

Richard Watts
Artist Statement 2017

I am a Canadian/American artist, born in New Jersey, raised in the midwest and on a family farm in Kansas, and in Chicago. I moved to Toronto, Canada in 1987 and have worked in the city and, more recently, at a live/work barn Studio in the Canadian Shield, since that time. The work explores environmental and climate change issues between the two countries, and has received feature print and television coverage.

The Studio is a developing environmental art centre, located on a wooded acreage in a large converted barn like an overturned ship on the edge of the Canadian Shield, beside the Crowe River, 40 minutes east of Peterborough and 2 hrs. from Toronto. The barn and woods combine creation, production, exhibition, and education in an environmental context. An influence would be the American artists Mark Dion and J Morgan Puett's Centre, Mildred's Lane, two hours from New York City.

Recent works include the "Earth Skins" series-- latex and gauze relief sculpture 'paintings, illuminated manuscripts, or x-rays of climate change'-- created from Shield rock faces, trees, vintage boats, and abandoned architecture (2008-ongoing . . .), the site-specific "Ark" under the Manhattan Bridge (2007), and a series of skeletal steel forms along Mission Creek, a salmon river, in Kelowna, British Columbia (2006). In summer 2008 six cottage boats were altered live in front of Edmonton City Hall for The Works Festival, according to climate change themes. In 2012 the "Earth Skins" were first shown at the MacLaren Art Centre in a solo exhibition called The Three Seasons, and in 2014 travelled to Two Rivers Gallery in Prince George, British Columbia, as well as the International Earth Art Exhibition in Hamilton, Ontario at the Royal Botanical Gardens. Artist and studio profiles were included in a group exhibition at the G21 Conference on the Planet (COP21) in Paris. Future exhibitions are in discussion with museums in Ontario and B.C. including the Art Gallery of Kelowna, Canadian Canoe Museum, Tom Thomson Museum (through curator John K Grande), and others.

Developing projects include the Mobile Art Circus, which involves an outdoor 'museum' made of cargo containers with "Earth Skins" made off old growth trees from different bioregions in Canada, shown inside, and an integrated courtyard performance space for multimedia presentations. Other developing projects might include an Ancient Grove cedar tree Earth Skin in British Columbia, Canada, works made from insect patterns carved into trees particularly those tree species endangered by climate change, and a project called "Pine: the Trudeau Project" involving works made on site where the Group of Seven painted.

The boat forms, archetypes of collective and individual life cycles and journeys, refer to the way the continent was originally traversed—in wood, bone, and skin crafts on the lake and river system—as well as to the vehicles of European colonization. The old growth trees are ancient world-symbols from which human culture has evolved—cathedrals, or ships, both depended on them and, classical columns and architectural proportions evolved from the sacred groves. With current climate change trajectories we need many more of them. The forms remind us to protect what remains.