

BUMBERSHOOT

Natural meets supernatural in exhibits of startling imagination

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If fish could scream, the sound of their agony would take the fun out of fishing.

That's the theory behind Andrew Sempere's "Sod Off!" at Bumbershoot. Stand on his patch of grass and it will groan, a low mutter that moves up your body as vibration before hitting your ears as sound.

Sempere's "Sod Off" isn't actual sod, and the reason is the audience. Sempere is expecting the usual Bumbershoot hordes and planned accordingly. Grass can't take the weight of all those feet, but artificial turf can, remaining crisp during the crushing.

Sempere's installation is part an exhibit curated by Kate Seekings titled "Outside In," which is one of the handful of art exhibits in the Northwest Courtrooms during Bumbershoot.

Most people come to these shows on a whim. They're not sure what they'll find but are willing in a larkly way to be entertained.

This year, curators appear to be playing with Seattle's high-tech reputation. A lot of the art is programmed to be a nature unto itself, and its simulations are intended to startle.

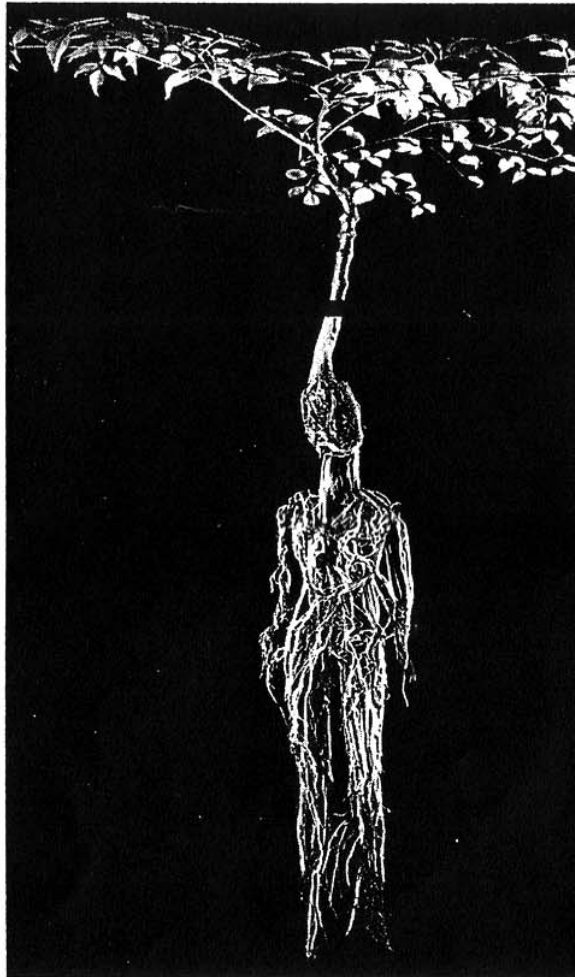
Also in "Outside In," Ryan Wolfe offers an intricate machine that imitates a field of grass blowing in an ocean wind. Wolfe's "Field (biaxial)" is the kind of art you might expect to see from colonists living on the moon.

Wise audience members will stand a few feet back from Seth Lewis' elegant and creepy "Hatching Apparatus," a tangle of tubes terminating in lamplike heads. During the course of the exhibition, four will hatch, which means they will explode.

If there's any befouling of land to be done, W. Scott Trimble wants to give everybody a chance to participate. In a carnival glass case is his foam-core terrain. Put 25 cents in the slot, and paint and ash will fall on it.

In an exhibit titled "Raw and Refined," curator Jess Van Nostrand found artists who don't mourn for the natural world, they organize it. Francis Baker trains plant roots into various molds, producing bizarre figures that he photographs. From the top of a Barbie-like head, a tree sprouts.

Paula Hayes envisions a time when we have no time to walk in the woods. Her fur-covered contraptions allow us to carry a plant with us, with tubes to drain water from the soil. Jere Smith paints on bias-cut log slabs, including a rolling sea of painted stumps under the legend, "On a clear cut day, you can see forever." Smith is obvious, but his punk-comics style fused with Grant Wood proto-



Tree roots weave a body shape in Francis Baker's "Containment," a photo on display at Seattle Center.

Pop is compelling.

Then there's Jason Wood. Starting with milled wood byproducts, he created a forest. I believe in these stumps that are trying their artificial best to bloom.

In "Recontextualized Vistas: Concerning Place," curator Donna Stack asked artists what they think of living in Eastern and Central Washington.

Video artist Justin Beckman walked away with the assignment. In one video, he's digging a hole. The dirt he throws up obscures the landscape behind him, a perfect metaphor for tract housing burying a natural expanse. In the other video, he builds a fence, again obscuring the earth, and then in a hopeful gesture, reverses himself and takes it down.

Howard Barlow makes babies out of thousands of earplugs and places them on bullet-ridden steel bases. Maybe if these babies were enormous, like Jeff Koons' giant puppies made of flowers, they'd make more of an impression.

Natalie Schimmdt Dotzauer recreated an attic. She did it really well, but I'm not clear why she did it. Stepping inside, you'd swear this attic has been gathering

dust for decades.

John Paul Pena wants to test your honesty. He has a cell phone you can use to call people and say you love them. He paid for 6,000 minutes and, he hopes, 6,000 love connections. If you call to say drop dead, there's nothing Pena can do.

Curated by Fionn Meade and Robert Millis, "In Resonance" is a terrific exhibit in the wrong place. It's about sound as sculpture, and the sound of so many people shuffling through is going to bury crucial effects.

Steve Roden's upside-down forest of celestial sounds, "Transmission," is thrilling when you stand in its center. The look of the piece is so cool, these half-painted tin cans trailing sound evidence of space travel, the tin-can music of the spheres.

Speaking of cool, Jesse Paul Miller's black megaphone attached to a mysterious white box sitting on two speakers, "the Indeterminable Obsolescence of a Once Inscrutable Fact," is root music for the history of recorded sound. Where's the sound coming from? The obvious answer is wrong.

I also love Miller's layered drawings, projected on a screen from a notebook of his travels, landscape altering the landscape that came before it, accompanied by a sound journal.

For Marina Rosenfeld, video scenery is a kind of musical score. For video artist Jennifer West, sound is a scalpel that she uses to cut up the elements of her visual collage.

Back in 1961, Robert Morris built a small walnut box titled, "Box With the Sound of Its Own Making," audio tape of sawing and pounding inside.

It would be hard to top Morris for wit, but while Morris focused in, the artists in "In Resonance" focus out into the world with its ambient sounds serving as a cushion for visual moments. If you can hear its effects, "In Resonance" can take your breath away.

Finally, Bumbershoot's art offerings close on a populist note. There's "Art of Modern Rock: The Poster Explosion," curated by Jacob McMurray, Dennis King, Jacob Covey and Gabe Kean. The show has the design sensibility of a bull in a china shop. The visual power comes from the simulation of a crash