

ART CITY EXPLORES PLACE: Sacred Spaces

Christmas Tree Groves

by *Rafael Francisco Salas*

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I used to ride my bicycle on country roads between Wild Rose and Wautoma. I was about 10 years old. The land there is completely dominated by pine forest, all planted by design in orderly rows. Wautoma has dubbed itself “The Christmas Tree Capital of the World,” and in that place is one of the most remarkable visual experiences I’ve ever had.

There are stands of older trees, 100 feet tall, areas of young Christmas trees more like a conventional field of crops, and other configurations planted as wind breaks and hunting habitat. The functions of planted pines on the landscape are many, from commercial to conservation, and even date back to reforestation and erosion control projects from the 1930s.



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I have never been held by religious conviction or faith as such, so when I describe these trees as a place of worship, perhaps this is simply the closest that I have come. And it will do.

Rafael Francisco Salas is a painter, an associate professor of art at Ripon College and a regular Art City contributor.



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The trees create a contrast between their regimented design and the fact that they still retain the primal mystery and atmosphere of the woods. This combination of the human hand and the natural sublime creates a tension that has evoked a deep pull on my consciousness. These forests connect the infinite, natural world with one made by hand. One could use this as the definition of what a church is.



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