

Responding to Nature Through Art



Pam Stephens

Responding to the natural world offers visual artists many avenues of inquiry that result in unique works of art. The range of visual responses is limited only by the artist's imagination and skill. Regardless of the chosen media or technique, responses to nature imply careful observation and visual communication on a deep level. This approach is seen in the metal work of Arizona artist, Matagi Sorenson.

An Encounter with Nature

Sorenson's jewelry designs frequently communicate ideas derived from nature. The organic forms in his work call to mind objects which are at once familiar, but perhaps not entirely known. It is this sense of mystery that elevates Sorenson's work as a well-tempered response to nature.

How does such a response come about? Sorenson explains that, like many artists, he is influenced by his


surroundings. The diverse geology of Arizona, the state's cactus blossoms, flowers, creatures, and ink-black night skies help to shape Sorenson's approach to creating. Another inspiration—and this is somewhat more surprising—is the natural process of decomposition. This inspiration came about as a result of the simple discovery of a dead butterfly.

The colorful pattern of the butterfly's delicate wings, interspersed with lacey holes of decay, stirred an artistic curiosity to explore the beauty of what is *not* there. Today, many of Sorenson's contemporary designs include organic open spaces reminiscent of those found in the butterfly's wings. It is this sort of artistic interpretation that sets a model for K–12 art educators to consider.

Helping Students Respond to Nature

Providing opportunities for young artists to think, explore, translate, and create beyond the limits of what they

see opens a broad range of possibilities. As we think about encouraging responses to nature, keep in mind that the term "response" implies that an individual gives a thoughtful answer. In the visual arts, thoughtful responses are most often those that go beyond the obvious to expose that which is hidden to the casual viewer.

Do you have a favorite or tried and true way to help students respond to nature? How do you encourage thoughtful visual answers? Join the conversation on Facebook where you can share your thoughts and student work. 

About the Artist

Matagi Sorenson, a recent graduate of Northern Arizona University, lives and works in Flagstaff and Tucson, Arizona. MatagiSorenson@gmail.com

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