



From Natural to Supernatural: Christine Sciulli's "Expansive Field" at The South Fork Natural History Museum

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by Sandra Hale Schulman

Don't be surprised if you find cutting edge video installations at the South Fork Natural History Museum (SoFo). This year, the natural history museum has added contemporary art to its roster by inviting its first artist-in-residence to create art fused with nature or reinterpreting the grounds of the museum.

Video artist Christine Sciulli has risen to the challenge with "The Expansive Field: The Environmental Art of Christine Sciulli." The artwork is a multi-media installation that uses branches, wire mesh, fabric, sound and video projections.

Formerly of Manhattan and now living in Amagansett, it's clear Sciulli has taken her own title to heart, expanding her high-tech art into the wilds of the East End, both visually and spatially.



Partial installation view of "The Expansive Field: The Environmental Art of Christine Sciulli." Photo by Sandra Hale Schulman.

Sciulli is known for her line/light projections on various objects – reacting with trees, passing through transparent shapes and using the confines of enclosed rooms to form complex geometric patterns and a reinterpreting of space.

For the SoFo installation, Sciulli has expanded to embrace the entirety of the outdoors, using the spread-out playground of fields the museum has given her. Another installation project inside a barn plays to her strength of transforming interior spaces through light and projection.

Winding down the staircase of the museum, past the dioramas of woodland possums, bats, turtles and birds, the large glass doors open to the back field and Sciulli's "The Expansive Field."

Going bold with a 'this-ain't-your-Hamptons-estate privet hedge,' Sciulli has literally flipped the sacred Hamptons perimeter plant upside down to create something new of them for her outside installation.

Stripped of their leaves, the skeletal shapes create teepee like structures that dot the landscape

around the pond. The installation conjures an eerie Plains Indian village, devoid of inhabitants and protective animal hide covering, where nature has taken over and turned the settlements into bones.

Last Saturday, a special sound performance directed visitors past the outdoor installation and into a barn whose doorway was draped with a heavy black curtain.

After entering, it took me a moment to gain my bearings. Pitch blackness enveloped me and wild, weird noise of clanging, howls, sonic chords and chanting echoed everywhere. After some fumbling in the darkness, a couch was located to sit and watch the show.

Looking up, the rafters were latticed with branches that ran the entire length of the barn and were pierced with sweeping laser light. The straight line of light splintered and danced through and over the snaky fingers of twigs. Twinkling and luminous, the interplay of light on the twigs appeared alternatively as the cosmos and the electro-neuro-pathways of the brain. It felt like tripping or glimpsing what lurks behind your eyelids when you close your eyes.



Artist Christine Sciulli beside a part of her “Expansive Field” installation project at the South Fork Natural History Museum.
Photo by Sunny Khalsa.

Back down here on Earth, Sciulli placed amorphous wire mesh figures on half of the barn floor. More light swept through them as she layered and rearranged fabric and mesh over them. They changed like a shape shifter: undulating creatures unearthed and reburied.

Sciulli collaborated with musician David Rothenberg to create interactive waves of sound that startled and oscillated for the barn installation. Artist Jaanika Peerna deepened the experience furthered by encouraging drawing physically through movement. For the special performance, children and adults were handed glow sticks and wands to wave in and out of the light, making their own patterns and sounds.

The sounds changed when interrupted by human or plastic content, becoming more jarring or abrupt. There were multiple interactions going on at the same time, making it indistinguishable to figure out how the different intrusions changed the kaleidoscope of sound and light patterns. This random static was the point—there is an action and a reaction for everything.

Following is a video filmed at the opening of Sciulli’s “The Expansive Field.” The footage captured Sciulli and Cecilie Hafstad-Richards’s voco-visual collaboration at the South Fork Natural History Museum in April 2013. The vocalist and composer is Cecilie Hafstad-Richards. The sound-reactive video installation is by Christine Sciulli.

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Video Courtesy of Christine Sciulli.

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BASIC FACTS: “The Expansive Field: The Environmental Art of Christine Sciulli” remains on view through May 31, 2013. The South Fork Natural History Museum is located at 337 Bridgehampton/Sag Harbor Turnpike, Bridgehampton, NY 11932. www.sofo.org

Editor’s Note: The story was corrected and updated on June 5, 2013. The original version implied future interactions with “The Expansive Field” would unfold and the exhibition continued through Sept 1, 2013. In fact, the exhibition concluded on May 31, 2013.

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