

## Creative Creatures

*The ideas and the work of the American and European painters, songwriters, photographers, fiction and non-fiction authors, musicians, film makers, architects, designers, poets, and dreamers I met during my 20 years in America.*

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### # 24 / Anne Ausloos, earth artist, Antwerp, Belgium

She returned to Matfield Green, Kansas within three years after her first visit in the summer of 2010. Then she left three of her mysterious art pieces behind, one on the porch of The Gallery at Pioneer Bluffs, one in my backyard, and one sitting in front of my desk. This year, Anne Ausloos arrived in the company of Dutch artist-friend Jeroen van Westen to work together with Bill McBride (Matfield Green) and also Laura Berman (Kansas City) on an experimental art project called *EARTH—Sites and Structures*. Anne teaches at one of the university art schools in the Belgian city of Ghent; she started working with earth long ago and has never stopped working with earth, sand, mud, clay, dirt--which is why I call her my "dirty woman". She's a pretty woman too.

I have known Anne since she graduated from art school in Breda, the Netherlands. Ans and I bought one of her sculptures at the graduate show and our paths have crossed many times since. She came several times to work in New Mexico; executed a project at the Santa Fe Art Institute; and had a show in the Harwood Museum of Art in Taos. One of her dirt installations found a more or less permanent home

behind my house in Abiquiu before I carefully moved it to Kansas, where 2/5<sup>th</sup> was destroyed in the second winter by freezing water. Anne couldn't care less, because decay and destruction are often part of the game if not the essence of her work: she explores the "raw land" by experimenting with the natural transformation of the material as it is exposed to water, heat, light, gravity--and cold. The effects of time and these physical forces are documented by camera to create a record of the process.

The results of her research and involvement at making objective the interactions between the materials of the land and the forces of nature are unpredictable but unexpectedly beautiful. Not being a scientist, Anne isn't interested in geological data. What she is aiming at is to lay bare the beauty of "earth in motion"—to reveal its secrets and expose them to us, lay them smack in the face of us who are rather guileless walkers on earth even if we are convinced conservationists. Hers is a story not about solidity, but about the fluidity of objects, about how they decompose and recompose themselves as the object of a new fascination. As Bill Brown wrote in 1999, "It is (a story) about dislocating material (...) from an instrumentalist teleology and into an aesthetic scene (...), not as a dictate but content with intensely private, inconspicuous display."

Anne is indeed fascinated by ecosystems; she allows herself to be surprised by the small and trivial things she finds for instance in sediments; and she shows her respect by creating the circumstances for the materials to act autonomously. She foremost looks for circular forms; she finds her materials on the border of rivers as well as in the towns they serve; in deserts; or on prairies. She focuses on what is "not seen," not recognized by most people. What drives her is the poetry of incidental discoveries and the amazing qualities of insignificant organic or man-made things. She loves the beauty of decay in an unromantic way. She does not discriminate either; her curiosity acts as a camera and she registers tactility and form, and wonders about what an object's lair has to tell her. The discoveries she makes deliver the material for the plastic work she creates in her old-Antwerp studio: installations like her "experiment wall," things that need time to grow just as her exploratory expeditions need patience. Anne takes all the time of the world to *observe and let happen*. Sustainability is a driving force; she never buys clay, cherishes the sites where she locates desirable dirt, and often re-uses her material.

Her installations have been justly called "mental"; they are intimate theaters of space and time that will never be finished and, just as movement in rivers, in deserts, on prairies and in cities, continue forever. The graphic patterns she makes visible, in the same way as veins do in a landscape, expose the art--the art of temporality, materiality, and locality.

Her recent EARTH project in Chase County? At the time of writing I haven't yet seen any results, but I have been engulfed once again by her lively reactions to the prairie and what can be found there, left behind by nature and human beings. She reads the land as few others can; her eyes catch details that always manage to escape me. Anne is a driven woman, and it is the process that drives her art projects. It is hard to escape from her drive—her Olympic energy is not just fatiguing or exhausting, but plain infatuating. There is no escape from her enthusiasm; she makes earth lovers on the spot.