

Tonight I would like to discuss Civic responsibility

What do you want your future to be? How would you like the world to be different if you could change it?

“Myth” is simply the idea you have about reality, your world, on the way to becoming “truth”

Imagine your “Myth” engage in it, and change your future, change your world.

I have been thinking about the things we do early in our lives show back up later in our lives. They often become our occupation, or preoccupation.

I grew up in rural Texas. It is an experience that sensitized my understanding and sense of the world.

When I was in college I recall three actions I created with a group of friends when I was in College. (1,2,3)

Later in graduate school I became interested in landscape and place, their differences and what they feel like.

These were not analytical thoughts, but feelings. And I became aware of a similar feeling I experienced between great art and wild places.

From this realization I became aware of the great change that were and still occurring in the world. Mostly caused by our own actions.

I was greatly distressed by these changes. But I wasn't sure what I could do about them.

I was given a book from a friend, written by Terry Tempest Williams, Called Refuge. She was using her gifts of feeling, self expression, and writing to create awareness and effect change to the world, most specifically the natural world.

So jump forward a number of years to today.

We are here together and green rubber wrist bands and strips of paper are being handed out. One side of the band has a statement “change your future”

It is change, the idea of change that I am going to talk about this evening.

I would like to begin by considering the relationship civic engagement has to the environment. In particular, I think about the rural constructed environment.

**Civic** - pertains to citizenship, civic duties.

Some context relative to the world you are living in today:

1/3 of the design profession is out of work.

We are in the worst economic recession since the depression of the 30s. (the third recession of my career).

Our environment- home- the place we live, is in state of deterioration,

None of this is news to you.....

What do we do?

Crisis – Clive Ponting

Collapse – Jared Diamond

We cannot wait, we must act, we must believe, we must profess. We can simply not be another cog in the wheel, we can no longer simply be users. And we can do great things with invention, creativity and action..

I want to talk to you about what I do – to be engaged. And the varied application of this engagement, which I believe is a form of activism.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:

We typically think of **civic engagement occurring in urban environments**. If one wants to feel a part then one must go to the city.

This is the case **because of the paradigm through which we construct our reality**. And because of this, the activities of engagement, the economic development, and the infrastructure that supports such an identity of civic engagement, all that are primarily focused on investing in populated environments.

From **forums to plazas and oratory halls** to market places. our urban environments have been enriched and our societies have gained a sense of community and wholeness from gathering in such places.

Certainly these places accomplish an **honoring of community** through repeated activities of gathering or gatherings that express solidarity – such as the gathering of 10 of 1,000s of American citizens that gather when an official wins an election, or the looser sense of community when participating in the same activity– such as attending a weekly farmers market.

The primary intention of the civic structure or place in our cities is to provide context for honor and value of humankind and the community of human beings.

But what about the population that lives in rural environments? And what about the places that are beyond urban communities. Are they simply left out of the discussion or actions? Ignored?

How do the places we live, and the landscapes we live in effect our engagement with each other? And our engagement with the land itself?

Who is it we are engaging with?

Especially if we live in or spend time in rural and wild places?

This brings me back to civic engagement – and how we understand and experience community, who our community is, and the question of civic engagement.

In general is it possible for people living in these rural environments to experience civic engagement?

Is community defined by political boundaries? Or physical qualities?

Is community a mindset or a sensual experience (physical, can it be sensed)?

Is Community species specific? Maybe not.

Who is our community? This brings me back to considering the fact that the places we call home – Earth – is experiencing deterioration. We know this is not a good thing. But what can we make? How? And can we make the changes fast enough to make a difference? We are in crisis, but we have not yet collapsed.

What can we do to effect change?

Change how we think

How we live

Help transition how other think and live? That is a paradigm shift.

A shift will change the future.

Today I am here speaking to you as an activist. A professional who practices what they believe. And here is what I believe:

We can no longer live as we have,

We need to understand that our engagements extend beyond humankind, and that our responsibilities extend beyond the human species.

Activism is founded on Ethics.

Historically ethics. **All ethics** rest upon the single premise that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. We typically view ethics as human to human membership.

Aldo Leopold's LAND ETHIC.

Leopold expanded the concept of community to include: souls, water, plants, and animals THE LAND>

That we begin to shift our perception away from the land as resource to LAND \_ and all its parts being a fully interdependent community, with us a part of the community. Each having inherent value.

This belief will bring us to a new way of understanding ourselves in the world, and the action/doing/living/making the world that will result in change.

Back to what I do, how I create engagement.

Artemis Institute / Remote Studio

Has an educational mission –obvious is the educational experience brought to university students.

Less obvious, but no less intentional is the experience and effect of the student's work upon people, place and land.

Another fact of the work is that while the students are responsible for the design, artemis institute is responsible for the condition of the projects: client, place and community.

When I founded Artemis Institute I chose to situate remote studio in the rural wildlands interface not only to benefit the education of students. But to benefit the experience of the rural communities, to provide places of civic engagement

To extend the places for civic engagement – and who is involved in this engagement .

These landscapes, when influenced with the student's designs allow an experience as "part of the World" not simply a member of human society.

These projects achieve this experience by bringing us and our creative expression into context with the natural world.

Not just to be LOOKED at not to be ABOUT the place, but to be OF the place.  
Interconnected.

The practice and experience the effects of practicing a LAND ETHIC>

If civic engagement , as I discussed earlier, is the connection one feels with their large community- and our community includes the plants, land, water, and wildlife where we live –perhaps we are ready to recognize what Neil Carter calls an ecological citizenship.

Carter believes that if we are to fully transition to a sustainable society we must not only restructure our institutions, but fully transform our beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. Beliefs and behaviors are best transformed not through abstracted notions or lessons, but through real-world experiences and practices that occur in "places" that support such activities.

#### PROJECTS:

The work of Remote Studio moves beyond a romantic sense of "wild" and "wilderness", Although they may serve as places for reflection or in contrast to the civilized world, and sometimes they may offer "primitive" alternatives to the more modern. The community projects seek to connect us to the phenomenal experience of the place we live.

Because the students are considering the interrelationship of the land and animals, conservation and preservation comes naturally, material use and reuse is obvious.

They are designed with the intent of realigning our sense of belonging to something greater than humanity - extending our sense of community .

The work of Remote Studio – part building, part landscape, part intervention, **provide context for an expanded sense of civic engagement** not only by **what** they are, but **how** they are placed and given place with the land, and how they teach of environmental conservation, sensitive use of resources and sustainable concepts.

To better explain their work, I would like to show you Three Projects completed over the last several years located at the environmental interface between the rural and wild.

### **Pine Creek Pavilion (2006)**

Untrammeled gateway  
Forest service public use for all

Fitting within a historic place without being nostalgic

Fully accessible

Interpretations of use

Materials

Trees, steel, rammed earth, concrete

### **City of Livingston Reflection Point and Sanctuary park (08-10)**

Greatest challenge to anticipate use in a loosely configured  
space

Engaging as many senses as possible.

Sound, touch, sight, and smell

How to experience and understand the landscape.

Scale of intervention

to blend with place helps us experience that we are a part of place

materials, steel, willow, wood, steel grate

landscape to take over.

### **Childrens Learning Center – Natural Playground (11, in Jackson)**

Children spending too much time indoors

Experiencing “tamed” nature

Playground serving as a bridge between their “tamed” to “wild” experiences.

How are these places changing the way people experience the world? Some years ago a community project was to design and build a Quail Watching "station." When the structure was near completion and we had left for the evening a camper in the campground went to explore the pavilion and watch the quail in the evening. What he told me of this experience was that

" he sat in the pavilion as the sun was setting to wait for the quail to come down the hillside. When sitting in the carved out space and looking at the surrounding land at eye level he said he felt that he was a part of the place."

The visitors experience of the pavilion was not of how pretty or well constructed the pavilion is, but how he felt that he belonged to the place.

It is this sense of belonging that provides an engagement with a larger community. Engagement with community provides a sense of value and necessity for something other than ourselves.

**That can move us into Aldo Leopolds practice of a LAND ETHIC – that we are interrelated.**

These experiences engender a sense of responsibility and CARE.

So this brings me back to today, and the question I am going to ask each of you to consider. Holding a wrist band and a strip of paper. I would like to challenge you to a type of civic engagement and a practice of activism.

The band says "Change your future"

I started the thought with a condition that is critical to all of our wellbeing "save the wetland."

What I would like you to do right now. Is write down on the slip of paper " a change you want to occur. An action based change. A challenge that would change your future.

You hand these over before you leave tonight, and I will choose FIVE .

Tomorrow – vote for 1.

The Top Winner Artemis Institute will turn into the next wrist band that will I will bring to the next talk on October 27.

WHY DO THIS?

Because if we want change we must commit action. We must all be engaged in our communities to recognize the need for change which changes are critical.

works built within the rural / wild interface have the ability to transform our sense of self extend the understanding of the civic engagement beyond humankind and into the larger world we all belong to.

This sense and experience is critical if we are to move from a people who reside over the world to one that belongs to the world.

A people who no longer dominate, but respect and care for a larger community will evolve a truly sustainable society.

I believe that small grass roots ideas and initiatives are the ones that truly change communities – it is a great thing about democracy. But you must participate as a citizen of the world, as a designer – you must be engaged to **CHANGE YOUR FUTURE>  
ACTIVATE YOUR BELIEFS NOW>**

Remember it can start small, change can start with chalkboards and trash bags.