

A neat and tidy synthetic world in Kentucky Perfect by Victoria Handysides

Tending the lawn

A&M



Mechanized blades whirl and an automatic sprinkler distributes even, calculated streams of water on a patch of grass engineered with absolute precision.

Genetically, aesthetically and technically, the strip of Kentucky Bluegrass is perfect, but ironically, therein lies its failing – there's nothing at all natural about it.

"The intent for me was to create a perfect lawn," Toronto-based artist Robert Hengeveld said of his mechanized grass growing, watering and trimming exhibit. "And while it sometimes works, there's still a lot

of maintenance with it. Even though I thought I could create something I could control, I can't control it, either. It's an irony to have control over a natural environment."

It took Hengeveld, who was relatively new to tinkering with electronics, over a year to build a working, self-sustaining grass-growing machine. It isn't pretty, it requires a constant energy source, and it's abundantly clear Mother Nature played no part in its creation.

The exhibit, currently on display at Moncton's Galerie Sans Nom, is a response to a ludicrous compulsion to manipulate our natural world.

"There's a really weird intersection between the synthetic world and our ability to control things," he said. "Even though the piece is quite exaggerated, it's only marginally because we already do it – robotic lawnmowers, irrigation systems and there's already quite an industry around our lawns already."

While Hengeveld isn't necessarily an environmental artist, his work inspires perspective shifting. He says it's his intent to create pieces that subtly tweak the way our world appears.

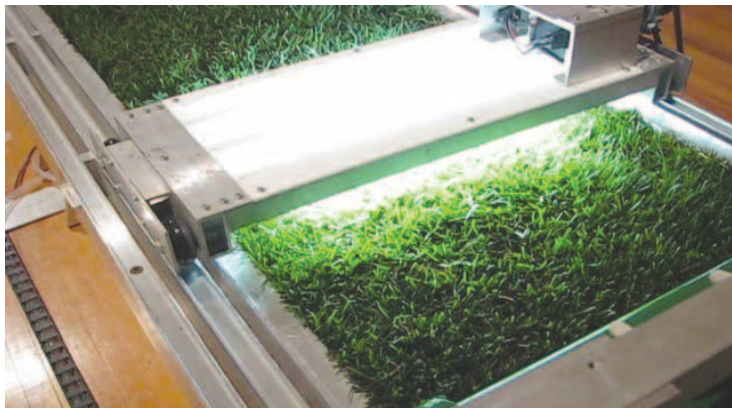
Kentucky Perfect, he says, offers an opportunity to question why people put so much effort into maintaining spaces that should be considered perfect by nature.

"Sometimes I don't believe it, but I hear there are people who have never gone for a walk in the woods or something. There's a bit of a disconnect with our natural environment."

The installation and multimedia artist studied at the University of Victoria and Ontario College of Art. He's shown his work internationally, including in the U.S. and Scotland. His previous work includes a piece that Canadian Art described as a "miniature arena-rock light show choreographed to Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody."

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- Robert Hengeveld, artist



Robert Hengeveld's mechanized lawn comments on the disconnect between nature and modern society.

**KENTUCKY
PERFECT**

Kentucky Perfect is on display at Galerie Sans Nom until March 25. 140 Botsford St. 854-5381.