

THE EAST HAMPTON STAR SHINES FOR ALL



NOVANOAH

A Cosmic View Of Art

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A steady downpour fittingly worked its way to a roaring deluge and pounded on the roof of the Ark House on Millstone Road in Bridgehampton as Novanoah (once known as Mihai Popa) expounded on his philosophy and the art that springs from it.

Nova, as he calls himself, is convinced humanity, ready or not, is embarking on the second and "most formidable step in our evolution" — "a long and mysterious trip into the future" that will take it into space and make it one with the cosmos.

"We must evolve to save the planet; and get into space," Novanoah said. "We must get ready and we can't stop."

But time is short. "We're playing our last cards," he said. "If the population bomb is not stopped . . . it might be too late." Noting that the earth has been poisoned by humans, Novanoah noted, "The planet will survive the shock. We won't."

Art And Nature

Considering that the first major evolutionary step occurred, according to Novanoah, when life "came out of the ocean and inhabited land," it became abundantly clear he is thinking about the big picture here. "The new hope is one species, one race, one brain united," he said.

Like his Biblical namesake, Novanoah has been preparing. As an artist, he believes his job is to help "direct the human species into the next century."

To do that, he works at a frenetic pace, painting, sculpting, practicing architecture and design, and perfecting his vision of "integral art," which aims to fuse "the old with the new, the spiritual with the technological, the abstract with the realistic."

At his Bridgehampton home — dubbed the Ark House when it was under construction in 1989 because its beams resembled the ribs of a boat — and at the former Tiska farm next door, Novanoah is busy putting his philosophy into practice by integrat-

ing his art with nature.

Ark Project

The house, studios, work spaces, and sculpture gardens make up the Ark Project, which Novanoah and his companion, Tundra Wolf, see as a future center for the arts, where artists can come to discuss their work, and, possibly in the future, display it in galleries as well.

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"Art is the mirror of the time in which you live," he said. "You have to make the art credible and useful."

A native of Rumania — who escaped in the mid-1960s under harrowing circumstances, according to Ms. Wolf — Novanoah began to form his world view as a child. "I saw the bitter consequences of World War II," he said. "I couldn't believe it."

The horrors of the war left a deep impression on Novanoah and "how to counter this destructive time" became an "obsession," he said. "This species can't fight. We have to get together. If we are united, we can expand into the cosmos."

Huge Spheres

In Rumania, Novanoah studied art and served as a cultural ambassador to Russia and China before escaping to the west. He settled for a time in New Orleans before moving to New York, where, he said, he worked in "isolation" on his integral art.

With the future of the species in mind, Novanoah has painted his vision of the city of the future, which could exist on earth or in space.

Of his earthly version, Novanoah said, "I want to build a city like nature builds a tree." Activities like

education, art, and celebration would take place in huge spheres. "Sports and entertainment would be the biggest," he said with a chuckle. People would live in apartments in ring-like structures surrounding the spheres. Factories and mechanical systems would be buried in root-like spheres.

House With Soul

To help relieve the earth of overcrowding, he has also proposed futuristic skyscraper-like buildings, also based on spheres, that would hold a variety of "subsidiary buildings."

Although Novanoah's cities and buildings are conceptual, his contacts in architecture and engineering tell him "everything is constructible," he said. "If I won't be able to construct it physically, I'd like to put it in people's minds."

While his vision of the future is toward the heavens, Novanoah's own home is well grounded. His barrel-shaped house is designed "to give back the terrain" with a minimal footprint, while providing maximum interior space within its bulging walls.

The house began as "a garage-shack with girlie calendars and two potato trucks," said Ms. Wolf. Novanoah and a number of helpers used mostly old wood, "noble wood because it has a history," Novanoah said. "I wanted to make this house have a soul."

Traffic Lighting

It has been furnished with rough-hewn tables, chairs, and counters. Bedrooms, work rooms, and storage areas arrayed along the outer walls have the feel of ship's cabins with the exposed ribs and porthole windows.

Novanoah has sculpted wood dinosaurs on one wall, like prehistoric caves. A Japanese gate of rough timbers and enormous welded steel hinges closes off the kitchen. "Hinges are such beautiful things, and they are always hidden," said Novanoah. Other uses of metal

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Novanoah

Continued From III-1 include an awning over a bank vault-like door and the sharply angled stairway banister that is suspended from the ceiling.

Traffic lights, which Novanoah favors because when the red, amber, and green lights are turned on at once they give a warm light "like the sun," provide much of the lighting.

"Whoever lives in such a house is lucky man," he said. "You never get bored."

Concrete Sculpture

An adjoining potato barn has been converted into a studio, with sculptures and paintings on display.

The Species, a series of 15 brightly painted, concrete sculptures of a futuristic Noah, his wife, a tree of life, and an assortment of creatures, meant to reflect a reconciliation between man and nature, is on display in the side yard.

At the former Tiska farm, which Novanoah and Ms. Wolf recently acquired, a 30-foot-tall steel abstract sculpture, Orion, looms over nearby Millstone Road from the front lawn. "Orion is the closest constellation," Novanoah said. "It's in the same village in the cosmos."

The main barn, once white, has been repainted black. Surrounding sheds and outbuildings have been painted red, green, yellow, and purple.

Like Stonehenge

Inside, the barn has been transformed into galleries, studios, and workspace. A team of assistants, Min Lee, Adam Brent, Gil McManus, John Bayley, and Joe Imbriano, work

on Novanoah's projects and their own art. Another assistant, John Sherman, works on the farm, which is planted with corn and beans and includes horses, sheep, ducks, and sections set aside for wildlife.

The main body of the barn itself looks like a medieval banquet hall with a huge table and heavy timber benches serving as a centerpiece. The barn door has been replaced with large sliding glass doors, which look out over a field.

A steel A-frame abstract sculpture frames the vista. Arrayed in a meadow are five abstract steel sculptures, "The Astronauts." The figures look as if they are in prayer in Novanoah's "natural temple." The artist wants the installation to remind the viewer of Easter Island or Stonehenge. It does.

Retrospective Planned

Novanoah is currently preparing a retrospective of his art, with over 120 pieces, which he wants to display at the Ark Project this summer.

Work is under way on a series of pieces that combine painting and soft and steel sculpture to depict some of the wonders of nature that have been endangered by man. Serengeti will be of lions under a brilliant sun; The Shore will depict swimmers, muscle men, and bathing beauties in an abstract melding of the ocean and beach. The Amazon and Mount Kilimanjaro will be other subjects.

"Remember humans, remember the beauty that you have," said Novanoah.

"The human species is the consciousness of the universe," he said. "The universe sees itself through us. It is a species that deserves to survive."