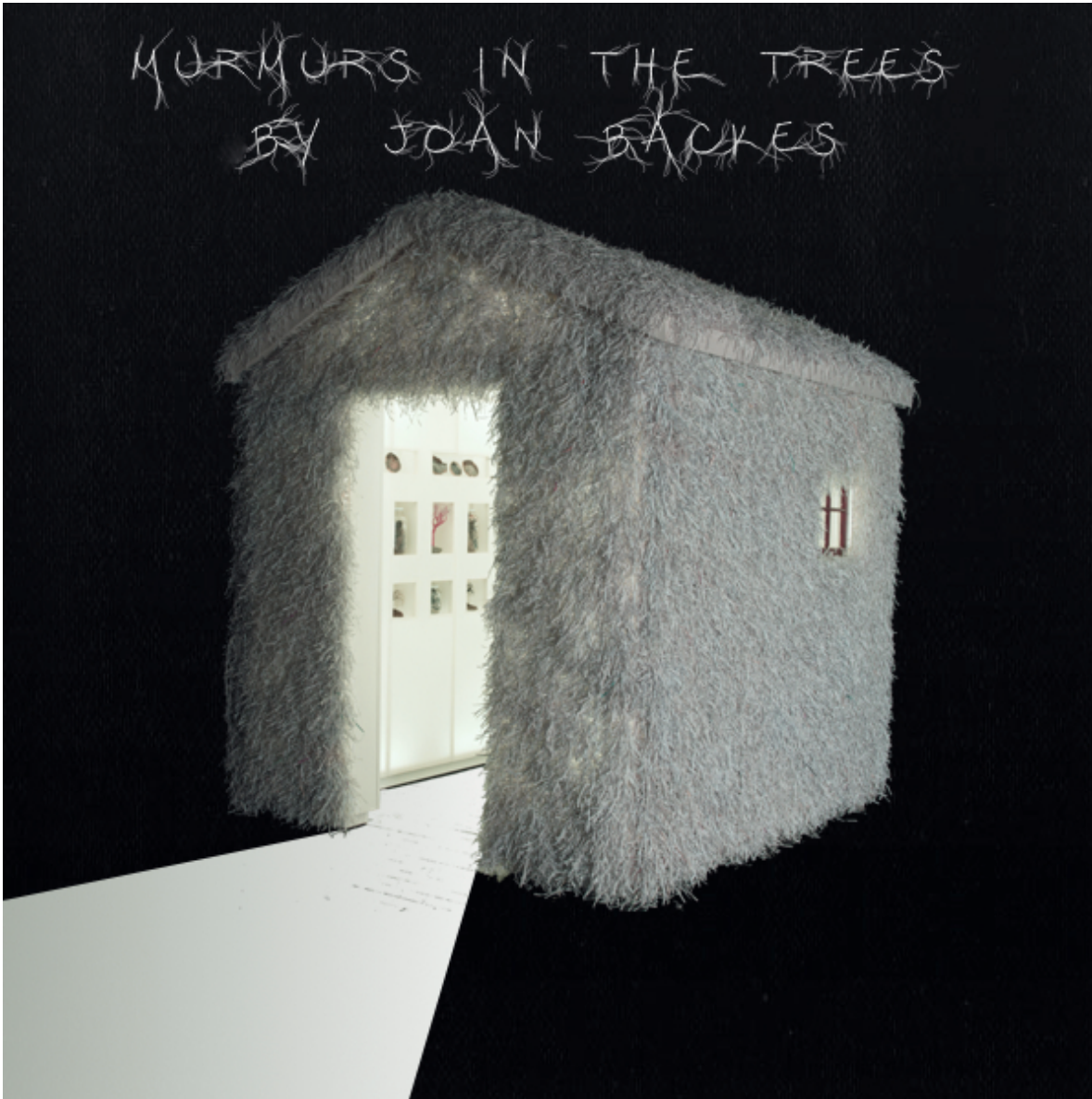


Joan Backes: Murmurs in the Trees





EXHIBITION INFORMATION

Exhibition Dates: April 15 - May 28, 2011

Artist Reception: Friday, April 15, 6-9 p.m.

Review by Mary Louise Schumacher

EXHIBITION ESSAY

Joan Backes: Artistic Intermediary

Artist Joan Backes is an intermediary. Her art is poised in a space between nature and the built environment; between the allure of surface and revelatory layers of meaning; between the contemporary present and deep-seated connections to her past. Backes was born and raised in Wisconsin to parents whose interest in nature and encouragement in art had profound, lasting effects. The work of her grandfather, an architect, echoes subliminally in her recent explorations of the house as a designated place of investigation and awareness.

The roots of Joan Backes emanate from the people and places of her past, but she continues to develop fresh branches in her art. Currently based in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, Backes has shown her paintings, videos, installations, and three-dimensional pieces internationally. Nature, and in particular, the form of the tree, has been a significant metaphor in her art, and one that lies at the heart of the exhibition, *Murmurs in the Trees*.

A tree, transformed from its raw state, becomes building material for a house. It is a place of shelter and protection, and one that we may identify strongly with as a private refuge shared with family and friends. Backes' large-scale installation, *Paper House*, appears on the exterior as an ethereal delight: a cottage covered with a heavy white coat, like a gentle, domestic beast. This lively surface is made from shreds of recycled computer paper - the ordinary office variety. We may touch the stuff everyday, and even in our technology-saturated society, paper is still abundant around us. *Paper House* takes it as its most obvious building material, and reminds us that these document shreds are but trees in another form. Nature appears in many disguises.

The charming exterior of *Paper House* beckons us inside, and our attention is drawn even deeper. It is like a visual laboratory, a place for examining and considering the niches of objects and collections, retrieved from unknown origins and presented for examination. Not just a place of repose, this house has an intellectually engaged purpose. In a 2010 interview in Darmstadt, Germany, Backes discussed her ideas of a house as a place that may be acutely functional though evocative. The sense of purpose, of practicality and

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Joan Backes lives and works in Massachusetts | <http://joanbackes.com/home.php>

Education

- MFA Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois

- BA University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa

Selected Honors and Awards

- Invitational International Biennial, Internationalen Waldkunstpfad, Germany (2010)
- Edwin Austin Abbey Fellowship, National Academy Museum, New York (2009)
- American-Scandinavian Foundation Project Grant (2009)
- Brown University Creative Arts Council Faculty Grant (2008)
- Embassy of the US Iceland (2006)
- Fulbright Hays Grant (2003)
- Ragdale Foundation (2000, 1999, 1998)
- Senior Fulbright Scholar Award (1994-95)
- National Endowment for the Arts/KS Art Com. (1992)
- Yellowstone Association for Natural Science, History, and Education Grant, Yellowstone National Park (1992)
- American-Scandinavian Foundation Award (1991)

Selected One Person Exhibitions

- sleeper Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland. Brochure (2010)
- Uppsala University Linnaeus Garden, Uppsala, Sweden. Brochure (2009)
- Dean Jensen Gallery, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Catalog (2008)
- LA Contemporary Gallery, Los Angeles, California. Catalog (2008)
- Gallery of the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. Brochure (2008)
- Thomas McCormick Gallery, Chicago, Illinois (2007)
- Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University, Halifax, NS, Canada (2007)
- SAFN Museum, Reykjavik, Iceland. Brochure (2006)
- Rauma Art Museum, Rauma, Finland. Catalogue (2005)

Selected Group Exhibitions

- Big Bangs/Small Bucks III, Dean Jensen Gallery, Milwaukee, WI (2011)
- Four Forest Artists, Merck, Darmstadt, Germany (2011)
- International Biennial and Symposium: Internationaler Waldkunstpfad, Darmstadt, Germany (2010)
- Baltimore Museum of Art Contemporary Prints & New Editions, Baltimore, Maryland (2010)
- Botanica, Hunterdon Art Museum, Clinton, New Jersey (2010)
- Gallery Benoit, Boston, Massachusetts (2010)
- Arbores Venerabiles, Glyndor Gallery, Wave Hill, Bronx, New York (2009)
- Art Chicago/NEXT, Chicago, Illinois (2009)
- The Intimate Page, Portrait Society, Milwaukee, WI (2009)
- Edwin Austin Abbey Fellowship Exhibition, National Academy, NY, NY (2009)
- The Decorata Project: Three Artists, Three Installations, Bristol Art Museum, Bristol, Rhode Island (2009)
- Nature Interrupted, Chelsea Art Museum, New York, New York. Brochure (2008)
- Big Bangs/Small Bucks, Dean Jensen Gallery, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (2008)
- Faculty Exhibition, Bell Gallery, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island (2007)
- Nature Interrupted, New Bedford Art Museum, New Bedford, Massachusetts. Brochure (2006)
- drawing _ drawing 2, The Foundry, London Biennial, London, England (2006)
- Ragdale Anniversary, Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, Illinois (2006)
- Summarize, Jan Weiner Gallery, Kansas City, Missouri (2005)
- Magnificent Extravagance, Racine Art Museum, Racine, Wisconsin (2005)
- Scapes, Virginia Lynch Gallery, Tiverton, Rhode Island (2005)
- A Forest Somewhere, Dean Jensen Gallery, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (2004)
- From Nature, BCC Gallery, Fall River, Massachusetts (2004)
- Contemporary Drawing, U. of Nebraska Galleries, Lincoln, Nebraska (2004)
- Hands to Work, Mind to God, Borusan Art Museum/Foundation, Istanbul, Turkey (2004)