

"Through the medium of photography I am interested in exploring the benefits of physical labor and personal struggle to find a balance between community and the landscape. The adventure, spiritual fulfillment and the giving back to nature are key elements in my work.

Planting trees in northern Manitoba is a rite of passage for many young adults in Canada. Some do it to pay their way through University, for other the motivation is travel. Most of us swear by the end of the season that we will never return, but we always do. Yes, the money can be very good, but not enough to make up for the bugs, the heat, the rain and the hard, hard work. The reason we all come back is for the "good times," the strong sense of community and building something lasting and important, together as a team. Perhaps even more importantly, we also return for the hard times. The best part of doing something difficult is that once it is finished we are left with a wonderful memory, a new sense of maturity and self worth with emotional rewards that stay with us forever. This is why we keep going back; because it makes us feel so damn good.

Throughout art history there has been a great deal of work investigating the notion of the sublime and the search for a utopian society. My project is, in a way, a response to that work. However, I am engaging with this subject from a unique and original perspective; through the act of hard labor with a connection to the landscape and a strong sense of community. I believe this enterprise to be one of sublime intervention, a pure gesture and a truly authentic moment between people and their environment.

I want my art to make a difference in people's lives. I realize this is a tall order, but art can be an incredibly powerful tool. I have always been fascinated by how art has been used throughout history to educate and to have an impact on the masses. This is one of the elements I am exploring in conjunction with the concept of the utopian community. I came to this realization after people began telling me that they were interested in going tree-planting after viewing my pictures. So, I admit to having a quiet political agenda; our society sorely needs to be awakened to the empowering emotion born in good old- fashion hard work for an important cause.

Showing pictures of the "real" world mixed with photographs of dioramas and figures that I have built is a crucial element in strengthening the concept of memory based on actual experience. The pictures of the "real world" ground the work in reality, while the pictures of the dioramas express the love of the memory of the actual event. Moreover, these two ways of picture-making depend on each other to flesh out the entire event and strengthen the suspension of disbelief."

Sarah Anne Johnson