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**Purely Primitive Pub**



Artist explores pre-consciousness and environmentalism

**by Sally Deskins**

Imagine a place where egos are lost, a place to escape from the modern world, and just be ... while drinking a brew, listening to some good tunes and coming together as a community. Eugene, Oregon-based artist Sean Ward brings his "back-to-the-land" idea to fruition in his cave-installation in "A Pre-Conscious Space."

Located in the Okada sculpture facility east of the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, it was built from concept to construction with purely primitive purpose; Ward used only salvaged and recycled materials with zero waste to create this introspective, conceptually focused space.

"As a society, we have almost reached a situation of overdevelopment, often at the expense of others," said Bemis curator Hesse McGraw, "and the way this space is built and programmed will reach out to larger communities."

McGraw met Ward shortly after Ward graduated from the Kansas City Art Institute five years ago. He took notice of Ward's green-constructed, socially transformative environments. Shortly after McGraw came to the Bemis, he and Bemis Director, Mark Masuoka, discussed how to best use the Okada space. McGraw thought of Ward.

Ward said his idea was based on the combination of curiosity about how people would react to an "un-20th Century" cave atmospheric bar, and his thrifty lifestyle.



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"I grew up dumpster-diving at a young age," the artist said. "Money is never a limitation with art, that is the cool thing about it."

Ward's desire for ethical use of resources and a connection to pre-conscious materials also drives his building style — achieved largely through donations from the Council Bluffs Recycling Center. The center donated massive amounts of trees from the storm last summer, glass and linseed oil to make his clay mixture that formed the cave. Other items donated include burlap, coffee bags, and phone books from previous Bemis events.

To demonstrate commitment to his zero-waste approach, Ward used leftover wine bottles from Bemis openings to make candles for the cave, filling them with hot wax and leaving them to form. The crushed glass from the bottle was then used to make clay walls for the cave.

The result is an immediate warp into, well, a prehistoric cave; from floor to ceiling the room is layered with liquid-looking red cob surfaces, from the dark stairway entrance, to the deep cave bathroom, to the corner bar, to the murky "make-out nook." The room is fire-retardant, controlling humidity, extracting dust from the air, and conducting a radiant heating and cooling, maintaining an extraordinarily high negative ion rate, which, according to Ward, induces happiness.

Some 20 volunteers — including architecture students, musicians, photographers, and various others who just wanted to be a part of this happening space — added to the community aspect of the project, which was commissioned by Mutual of Omaha and began three months ago.

The space will remain as a community area after its opening night July 24, which will include music by Vverevvolf Grehy, FATHR^, Plack Blague, Pod Blotz and Bone Rattle, a pig roast outside, and a special live-yeast, cask-conditioned ale brewed by Upstream (the latter of which will always be available in the cave bar served in Ward's clay mugs). The space will continue to function as a music venue and event space used for free school, micro-lectures, picnics and contemporary art programming throughout the next year.

McGraw says the space aims to amplify civic engagement by generating a more mutual and other-centered cultural hub, while extending the Bemis Center's mission to support exceptional talent.

"This was a great challenge for the Bemis and the city as a whole to create such a space, to make something truly amazing happen here," said McGraw. "And we made this with a massive amount of help from the community, and along with this destination place is a true sense of ownership."

Ward was very specific about wanting to create this space in the Midwest.

"I grew up on the East coast, but the Midwest is a very generous place, and a great place to create," he said. "I'll always come back here, and will not forget it." ,

*A Pre-Conscious Space was funded in part by Mutual of Omaha and premieres July 24, during Mutual of Omaha's Wild About Omaha celebration. Cave events are 5-11 p.m. with music starting at 8 p.m. Bemis Center will also be open for viewing exhibitions Adam Frelin: DIVINER and spurse: MATR, with open studios 6-9 p.m. and an*

*exhibition by local artists Joel Damon, Josh Powell and Amy Morin in the Bemis Underground. All events are free. For more information go to bemiscenter.org.*

23 Jul 2009

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