**SCULPTOR EXPLORES**

**NATURE**

Exhibition: Nature:

A Sensory Experience

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Somewhere between the forest and the river, a lone artist walks. She kneels to look at some delicate woodland flower or a lacy mushroom hidden beneath the skirt of a leavy fern. Fat slugs sit meditatively in the middle of her path. She examines their wet, shiny excretions, like silver filigree.

A year later, Karen Bagayawa recreates this nature scene within the four walls of Blackberry Gallery at Port Moody Arts Centre.

It's a grand vision that comes up only slightly short, given that the walls are white, and the room is warm and a little confining. But, as one steps across a path of river rock into a room full of scented bark mulch, it is still possible to see Bagayawa's creative interpretation of the cycle of birth, life, decay and re-growth.

The installation fills the entire room. A path of river rock weaves around mounds of bark mulch, on which sit small baskets of woven linen and crushed clay. They're filled with bits and pieces of leaves, flowers, sticks, things a child might pick up during a walk.

Some of the tinier baskets are elongated and wrapped in thread. They look like cocoons and you have to look close to see what they contain. There are also small, colourful leaves stiched from embroidery thread.

"The idea was supposed to be that people would get down and look at them," said Bagayawa. She even wants people to touch them.

It's easy to imagine Bagayawa down on her knees peeking at life at bug level. After all, she's a mom, with a four month old and a five- year old. Bagayawa got the idea for the installation when she was living near Grouse Mountain. She saw such an abundance of life and she wanted to find ways to bring people closer to it through her art.

A student of the Japanese art of flower arranging and Capilano's College's advanced textile program, Bagayawa has combined these arts in "Nature: A Sensory Experience."

In addition to her sculpture work, the fine arts graduate from Queen's University also paints and has an exhibit this month at the Jacana Gallery in Vancouver.

Bagayawa said she had to squeeze her art between giving birth to her son, moving to Coquitlam, and being mother to her five - year old daughter.

The Port Moody gallery project was a year in the making, and started with sketches and proceeded to full sculptures, made from chicken wire, with tile grout, woven materials, enamel paints and fabrics. The result is an imaginative recreation of the river at a forest's edge.

Nature: A Sensory Experience is at the Blackberry Gallery to Oct. 23. The gallery is located in the Port Moody Arts Centre, 2425 St. Johns. Bagayawa is also teaching a weaving course for children, which uses non-traditional tactile materials.