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Arts & Culture

Bless the Beasts

Environmental series reaches out to homeless animals

by Jessica Wallenfels

A project like *Animal Estates* has legs: Fresh from the 2008 Whitney Biennial in March, queer artist Fritz Haeg's environmental series has already seen installments this year at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art before coming to Reed College in time for the TBA Festival.



But the legs that matter to Haeg belong to bird, bat, bee and beetle varieties that once occupied the Portland metropolitan area.

During a monthlong residency, Haeg and Reed students built a structure based on the concept of the snag, where potential homes for seven species of Northwest fauna may dwell if they so choose. The snag "represents the role of death in a healthy ecosystem," Haeg explains.

Within the snag-structure are nest boxes for White-Breasted Nuthatches and Edward's Bumblebees, gaps for roosting Silver-Haired Bats and perches for the Olive-Sided Flycatcher. Each hollow is painstakingly designed to the exact specifications of the animals' habitats in the wild, amounting to an open invitation to come in.

Having begun his career as an architect, Haeg is more or less returning to his roots. But he "feels ambivalent about buildings," preferring instead to author a movement that converted lawns into edible gardens from Kansas to London. Haeg's series spawned the book *Edible Estates: Attack on the Front Lawn*.

"I'm not interested that is about life or nature; I'm interested in work that is life or nature," Haeg says.

Which Portland has given him plenty of. "This is my favorite structure of the series," Haeg divulges, owing largely to the community's vested interest in environmental issues.

The unspoken question remains: Since they're building it, will the animals come? "It's not like a zoo where you get an animal and put it in," Haeg points out. The estates may be empty for a time, or the animals may move in and out.

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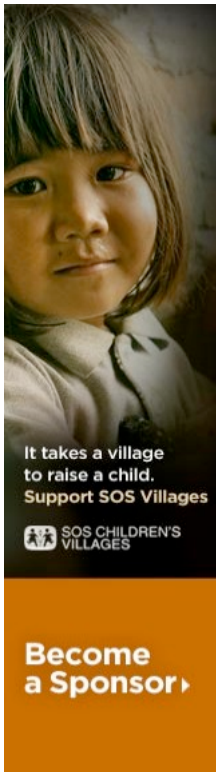


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"It's there if they need it," Haeg offers.

Fritz Haeg *presents* Animal Estates, which is on display as part of the exhibition Suddenly: Where We Live Now at Reed College, 3203 S.E. Woodstock Blvd. Curator Stephanie Snyder will give tours in conjunction with the TBA Festival through Sept. 14.

Haeg will also speak during a free Suddenly symposium Oct. 5 organized by Matthew Stadler along with Lisa Robertson, Thomas Sieverts and Snyder. For more information visit www.reed.edu/gallery or www.suddenly.org.

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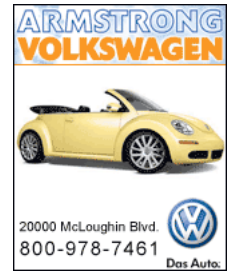
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