

STAGES » THE RED & THE BLACK

End of Nature

By Robin Tierney
Special to The Examiner

Rows of canning jars draw passers-by to the window, eager to see what selections from Nature's bounty they hold.

Closer inspection reveals aqueous vignettes of natural resources exploited, wasted and damaged. Dysfunctional ecosystems, wreck-o-systems, feature haphazard jumbles of plastic farm animals, fake flower parts, deformed frog and fish figures, and detritus of humans' appetite for all things consumable. Clearly, nature got the bad end of the bargain.

While training spotlights on her mixed media installation, "Preserved," artist Renee Shaw talks about growing up on a farm. Her family grew their own food, instilling in Shaw a deep sense of how the Earth works — uncommon sense in a culture that wrings the hand that feeds.

Humans clearly excel at dominion of animals and plants. Stewardship? Not so much. Where will the man-handling lead? Thirty-two local artists ply their choice of raw materials to speculate on "The End of Nature."

Rather than a feel-good Earth Day celebration, Warehouse's latest show is a cerebral and visceral quagmire. The rough-around-the-edges works match a frayed, trampled planet. In place of polish is passion. Preachy? A tad, but hints and whispers haven't lit many fires.

Here, visual editorials counterbalance simple, powerful statements. In

If you go

The End of Nature

- **When:** Through May 4
- **Where:** Warehouse Gallery, 1021 7th St. NW
- **Info:** warehouseheater.com
- **Admission:** Free

a trippy triple diptych, "Silent Scrolls," JS Adams depicts disintegrating images of a biplane, farmland and industrial site, among major imprints man has made upon Planet Earth.

Appealing wordlessly to the soul are Joan Mayfield's emaciated elephant of corroded metal, Jonathan Prull's hyper-tactile wall-climbing "Monkey Paws," Paul Rhymer's wrenching bird memorial, and curator/crusader Ruth Trevarrow's multimedia wake-up call, the "Red List" of extinct species. Madagascar Dwarf Hippo, we never got to know you.

Mimicking those driftwood shanty-shacked fishing pier souvenirs is Homer Yost's relief sculpture of Gulf-side Biloxi — symbolic of areas increasingly vulnerable to "natural disasters" as oil rigs, refineries, casinos and other man-made encroachments destroy barrier reefs. Leavening the contemplative atmosphere are colorful curiosities such as Matt Hollis's "Last Stand," a large burro-like creature woven from a clever mix of recycled materials.

Will human ingenuity help us bypass the path to destruction? Will temperance trump greed? Might the Cassandras and Chicken Littles be right? This is an art show, not a crystal ball — but the conscience-tingling scenarios offer plenty of post-fossil fuel for thought.



If you go

- **What:** Girl in a Coma opening for Detox Retox
- **Where:** The Red and The Black Club, 1212 H St. NE, Washington
- **When:** 9 p.m. Sunday
- **Details:** \$8; at the door only; redandblackbar.com

By Nancy Dunham
Special to The Examiner

It's one thing to be a Morrissey fan, it's quite another to have him become a fan of yours.

That was the enviable situation Nina Diaz found herself in recently. When Diaz was 12, she formed the band Girl in a Coma with two friends. Although several notable musicians (including Joan Jett, who signed the trio to her Blackheart Records label) have raved about the band, meeting Morrissey was especially motivating for Diaz.

"He came to see us at [the Los Angeles club] The Viper Room and gave us some compliments," said Diaz. "It just makes you feel so cool and like anything is possible."

Soon after the meeting, Morrissey invited Girl in a Coma to open for him on a European tour earlier this year. Although plenty of up-and-coming musicians model themselves on Morrissey and The Smiths, you don't hear of many that receive such attention from the legendary musician.

Not that opening for big-name musicians is really new for the band, which has also toured with The Pogues and Social Distortion. That recognition might overly inflate some performer's egos, but

it's clearly not the case with Diaz, who speaks affectionately about her family and friends and seeks paths for self-improvement.

"Recently I've started reading a lot about Zen and [practicing] Yoga," said Diaz, who lives in San Antonio. "I'm opening my mind to different things to stay focused and centered."

That self-awareness is also helping Diaz and her bandmates focus on writing their next album.

She promises it will have the same kinds of '90s alt-rock vibe (think of the Toadies) as the band's 2007 debut, "Before I'm Gone," which received wide critical acclaim.

"Girl in a Coma are as influenced by the Smiths as their moniker implies, but the all-female, Latina trio also put plenty of spit-polished guitar and intimidating atmospherics into their silver-throated sound," wrote a critic for Seattle Weekly. "[It's] a slickly produced but smartly executed collection of dreamy, anthemic hard rock. ..."

Let other musicians fret about a "sophomore slump" after a well-received debut; Diaz seems energized by the challenge to put out another well-received record.

"We're excited to play the new songs," Diaz said. "It's all come together really well; these songs are definitely cool."

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