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*****PRESS RELEASE*****

New Public Art Project for Northeast Philadelphia Inspired by the "Father of the Environmental Movement"

"In wildness is the preservation of the world."—Henry David Thoreau

PHILADELPHIA, PA—During a dedication ceremony on Saturday, October 4 from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. the Fairmount Park Art Association will unveil a new public artwork at the Pennypack Environmental Center in the northeast territory of Fairmount Park (8600A Verree Road; near the intersection of Verree Road and Bloomfield Avenue).

Artist Ed Levine has created *Embodying Thoreau: dwelling, sitting, watching*, a series of wooden structures "between sculpture and architecture" that explore various aspects of humanity's relationship to nature. Elements of the project are located at different sites on the Pennypack Environmental Center's grounds, and will be integrated into the Center's educational programs, while also inviting independent exploration in the park.

The project was inspired by the writings of famed nineteenth-century author Henry David Thoreau, who is often described as the "father" of the contemporary environmental movement in the United States. "Thoreau wrote about our need to observe, study, and relate to natural forces both inside and outside ourselves, and saw and expressed the dynamic relationship between culture and nature," explains Levine.

To develop this project, Levine worked closely with the Pennypack Environmental Center Advisory Council. Says Levine, "I was struck by the similarity between Thoreau's values, and the values expressed by members of the Pennypack Environmental Center community." The Advisory Council has embraced the public artwork, with member Marge Shire reflecting, "Mr. Levine has captured the vision of our community group, interpreting our mission in a most effective and beautiful visual statement."

The project's first element, *Thoreau's Hut*, emphasizes Thoreau's exploration of humans' place within the natural world. With the same dimensions as Thoreau's cabin at Walden Pond in Massachusetts, the structure is open to the elements and contains seating and a "symbolic hearth" to represent the hearth in Thoreau's cabin.

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In *Walden*, Thoreau declared, "I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society." Similarly, Levine has created three *Benches* that face one another, placing visitors in a social and personal relationship to the park and suggesting a family. Two of the *Benches* are relatively big for their intended occupants, Levine explains, making "the sitter aware of the scale of the body in contrast to the surroundings."

"It is remarkable how many creatures live wild and free though secret in the woods, and still sustain themselves in the neighborhood of towns," reflected Thoreau. To encourage visitors to observe the Center's urban wildlife and thus to investigate human relationships with the animal world, Levine has constructed a *Bird Blind* as the third element. Two different structural systems convey both our connection to and our separation from wild creatures: the interior or "human side" resembles standard architecture, while the exterior suggests a woven nest.

Embodying Thoreau was commissioned through the Fairmount Park Art Association's ongoing program *New•Land•Marks: public art, community, and the meaning of place*, which works with artists and communities to plan and create new works of public art. *New•Land•Marks* was selected for a 2002 Place Planning Award by the Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA) and the design journal *Places*. *Embodying Thoreau* was made possible with the generous support of the William Penn Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, and the Independence Foundation.

Ed Levine has had a long and distinguished career as an artist, thinker, and educator, serving as Professor and Director of the Visual Arts Program at MIT. He has exhibited in many museums and other venues throughout the United States, including the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, North Carolina; the Atlanta Arts Festival; the Artists Space in New York; and the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. Levine's most recent permanent public installation, *Floating Rocks: Looking into Time*, was commissioned for Pusan, Korea.

The Pennypack Environmental Center Advisory Council is a volunteer organization formed in 1974 to support the operation and growth of the Pennypack Environmental Center. Located on a 100-acre site in Pennypack Park, in the northeast section of Philadelphia's Fairmount Park system, the Center seeks to inspire future generations to conserve and protect our environment. The Center offers access to natural trails and a variety of environmental educational programs.

Chartered in 1872, the Fairmount Park Art Association is the nation's first private, non-profit organization dedicated to integrating public art and urban planning. The Art Association works to promote the appreciation of public art through programs and advocacy efforts that commission, interpret, and preserve public art in Philadelphia.

Enclosed: Fact Sheet about *Embodying Thoreau: dwelling, sitting, watching* (1 page)

Available: A fully illustrated publication of the *New•Land•Marks* proposals (Aerial Editions, an imprint of Grayson Publishing, 2001)

To request photographs or arrange an interview with the artist, please call (215) 546-7550.