The Art of Reciprocity

Sean Connaughty Exhibition

The Art of Reciprocity is an outdoor exhibit by artist Sean Connaughty, created in partnership with Sugarloaf Cove Nature Center and Grand Marais Art Colony. The ephemeral works on display at Sugarloaf Cove were created from local, natural materials during a residency spring of 2021.

Sean Connaughty is an artist and teacher at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Department of Art. His artworks have focused for the previous six years on Lake Hiawatha in South Minneapolis where he lives. His work there has included restoration, pollution mitigation, wildlife and habitat protection, and has ventured deeply into public policy, planning and community work to restore an anthropogenic space in recovery. He uses his interdisciplinary artwork as a catalyst for change.

1. “Drumming Log” spruce log, charcoal and inscribed text, Sean Connaughty 6/2021

The Drumming Log is intended to be used by male ruffed grouse (bine (na) | from The Ojibwe People’s Dictionary), and was hollowed out to increase resonance.

The log was harvested from a fallen spruce and cut by Ryan Murphy with a reciprocating saw. The log was partially hollowed out using a power drill and wood chisels. And the text, that reads as follows, as inscribed using letter stamps:

“The principle of resonance: When vibrations from one object match the resonant frequency of another object, the two are said to resonate because the first object amplifies the vibrations of the second object.” “ruffed grouse, imbued with confidence, you got this, drum, bine, harmonic, bonasa umbellus, loner, forest, alder, dogwood, birch, winter, burrow, aspen.”

2. “Unidentified Nest Object 1” alder and hazel branches. Live birch tree. Sean Connaughty 6/2021

This nest was constructed using green branches from alder and hazel saplings harvested by Sugarloaf staff and a local Grand Marais property. These nest constructions were all made using a process I developed starting in 2008, where green and flexible branches are woven together to form a spherical shelter. The tension of the bent branches holds them together and makes the nest strong. The opening of the nest faces away from the trail. My thought was that the nest might be of interest to and large enough for Great Horned Owls, who often take over a nest made by another animal. Ruth Pszwaro, Ellen McGuire, and John Schuermann helped with the installation.
3. Unidentified Nest Object #2, alder and hazel branches. Poplar tree. Sean Connaughty 6/2021

Ellen McGuire and John Schuerman helped with the installation.

4. Unidentified Nest Object #3. Woven using alder and hazel branches with dried grasses, a dead birch trunk. Sean Connaughty 6/2021

Ellen McGuire and John Schuerman helped with the installation.

5. Unnamed Streamlet a thought in process:

I spent the first two days of my residency exploring, soaking in the space, asking questions, and meeting with folks in the community. I met with elder Alta McQuatters, an Anishinaabe woman in the community, who spoke to me of the long history of the Schroeder area and her work to preserve the history. I met with Erik Simula at the Cross River Heritage Center and viewed Alta's exhibit there.

I had heard that the streamlet that runs through Sugarloaf does not have a name. I thought that it might be interesting to learn about the streamlet and work with Anishinaabe folks to arrive at a name. I learned that though small, the streamlet never runs dry, unlike Sugarloaf Creek which also runs through the property. Alta said this was meant to be, so that the animals can always get their drinks.

With my friends Matt and Ryan we decided we would follow the streamlet to its source. We started at the Cove and followed up the hill. The water ran along the road for a while and then we followed through several small wetlands. We traced the streamlet up the hill, where the flowing water was reconstituted into a running streamlet again, and small, rocky waterfalls. Continuing on, the streamlet finally led us to a larger wetland at the top of the hill, about 2.5 miles from Sugarloaf. We believe this is the source of the streamlet, apparently not connected directly to Sugarloaf Creek as we thought it might be. In the end any naming of the stream should rightly be designated by the Anishinaabe. My hope is that the conversation can continue and I am particularly indebted to Alta McQuatters for her time and shared knowledge.

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