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The Courier-Journal

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# Arts & Travel



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## Love of Earth fuels 'green' art

### Eco-awareness yields exhibit, art center

By Diane Heilenman  
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The Courier-Journal

Ecoventions have been happening for 30 years, but not necessarily in Louisville. That is, until now.

You may recall how Agnes Denes created "Wheatfield — A Confrontation" on two acres atop the Battery Park landfill in 1982 outside Manhattan. You may have heard of the artist-reclaimed mine land in Vintondale, Pa., that opened in 2001 as "Litmus Garden," with ponds of water changing color as the acid level goes up or down.

The ecovention happening in Louisville and Southern Indiana is the Ohio Valley Creative Energy project.

It began two years ago when Lori Beck, now 25, had an idea.

It was a pretty selfish idea, she concedes. The graduate of the University of Louisville painting program was getting strapped paying for hot glass studio time,



A painting of interstate highway markings on the shapes of black clouds at NuLu Gallery is a not-so-subtle reminder of how auto emissions affect rain and air quality.

#### IF YOU GO

**'Planting Seeds: Cultivating Consciousness,' an exploration of linking art and ecology**

**Where:** NuLu gallery, second floor, 632 E. Market St., Louisville.

**When:** Opening reception: 5 to 9 p.m. Friday. Closing reception with gallery talk: 5 to 10 p.m. Aug. 24. Show ends Sept. 3.

**Gallery hours:** 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday.

**Some of the artists:** Casey Hornung of New Albany, Ind. — "Living Green," an installation that deals with carbon footprints; McKinley Moore of Louisville — glass sculptures about oil dependency; Stephanie Grote of Louisville — photographs about eco-destructive daily habits; Dan Levenson of Brooklyn, N.Y. — paintings about interstate highways; Michele Brody of Brooklyn — photo series on the life cycle of a palm oil plantation; and Mara Adamitz Scrupe of Washington, D.C. — using native Kentucky lichen species, great survivors of eco-disasters, as her art medium.

#### Related events:

► NuLu neighborhood beautification: noon-5 p.m. Sept. 1, led by Ohio Valley Creative Energy to pick up litter and plant flowers and shrubs.

► Rooftop concert at Glassworks, 815 W. Market St., Louisville: 7-11 p.m. Wednesday. Admission: \$7.

#### ON THE WEB

► [www.ohiovalleycreativeenergy.org](http://www.ohiovalleycreativeenergy.org)

#### OHIO VALLEY CREATIVE ENERGY

The purpose of OVCE is to create a center where expensive art forms such as casting and hot glass are fueled by the landfill waste product, methane.

OVCE, which has a membership of more than 30 regional artists, is supporting the \$2 million project through fundraising, including concerts, and grants. These include a recent \$15,000 architectural planning grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and a similar grant of \$25,000 from Caesar's Foundation of New Albany. Founder and artist Lori Beck said they need \$60,000 more for planning and then will start a campaign for building funds.

Construction of the center could begin this year and be completed by 2009.

Once done, studio costs will vary from \$300 to \$300 per month. Artists can stay for three years in the professional development program.

Partners in the project include Clark County, Ind., government, the federal Environmental Protection Agency's Landfill Methane Outreach Program, the Community Foundation of Southern Indiana, Stewardship Associates, Hoosier Energy, and the Clark County Rural Electric Membership Co-operative.

The early designs were created by Miami (Ohio) University School of Architecture students and presented in May at the Cressman Center for Visual Arts in Louisville. The top two selected by OVCE will be merged by California architect Douglas Pierson, a specialist in green architecture.

— Diane Heilenman,  
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# GREEN | Love of Earth fuels art exhibit and art center

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which costs around \$35 for a half-hour and could grow to an energy bill of \$4,000 to \$5,000 per month for the super-hot kilns that run day and night.

Beck was pondering how to make it affordable for her to work in hot glass. She put that need together with the realization that methane is a fuel and a waste product of landfills.

"It was a true light-bulb moment," she recalled.

The urge to turn trash into treasure sent her to visit a similar project in North Carolina. She then founded Ohio Valley Creative Energy, a nonprofit organization that is designing an arts center in Southern Indiana that will be fueled by methane.

In short, here's how it would work: The methane would come from a Clark County landfill; the majority of the energy would go to a rural electric cooperative, and the artists using the studio would get the excess, which would be free.

For Beck, the project has changed her life. "I didn't even recycle," she said. "Now, I feel like I'm on a mission."

"This has powered purpose and put meaning in my life. ... I think of OVCE more as an eco-vention than an organization. I feel like this is my artwork, the things I'm doing, the ways they connect."

Ecoventions don't happen in a vacuum. There are lots of Louisville connections.

Beck, who works as a curator and art broker in Louisville and Cincinnati, has organized an exhibition called "Planting Seeds: Cultivating Consciousness," which opens Friday at Louisville's NuLu gallery.

Works will include glass sculptures about oil dependency and photographs that show destruction of the ecosystem.

NuLu was started a few years ago when independent filmmaker Gill Holland and his wife and partner, Augusta Brown, decided to move to Brown's hometown from Manhattan. In the process,

they were so impressed with Louisville's art scene that they opened a gallery.

Holland, 42, recalled meeting Beck a year or so ago. "I'm a little bit obsessed with trash and recycling. I was like, wow, you are right on the same wavelength."

He has, for instance, produced a carbon-neutral film, "Sweet Lands." For this, Holland's firm, CineBLAST! Productions, "counted carbon footprints and gas and bought (and planted a corresponding number of) trees."

Holland and Brown are also in the middle of trying to produce Kentucky's first platinum LEEDs building in the renovation of a 19th-century Louisville warehouse on East Market Street as a new and bigger NuLu gallery and commercial offices.

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system is the industry standard for gauging a design project's sustainability or "greenness." The United States Green Building Council published the rating system in 1999 to improve

environmental and economic performance of commercial buildings.

The point system has six categories, with platinum being the most "green" and hardest to achieve.

"It was going to cost more to fix it up than buy the building," said Holland. "Then we started thinking we should kind of lead by example. We're big greenies to begin with. ... So we're going for it."

And there's another connection — the green architect for NuLu, Douglas Pierson of FER (which stands for form environment research) studio in Inglewood, Calif., is also the architect for the OVCE center.

Beck said she is proud of the show at the NuLu, because it is an entry point linking art and awareness of the environment.

"Artwork lets us do this," she said. "Reflect on things that hit us hard."

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Reporter Diane Heilenman can be reached at (502) 582-4682.



By Michael Hayman, The Courier-Journal  
Lori Beck, curator of a green exhibition at NuLu Gallery, held "The Blood Spills Around the Pond," a mask in oil by McKinley Moore. Beck founded Ohio Valley Creative Energy, a nonprofit designing an arts center to be fueled by landfill methane.