

It is the story of all life that is holy and good to tell, and of us two leggeds sharing in it with the four-leggeds and the wings of the air and all green things; for these are children of one mother and their father is one Spirit.

*Black Elk (Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux, from Black Elk Speaks)*

Over the past thirty years my art practice revolved around the exploration of the built environment—usually urban—in which I lived and worked: Philadelphia, Rome, Brooklyn and Pittsburgh. As an observer/explorer I sought insight from the local surroundings, history and culture in order to locate myself within these places. I often used the discarded materials and/or persons of society as a point of departure. By recycling and combining disparate elements and stories into new relationships, I created contemporary ‘temples,’ spaces/places for viewers to contemplate existential notions about how we both ‘live in’, and ‘perceive’ the world around us.

As my work evolved to address ecological and environmental issues, I moved from museum and alternative space venues to the public domain and incorporated community-based processes. Continuing to address the built environment, I began to incorporate systems of growth—live plants and natural materials—that added an element of change and transformation within the static environments. I also began to incorporate collaborative team strategies of community-based art in order to garner participation from local residents. By combining a systems approach to include a variety of other participants, I intended to raise issues pertaining to the contemporary problems we face living on this planet: sustaining a future where technology and nature exist in a symbiotic relationship.

As I become older and wiser, I am often reminded that life is circular, driven by natural evolution. Chaos occurs, sometimes caused by natural forces, sometimes by human intervention and usually nature restores itself to balance. Growing up in Minnesota and Montana, I developed a deep respect for Native American culture. When the Europeans settled this continent, they learned many things from the Native Americans about survival. Perhaps the most important was their form of democracy; the most critical missed opportunity was their concept of sustainability.

My three young daughters and deceased father constantly remind me that ‘change’ is a given. Recently, while giving one of many tours of the ‘green roof’ on campus, I was asked where my interest about green roofs derived from. I told a short story about growing up in Minneapolis and working as a roofer, then beginning university studies in landscape architecture before shifting to art. Then, how living in the Rocky Mountains changed my life forever, and although I choose urban living, it is my mission to remind the humans about the importance of being connected to nature; to be a catalyst to change and evolve conversations towards sustainability.

So here I have come full circle growing roofs and empty lots in the city, restoring streams, attempting to soften the edges of the built environment in order to make life more humane and insure its future. Humans will always live in urban areas, why don’t we grow them in a more creative, ecological manner? I believe it is a slow, natural process that we are finally realizing, and I am excited to be a catalyst for this positive change. I believe in the artist’s ability to make us see things from a different perspective, as well as facilitate the conversations and group dynamics necessary to insure more citizen participation in the processes of reshaping and resettling the environment; therefore the better off we will all be, including the four-leggeds, the wingeds and all green things.