aurora robson
THE GREAT INDOORS (KISSIN' THE GREAT OUTDOORS G'BYE??)

- A highly regulated landscape comprised of sculptural objects + a passive system made entirely from discarded plastic bottles.
- Some objects will have a subtle glow / LED/solar powered?
- All elements will be animated based on internal organs & microscopic/cellular constructions/consumption - consumed by that which we consume, veins, vesicles, cells, bacteria, viruses, microorganisms, udders, stomats, kidneys, etc...
aurora robson
the great indoors
18 September – 26 October 2008
When Aurora Robson’s installation, *The Great Indoors*, was on view at Rice Gallery in fall 2008, a visitor commented, “Wow, what elegance from plastic! I’m amazed.” This simple response sums up Aurora’s incredible skill and ingenuity as a sculptor, and the impact her work has on those who see it first-hand.

I was awestruck when I first saw Aurora’s work at an art fair in 2006. *The Jungle* was a small installation of translucent sculptures in green and blue, elaborate compositions of sensuous, curving forms – ribbons, bubbles, and thin, antenna-like feelers. Suspended at varying heights and depths, they floated in a mysterious world, reminding me so much of plant life or deep-sea creatures that I was surprised to learn the fragile-looking sculptures were made entirely from re-used plastic bottles. The exceptional beauty of Aurora’s work led me to contact her immediately and extend an invitation to explore her ideas on a larger scale at Rice Gallery.

*The Great Indoors* was a massive project requiring a high level of organizational skill. Aurora enlisted and trained a team of 20+ assistants to clean, cut, and rivet parts from the almost 15,000 bottles she used to form the components of the installation. After a summer of non-stop work and planning, Aurora arrived at Rice Gallery and worked for two weeks to construct an installation that had the feeling of spontaneity and effortlessness. Viewers entered a fantasy landscape based loosely on microscopic imagery of the human body and walked through membrane-like, translucent tunnels toward spaces filled with suspended sculptures containing solar-powered LED lights, which caused them to glow.

Conceptually, the lights were part of Aurora’s ecologically mindful approach and they accentuated the remarkable vocabulary of shapes and techniques she has devised for her medium. The installation’s beauty and complexity kept visitors intrigued and eager to explore before and after they realized every part had been made from re-used plastic bottles. *The Great Indoors* was a magical work of art that touched the imaginations of visitors from all walks of life. One viewer wrote in our guest book, “As a medical student, I find the similarities between this beautiful work and microscopic biology fascinating. I felt like a microbe traveling through the human body.”

During Aurora’s installation, Hurricane Ike battered Houston. Her hotel lost power and water, so that Aurora, her husband, and their 11-month old daughter were forced to move into Sewall Hall where they experienced less than luxurious living conditions. Yet, Aurora never uttered a complaint; each day she was up early and working, always in a good mood. She was a trooper, a consummate professional who made our lives easier and allowed us to open as scheduled, the only institution in town to do so. Aurora is convinced that something that seems inherently negative has the potential to be transformed into something very positive. For reminding us of this truth in art and in life, I thank her.

Kimberly Davenport
Director
In the 1966 science fiction film Fantastic Voyage a team of doctors are miniaturized and injected into a patient in order to repair a blood clot in his brain. Along the way they journey through alveoli and arteries and fight off white blood corpuscles. The special effects are kitschy by today’s standards, stuff like Cheerios and strawberry milk were used to achieve the film’s biological visuals. But when I saw Fantastic Voyage on TV as a kid it was pretty incredible, creepy but fascinating. Aurora Robson’s installation The Great indoors at Rice Gallery achieves a similar effect as the artist takes low-tech junk and transforms it into a disconcerting wonderland.

Using 15,000, count ‘em, 15,000 stacked, shredded and riveted plastic bottles Robson crafted an environment of translucent tunnels and chambers. Walking through it feels like you are exploring the body systems of some giant organism. To find inspiration for her work, Robson checked out various medical illustrations and surfed the Centers for Disease Control website. The colors of Robson’s constructions, visceral reds, pinks and greens - the colors of the abattoir - somehow manage to come across as pretty and fantastical. Maybe it’s the light passing through the translucent hues.

To create Robson’s work, each plastic bottle had to be washed, its label and any residual adhesive removed. Robson then cut the bottles. She used heat to bend and stretch them and rivets to fasten them together. Green ginger ale and Sprite bottles found their way into the mix but when Robson wanted to vary the hues of the clear bottles she took out her airbrush to give her constructions smooth translucent tints.

Ribbed water bottles are linked together to create arching tubes that resemble ringed tracheas. Smaller tubes look like capillaries. Networks of bottle bottoms create clusters of things that could be cells, moles or fat globules. Robson’s organic tunnels lead to a domed center chamber where a glowing red, heart-like organ dangles. Other vaguely spherical constructions are suspended around the gallery like giant viruses. Many of them are lit like the “heart,” illuminated by solar-powered LED lights.

There is an environmental angle to Robson’s work, but it is unobtrusive. Eight out of ten plastic water bottles become landfill waste and even when they are recycled, the recycling process itself consumes energy. Robson is not only recycling the bottles in a more creative way, she is also using non-toxic water-based paint and solar-powered lights to further “green” her art. Robson has pulled off a pretty amazing feat, she has created an installation with material choices fueled by environmental concerns but those concerns don’t come across as the subject of her work. She has used her materials so beautifully and transformed them so effectively that “eco-art” is the last thing you think of when you walk into the installation.

Instead, the artist has given us a world that evokes the amazing internal environments of our bodies. The Great indoors is a Fantastic Voyage visitors can make for themselves.

Kelly Klaasmeyer

Kelly Klaasmeyer is a Houston arts writer. This article first appeared in the Spring 2009 issue of Rice Sailing, The Magazine of Rice University.
MAP

INDIVIDUAL HANGING COMPONENTS

18 ORBS/VIRUSES/CELLS/HAIR BALLS
17 SPIRILUS/EYESHRIMP
5 ALVEOLI/VORTEXES

ORBS/VIRUSES/CELLS/HAIR BALLS
1. PEORIA
2. FLO
3. CELULIGHT
4. FOLLOP
5. AMYGDALA
6. RUBELLA
7. BUZZ
8. BLOOD BLISTER
9. LIVER SPOT
10. VESPER
11. GREY MATTER
12. YELLOW FEVER
13. LOVE NUT
14. BALLSY
15. SON
16. BUTTERBALL
17. SPIKED CELL
18. SCARLET FEVER

SPIRILUS BACTERIA/EYESHRIMP
1. BOLA (ICELANDIC FOR PIAFLE)
2. LOVE BITE
3. KINESSER
4. CUTICLE
5. LASH
6. MCLOVIN
7. BRUISER
8. PARA SIGHT
9. BUG
10. SMOCH
11. RASACIA
12. HICKEE
13. PUPIL
14. COOTIE
15. HAIRLIP
16. BONTECO
17. VARTA (ICELANDIC FOR WART)

ALVEOLI/VORTEXES
1. ALVEOLI
2. ALIEN SEX FIEND
3. VORTEXAS
4. IRIS
5. UF SYNDROME
Aurora Robson was born in Toronto, Canada in 1972, but grew up in Hawaii. In 1991, she moved to New York City to pursue her artistic career. She attended Apex Technical School and became an NYS certified structural welder and for many years ran her own welding studio. Later, she entered Columbia University, where she studied under sculptor Jon Kessier, graduating *magna cum laude* in 2000 with a BA in Visual Art & Art History. Robson works extensively in painting, collage, and sculpture, and her works have been included in exhibitions throughout the United States. In 2007, she completed *What Goes Around Comes Around*, a large-scale suspended sculpture commissioned by Merrill Lynch for its offices in Hopewell, New Jersey, and a site-specific installation for the Carriage House at the Islip Art Museum, East Islip, New York. Aurora Robson lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.
Aurora Robson, The Great Indoors
Commission, Rice University Art Gallery
18 September – 25 October 2008

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