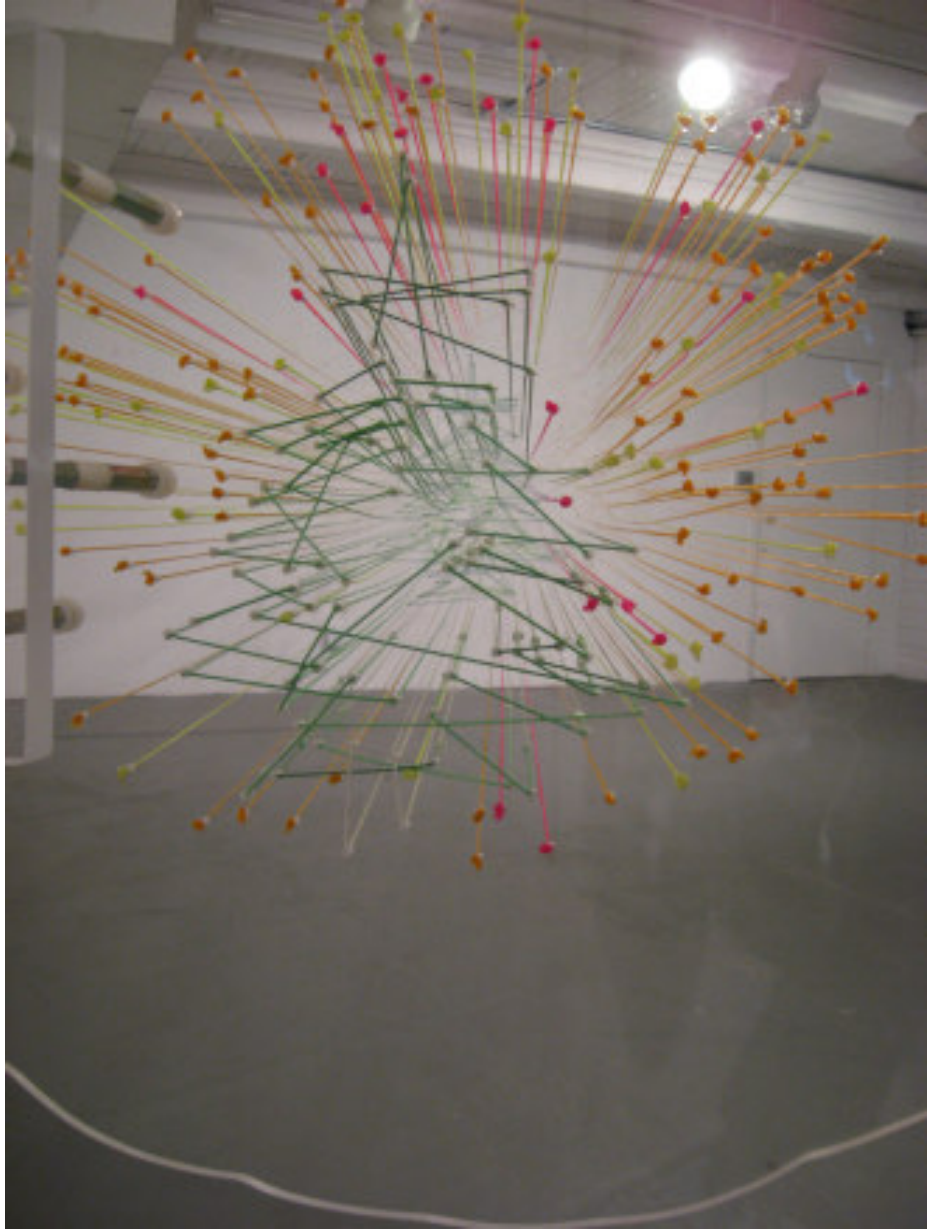
Mixed media

Jason Paradis

Obscura

My work is made from the visual interpretation of systems and the association of these systems to personal experience. There is a sense of contemplation or of reverie that speculates on a fundamental mystery. As a kid I did a lot of camping in the northern Canadian wilderness—where as I gazed into the stars, questions emerged regarding the existence of something much larger than my immediate world. Some work expands into an installation or assemblage that activates the surrounding space. The pieces end up feeling like some sort of phenomenon (either natural or supernatural) has occurred, or is occurring.

I am interested in a moment where past, present, and future collides. Modes of my current environment, laced with reflection, memory and speculation, filter into the development and translation of the work. This disjunction demands a layered approach in both the meaning and implementation of the art work. Specific, symbolic systems give way to a more intuitive decision-making process. Therefore, the overall effect is more of a visceral experience instead of an instructional model explaining a particular system.



Jason Paradis
Obscura
Mixed media
Installation views



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State of the Arts



NYSCA

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