Seeing the Forest: Art About Forests & Forestry, began with a pilot in 1999 and continues with the current 2002 edition of the show, but for clarity, we present analysis and results from only the 2000 show.

Why Art?
The educational objectives of the project are several:
• To increase viewers’ awareness of the complexity of forest issues.
• To reach new audiences and introduce OSU Forestry Extension to the general public.
• To provide a conducive environment for dialogue about values and beliefs relating to forests and forestry.
• To challenge viewers’ existing beliefs and perspectives and stimulate consideration of other viewpoints.
• To gain insight into the general public’s understanding about forestry.

Why use art to meet those objectives? Art is immediate and emotional and can transcend cultures and values, reaching new audiences. It elicits reactions that conventional Extension education methods simply cannot. It presents many possibilities and has the capacity to both inform and open new avenues for dialogue. Art can be a cat-
Fire Lilies by Jim Denney
Oil on canvas

Artist’s statement: This painting uses information from several photographs taken of the Charleton Fire near Waldo Lake during the summer of 1996. The ecological role of fire in the forest is still slave to fire hysteria. Catastrophic fires occur because of the exclusion of small fires. In this picture, I enjoyed the idea of placing a reference to the constructed artifice of Monet’s gardens with another kind of constructed landscape—that is, the forest after a catastrophic fire.

Viewers’ comments:
• “I liked it best because of [the] analogy to Monet and [the] image itself and the surprise of beauty and destruction.”
• “Fire Lilies tells it like it is. If we don’t manage forest fuels, wildfire will destroy all. We can’t manage forest fuels in areas set aside as protected preserves.”
• “Our forests need fire as a natural purifier of the ecosystem. Smokey says ‘fire is natural if done in a controlled manner.’”
• “Does Jim Denney agree with the current ‘let it burn’ policy of the [Forest Service]?”
• “… although the image is stunning, it portrays a nearly blank canvas ready for all the new life of wilderness.”
• “Fire Lilies, the stark reality of what fire does.”
alyist for conversation, sparking discussion of a forestry issue while buffering personal attacks.

The idea of using the arts to explore resource management issues is not new. The E.R. Jackman Foundation at the OSU College of Agriculture has for many years had great success in developing topical art exhibits called Art About Agriculture. The Manitoba Farm Women's Conference presented the Women in Agriculture art show in 1999. Other Extension educators are using theater to teach Wisconsin residents about lake issues (Stencel and Korth 2002) and various media, such as videos, quilts, and youth art, to reach nontraditional forestry audiences in Kentucky (Szymanski et al. 2002).

Core Concepts

Seeing the Forest, however innovative and exciting, is fundamentally an educational program, and we have taken a systematic approach. Several core concepts have guided the project from the beginning: We would use a content plan, an evaluation process, and multiple channels of communication among artists, viewers, and Extension; the show would travel to different communities around the state, be displayed in public spaces such as libraries and government buildings, and target general audiences with little awareness of forestry issues.

The content plan is the educational foundation of the exhibit, serving as the template for each edition of the art show and distinguishing it from standard juried art shows. The team selects art that conveys specific values or practices that illustrate the scope and complexity of forestry issues. We include portrayals of wildlife habitat, aesthetic beauty, harvest methods, jobs, forest health, recreational use, water resources, fire, conflict resolution, and urban encroachment. Besides topical content, we include images representing different ecological and geographical regions of the state and select a variety of artistic media, including photography, oils, watercolor, ceramic sculptures, Native American–style carvings, quilts, paper, furniture, turned wood, and folk art.

An evaluation component is built into the project. A brief questionnaire, part of the brochure that accompanies the show, has four multiple-choice questions tied directly to our educational objectives and, for the 2000 show, two open-ended questions that elicit additional information (table 1). Viewers are asked to respond anonymously and place the completed questionnaires in a box before leaving the show. The multiple-choice responses were analyzed with SPSS (1999). For the open-ended responses, we performed a content analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994), looking for recurring themes. Such a sample of respondents is, of course, self-selected, which may bias the findings. That we had a wide range of responses, positive to negative, however, suggests that the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Concepts</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seeing the Forest, however innovative and exciting, is fundamentally an educational program, and we have taken a systematic approach. Several core concepts have guided the project from the beginning: We would use a content plan, an evaluation process, and multiple channels of communication among artists, viewers, and Extension; the show would travel to different communities around the state, be displayed in public spaces such as libraries and government buildings, and target general audiences with little awareness of forestry issues.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Seeing the Forest questionnaire, 2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Did Seeing the Forest succeed in illustrating the diversity of forest issues in Oregon?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Which issues did you see illustrated?</td>
<td>Harvest methods, Aesthetic beauty, Urban encroachment</td>
<td>Conflict resolution, Recreation, Forest health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I think Seeing the Forest increased my understanding of the complexity of forestry issues.</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Which art image did you like the best? Why?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Which art image did you find the most intriguing or thought-provoking? Why?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Themes most frequently identified by survey respondents answering the open-ended questions about which images they liked best and found most thought-provoking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best-liked and why</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Most thought-provoking and why</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forestry-related responses</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Forestry-related responses</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic beauty</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Forest health</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvest methods</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Harvest methods</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Aesthetic beauty</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife habitat</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Fire control</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire control</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Urban encroachment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest health</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jobs</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation use, urban encroachment, water resources</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Recreation use, urban encroachment, water resources</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonforestry-related responses</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Nonforestry-related responses</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unusable responses</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Unusable responses</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>249</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = number of times an image was identified as best-liked or most thought-provoking.
self-selection bias was minimal.

Creating and using multiple lines of communication has been a highlight of the art show. The first line of communication is, of course, the art. Each artist has visual messages to express to the viewer; in addition, most artists provide written statements that accompany their images. Likewise, the Extension team communicates the educational message through the team’s selection of artwork and explains the show’s objectives and key points in the brochure and on text panels dispersed throughout the exhibit.

Equally important, we give viewers multiple ways to communicate with us. Besides using the questionnaire to formally express their opinions and thoughts, they can share their thoughts informally with other viewers by writing comments on cards and posting them on the corkboards distributed throughout the exhibit. And they can speak directly with artists and foresters at the public receptions.

Analysis of Viewers’ Responses

In total, more than 65,000 people in six Oregon communities viewed Seeing the Forest in 2000. Only 305 viewers completed the formal questionnaire; many people contributed informal comments. Those viewers who took the time to complete the questionnaire, even though the percentage was less than 1 percent, provided valuable information about their Seeing the Forest experiences. In this section we look at the analysis of the formal responses to the questionnaire only. Of the 305 respondents,

- 86 percent ($n = 305$) thought Seeing the Forest successfully illustrated the diversity of forest issues in Oregon.
- 77 percent ($n = 284$) agreed or strongly agreed that viewing Seeing the Forest increased their understanding of the complexity of forest issues.

- 70 percent or more correctly indicated that three issues—wildlife habitat, aesthetic beauty, and harvest methods—were illustrated in the show. Respondents listed urban encroachment and conflict resolution least frequently.

The two open-ended questions were addressed by 65 percent of respondents, who provided qualitative data on the best-liked and most thought-provoking images and the reasons why they selected those particular images. Of the 53 art pieces included in the show, only three were not mentioned specifically at least once in answers to the two open-ended questions. These results show that Seeing the Forest was varied enough to appeal to a wide audience—there was something for everyone—and also that viewers were thoughtfully considering what they had seen.

The content of Seeing the Forest centered on 10 issues meant to illustrate the diversity and complexity of issues; these were listed in question 2, which asked respondents whether they had identified them in the art. We examined the association between those answers and the responses to the two open-ended questions (5 and 6). Core
forestry issues were identified 104 times in question 5 (best-liked image and why) and 105 times in question 6 (most thought-provoking image and why) (table 2). In the open-ended questions, forestry issues were identified by respondents approximately 40 percent of the time in both questions. Thus, viewers were cognizant of forest issues in general and able to identify them in the images.

In addition, the issues listed most frequently in comments in the qualitative data from questions 5 and 6 were aesthetic beauty, harvest methods, forest health, and conflict resolution. The issues most frequently identified (>70 percent) in the quantitative data from question 2 were wildlife habitat, aesthetic beauty, and harvest methods. Comparing respondents’ answers with both the qualitative and the quantitative questions, we found that aesthetic beauty and harvest methods were common characteristics that respondents identified in the art.

An oil painting by Stev Ominski titled Predator prompted the most comments from viewers and was at the top of most viewers’ “best-liked image” list (32 comments). Although Predator provoked more thought—or at least reaction—than any other image, Beside a Mountain Stream, a vivid quilt by Libby Ankarberg, was equally well liked (30 comments). These two contrasting images evoked very different responses from the viewers. One viewer chose the quilt as the best-liked image because “Beside a Mountain Stream detailed beauty and depth of the forest.” Some viewers liked the quilt because of its content, offering such statements as, “Beside a Mountain Stream because of concern for what we are losing.” However, most seemed to appreciate Ankarberg’s art for its beauty and the quilting medium: “stunning,” “instant visual impact [and] technical control of medium,” and “liked the subject and appreciated the technique” were among the comments.

Ominski’s Predator elicited statements about the controversies of forestry and logging along with artistic appreciation for the painting. One viewer wrote, “Predator…represents man in its predator activities, and yet it is done in great beauty by the artist.” Another said, “the violent image combined with beautiful art work created conflicting emotion.” Another viewer responded, “it spoke to both the reality of forest harvest and the mixed feelings of starting over.”

Because of the strong reaction to Predator, we examined the issues that viewers identified in this piece: 16 respondents to question 5 (best-liked?) identified at least one forestry issue, with harvest methods most frequently mentioned; 29 respondents to question 6 (most thought-provoking?) identified at least one forestry issue, with harvest methods again the most frequently mentioned.

Overall, conflict resolution, aesthetic beauty, urban encroachment, forest health, and jobs were also identified in answers to both open-ended questions. The data confirm that the images evoked a wide range of responses.

**Discussion of the Project**

We were concerned about the low percentage of viewers who responded to the formal questionnaire. To better understand the distribution of viewers and respondents, we conducted an informal two-hour observation at one of the high-traffic sites. A total of 526
adults entered the building, 465 of whom (88 percent) walked through the Seeing the Forest gallery. Of those 465 viewers, 52 (11 percent) picked up the brochures. Of those 52, six people (1.3 percent of all viewers) filled out the questionnaire within the brochure and dropped it into the questionnaire box before leaving. The rate of response in the two-hour observation was approximately the rate of response for the overall project.

The analysis of viewers’ responses shows the effectiveness of the exhibit and the contribution of the content plan to meeting our objectives. One of our goals is to provoke thought, and images like Predator succeeded in both stimulating thought and appealing to viewers. We infer that viewers are able to “see” the issues more frequently in art that appeals to them than in those pieces that only provoke thought.

Both the qualitative and the quantitative data also indicate that forest issues like aesthetic beauty, harvest methods, wildlife habitat, forest health, and conflict resolution are the easiest for people to recognize in the artworks and that we did a satisfactory job of including this content in the show.

For two issues, the art show gave less consistent results. Wildlife habitat was prominent in the numeric data but did not show up frequently in open-ended comments. Conflict resolution didn’t appear in the numeric responses but appeared frequently in the comments. The inconsistency could be caused by the coding structure.

The remaining issues—recreation use, water resources, urban encroachment, forest health, and fire control—weren’t often identified. There are several possible reasons: These issues may not have been represented well, or the images in the show that we felt represented these issues may have been unclear to the viewers, or the citizens of Oregon may not consider these issues important and were not looking for them. In this case, our educational approach needs to be more direct.

This article would not be complete if we did not point out some surprises and unexpected, intangible benefits. First, people care deeply about their forests—and viewers vehemently told us how they felt about forests and forest industry. Project team members were taken aback by the polarity and forcefulness of statements by viewers, particularly those who posted their comments on the corkboards for others to read.

One viewer would write “Predator is fabulous!”; another would state “I HATE Predator!” Some viewers called the show “too biased toward primal nature”; others said, “This show is all about logging. Why don’t you show some real forests?” One respondent wrote that Predator and Untitled were “… inflammatory and ill conceived; they are confrontative and do not help
to solve a problem!” Several times, viewer comments would catch us off guard: “Fish are not forestry! What are salmon images doing in a show about trees?” And, “I don’t get why you have a book and a three-legged table [art objects displayed in the show] in an exhibit about forestry.” Some comments were amusing: “Hooray for trees! Three cheers for oxygen.” Others were ironic: “I noticed that the ‘antilogging art’ pieces are all mounted in wood frames … hmmm.”

We were impressed by the quality and thoughtfulness of dialogue that could take place in the informal setting. Consider the following series of asynchronous corkboard comments:

- “I don’t like the trees being cut down. Trees give us air.”
- “Where do you think the wood for your house came from?”
- “I think people are too harsh. Our forests are really valuable, and it’s important that we do care. They are a renewable resource, but it takes a long time to grow one tree. It’s important that we don’t get careless.”
- “Yes, renewable—but only when used wisely. Past practices should be learned from, not repeated. [The forest] was here thousands of years before us and should be here for thousands more!”
- “Logging is necessary; we need the wood to build, but we also need to let the old-growth alone!”
- “Antilogging propaganda does no one a service other than spreading falsehoods and an unrealistic reality.”
- “I’ve read all the comments here, and I don’t see any antilogging comments except the first one. People are just saying, ‘Be careful, use it well.’”

Another surprise for us was our relationship with the artists. Foresters and artists don’t generally interact professionally, but artists responded well to our idea of an educational art exhibit. All the shows have featured high-quality artwork. We look forward to continuing and expanding this relationship.

We also learned the obvious lesson that artists are part of the “general public.” Most are urbanites and, with some exceptions, have no working connection with and little firsthand knowledge of forestry. Thus, their awareness and impressions of forests and forestry issues often reflect commonly held public beliefs. This may be a strength as we look for images expressing themes and values familiar to many viewers. But this can also be a liability if we cannot find art that illustrates the less familiar issues or concepts. It seems ironic that we have had chronic problems finding images representing salmon (or their recovery), recreation, and conflict resolution, given the importance of these issues to the increasingly urbanized population of the state and the loud debates Oregonians have over forest resource use.

Conclusions

Seeing the Forest has been a success and seems to be a good way to engage the public in dialogue. The evaluation process revealed that we achieved our objectives and confirmed the value of the show as an educational tool. We have increased viewers’ awareness of forestry issues. We have reached new, nonforestry audiences. We have provided a conducive environment for dialogue, challenged existing beliefs and perspectives, and stimulated consideration of other points of view. This has given us new insight into the general public’s views and understanding of forestry.

But Seeing the Forest is just one example of how art can be used to help us engage new audiences in conversation about forest management and other natural resource issues. We have reached new, nonforestry audiences. We have provided a conducive environment for dialogue, challenged existing beliefs and perspectives, and stimulated consideration of other points of view. This has given us new insight into the general public’s views and understanding of forestry.

The art show has moved our Forestry Extension program forward and become a mechanism for us to engage individuals and communities in dialogue about natural resource issues. Ultimately, the impact of this initiative may assist in development of forestry policies grounded more in understanding of important issues than in emotional and unprocessed reactions. As natural resource professionals, we need to hear what’s important to the citizens of our state. Supreme Court Justice Breyer said, “Listening brings dignity to the person being listened to.” We respectfully suggest that listening also facilitates better natural resource decision-making.

Literature Cited


SPSS for Windows, Rel. 10.0.0. 1999. Chicago: SPSS Inc.
