

# Visiting artist presents art on local environmental issues

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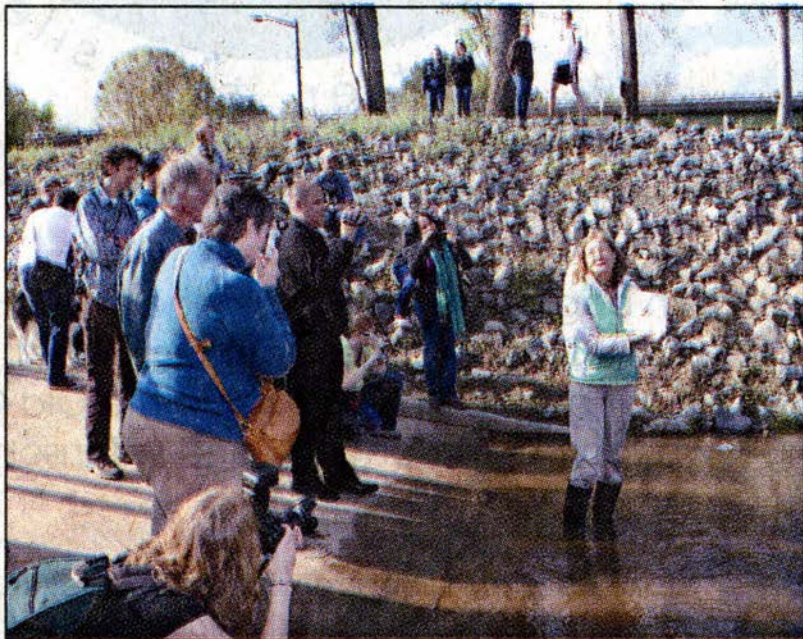
The crowd silences. A quiet chanting is emitting from the speakers as Elissa Auerbach, art history professor and chair of the Visiting Artists and Scholars Committee, walks on stage and introduces Georgia College's final visiting artist: Basia Irland.

Irland begins her artist talk by explaining that the chanting is actually the names of chemical pesticides found in rivers being sung over and over. It immediately becomes obvious how passionate she is about being an environmental artist.

Water-related projects are of the utmost importance to Irland. In the past 30 years, she has done projects in places all over the world. She also wrote a book about her projects titled "Water Library" in 2007, as well as wrote, filmed and produced eight documentaries about water. At the artist talk, Irland explained why she is so intrigued by water.

"Water is something that is so important. We can't survive without it," Irland said. "It also has so many different faces. There's water that can destroy Japan or water that is part of a serene lake."

The whole project began one year ago when the Visiting Artists



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Visiting artist Basia Irland gives her artist talk and presentation at the Oconee River Greenway. Irland sent iceblocks shaped like books with local plants down the river. "She came in December to research the Oconee River and collect seeds for the clay diatoms that were made. We have never had an artist come beforehand to do research," said Elissa Auerbach, chair of the Artists and Scholars Committee.

and Scholars Committee met to discuss what artists they wanted to host at Georgia College. The committee decided on a Land Grant theme that would emphasize contemporary artists who address environmental issues in their works. Along with Mark Dion, who came to Georgia

College at the end of January, Irland was chosen to be a visiting artist. The committee was already somewhat familiar with Irland's work because of art professor Cynthia Brinich-Langlois' previous



# Basia Irland

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work with her at the University of New Mexico.

The committee proposed the idea to Irland and by the following December, Irland was already walking along the Oconee River collecting seeds and beginning the research for her project. Her idea was to make clay diatoms and ice blocks carved into the shape of books that she could send down the Oconee River.

"Basia's work is sight specific," Auerbach explained. "She came in December to research the Oconee River and collect seeds for the clay diatoms that were made. We have never had an artist come beforehand to do research."

Since the project was meant to be a collaboration, a large portion of people at Georgia College, as well as people who are a part of the Oconee River Greenway community, got involved in the process. Virtually all of the Department Art was a part of the project. Irland chose to make her objects at Georgia College so students and faculty could contribute.

"Basia wanted to make her objects at Georgia College so more people could be involved. It was part of the collaboration aspect that she was trying to emphasize," Auerbach said.

Sandra Trujillo, professor of art and ceramics, and her upper

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*Annie Harvey,  
junior art major*

level ceramics students were in charge of creating the clay diatoms. 3D Design students were also involved in the project and had the opportunity to help Irland carve her icebooks. Working with the icebooks proved to be quite a challenge, but the students were grateful to have a chance to work with Irland.

"Despite the issues concerning the melting and shape of the ice, the process of carving explained by the artist is fascinating," said junior art major Annie Harvey. "It was more complex than I had imagined, and it shows dedication and immense talent."

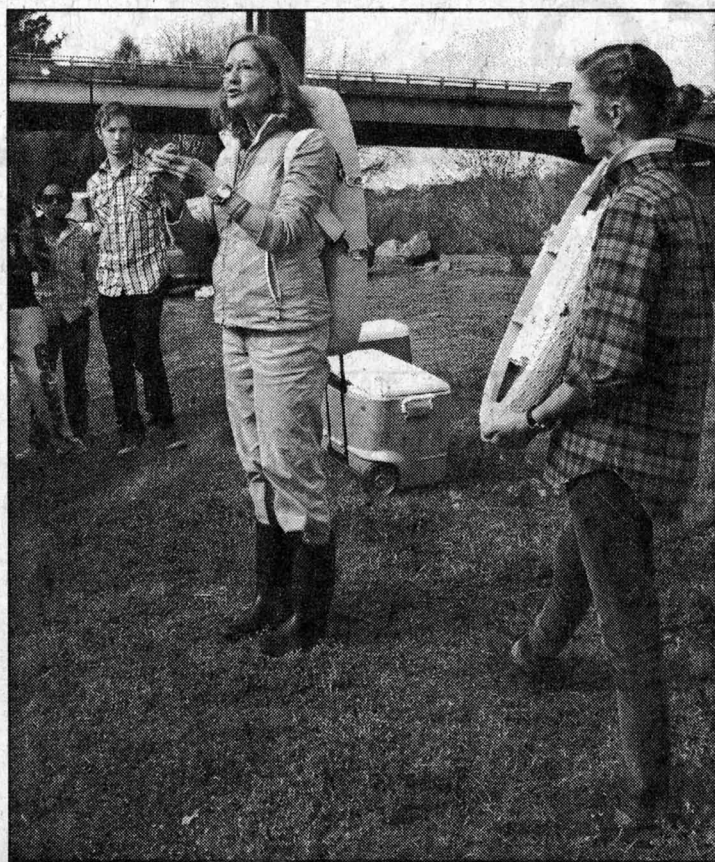
Along with the Department of Art, the faculty of the Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences also played a huge role after they agreed to co-host the project. Environmental science professors Kalina Manoylov and Caralyn Zehnder headed the environmental aspect of the project. Environmental science students were given the responsibility of taking the seeds that Irland collected and identifying them.

Another person who played one of the biggest roles in Irland's project was senior art history major and Biology minor Daniel Chamberlain. Because of his interdisciplinary studies, Auerbach found him to be the perfect student to have working alongside Irland.

Chamberlain worked with Irland during all of March. He curated Irland's show and worked on the installation that will be on display in the library as well as the permanent display that will be in the Natural History Museum in Herty Hall. Despite the constant running back and forth between departments, Chamberlain could not have had a better opportunity for his first time working with an artist.

"Basia was easy to work with; she was very nice. She didn't want anyone to go out of their way for her," Chamberlain said.

All of the hard work came to



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From left, visiting artist Basia Irland and senior art history major Daniel Chamberlain present Irland's art at the Oconee River Greenway. "Basia was easy to work with; she was very nice. She didn't want anyone to go out of their way for her," Chamberlain, who is also a Biology minor, said.

an end last Friday at the Oconee River Greenway. Irland presented her first project: a backpack shaped like a navicula, which is a type of algae. The backpack is made out of diatomaceous earth, and on the inside there is a watershed map as well as an algae collecting kit. After presenting her backpack, she explained the clay diatoms and the community joined together in throwing the diatoms into the river.

Her final presentation was the launching of the icebooks. Seeds were inserted into the ice to resemble text in a book. Her hope for the icebooks is that they will eventually melt, the seeds will disperse and plants will grow that will provide shelter for animals that live in and around the river along with prevent erosion.

Irland's project showed a great fusion between the arts and sciences, which is exactly

what she was looking for.

"As artists and scientists we speak different languages, but we often are searching for the same goals," Irland said.

Students were excited to have Irland at Georgia College and were very supportive of the cause that she was trying to emphasize.

"I thought it was a wonderful approach for GCSU to combine two programs of study to bring someone like Basia here," said junior art history major Lin Locke. "Artists like her really play a significant part in bringing environmental awareness to places all over the world, and to personalize it as she does with the ice books brings each community closer to her cause. Having the crowd's interaction by everyone throwing a diatom into the river helps draw everyone together and into the cause they're supporting."