

Q & A with Blue Trees artist Konstantin Dimopoulos

'Trees are the lungs of the planet. When they go, so will we'

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April 16, 2015 11:54 AM



Photo by submitted

Vancouver Biennale plans to create a The Blue Trees environmental art installation in Squamish this fall. The Squamish Chief had a conversation with the project's Australia-based artist, Konstantin Dimopoulos.

Q. How did Blue Trees get started?

A. The Blue Trees began in 2003 after I visited the Melbourne headquarters of Friends of the Earth and was shown the huge devastation that is occurring globally to the old growth forests. I was asked how we could make this devastation more visible to global communities so that the destruction of a forest and a whole ecosystem was not merely reduced to a postscript in the back of a newspaper.

Q. What do you hope comes out of the Blue Trees project, specifically in Squamish?

A. What I hope is, that for the short time the project exists, it focuses the attention of people on trees rather than other issues. The Blue Trees project started as an idea to give visibility to something that is invisible. Deforestation happens somewhere out there – not in your backyard, but just far enough out that it doesn't seem to impact your life. But it will.

Q. Many people here are concerned it shows a disrespect for the trees. Do you think the message, and your clear value for nature, has gotten lost somehow?

A. Not at all, the message The Blue Trees sends out is very clear and succinct. We as a planet are in great danger. Deforestation has caused the extinction of countless species. The reality is that there are deserts now existing which were once heavily forested, like Squamish.

I think what disrespects trees is not an artist colouring a few trees blue for a short period of time. What disrespects trees and all the ecosystems that they house are people who destroy them. As a planet we don't have time to be subtle. We don't have another 300 years to act.

Q. Has there been initial reaction in other communities been similar to Squamish, where there is a bit of a backlash to the pigmenting?

A. People are concerned about their trees, some more vocally than others, and this I respect. Again, I can only assure them that I am as concerned about trees and the environment as are they.

It has been an absolute wonderful experience creating The Blue Trees in all the places we have visited. In order for me to make people see the primordial forest, I had to make the trees visible. This is a community engagement artwork and we've had people from 2 to 92 help us colour the trees.

Q. There are always different reactions to art and discussions about what defines an art piece, what is your response to the argument that this is not art?

A. Every century, various art practices have had the "but is it art?" tag. From the Impressionists, to the Cubists, Dadaists. Art in the 21st Century is anything you want it to be. I am a social and environmental artist, that's what I do. I address global and social issues through art.

Q. What is the pigment and how long will it last?

A. I colour the trees using a water-based environmentally safe colourant that will naturally degrade off the trees over the coming months.

Q. What else would you like people here to know about yourself or the project?

A. The Blue Trees Project takes a normal landscape with which you are familiar and changes it for a brief period of time so that it becomes something unfamiliar, perhaps even strange.

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