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New exhibits at Montalvo offer visitors a lesson in sustainability

By Shannon Burkey
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Posted: 08/23/2010 07:43:14 PM PDT
Updated: 08/23/2010 07:43:15 PM PDT

Sustainability seems to be on everyone's mind lately. Whether people are trying to live their lives by it or still trying to figure out what it's all about, it's all around.

With the start of Montalvo Arts Center's newest multidisciplinary thematic arts program, Natural and Creative Capital, and the opening of its latest exhibit, "Human Nature," people will have the opportunity to take a look at sustainability and what it means in a whole new way.

"Sustainability is at the forefront of current thinking, be it the environment, food production, climate change, our economic health and well-being or the very survival of our cultural institutions," said Kelly Sicat, Montalvo's director of programs. "This is the time to examine our priorities as we make decisions about consumption and what is required for sustainability; from our possessions to our entertainment, how do we want to spend our time and what do we need in our daily life. This is a time for redefining success, reinterpreting value and rethinking expectations."

It is these things that Sicat says she hopes Montalvo is able to help its patrons achieve as they take part in the 18-month Natural and Creative Capital program, which will "explore concepts of sustainability in our natural and cultural environments" through visual and performing arts, public programs and literary arts programs.

Sicat says the idea for the program came about after Montalvo assessed its programs, trying to come up with a mixed and balanced offering, and to bring to light the riches within the grounds.

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"His bronze work is a beautiful fit with our grounds," Sicat said. "A lot of the concepts in his work look at overpopulation and change in things we depend on."

The next big event taking place under the program's theme is the opening of "Human Nature" on Aug. 27. The exhibit will examine the human condition through the relationships humans have with animals.

"It's really a show that's very whimsical and plays with the human/animal relationship," Sicat said. "The pieces are light and humorous, but have a deeper undercurrent that makes you stop and consider what your actions are."

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The exhibit will feature works by internationally recognized artists Tim Hawkinson, Celeste Boursier-Mougenot and Ariane Michel, along with Montalvo Lucas Artists Residency Program fellow Misako Inaoka and former fellow Dana Harel.

Many of the works depict pets, livestock, wild birds and other forms of animal life, as a way of examining the distance between being human and being animal.

"Human Nature' examines human beings' relationships to the animals they share the planet with," Sicat said. "It seems we can better encourage sustainable actions by understanding the human condition, and these works begin to reflect the human-to-animal relationship, where humans influence, are entertained by or reject outright their relationship with the animal world."

Inaoka, who has been a Montalvo resident artist since the beginning of June, says she was honored to have her work displayed in the show.

"My work is very influenced by the environment, so Kelly thought it would fit really well into the show," Inaoka said. "I'm working with an idea of what we call nature and what is not nature, and how humans manipulate nature to where it's not nature anymore and try to control it."

Though the program is just in its beginning phase, Sicat says she hopes people will see the importance in things such as the Sculpture on the Grounds program and the "Human Nature" exhibit and keep coming back for all of the other programs and events.

"Our grand hope is that people see what we are doing and start to rethink their behavior," Sicat said. "Maybe it's the simpler things that are important--things that don't create such a carbon footprint."

Montalvo Arts Center's 'Human Nature' exhibit runs Aug. 27-Oct. 17 in the Project Space Gallery, 15400 Montalvo Road. The exhibit is free. The gallery is open from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Thursdays through Sundays. For more information on the programs at Montalvo, visit www.montalvoarts.org.

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