Lydia Kann Nettler

EMBEDDED LEGACIES

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Kniznick Gallery
Women’s Studies Research Center
Brandeis University
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“Embedded Legacies” is a large site-specific installation of sculptural and charcoal-drawn forest scenes. The gallery is filled with cylindrical tree forms, which integrate paper maché and prose on paper into a story environment. Tree to paper to story is a natural progression, which, in this installation, comes full circle as the story is grafted back onto the tree. The embedded prose functions as narrative but also as visual iconography.

This installation concerns itself with integration and transformation. It integrates Lydia Kann Nettler’s family history, specifically the story of her mother’s experience during the Second World War in France, into the daughter’s present identity. One side of the gallery represents the reforestation of a labor/concentration camp in the south of France and the eventual superimposed memorial commemorating the dark history of that place. The other side depicts the landscape of New England, the artist’s home for her entire adult life. This installation is a beginning visual exploration of the meaning of this particular piece of Nettler’s history.

Nettler is currently writing a memoir about what she views as the transformation of suffering over three generations. While at an artist’s residency in France this past spring, the artist conducted substantial research into one of the mysteries of her heritage: Where was her mother during the War, and how did she survive? The installation speaks to this exploration and the transformation of Nettler’s ideas about her own history as she uncovers the details of her mother’s past. Was her mother a hero or a victim? As the child of a survivor of the War and of a mother who succumbed to disabling mental illness, is the artist telling this story as one of pride or shame as the legacy of the second generation? The creation of this installation offers one possible response to that question.

—Lydia Kann Nettler

Nettler has exhibited her installations widely in New England and has created several public art projects. She also writes fiction under the name Lydia Kann and works as a therapist. She holds a B.A. from the University of California Los Angeles and an M.S.W. from the University of Connecticut and has studied art at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.