

BIRD SPIRAL/REEF IN WAITING

by Julian H. Scaff

Proposal for the Guandu Nature Park, Taipei, Taiwan

The focus for this year's outdoor sculpture festival at Guandu Nature Park is both prescient at this moment in history and fits in well with my particular areas of interest as an artist. The points of contact between humans and nature are usually points of tension, with human needs competing against the needs of other species and the ecosystem, but the long term consequences of this imbalance are adverse for all life on earth, including humans. I believe that public art can engage these points of contact and create what I call a "healing interface" between humans and nature. Wetlands are complex habitats, yet their beauty is simple. I propose an artwork that is aesthetically simple, using only natural locally-acquired materials, yet is functionally and conceptually as complex as the wetland ecosystem.

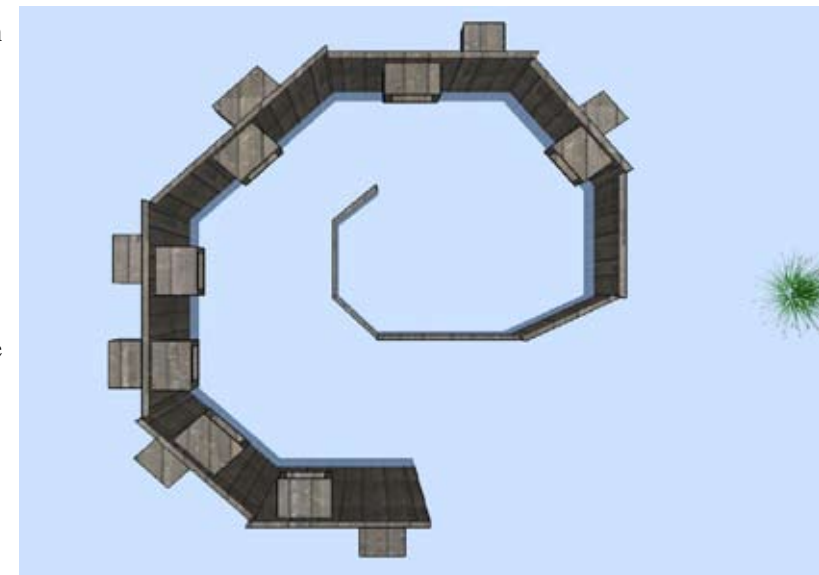
The title, *Bird Spiral/Reef in Waiting* implies multiple functions over time. It will be a spiral of recycled wood panels standing in water, providing roosting and nesting space for birds and in some ways serving the function of a tree. Birds can roost or sit upon the edges of the spiral, and wooden boxes attached to its sides can serve as nesting spaces. The foundation can be anchored to cement blocks, and holes or slits cut in the panels will allow air to pass through, making it more resilient to typhoons.

But how is it a "reef in waiting"? One of the consequences of global warming is rising sea levels, moderately estimated by scientists to be between 2 to 5 meters over the next half century. If the sculpture were to be left where it is, then as the wetlands become inundated with water it would adapt from a bird habitat to a sea animal habitat--an artificial reef. A sign nearby could illustrate how the sculpture would function underwater 50 years from now, creating a stark demonstration of just one of the devastating effects of global warming.

As a form I chose a spiral, for it is structurally strong and self-standing, and also symbolizes life, the womb, eternal rebirth. As I'll explain in a moment the spiral form also serves an acoustical function. I like to work not only with natural materials but also with recycled materials as much as possible. There is no waste in nature, and I take this cradle-to-cradle approach with my work. This piece will be built of recycled or reclaimed wood. It is structurally strong, easy to build with, and meets the requirements of a temporary structure. Additionally recycled wood tells stories of past lives as trees, as furniture, houses, boats, and so on. It is embedded with hidden narratives.

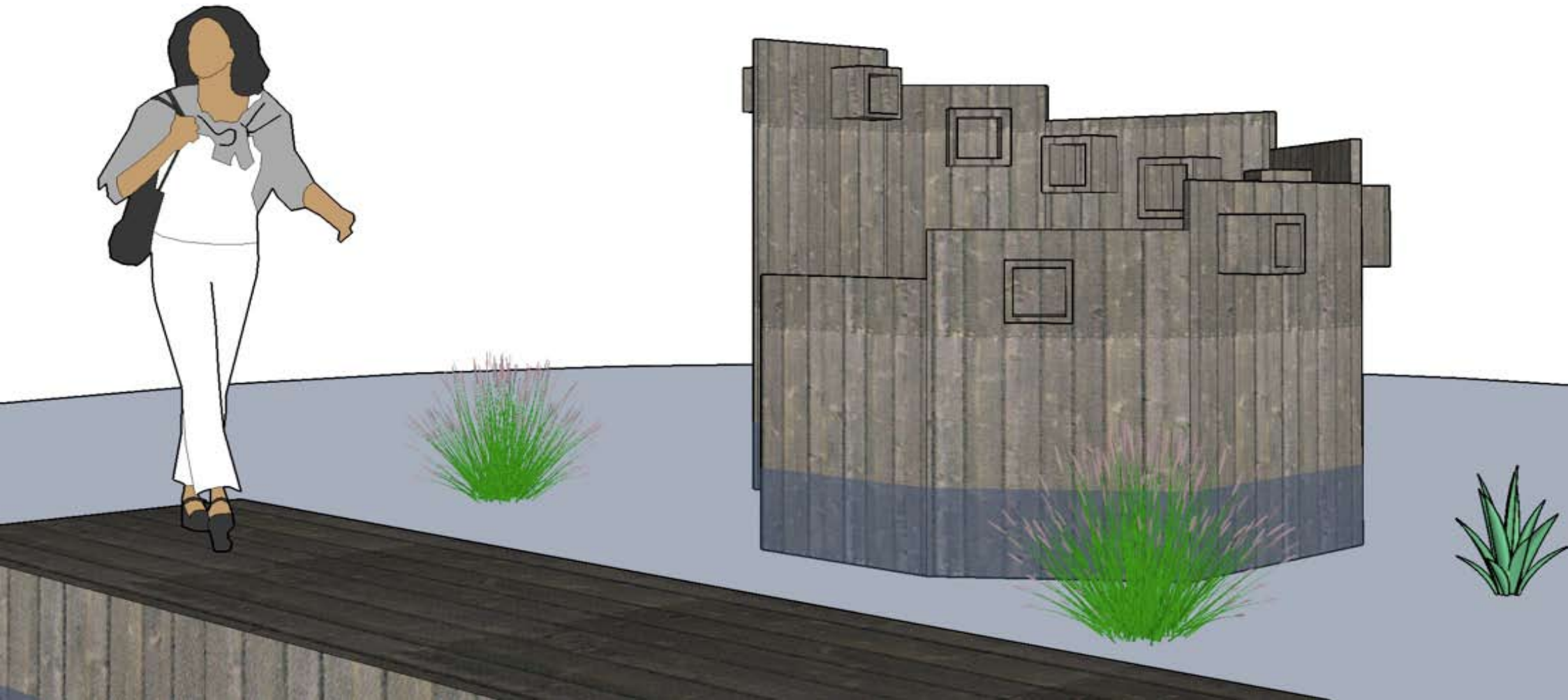
Expounding and reflecting upon the narratives of material and site, sounds will emanate from the spiral. A hidden loudspeaker, MP3 player and solar panel (all water sealed) will continuously play a soundtrack of ambient sound art and voice, an audio artwork that will be created in situ. My soundworks often explore the hidden narratives in soundscapes by combining audio recordings selected in situ to create sonic landscapes of the imagination. It should be a subtle yet moving sound piece that goes along with the tune of the wind and the wetlands. The spiral then is like a giant conch shell that when held to the ear seems to emanate the sounds of the sea.

The *Bird Spiral/Reef in Waiting* blends art and ecology, aesthetically motivated by its ecological function. Reflecting the character of the landscape of Guandu Nature Park, it is aesthetically sparse yet functionally and conceptually complex, reconceptualizing the space of the present while suggesting a radically altered space in the future.



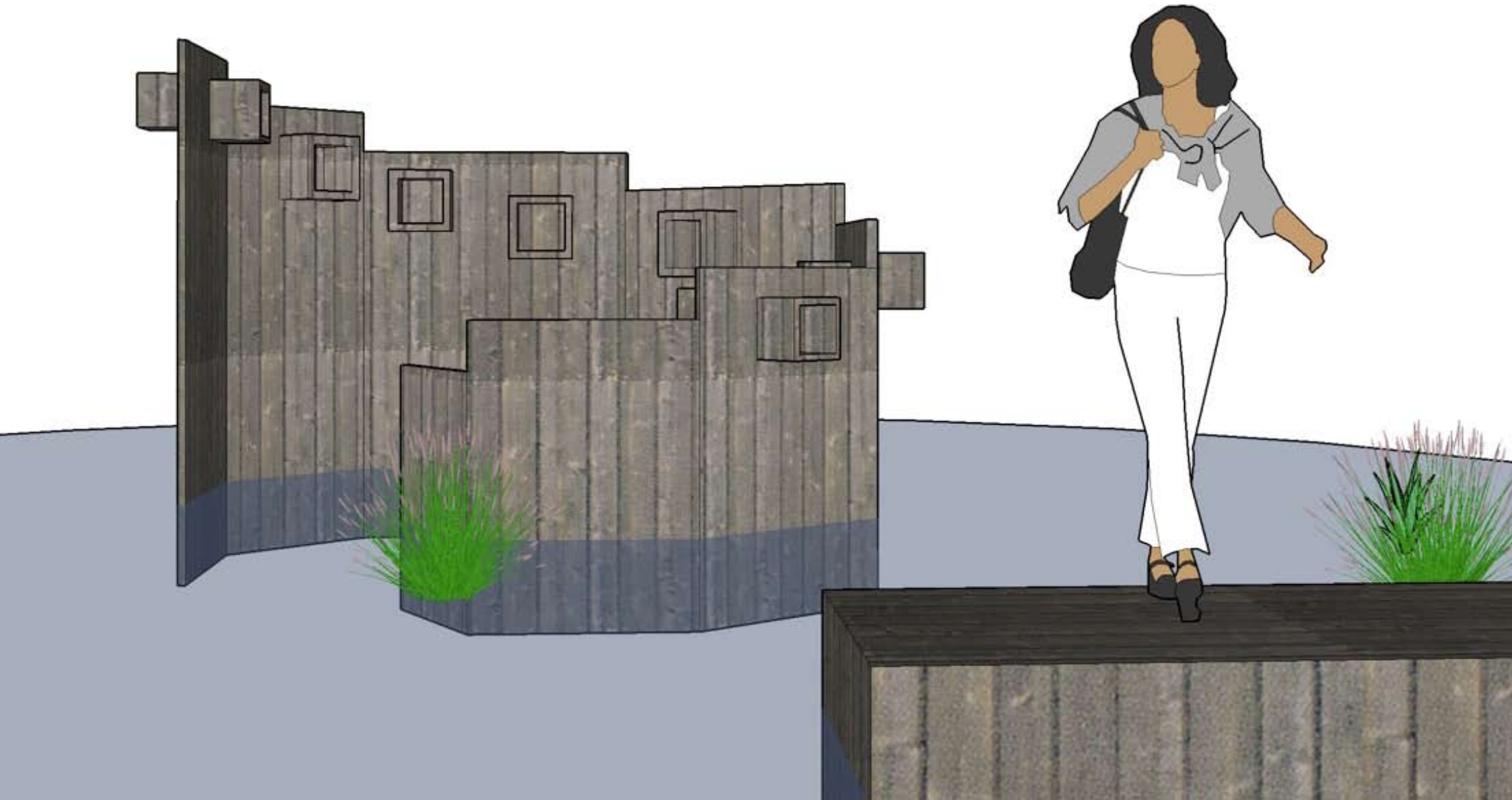
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As as “reef in waiting” it is also an ominous sign of the consequences of global climate change.



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A hidden MP3 player with loudspeaker and solar panel (all water sealed) will continuously play an ambient sound art piece. *Bird Spiral/Reef in Waiting* is not just a physical structure but also a sonic structure.



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