

GreaterRestonArtsCenter

SLEEPING TREE SHINJI TURNER – YAMAMOTO

Curator's Statement

The Greater Reston Arts Center's main gallery looks out on the corner of a thriving intersection in Reston Town Center. In contrast to this bustling scene Shinji Turner-Yamamoto has transformed the gallery into a quiet, meditative space by introducing a large dead dogwood tree, lying on its side as though asleep. Along its trunk and branches, tiny fern seedlings sprout and carpet the old bark with bright green foliage. Around the gallery luminous works on paper bring a sense of the heavens to this earthy place.

Taking a tree out of its natural context –the forest floor – and placing it on the gallery floor, Turner-Yamamoto hopes that viewers experience nature in a novel and surprising way. His intention is to make the connections and similarities between plants and humans visible, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life.

In the adjacent gallery spaces the artist exhibits his initial drawings for the project, a silver leaf and henna painting, and a series of elegant paper sculptures developed in Finland during the previous summer. These two and three dimensional works incorporate the dogwood tree's seeds, leaves, and twigs while red, Virginia clay from around its roots is used as pigment. Titled, *Petals of the Universe*, the paper sculptures reference cloud-like flower forms supported by the sphere of the earth.

Sleeping Tree is part of Turner-Yamamoto's ongoing *Global Tree Project*, a series of site-specific installations mounted in India, Ireland, Japan, and now Virginia. Through these varied projects, the artist offers viewers a new way to see trees by illuminating the similarities in our life cycles as entities that grow, flourish, and leave the world enhanced for the next generation.

Born in Osaka, Japan Turner-Yamamoto has exhibited throughout the world. His recent Washington, DC exhibitions have included *DE RERUM NATURE: On the Nature of Things* at Shigeko Bork Mu Project, and *THREE WINDOWS: Sun, Moon, Star* at the Ippaku-tei teahouse at the Embassy of Japan. For his teahouse installation Turner-Yamamoto used the sheltered spaces and serenity of the rustic structure to create illuminated tableaus referencing celestial phenomena. *THREE WINDOWS* marked the first time the Ippaku-tei teahouse was made available to an artist and opened to the public. Turner-Yamamoto's future projects in the metropolitan area include an installation at the National Arboretum.

Sleeping Tree has been a two-year endeavor connecting the artist and the Greater Reston Arts Center with numerous community members who have donated their skills, equipment, and labor to make Turner-Yamamoto's vision a reality. Reston Association's Environmental Resource Manager, Claudia Thompson-Deahl, located the dying tree in the Governor's Square neighborhood cluster's green space. She then asked Jackie Ogle, owner of Shady Lane Tree Movers, to relocate it. The

company drove their tree-spading equipment from Winchester to Reston, dug up the tree in June, and moved it to a storage lot. The residents of the cluster, who originally rescued the tree as a tiny sapling from a construction site, were on hand to watch as their now mature but dying tree was dug up and carried away for its next life as an art installation.

In October Turner-Yamamoto returned to Reston to oversee the installation of his artistic vision. Reston Association arborists, naturalists, equipment operators, and other staff members joined sculptor Marco Rando in lifting the tree, air-spading its roots, and loading it into a dump truck for the trip to GRACE. Outside the arts center the team unloaded the tree to the sidewalk where they carried it up to the front door. The tree is sixteen feet wide and the door is only eight feet consequently several branches had to be removed. Once inside the gallery Turner-Yamamoto, with Rando's assistance, reassembled the tree.

What the viewer now sees is a naturalistic installation of the entire tree with a mound of soil at its roots supporting a new plant. On an adjacent column a work on paper shows the artist's original vision of a mound of earth where a tree once grew. His initial inspiration for the project, the sight of an uprooted tree and its subsequent disappearance, is represented by a henna painting on paper at the entrance to the gallery. The installed tree is planted with Japanese painted ferns representing the rebirth of life. These tiny ferns are scattered throughout the upper branches and in mounds on the floor in reference to glittering constellations above and the life-giving qualities of the earth below. The entire tree now represents the complete cycle of life.

Shinji Turner- Yamamoto has brought his rare vision to our community and invited us to participate in realizing it. It has been a deeply moving experience for everyone in demonstrating the beauty of our natural world and celebrating the gifts we share when working together. For the audience, *Sleeping Tree* is a graceful tribute to the pleasures of observation and the power of nature to restore the human spirit.

At the end of the gallery exhibition, the tree will be moved to the woodland at Dogwood Elementary School in Reston. Turner-Yamamoto will return to develop the setting where the tree will continue its natural evolution and begin a new life as ecology demonstration and outdoor public art.

SLEEPING TREE is sponsored in part by Initiative for Public Art Reston (IPAR), an organization dedicated to fostering community discourse and education about public art, creating new expectations about the possibilities for art in the public realm, and cultivating a new generation of artworks in the community.

Special Thanks: Finnair, Reston Association, Shady Lane Tree Movers

Joanne Bauer
Exhibitions Director