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## EPISODE THREE: *ECOLOGY*

Premieres Sunday, November 11, 2007, at 10:00 p.m. ET

### EPISODE DESCRIPTION

How is our understanding of the natural world deeply cultural? Episode Three delves into the work of four artists who explore the relationship of nature and culture, including the submission of wilderness to civilization, the foundations of scientific knowledge, the impact of technology on biology, and our relationship to the earth forged by working the land.

German-born **Ursula von Rydingsvard** uses sculpture, in part, as a means to express the memories of her childhood. "I grew up as one of seven children in the post-World War II refugee camps for Polish people in Germany... We stayed in wooden barracks... raw wooden floors, raw wooden walls and raw wooden ceilings... so somewhere in my blood I'm dipping into that source," she says. Von Rydingsvard's studio is filled with massive cedar sculptures, which she painstakingly constructs layer by layer. The end result is a complex and unpredictable surface for viewers to explore and experience. As viewers are brought into her studio, von Rydingsvard explains how her structures often depict opposites. "Nothing can exist in my head without opposites... Within a piece that has tremendous amount of agitation and agony, there can also be something very hushed and very quiet and very lyrical and very humane." Even her unfinished pieces serve an important purpose. "My whole cedar studio is loaded with pieces that are unfinished and I need all of those things in my environment to feed me, to give me always options."

"If art for me is a platform from which to speak, but not tell you something? That's good. ... Ultimately art for me does not reside in the object, it resides in what's said about the object," says **Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle**. Born in Madrid to a Spanish father and a Colombian mother whose work lives were primarily in Chicago, Manglano-Ovalle's interest in architecture, politics, and science underscores much of his work. In this segment, he describes the concepts behind his unique installations, such as restrained love portrayed in his performance piece *Le Baiser/The Kiss* (2000), which was filmed at, and is an homage to, Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House in Plano, Illinois. In the film, Manglano-Ovalle uses the structure of a transparent window pane to depict total separation, as a window washer outside the building (played by Manglano-Ovalle), who hears only the sounds of his squeegee, is juxtaposed against an isolated young woman inside the glass house,

(cont.)

who is listening to ethereal, electronic music. The documentary follows Manglano-Ovalle to an exhibition of his work in New York, which includes sculptures of an umbrella and jack made of indestructible military grade materials. As the artist describes the exhibition, "There are many connections between these things and I think it's just, for me, important not to make it readily apparent." Manglano-Ovalle reveals the ideas behind other works, such as his *Random Sky* (2006) façade in Chicago, for which computers process weather data at the installation site to generate a visual representation of temperature, wind speed and barometric pressure, among other climate conditions. The artist also discusses the duality of turbulence and hope portrayed in *La Tormenta/The Storm* (2007), a large-scale sculpture of two thunderstorm clouds, installed at the Citizenship and Immigration Services building in Chicago, which serves as a metaphor for the U.S. immigration process.

While living in Colorado Springs, **Robert Adams** began to capture black and white photographs of a burgeoning suburban strip – highways and tract houses that marred a dramatic landscape – a development that he loathed. Yet when Adams examined the images in his darkroom, he recognized for the first time the beauty within these pictures. "The final strength in really great photographs is that they suggest more than just what they show literally," says Adams. He went on to create *The New West* (1974), a collection of refined photographs that strive to capture "the contradictory nature of the western experience." Working closely with his wife, Adams created *Turning Back* (1999-2003), which illustrates deforestation in the West, a practice that Adams describes as "not just a matter of exhaustion of resources. I do think there is involved an exhaustion of spirit." Through images of his subjects – the ever-changing ocean, tree stumps within deep valleys, and others – Adams details for viewers the surprising nature of photography, his own pursuit of beauty, and the continuing deterioration of our environment.

**Mark Dion** is a collector and a shopper. "I am constantly out there buying things, going to flea markets and yard sales and junk stores, and I like to surround myself with things that are inspirational." Intrigued by natural history and museum procedures, Dion's collections become part of his installations and public projects that address our ideas and assumptions about nature. "I'm not one of these artists who is spending a lot of time imagining a better ecological future. I'm more the kind of artist who is holding up a mirror to the present." The program follows Dion on a journey during which he brings a "nurse log" – a fallen Hemlock tree which is home to a wide variety of flora and fauna - into the heart of Seattle. Viewers observe Dion and his team of construction workers, advisors, soil scientists, and biologists, as they create a complex shelter for the tree – a Vivarium – which becomes both a showcase and a living eco-system. "It really shows that despite all of our technology, despite all of our money, when we destroy a natural system, it's virtually impossible to get it back."

## **ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES**

**URSULA VON RYDINGSVARD** was born in Deensen, Germany in 1942. She received a BA and an MA from the University of Miami, Coral Gables (1965), an MFA from Columbia University (1975), and an honorary doctorate from the Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore (1991). Von Rydingsvard's massive sculptures reveal the trace of the human hand and resemble wooden bowls, tools, and walls that seem to echo the artist's family heritage in pre-industrial Poland before World War II. Having spent her childhood in Nazi slave labor and post-war refugee camps, the artist's earliest recollections of displacement and subsistence through humble means infuses her work with emotional potency. Von Rydingsvard builds towering cedar structures, creating an intricate network of individual beams, shaped by sharp and lyrical cuts and glued together to form sensuous, puzzle-like surfaces. While abstract at its core, Von Rydingsvard's work takes visual cues from the landscape, the human body, and utilitarian objects – such as the artist's collection of household vessels – and demonstrates an interest in the point where the man-made meets nature. Von Rydingsvard has received many awards, including a Joan Mitchell Award (1997); an Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1994); fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation (1983) and the National Endowment for the Arts (1979, 1986); and exhibition prizes from the International Association of Art Critics (1992, 2000). Major exhibitions include Madison Square Park, New York (2006); the Neuberger Museum, SUNY Purchase, New York (2002); and Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York (1992). Von Rydingsvard lives and works in New York.

**IÑIGO MANGLANO-OVALLE** was born in Madrid, Spain in 1961, and was raised in Bogotá, Colombia and Chicago, Illinois. He earned a BA in art and art history, and a BA in Latin American and Spanish literature, from Williams College (1983), and an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (1989). Manglano-Ovalle's technologically sophisticated sculptures and video installations use natural forms such as clouds, icebergs, and DNA as metaphors for understanding social issues such as immigration, gun violence, and human cloning. In collaboration with astrophysicists, meteorologists, and medical ethicists, Manglano-Ovalle harnesses extraterrestrial radio signals, weather patterns, and biological code, transforming pure data into digital video projections and sculptures realized through computer rendering. His strategy of representing nature through information leads to an investigation of the underlying forces that shape the planet as well as points of human interaction and interference with the environment. Manglano-Ovalle's work is attentive to points of intersection between local and global communities, emphasizing the intricate nature of ecosystems. He has received many awards, including a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Award (2001) and a Media Arts Award from the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (1997–2001), as well as a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts (1995). He has had major exhibitions at the Rochester Art Center, Minnesota (2006); Art Institute of Chicago (2005); Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey, Mexico (2003); Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, Ohio (2002); and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1997). Manglano-Ovalle lives and works in Chicago, Illinois.

**ROBERT ADAMS** was born in Orange, New Jersey in 1937. His refined black-and-white photographs document scenes of the American West of the past four decades, revealing the impact of human activity on the last vestiges of wilderness and open space. Although often devoid of human subjects, or sparsely populated, Adams's photographs capture the physical traces of human life: a garbage-strewn roadside, a clear-cut forest, a half-built house. An underlying tension in Adams's body of work is the contradiction between landscapes visibly transformed or scarred by human presence and the inherent beauty of light and land rendered by the camera. Adams's complex photographs expose the hollowness of the 19th Century American doctrine of Manifest Destiny, expressing somber indignation at the idea (still alive in the 21st Century) that the West represents an unlimited natural resource for human consumption. But his work also conveys hope that change can be effected, and it speaks with joy of what remains glorious in the West. Adams received a BA from the University of Redlands in California and a PhD in English from the University of Southern California. He has received numerous awards, including a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Award (1994); the Spectrum International Prize for Photography (1995); and the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize (2006). Major exhibitions include the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2005); Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven (2002); Denver Art Museum (1993); Philadelphia Museum of Art (1989); and the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1979). Adams lives and works in northwestern Oregon.

**MARK DION** was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1961. He received a BFA (1986) and an honorary doctorate (2003) from the University of Hartford School of Art, Connecticut. Dion's work examines the ways in which dominant ideologies and public institutions shape our understanding of history, knowledge, and the natural world. The job of the artist, he says, is to go against the grain of dominant culture, to challenge perception and convention. Appropriating archaeological and other scientific methods of collecting, ordering, and exhibiting objects, Dion creates works that question the distinctions between 'objective' ('rational') scientific methods and 'subjective' ('irrational') influences. The artist's spectacular and often fantastical curiosity cabinets, modeled on *Wunderkabinetts* of the 16th Century, exalt atypical orderings of objects and specimens. By locating the roots of environmental politics and public policy in the construction of knowledge about nature, Mark Dion questions the authoritative role of the scientific voice in contemporary society. He has received numerous awards, including the ninth annual Larry Aldrich Foundation Award (2001). He has had major exhibitions at the Miami Art Museum (2006); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2004); Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut (2003); and Tate Gallery, London (1999). *Neukom Vivarium* (2006), a permanent outdoor installation and learning lab for the Olympic Sculpture Park, was commissioned by the Seattle Art Museum. Dion lives and works in Pennsylvania.

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