



*Emerging artist  
NINA DUBOIS is  
a new New Mexican  
who observes her new  
home environment  
with an artist's eye  
and a conservationist's  
sensitivity.*

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ina Dubois radiates a gentle precision. Her studio – one of many in a former parking garage converted for the University of New Mexico’s MFA candidates – is pristine. Describing her artistic evolution, she employs her words as carefully as she crafts her work.

“I grew up in Quebec with my father and my uncle,” Dubois explains, “who were always constructing things and are very capable. I watched their work unfold and that’s how I related to them... I developed a sense that there’s nothing to stop you from building things if you

*Top left: Untitled, 2009, from Nina Dubois’ Series Déchets Digest(e)s  
Top right: Dome, 2011, Nina Dubois.*

# IN HER HANDS



want to, and an attitude that if it doesn’t exist, we just invent it, we just make it so.”

A mechanical draftsman and a builder of architectural models by trade, her paternal predecessors were photographers by calling and devoted themselves fully when they emigrated from France. Dubois considers photography her artistic foundation. Her formative work documents manmade structures, abandoned and derelict, being overgrown or reclaimed by nature.

At a point, Dubois says, “I realized what I was drawn to was not just the structure, but how it functions as a closed system and what the legacy of architecture says about our relationship to nature, about our scientific wanting to control it. I decided to go in pursuit of the whole environment.”

Dubois began building greenhouses out of materials like tissue paper and cardboard (that appear as structurally sound as glass and steel) and prodigiously studying the Earthworks movement of the mid-twentieth century. She was drawn to UNM’s pioneering program, Land Arts of the American West, as a Concordia University exchange student in 2004. A semester-long field exploration, Land Arts takes participants from ancient petroglyphs to modern Earthworks, examining man’s impact upon the environment and encouraging students to create pieces in response.

“When I left [Land Arts], I wanted to go beyond my superficial idea of how things work, to a more concrete understanding,” Dubois recalls. So she apprenticed and built low-impact infrastructure on organic farms; worked at 3e Impérial’s artist residency program in Granby, Quebec; took workshops in subjects from permaculture to alternative building at Yestermorrow Design/Build School in Vermont.

Dubois then entered UNM’s newly-established Art & Ecology MFA. “New Mexico was where my art community was,” she reflects. “Because of that interest in environment and land-based

issues, the opportunity to go out into Earthworks sites, having a community of artists to go with, dialogue with, collaborate with, it is very rich territory for me and why I’ve come back this second time.”

Coinciding with the tenth-anniversary Land Arts retrospective, Dispersal/Return, a group show hosted by the UNM Art Museum in 2009, Dubois worked in collaboration with Jeanette Hart-Mann to create a living, grass-sown greenhouse framed in steel and plexiglass. In complement, she composed a lush, indelible still life series – Déchets Digest(e)s – that portrayed the contents of compost bins in the style of the Dutch masters.

Somewhere between Earthworks and phenomenology, fine art and design, are Dubois’ most recent creations. A form that’s long fascinated her because of Buckminster Fuller’s World Fair Expo 67 Biosphère and her father’s photographs of it, the geodesic dome is almost omnipresent. Hers are sustainable interpretations, proportional to human size and constructed of reclaimed pallets, cardboard and (for an innovative portable version) coroplast. She is also considering immediate personal environments, like backyards, with mobile hexagonal garden beds.

“I’m interested in do-it-yourself, low-tech approaches... in responding to the desire we’re seeing for a new kind of structure on every level,” Dubois suggests. “And that’s really what I hope to do with my work – through proposing different ways of relating to space and to the built environment, I’m hoping to suggest that power, that agency to offer an alternative and come up with different designs, is all in our hands.”

*Julia Mandeville works by day for Creative Albuquerque ([www.creativeabq.org](http://www.creativeabq.org)), a nonprofit dedicated to growing the creative economy for the dynamism and prosperity of New Mexico, and by night / weekend on her writing portfolio.*