



THE ART OF
SAVING
THE **WORLD**

ARTISTS BEAR WITNESS TO THE WORLD:

They take notice of the seas, the plants, the animals with whom we share this planet. And for some, the work is actually a call to action. Here are three local artists for whom the environment is more than a muse, it is a mission.

by MARGARET MATRAY
photography by TODD WRIGHT





DONNA IONA DROZDA

PAINTER AND MIXED-MEDIA ARTIST

In 2010, Donna Iona Drozda's partner bought 50 acres of land in central Virginia.

The swath of forest had been clear-cut, the trees chopped down to feed the logging industry. What remained were piles of debris and tree stumps laid bare. It was a barren zone surrounded by old forest along a creek protected by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Drozda's partner, Brenda Davidson, purchased the property with the hope they could watch it re-grow. They were heartbroken to see what logging had done – trees hauled away on trucks. "It's brutal," Drozda says.

But what struck her most was the way the forest began to "heal" itself, growing wild. New grasses and trees sprouted. In time, rabbits, deer, coyotes, foxes, bears and bobcats returned.

"It gave me a lot of hope," she says.

In her series *Roots and Wings / Reclamation*, Drozda explores the delicate balance of the nat-

ural world around her. She reflects on resources, cultivation and consumption. Through mixed media and bright acrylics on large canvas, she paints about rebirth.

For Drozda, 68, it's a metaphor for life. We all encounter challenges that make us feel cut down. But from that, Drozda says, we can re-grow if we find our roots. Sometimes, nature itself can help us recover from our traumas.

"Nature has the potential to heal us," she says. "How does nature impact you when you take the time to visit?"

An art activist, Drozda has had many roles in her career, from owning a gallery to serving as an artist-in-residence at Cuyahoga Valley National Park in Ohio.

She's lived in Virginia Beach for more than 20 years and works as a statewide educator for Richmond's Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and as a faculty member for the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art here, where she designs

programs for adults and children.

Often, Drozda takes her young students onto the grounds surrounding MOCA, where they learn to identify the different environments and forms of life in creeks, marshes and ponds. They talk about what the land looked like long ago, what it is now and what it could become based on our presence here, she says.

"We think about our footprint, and we think about doing things consciously," she says. "Being thoughtful and being connected to one's environment makes us more caring."