ART & SCIENCE: CREATIVE COLLABORATIONS

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(closed March 14-22)

John Sabraw

BIO

Artist John Sabraw was born in Lakenheath, England. An activist and environmentalist, Sabraw's paintings, drawings and collaborative installations are produced in an eco conscious manner, and he continually works toward a fully sustainable practice. He collaborates with scientists on many projects, and one of his current collaborations involves creating paint and paintings from iron oxide extracted in the process of remediating polluted streams.

Sabraw's art is in numerous collections including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Honolulu, the Elmhurst Museum in Illinois, Emprise Bank, and Accenture Corp. Sabraw is represented in Chicago by Thomas McCormick.

Sabraw is a Professor of Art at Ohio University where he is Chair of the Painting + Drawing program, and Board Advisor at Scribble Art Workshop in New York. He has most recently been featured in TED, Smithsonian, New Scientist, and Great Big Story.

ABOUT

Artist activist John Sabraw is working to return southeastern Ohio's streams to the picture of health. Sabraw has partnered with Guy Riefler to extract toxic acid mine drainage (AMD) from polluted streams and turn it into paint pigment. Once the pigment is sold on a commercial scale, revenue will be invested back into the streams' remediation.

Sabraw became inspired to transform the toxic sludge after moving to Ohio. While touring the southeastern part of the state with sustainability group "Kanawha", he was struck by the colors of the local streams – orange, red and brown. The polluted water contained iron oxide, which was flowing freely from abandoned coal mines. Sabraw reflects, "I thought it would be fantastic to use this toxic flow to make

paintings rather than with imported iron oxide. It turned out that environmental engineer and fellow Ohio University professor Guy Riefler had already been working to create viable paint from this toxic sludge; so we began collaborating."

To make the pigment, Sabraw and Riefler intercept the AMD before it gets to the stream. They take the water back to the lab, neutralize it with sodium hydroxide or another base, then bubble oxygen through the water, causing the iron oxide to crystalize and fall to the bottom. The clean water is then returned to the stream. The iron oxide is blended with acrylic polymers and resins to make acrylic paint and with drying oils to make oil paint. Colors range in hues from yellow to brown to red to black, which are achieved by firing the pigment at different temperatures – up to 2000 degrees Fahrenheit – in a kiln at Ohio University's ceramics studio.

Sabraw tells the pigments' story via his circular artwork. "I make paintings that express the sublimity of nature but also the fragility of our relationship with it. All of my paintings use these toxic pigments in combination with standard artist colors", says Sabraw.

Sabraw and Riefler are building a pilot facility that will not only demonstrate their process, but will also serve as an immersive, educational installation. By producing the pigment on a commercial scale, they believe their closed-loop solution will provide the state a great service: restoring polluted streams from their own clean-up. The project will create eco job opportunities and can serve as a model for future environmental clean-up solutions.

—www.johnsabraw.com