

Proposal for Jardin de Metis 2024  
Nous sommes la Nature  
We are Nature  
Pierre Leichner

I am an interdisciplinary artist with a socially engaged practice focusing on the environment and mental health. Since 2008 my work has aimed to reconnect humans to their environment using community participatory ephemeral installations and root sculpture installations to promote community and individual well-being.

This proposal consists of 3 parts.

*Roots-We all need them-* installation in Foret Fini *Espace Infini*

*Slowing Space-* Ephemeral installations by community participants

*Worm Art Work- Footprints and other signals.* A community engaged project

This proposal may thus be different in that it consist of one installation on root sculptures and 2 community engaged projects. This is partly because the first project needs 3 weeks to grow before installation and during that time, I could engage the community and visitors in a couple other projects that address social and ecological issues.

*Roots-We all need them*

*Racines- nous en avons tous besoin.*



Spirits of the forest and trees? Ephemeral. Solitary and in groups. They remind us of our roots, our connection. At first surprised the walker comes up close to see their unique beauty and then they start looking for the others along the path, slowing their travel and connecting with the gardens.

When I was a child in Provence in France every Christmas, my family planted wheat on cotton in a dish. This was a tradition. If the grass grew straight and strong it would be a good year. I remember that when it was done, we pulled the grass out of the dish and the roots had taken the shape of the mold. In 2008, at Christmas time, I was in a master sculpture program and the idea came to see if I could use the roots as the medium to make sculptures. My first project was called *The Root Laboratory Project*. I experimented with many shapes and learned to get strong sculptures reliably. My second project was called *The Many Faces of Apollo (MFA)*. I sculpted the faces of 12 Masters of Fine Arts students. Then came *The Grass Roots Project* in 2012. For it, I sculpted the faces of 8 grassroots workers selected from the community and installed them in a community center.

Since then, the root sculptures have been grown and installed in several environmental art festivals, galleries, parks, and botanical gardens including this

year at the Burnaby Blooms Festival in British Columbia, and the first International Environmental Art Festival- *We Are Nature*- in Cephalonia, Greece.

For Ecology des Possibles, I am proposing to grow and install up to 40 wheat grassroot sculptures either in a wooded area or along paths. It takes up to 3 weeks to grow a sculpture. The effect would be that there would be sculptures at different stages of drying out along a path. They could remain there for the duration of event. Some could be kept when dried to be installed indoors.

All the materials for the project the wheat grass grains, and the peat moss are easily available, and I would bring the molds.

By growing wheatgrass in molds of faces the roots metamorphose into representations of human forms. During the exhibition they weather reminding us of our ephemerality. In this way nature imitates us in celebrating our community at this time of great ecological concern. Working directly with plants has made me realize that we have created a false separation between nature and ourselves; after all, roots occur in our bodies, families, and communities and spiritually with our planet and the cosmos.

*Slowing Space*-Ephemeral installations by community members of all ages



We move faster and faster within our environment and slowing down is equated to aging or laziness. As we move faster our awareness of space also shrinks. Slowing down stretches time and space. Thus, the goal of this project is to increase awareness of the space of a park by creating surprises that will slow the traveller. To do so, community participants will draw lines and create patterns with materials from the earth to make previously invisible spaces more visible in the park.

While waiting for the roots to grow I propose to engage the local community and visitors to create ephemeral installations in a designated area or along the paths of the garden.

Following a brief introduction to environmental art, twelve to fifteen participants first experiment using natural materials to draw and create shapes. After choosing their materials, they then create their own small environmental art installation in one of several designated areas in the gardens.

I will gather the materials from garden cuttings and local gleaning. A dozen or so installations could thus be made and remain during the festival until they are removed.

*Worm art works – Footprints and other worm signals. A community engaged project.*



Humans are probably the most invasive and damaging animal species to our planet's ecology currently. One such development is the creation of poor soil fertility by the killing of earth worms indirectly from the toxic chemicals (e.g.: fungicides, herbicides, and pesticides) farmers use regularly on their crops to increase yields and the marketability of their products (e.g., no blemishes on fruits and vegetables). This diminishes soil fertility thus forcing farmers to use fertilizers. The goal of this ongoing ecological art project is to increase the awareness of the public to the ecological cost of perfect looking vegetables, fruits, gardens, and lawns.

This proposal was inspired by the poem *Sink* by Alyssa Harms -Wiebe that speaks to our disconnection with our earth:

*I stand still*

*it's a rare occasion to stand still*

*I stand still and my shoes come off my feet I am*

*so still*

*So still*

*that I begin to form architecture*

*I become suddenly aware of my human footprint I*

*cannot stand still without leaving an imprint*

*I stand still*

*and I*

*sink*

*sink*

*sink*

*into the depths of the soil*

*begin to architect a body of work*

*as I watch the Land*

*make space for my imprint ...*

*your footprint carries a weight  
your footprint carries a weight so heavy*

*your footprint carries a weight*

*what I see*

*what I know*

*what wealth of history I preserve  
is of no interest to you*

*your footprint carries a weight  
your footprint carries a weight so heavy  
your footprint carries a weight*

*tell me*

*Earth-dweller*

*how to remain still*

*when your stomping  
drives me to madness ?*

*I listen, listen  
can't stop listening to her ...*

The works begin by painting footprints and other signs with dyes or acrylic paints mixed with commercially available pesticides, fertilizers, and fungicides. Once these are dry, worms from a compost bucket are gathered placed in diluted non-toxic food coloring. They are then put on canvas and their movements are video recorded. As they move, they leave color traces of their path. Their avoidance of the toxic chemical area is also visible. After they move off the canvas, they are washed and returned to the compost bin. The results may appear as abstract paintings to an uninformed viewer.

I propose a couple workshops with local community members. During the first one the participants choose a sign or object to paint that reflects their local environmental concerns. In the second workshop the compost worms are brought in to complete the picture. I have completed such workshops on two previous occasions these paintings could later be shown alongside with the videos documenting their creation. I would envisage up to 12 paintings. QR codes would be posted beside each painting linking them to their process video. If available a monitor could show a loop of the videos as well. I also have the poet's Alyssa Harms Wiebe permission to present the full text of her poem as part of a show.

I could bring the compost worms if needed. Stretched canvas and acrylic paints are readily available as well as commercially available chemical pesticides etc.

This proposal brings BioArt as an art form in engaging a current contemporary environmental issue of local and global importance. The process in the making of these works is experimental, unique and bridges science and art. It could provide an opportunity to foster dialogue between local gardeners, farmers, and the ecologically minded community.

I would also be available to give an artist talk/demonstration on environmental art, BioArt and this work in French and English as needed.

In conclusion, I have done the 3 projects suggested above several times in separate occasions. The feed back has always been positive. The community engaged participation would be require some planning prior to my arrival to call for interested participants. This proposal is perhaps more alike an artist residency proposal for a one-month period during the festival. The 3 projects fit the relational aspect of this years' theme by bringing participants and viewers to reflect on their spiritual connection and social responsibilities with the garden.



## Images for Jardin de Metis proposal 2024

Further information and images are available on my website.

<http://leichner.ca/Curating/Kephalonia/ephemeral.html>

<https://leichner.ca/Curating/VictoriaPark/VictoriaPark.html>

<http://leichner.ca/Curating/Ephemeral/ephemeral.html>

<http://leichner.ca/Curating/Contour/contour.html>

<https://leichner.ca/Installations/RememberingRoots/RememberingRoots.html>

<https://leichner.ca/Installations/Panoply/panoply.html>

<https://leichner.ca/Installations/grassroots/grassrootsproject.html>

<https://leichner.ca/Installations/FacesofAppolo/faces.htm>

<http://leichner.ca/Paintings/cephalonia.html>

<http://leichner.ca/Paintings/wormartwork.html>

*Roots we all need them.*

Images of previous installations in environmental art festivals













Slowing space  
Ephemeral community installations











## Worm Art Works



**09 waw#9web, Foot Print series #1 made by red wrigglers with non-toxic dyes on paper with footprints with insecticidal soap and black paint, 24in.x18in., 2020**

**<https://youtu.be/Ir95xBL4ZFA>**





**Please turn the power off made by red wigglers with blue, green, red non-toxic dyes on canvas with on/off sign in insecticidal soap and black paint, 14in.x 14in., 2021**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zTro8W5Mlo&t=167s>



**Yin and Yang- made by red wigglers in non-toxic red and blue dye and symbol in acrylic paint mixed with insecticidal soap, 16in.x12in., 2022**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMPEUm8uLRE>

## **Budget**

Transportation to Jardin de Metis from Vancouver = \$2000

Accommodations and meals for one month: \$4000

Car rental= \$2000

Project Supplies = \$1000

Artist fees at \$30 per hour

Includes preparation and events 5 hours per day for 25 days = \$3750

Promotional materials provided by Jardin de Metis in kind via website and posters  
or approx.= \$200

Total = \$12,9750