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Art for the Environment

The end of Klaus Toepfer's eight-year tenure as UNEP's Executive Director was marked by the launch of a new initiative on art and the environment. The first exhibition in the initiative – for which the Natural World Museum (NWM) has joined forces with UNEP – was opened at United Nations Headquarters in Nairobi as part of his farewell reception on 31 March.

One spectacular work, *Trapped Inside*, was installed in the grounds in Gigiri, on the outskirts of the Kenyan capital, in dedication to Mr Toepfer, as a tribute for his years of service to UNEP and in gratitude for his efforts towards using art to educate the public about the global environment.

By French artist J. C. Didier, it features a living tree on life support. The African Greenheart (*Warburgia Ugandensis*) was selected because it is indigenous to East Africa and is also used for traditional medicine.

"*Trapped Inside* symbolises both destruction and regeneration", said Mr Didier. "It gives us a glimpse of the future and puts us in close relationship to a nature in jeopardy and nature at a crossroads."

Another work, *Booked Out* by Samuel Fleiner of Germany, is an installation of recycled United Nations books and papers. He also presents RE-ART ONE, the first international art collection that focuses exclusively on art and design made from recycled waste materials. It includes 128 works by 51 artists, designers, and craftsmen from 15 countries, made from such materials as aluminium cans, scrap metal and paper or plastic waste.

"Sustainability is at the heart of my projects", says Mr Fleiner. "I organize events that involve people in new environmental thinking, taking raw material that has already 'lived' and, through art, is recycled into a positive medium."

The exhibition also includes *Arbres Brûlés*, an installation of 45 burnt trees turned into sculpture by Philippe Pastor, an artist based in Monaco. The sculptures were created from the calcified trunks of trees in the forest of Garde Freinet in Var, southern France, which were devastated in the summer of 2003 by a forest fire started by arson. Through the work, the artist expresses his anger at the wanton destruction and sets out to sensitize the world to the damage caused by forest fires and the need to preserve natural resources.

"Art is the cornerstone of conservation and the emblem of civilization", said Mia Hanak, Executive Director of NWM, adding that its exhibits "are exciting in what they showcase, but are also important as a focal point where the public can interact and be part of an environmental community."

NWM's next exhibition will be housed at City Hall, in San Francisco, California to mark World Environment Day in June. It will also produce an environmental art exhibit as part of the celebrations of the Day, which will be hosted in Algiers, Algeria ■



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