

Getting the big picture

Art & Design

Kennecott Copper Mine, No. 22



Photographer Edward Burtynsky talks about sustainability and supporting arts education at the Chicago Humanities Festival.

Among the many synergistic events at this year's festival is a lecture by Canadian photographer **Edward Burtynsky** sponsored in part by the nonprofit Art Resources in Teaching—or A.R.T. The organization, established in 1894 at Jane Addams's Hull House (under a different name), focuses on bringing visual-arts education to Chicago's elementary schools. "Exploring Connections," A.R.T.'s annual benefit kicks off at 6 p.m. with a CHF lecture by Burtynsky (it's \$15 to attend the talk, \$200 if you wish to stay for the "elegant reception + wine bar.")

Burtynsky's large color images document how the landscape is transformed by industry and, by extension, what (and how) we consume and discard. (You may have seen Burtynsky's work in the "Made in China" group show at the Museum of Contemporary Photography in 2005. He was also featured in the recent, critically acclaimed documentary "Manufactured Landscapes.")

How we humans impact the environment has been the primary focus of Burtynsky's work, but it's not the only issue of concern. In a recent telephone interview, Burtynsky talked about why he supports arts education. "I have this belief that each and every one of us is creative, and what happens over time is, it gets drilled out of us," he says from his Toronto studio. "But I think the world we are going into is going to favor creative people rather than the rote learners," he says. The latter seem to be "finding

a home in China in a profound way." As factory jobs move abroad (how many things do you own that are stamped "Made in China"?) you got to wonder what advantages we might have here in the West. As far as Burtynsky is concerned, what we have going for us is our creativity—that includes film, television, visual arts and performance. "Art is what makes a city like Toronto or Chicago or New York appealing [to tourists]," he says. (Well, they aren't coming for the mathheads.)

The photographer says he was motivated to support A.R.T. because he has always been interested in how art intersects with raising consciousness. Perhaps photography, more than other media, reaches people more readily because it is so understandable, but being exposed to all kinds of art is an important part of human development. "It can be a powerful tool to bring meaning and a greater understanding of the world around us," he says.

Since Burtynsky has been exploring the changing environment with his camera for the past 25 years, we asked if his work had made him more of an activist. "I have become a passionate advocate for sustainable living and ideas," he says. "We have to have economies so we can have a roof over our heads and eat and have some pleasure in our lives... but there has to be a reasonable change in the way we live. We have to be concerned with the environment because it's our habitat."—*Ruth Lopez*

The "Exploring Connections: Edward Burtynsky" lecture is Tuesday 6 at 6pm at Chase Auditorium (21 S Dearborn St between Madison and Monroe Sts). For more information, chfestival.org. See events.