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FOOD FIGHT  
CHRIS SHULL, The Wichita Eagle

Sculptor Christy Rupp is as much a research scientist as she is an artist. Her sculptures – of bugs and sea creatures and models of the atomic structure of molecules – raise complicated issues about biodiversity and genetic engineering, globalization and personal choice.

Rupp's art, featured in an exhibit, "Nature in Pieces: The Environmental Sculpture of Christy Rupp," which opens today at the Ulrich Museum of Art at Wichita State University, is rooted in hard science – biology, chemistry, genetics. It is also filled with humor – laugh-out-loud puns and not-so-subtle ironies that take some, but not all, of the edge off the contentious questions she raises with her work.

Rupp will introduce the issues and the art at 6 p.m. today at the Ulrich Museum, part of the opening reception for "Nature in Pieces" which runs from 5 to 7 p.m.

The show includes three related bodies of recent work – "Toxic Molecules," "Viruses and Bacteria" and "Genetic Engineering" – and five drawings made with algae pressed into handmade paper.

"The "germ" of the exhibit is that diversity is good, monoculture is bad, and it is much easier to destroy a system than to restore it," Rupp said last week during a daylong visit to the Ulrich to help organize the show.

If the installations in the show sound like science projects, it is because Rupp's art cannot be divorced from the science that inspires it. The models she makes of the molecular structure of ozone and dioxin, estrogen and Olestra are all accurate.

Rupp can explain how viruses make you sick, why toxins affect shellfish, or how bugs can stay one step ahead of the pesticides bio-engineered into corn.

Her art also touches on some of the same socioeconomic issues that fuel anti-globalization protests every time an economic summit convenes.

"One of the big issues about genetic engineering is that it is really not about feeding more people," said Rupp, who is based in New York City. "We are kind of greenwashed into this idea that there is this thing called Golden Rice which will have vitamin A in it.

"But if we were really interested in people having better nutrition from rice, we would make sure that they had rice. We would not wait until we have a super rice and make them buy it. We would just be helping them grow rice."

For Rupp, the sculptures in "Nature in Pieces" take the viewer to the big issues beyond economic studies and scientific statistics.

In the "Genetic Engineering" installation, Rupp made dinner platter-size sculptures of bugs that represent man's interference with nature – a fly has a body of test tubes, another has two left wings. Another bug has a light switch installed on its back.

Addressing the issue of genetically modified foods, Rupp has taken clear plastic salad-bar containers and provided each with a coyly upbeat advertising slogan like 'Greed Beans,' 'Stop & Frisk', 'Plunder Brand' .

The work illuminates the issues – scientific and social – surrounding genetic engineering. She herself does not condone it. What the work in "Nature in Pieces" expresses – is how genetic engineering and genetically modified foods are being foisted upon the public as a fait accompli – with little discussion and without other options.

"Art does not change things. Art creates an opening for dialogue. It is a coming together of ideas and anger; maybe it is a lightning rod for people's emotion."

## IF YOU GO

Who: Sculptor Christy Rupp

What: Gallery talk for the exhibition "Nature in Pieces: The Environmental Sculpture of Christy Rupp"

When: 6 p.m. today. Reception is 5 to 7 p.m. today. < Where: Ulrich Museum of Art, WSU campus

How much: The lecture, reception and exhibition are free. For more information, call 978-3664.

Gallery hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday; noon to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

Illustration:PHOTO

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