

INDIANA

Michele Brody
 South Bend Regional
 Museum of Art
 South Bend, 46601
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Prior to returning to her native New Jersey after several years of school and work in Chicago, installation artist Michele Brody was invited by project curator Philip Shore to present a piece to complement a regional artists' landscape painting exhibition at the South Bend Regional Museum (SBRMA). Filling a small adjacent gallery, Brody's living installation was far more effective than the representational paintings in the main gallery in conveying an essence of the land.

Prairie Preserve was an undulating grid of graduated, clear glass medicine bottles atop steel rods, rising to meet a low-voltage halogen light extended from a set of wires through an aluminum tube near the ceiling. In each bottle, Big Bluestem prairie grass seeds floated on water, initially with tenuous sprouts of translucent green. Beneath each seemingly precarious perch, halos of light dotted the floor. Scallops of light also fell along the walls at the perimeter of the grid, recalling gently rolling hills.

The piece offered an unusual way of being in the landscape. Walking through the topography of

bottles under their fixed constellation connected the viewer to what is beyond the sky and below the surface of the earth. The concentration of low-hung lights over the blonde wood floors in the creamy gallery space created a warm glow, not unlike the haze of a warm summer day. Brody literally spotlighted the individual blades that made up the oceans of grass once covering vast areas of the United States, as highlighted on an informative map outside the gallery.

This time-based work provided a moment of optimistic anticipation in its presentation of a germination stage. Yet over time, the sprouting seeds and grasses rising out of the bottles eventually grew mold or dried up, simultaneously emphasizing the delicate balance necessary for the plants to thrive as well as the inevitability of decay in the natural cycle. The genuine beauty of this piece lay in its subtle, yet effective presentation of its politics. *Prairie Preserve* was a metaphoric tonic for a toxic land, calling attention to the science behind the scenic.

Cynthia Morgan is an artist and writer living in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Eric Barth

Covering the Field, 1997.
 Oil pastel and soft pastel 14" x 10".
 Courtesy of the artist.

**Michele Brody**

Prairie Preserve, 1997. Big Bluestem prairie grass, glass bottles, steel rod, aluminum tubing, transformer, halogen lighting, 23' x 26'. Photo by Philip Shore, courtesy of SBRMA.

