

## forum

# Living life in the wild

**A**t the MacLaren Art Centre, artworks are displayed in the galleries, as well as the hallways, the boardroom and the lobby, and integrated into the building facade and green spaces surrounding the facility.

Projects in these common areas engage the interest of passersby, cafe patrons and attendees at events, attracting new audiences while introducing art into the fabric of everyday life.

The Massie Family Sculpture Courtyard affords opportunities to present works out of doors. Last winter, Denis Bolohan's enormous snow sculpture for Winterfest was carved on site over several weeks.

Visible from the windows in our foyer, our education centre and our cafe, the progressive evolution of a shapeless mound of snow into an intricate, 14-foot-high black walnut was riveting.

This summer, we are hosting a new work by Toronto artist and Georgian College alumnus Robert Hengeveld, created in response to the location and architecture of this secluded garden patio, sequestered from the hustle and bustle of downtown Barrie.

Nature continues to inspire the Canadian imagination, forming part of our national consciousness. In 'Wile Wild,' Robert explores this 'landscape of our imagination.' Perched high on wooden stilts, a life-size deer emerges at the centre of his 'Algonquin-esque composition' of trees, rocks and wildlife.

Imitating the drama and staging of a natural history museum display, Robert's towering landscape is similarly constructed from synthetic materials. However, he makes no attempts to disguise his use of mass-produced consumer objects. Artificial Christmas trees, faux rocks and decoys populate his verdant cliff, while alternating layers of shag carpet and Astroturf evokes the building blocks of colour in paint-by-number scenes. Wit, humour and irony prevail in his kitsch version of Ontario's wilderness terrain.

When you visit the MacLaren, be sure to view this installation from our second floor windows,



ANDRE BENETEAU Photo

Artist Robert Hengeveld's 'Wile Wild' is now on display at the MacLaren Art Centre.



**Carolyn Bell Farrell**  
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as Robert's five-metre high sculptural work permits eye-level vistas from this vantage point.

Here the coniferous trees and vines from the patio garden visibly extend beyond their role as frame for Robert's project, interweaving the natural with the synthetic.

Boundaries begin to blur between nature and culture, the authentic and the fake, and we are reminded that the garden is also a human construction. While blatantly artificial, 'Wile

Wild' calls into question how we define what is real.

Denis's snow sculpture lasted a few short weeks until the March thaw. While inclement weather may fray its plastic edges, Robert's wildlife tableaux will stay evergreen until it is dismantled late October, just as nature endures in our imagination.

Robert returns this month to lead Barrie youth in the creation of a different environment: an illuminated city comprised of paper lanterns on display Aug. 17 for Lawn Chair Luminata and in the MacLaren's Molson Community Gallery through August.

Visit [www.maclarenart.com](http://www.maclarenart.com) for more details.

*Carolyn Bell Farrell is executive director of the MacLaren Art Centre*