2014

# A Captive Audience

Holley Shinn
*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*

# A CAPTIVE AUDIENCE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The School of Art

by
Holley Shinn
B.F.A., University of Arkansas, 2009
December 2014

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thank you Landon for moving to Baton Rouge with me, for supporting me in everyway imaginable, and for getting me back to Arkansas.

Thank you Mom, Dad, and Derek for your endless encouragement.

Thank you Mikey, Andy, and Kelli for your patience and your advice. Mikey and Andy, through your shared values I have learned to trust myself as an artist and otherwise. This is more than I expected to gain from graduate school. Kelli, I look up to you as an artist and a teacher. I find myself considering your teaching practices when making decisions about my own.

Thank you Sidney, Squirt, BAMF, Lucy, Professor, Scarlet, and the late Morgan for tolerating my many intrusions.

Thank you to all of the vet students who have welcomed me at the Raptor Rehabilitation Center, and especially to Cheryl Chooljian, Crystal Dozier, and Megan Partyka. Thank you Dr. Javier Nevarez for allowing me to build things for and interact with the resident raptors.

Thank you Bonnie Brocato, Jay Ransom, and Fred Fellner with LSU's Facility Services for allowing me to plant the garden, for offering support when I needed it, and for saving my back with a tractor.

Thank you Betty Miley for writing about native plants, for making them available for purchase, and for donating some for this project.

Thank you Jess Cole, Jennifer Lawrence, Kim Howard, and Molly Gleason for helping me make border pieces. Thank you Jess and Amy for helping me with truck needs, planting, and my many landscaping questions.

Thank you Jenny Hager for microwaving a potato for me when I thought I was too busy for dinner. Thank you for inspiring me with your "just go for it," daring attitude, and for being the kind of artist and friend who made studio time (at least) twice as fun!

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**ABSTRACT**

*A Captive Audience* is a permanent onsite installation of cage furniture and a wildlife garden at Louisiana State University's Raptor Rehabilitation Center. Both the furniture and the garden are intended to enrich the lives of permanently disabled raptors who live in captivity at the center.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Raptor Rehabilitation Center (RRC) (Fig. 1) is part of Louisiana State University's Wildlife Hospital (WLH). There, veterinary students and faculty treat injured raptors and other birds, and release them back into the wild. However, sometimes a bird has injuries that do not heal well enough, and the bird is unlikely to survive in the wild. The RRC then has to decide whether to keep and care for the bird, find the bird another home, or euthanize the bird (depending on the bird's extent of injury and sometimes disposition). The work I did for *A Captive Audience* is for the birds who stay as long-term residents. While I can honestly say the birds are well-cared for at the RRC, it is still heartbreaking to see an animal living in captivity. I wanted to use my artistic skillset to provide environmental enrichment for these disabled birds.

Figure 1- View of Raptor Rehabilitation Center from pavilion

Environmental enrichment is defined as "a concept which describes how the environments of captive animals can be changed for the benefit of the inhabitant."[1] Captive animals have two types of environments: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic is the environment inside the enclosure. Extrinsic is the environment around the enclosure that the captive animal can still sense. For *A Captive Audience*, I used both types of environments for enrichment opportunities.

[1] Robert J. Young, *Environmental Enrichment for Captive Animals* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), 1.

## CHAPTER TWO: INTRINSIC ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT

I approached intrinsic environmental enrichment as a maker of objects. I made cage furniture, such as perches, hiding places, and a feeding tray.

### Squirt

Squirt is an Eastern Screech Owl who has been at the RRC since 2002. He has a wing injury that prevents him from flying well. He also has severe arthritis in his feet, a common problem of captivity. His talons curl into his swollen toes. (Fig. 2 -3)


Figures 2 and 3- Squirt and close-up of Squirt's feet

When I first started going to the RRC, Squirt had a rectangular hiding box that had a perch inside. Because of his arthritis, I wanted to give him a hiding place where he could get off his feet. I also wanted it to look and feel more like where he would live in the wild: A tree cavity. (Fig. 4)

Figure 4- Squirt's hollow on gallery wall

At first, when I hung it in his cage, he refused to interact with it. He seemingly ignored it for weeks. (Fig. 5) Three or four weeks later, I saw him perched on it. Every time I came back over the next week, he was in the same place. (Fig. 6) Then finally he went inside. Once he went inside, it seemed like he never came out. He was there every time I visited for the next year.

Figure 5- Squirt perched away from hollow


Figure 6- Squirt perched on hollow

Recently, he has been moved to an indoor cage because of his arthritis. His new cage is solid on every side except the front. So, the house hangs with its back to the room and its front to the back of the cage. I am told he goes in sometimes, but I do not think he uses it as much in that location.

**Sydney**

Sydney is a Turkey Vulture. She came to the RRC after having been shot in the wing in 2002. Her left wing will not fully extend, leaving her unable to fly. After observing her for several days, I noticed she had a pattern of standing in the sun at the front of her cage early in the morning, and extending her wings as far as they would go. The right wing stretches far, but the left stretches only a little. The first thing I made for her was a perch to be installed in the front of her cage. (Fig. 7)

Figure 7- Perch for Sydney

I found humor in taking processed wood (birch two by fours retrieved from pallets) and turning it into something that resembled its original state (a branch).

Perhaps because of her wing injury, Sydney has balance issues. She falls pretty often. So, I formed the branch to have a wide bottom in hopes it would help her to balance. This branch has been installed since July 2013, and, as far as I can tell, she uses it every day. (Fig. 8)

Figure 8- Sydney on her perch

I made a seesaw for her, wondering if it might help improve her balance. (Fig. 9) The only indications I had that she interacted with the seesaw were: bird poop on the seesaw and when I tried to remove it once she jumped on it and walked across. Eventually I removed it when she was out of her cage, to make room for a larger structure.

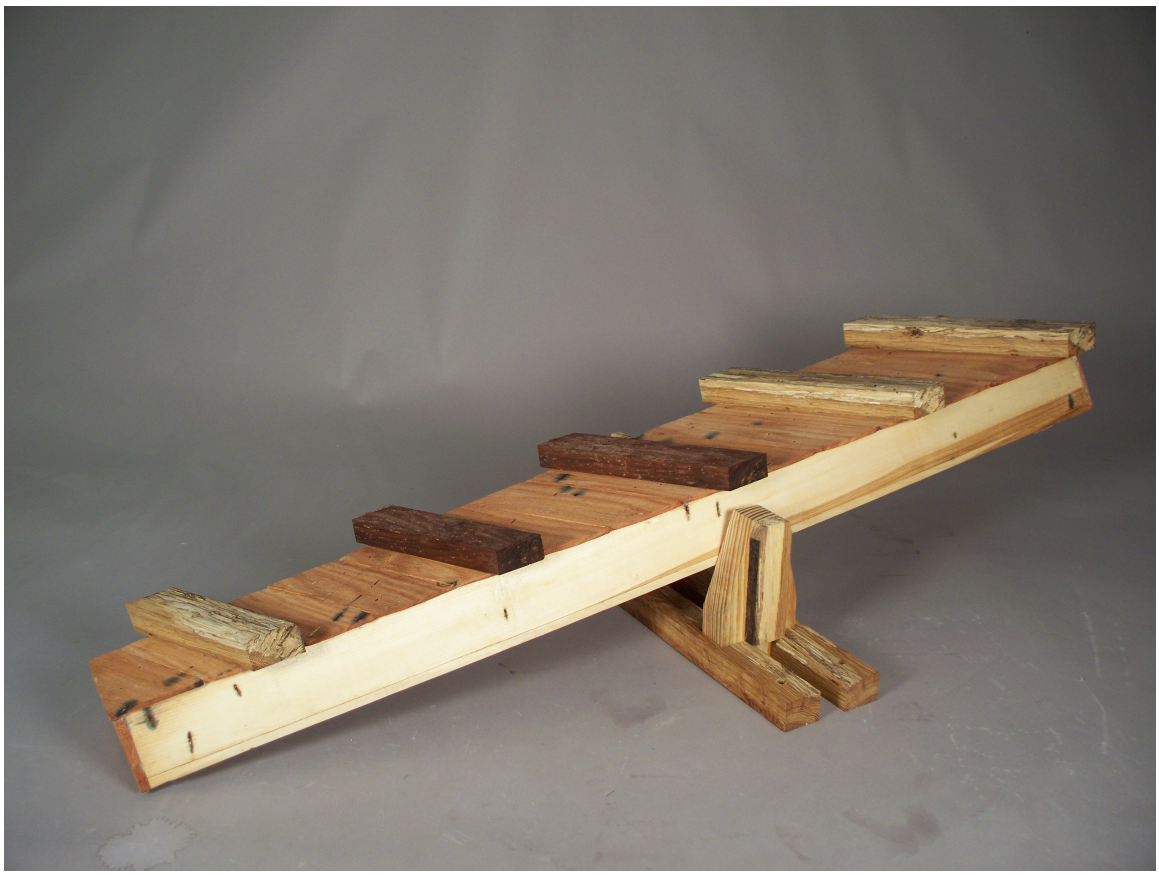
Figure 9- Seesaw for Sydney

Most recently I built her a "house." (Fig. 10-11) There is a small hiding box with windows to satisfy her curious nature. However, the feature she uses the most (every day) is the accessible roof. It is about five feet high, which is probably the highest she has been since she was shot in the wing. The roof is sloped back to prevent her from falling. (Fig. 12) She spends most of the day up there. She is often either standing on the perch on top, or sitting with her tail feathers hanging off. (Fig. 13-14)

Figure 10- Sydney's house, view from left

Figure 11- Sydney's house, view from right

Figure 12- Sydney on sloped roof

Figure 13- Perch on top of roof

Figure 14- Sydney sitting with tail feathers hanging off the edge

**BAMF**

BAMF is a Barred Owl. In 2006 he was hit by a car. The head trauma caused retinal detachment and partial blindness. When I first started making things for the raptors, one of the RRC co-chair said they did not want to change furniture around on BAMF because of his blindness. BAMF did, however, need a solution to a problem. He would accidentally drop his food on the ground, and would not retrieve it. Most of the raptors are fed dead mice. If the mice end up on the ground, bugs come into the cages. So, I made a feeding tray. (Fig. 15) It has slight indentations in the top of the perch for the mice. When BAMF drops the mice, they land in the tray. He perches there pretty often, even when not eating. (Fig. 16)

Figure 15- Feeding tray for BAMF

Figure 16- BAMF perched on feeding tray

**Professor**

Professor is a Great Horned Owl who, like BAMF, was hit by a car. According to his RRC chart, he has partial blindness and neurological abnormalities. It is hard to believe Professor has much if any blindness. He looks right at you with normal sized pupils. I have had veterinary students tell me Professor is not blind, and they did not know how exactly the neurological abnormalities presented themselves. Professor has been at the RRC since 2008. Student workers come and go. Information sometimes gets lost. I do know that raptors are required to pass two hunting tests before being released back into the wild. While the bird is in one of the larger flight cages, a live mouse is released. To pass, the bird must catch the mouse. Perhaps Professor was unable to pass the test.

I installed a house on the left side (if inside looking out) of his cage two weeks ago. (Fig. 17-18) So far, he has shown little interest. I am waiting to see if he reacts as Squirt did, taking time to adopt the furniture, or not.

Figure 17- Professor next to house

Figure 18- Full view of Professor's house

Professor almost always stays perched on the far right side of his cage. The only time I see him move from that spot is when someone gets too close and he is getting away from them. The main difference in the right side and the left side is that the left side is covered with lattice. (Fig. 19) As mentioned, I am not sure about Professor's vision. However, I suspect he stays on the right side of his cage because he can see out better. The lattice is probably supposed to resemble the dappled light one would experience while perched in a tree. I used an outdoor fabric and tried to mimic this effect a little closer, with softer contrast. (Fig. 20-21)

Figure 19- Professor's old view from left side of cage


Figure 20- New screen for left side of Professor's cage


Figure 21- Professor's new view from left side of cage.

**Lucy**

Lucy is a Mississippi Kite who came to the RRC in 2012. She has trauma to her right wing. The vet students said that even though she can fly around her cage, she cannot fly well enough to hunt and survive in the wild. (I hope she was given a hunt test, as it is a huge responsibility to decide whether an animal will be captive or free for the rest her life).

She has a perch by the south side of her cage. (Fig. 22) She stays there almost all of the time. I have seen her soaked because rain entered through that side of her cage, and she just sat there. At the time, the only other perch in her cage was a low stump perch, which I never saw her on. When she feels she needs to get away from that one perch, she flies across the cage and very awkwardly attaches herself to the fence. (Fig. 23) For Lucy, I installed two additional perches, so that she can move around her cage, and a slightly taller stump perch in a corner where rain does not enter. (Fig. 24-25)

Figure 22- Lucy on a platform perch on the south side of her cage

Figure 23- Lucy holding onto fence with her talons

Figure 24- New perches for Lucy

Figure 25- Stump perch in southwest corner of Lucy's cage

**Scarlet**

Scarlet is a Red-Tailed Hawk who has been at the RRC since 2013. She is permanently disabled due to wing trauma. She can fly around her cage, but unlike Lucy, her wing injury is apparent. Her right wing is permanently positioned lower than her left. She, too, awkwardly tries to perch where there are no perches. I installed an additional perch in her cage. (Fig. 26) A common problem captive birds develop is a condition called Bumble Foot, which is basically pressure sores on their feet. This is why perches at the RRC are often covered in Astroturf. It takes some of the pressure off their feet. In addition to covering the perch in Astroturf, I also rounded the top to feel more like a branch.

Figure 26- New perch in Scarlet's cage

## CHAPTER THREE: EXTRINSIC ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT

Originally, I had not even considered enriching the environment outside the cages. After observing the birds' behaviors for many hours, however, I realized most of the day they perch and gaze out of the cages. I also realized when I sit on my front porch, I basically do the same thing. What I want to see when gazing out is movement of animals: humans, birds, squirrels, cats, dogs, and so on. My cats also gaze out. They seem to be most stimulated by watching potential prey. The resident raptors reside in cages at the front of the structure. (Fig 27) Their view used to consist of four condemned buildings, a pavilion, one large tree (behind the pavilion), turf, concrete, power lines, sky, and Tiger Stadium in the distance. I decided to plant a garden to attract wildlife into the view of the long-term residents. My goal was to provide mental and visual stimulation for the raptors.

Figure 27- Satellite view of the Raptor Center

Being a maker of craft objects, it was important to me that the garden had a handmade aesthetic. I want future viewers to know that an individual created this garden, rather than a landscaping department. I want them to know it was a gift, that I believe these birds may benefit from a garden view in similar ways that a human might. To accomplish this, I recruited friends to help me hand-make border pieces for the garden. We made forty-one feet of bricks and ninety-four feet of taller rock-like and planter border pieces. (Fig. 28) The bricks are hollow, allowing for habitat opportunities. (Fig. 29-30) Some of the taller pieces are also hollow, and

others have indentations in the top to hold water for wildlife. (Fig. 31) Most all of them have evidence of the hand: finger marks and vulnerabilities. Evidence of the hand, to me, has a visual language of being warm. The vulnerabilities create a personal connection. Margaret Kilgallen made paintings that resembled hand painted signs. She talked about being unable to get a perfectly straight line and how the beauty is in the flaw. [2]

Figure 28- Bricks in foreground and taller border pieces in background

Figures 29 and 30- Inside view of hollow bricks

[2] *Beautiful Losers*, Director Aaron Rose, 2008, documentary film


Figure 31- Close-up view of larger border pieces

I need to mention that there were some serious challenges with the creation of this garden. First, university officials made several changes to the landscape and plans for the land around this site over the past two years while I have worked on this project. As a result, I went through multiple garden plans that had to change because of structures being demolished and other changes that affected which part of the land I could use. The demolition also caused a postponement of my thesis exhibition. Nonetheless, we continued to work together and I am grateful to have been allowed to use university land for this project.

The second major challenge was a failed collaboration. Because I had never gardened, other than putting a few herbs in the ground, I sought help from a horticulture professor who specialized in butterfly gardens. He and I met many times discussing and editing garden designs. We set several dates to begin preparing the garden bed. As the dates grew near, he would stop replying to my emails. I would eventually catch him in his office, we would discuss a new date, and the same thing would happen. It took five semesters of this for me to realize I was on my own. The garden area is roughly two thousand square feet. Without his access to tractor equipment, this proved to be a real challenge. However, there were positive aspects to the dissolving of this collaboration. The most important were a gained sense of control over the garden and a license to explore my own interests in plants, rather than rely on his knowledge and experience. Before, he would tell me

not to worry about certain aspects of the garden because he would take care of it. Had that happened, I would have missed out on learning opportunities. (Fig. 32)

Figure 32- Tilling the garden site

Often I see public landscaping that is clearly temporary, evidenced by the way plants do not fit a site (large trees in small planters, or spaced too closely) or how lifecycles are not allowed to occur. We are used to seeing flowers in their bloom cycle, and that's it. Many flowers reseed after the bloom cycle, but that is rarely allowed. Because I will not be here to tend it, I need this garden to be very low maintenance. I wanted flowers that reseed, and shrubs that survive the rough soil conditions of the site: occasional flooding and drought, poor drainage, hot full sun, and high pH level. The horticulture professor had planned to create raised garden beds and to treat the soil to bring down the pH level. After digging around, I think I discovered why the pH balance is so high: there are beds of shell. In some areas, the shells are so thick I was unable to dig past them. I was told that people used to use shells instead of gravel to create pathways. Most likely, when the path was no longer needed, soil was dumped on top. Any amendment to the soil's pH would be temporary as long as the calcium source is there.

I had read a book called *Geaux Native* by Betty Miley. Miley is a retired schoolteacher who has become passionate about the benefits of native plants. In addition to writing books, she runs a nursery called Maypop hill at her home in Norwood, Louisiana. She offers native plants that cannot be found at many nurseries. It made sense to me that native plants would be likely candidates to meet my goals: to provide food resources for local wildlife and to create a low maintenance garden. I contacted Miley with a list of plants I was interested in. She looked at my soil test results and graciously added to that list. I rented a cargo van, went to her nursery, and we loaded it up. (Fig. 33)

Figure 33- Cargo van loaded with plants for the garden

Next, I decided placement of the plants. Multiple factors were considered: How much flooding the plant could tolerate (the site has varying levels of flooding), how tall the plant grows, what type of wildlife the plant attracts. I tried to match plants with raptors based on species and individual characteristics and predicaments. For example, Professor, the Great Horned Owl, is skittish, so I tried to create a screen for him on both sides of his corner cage. Sydney is very curious and unable to fly, so I planted lower plants in front of her, to not block her view. Scarlet has hawk vision, so I also did not want to block her distant view. BAMF is in a cage that gets intense sunlight from the eastern side, even through a sheet of green fabric. I planted a shrub that will grow tall and dense to block the sun. Lucy, a Mississippi Kite, would eat mostly large insects in the wild. I used plants that attract insects in her view.

To communicate to viewers that the garden is intended to attract wildlife, I used signage. First, I had the garden certified with the National Wildlife Federation as a wildlife habitat. This certification process includes a sign to be placed in the garden. (Fig. 34) Second, I had plant markers made with quick response code images leading viewers to a website that describes the wildlife benefits of each plant. (Fig. 35)

The garden is still young, but it has had a few visitors. The first, visitor dug holes all around. (Fig 36) It must be a pretty deep tunnel system. One day the site flooded with rain. Later that afternoon I went to check on it, and the water was draining into these holes like a bathtub drain. In addition, there have been a lot of mosquitos on site, and therefore dragonflies, and one lone frog. (Fig. 37-38) Next year, I expect the garden to attract nectar and berry eating wildlife.

Figure 34- National Wildlife Federation certified wildlife habitat sign

Figure 35- Plant marker with quick response code


Figure 36- Hole dug by wildlife


Figure 37- Dragonfly in garden

Figure 38- Frog in garden

## CHAPTER FOUR: ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

I think one of the most beautiful art pieces ever produced is Mierle Laderman Ukeles's Touch Sanitation. During this eleven-month performance, the artist shook hands with eight thousand five hundred New York sanitation workers, and thanked them for keeping New York alive. [3] Showing her appreciation for an often-overlooked population was an act of kindness. Similarly, though on a lesser scale, *A Captive Audience* was an act of kindness.

Fritz Haeg is an artist whose media includes plants. He is concerned with the way land is used in suburbs. Haeg cites many problems caused by the carpet-like lawns, including loss of biodiversity, over use of water, and pollution from pesticides, fertilizers, and lawnmowers. He finds volunteer homeowners on "a typical street of endless sprawling lawns" and creates gardens of edible plants. The work is titled *Edible Estates*. [4]

Kathryn Miller approaches the same problem in a different way. She makes and throws seed bombs anywhere "toxic materials have contaminated soil or monoculture lawns have replaced diversity."[5]

Haeg and Miller have inspired me to think of plants as possible art media. Though my main goal in *A Captive Audience* was to provide environmental enrichment for the captive raptors, I have also become interested in the way landscaping invites or does not invite wildlife into a space. When talking with a horticulture student about my project, he said they are generally taught to use plants that will not attract wildlife.

What has influenced me most about Haeg and Miller's work is that they saw something they thought needed to be done, and did it. The results are visual models of solutions to a cultural problem.

Linda Weintraub is an artist and critic who writes about current artists tackling environmental issues in their work. Often, the work is nontraditional. These artists sometimes have backgrounds in other fields, or collaborate with specialists in other fields. The works tend to live outside of galleries, although sometimes documentation is shown in galleries and museums. The term she uses to describe artists like Haeg and Miller is "activators." She writes:

> In biology, this term describes agents that stimulate a substance, start an action, or accelerate a process. The term fits this impressive roster of artists who buckle their boots, pick up tools, and actively interact with soils, water, air, minerals, plants, humans and other animals…. When these responsibilities are assumed by artists, this practice is

---

[3] Brooklyn Museum: Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/gallery/mierle_laderman_ukeles.php?i=1111, accessed June 23, 2014

[4] Linda Weintraub, EnvironMentalities, Artnow Publications, 2007, 110-114.

[5] Linda Weintraub, EnvironMentalities, Artnow Publications, 2007, 115

> enhanced by metaphor, invested with passion, augmented by significance, and enriched by aesthetic consideration. [6]

The nice thing about being an artist is you have the freedom to follow any interest. Artists participate in many different conversations: how we use land, how we treat each other, how we share the world with other animal species, and so on. They bring to the table design solutions, creative problem solving, and an outsider's observations. Artists are part of culture and society. When they bring observations that are "outsider" to the field of study, they often show what a sample of the general population thinks or feels. Artists give voice to that sample. They challenge the notion that only experts in a field have the right to determine a course of action. They remind others that these things that affect the world are theirs to consider too, and anyone can take the initiative to educate himself or herself and participate in these various conversations. In *A Captive Audience*, the visual language of the installation shows that someone outside of animal sciences has a concern and a voice for these resident raptors. It is an example of what a maker can do for them. Perhaps it will inspire someone to consider what they might do with their own skills, resources, or expertise. Or perhaps it will simply make them view these animals a little differently, with a little more consideration.

[6] Linda Weintraub, EnvironMentalities, Artnow Publications, 2007, 97

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

*A Captive Audience* was my attempt to use my artistic skillset to enrich the lives of captive raptors at Louisiana State University's RRC. Through my actions and the works that remain as a permanent installation, I hope viewers (future veterinary students and visitors) will be reminded of the psychological and emotional needs of captive animals. I also hope the garden will inspire viewers to plant resources for local wildlife.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

*Beautiful Losers*, Director Aaron Rose, 2008, documentary film

Brooklyn Museum: Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/gallery/mierle_laderman_ukeles.php?i=1111, accessed June 23, 2014

Weintraub, Linda, EnvironMentalities, Artnow Publications, 2007

Young, Robert J., *Environmental Enrichment for Captive Animals* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), 1.

## VITA

Holley Shinn received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Arkansas in 2009 and her Master of Fine Arts from Louisiana State University. She works primarily with clay and wood. Her most recent work is a permanent onsite installation of cage furniture and a wildlife garden at Louisiana State University's Raptor Rehabilitation Center. Through her work, Shinn investigates relationships between humans and other animal species.