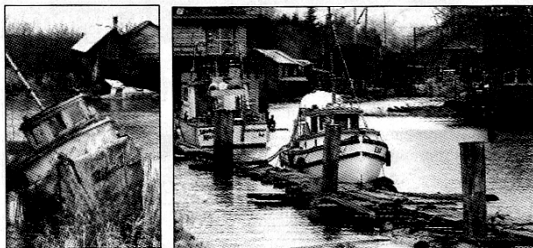


# community



## Ingrid Koivukangas finds magic, wonder & awe at Finn Slough

**T**here's a fascinating exhibit named *The Finn Slough Project* which is in the Richmond Art Gallery until April 15.

It's a collection of inspiring works by environmental artist Ingrid Koivukangas. In recent years she has worked on installations around the world in a variety of places where she could respond to her feelings and interpretation of place.

I spent part of an afternoon this week talking with her. I wanted to know what some of her initial impressions about Finn Slough were. And how did the ideas evolve for her pieces that are now in the gallery, as well as an installation at Finn Slough.

Koivukangas is no stranger to Richmond. She lived here in the 1990s when she used to be the art director for *The Richmond Review*. Garry Point was one of her favourite places to walk with her dog beside the river and sea's edge.

"I'd seen pictures of Finn Slough, and had heard stories about the place. But I had never



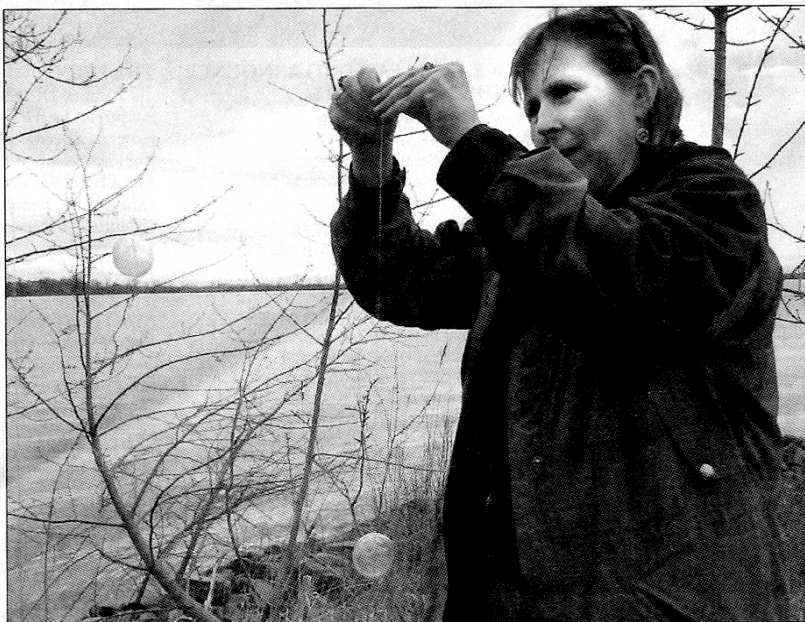
### Folio One

Mary Gazetas

visited there back then," she told me.

So in one way when she first started to go down to Finn Slough last year it was like she had returned to a place beside the river that was once her home—not Finn Slough, but the river banks of Richmond. She described how she spent "weeks, months" visiting the slough during the last year—seeing, watching, and breathing the soul of a place as another season passed.

Koivukangas let on that this project was very different from any other project she'd done before. The biggest difference it turned out to be was that Finn Slough had people living there—in their own spaces—and she was very aware of that and didn't want to intrude. And she knew that whatever she ended up creating, she wanted to honour the



Michelle Sylliboy photo  
Environmental artist Ingrid Koivukangas has taken Finn Slough to the Richmond Art Gallery, and taken art to the slough itself, as in *Starfloats*, where 99 small replicas of Japanese glass fishing floats have been hung in the trees.

site in such a way as to respect the people who lived there.

After awhile themes relating to the "site's energies" began to emerge. She began to gather small fragments of what she found. Two lines of glass-topped specimen tins run along one of the gallery's walls. Sixty-six tins hold her found-treasures such as snow berries, rose hip, barked twig and cat tail. And some hydrangea, ivy flowers and seeds. Plus circles of their cell structures placed below each one.

Her experimental nature took over. She took her "specimens" into a biology lab at Langara College (where Koivukangas teaches new media and design). She learnt how to cut thin slices and make slides. A camera was used on a high powered microscope. The moving cellular matter was magnified not only through the lens of the microscope but by the powerful camera as well. It blew her away. 33 coloured photographs of those micro-macro images are in the exhibit.

What's neat is that she has taken the audience far away from

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a physical setting and made the viewer feel connected in another way. There is another layer to this project and it's a site work called *Starfloats* that she created at the point on Whitworth Island, beside the slough's entrance. Ninety-nine small replicas of Japanese glass fishing floats have been hung in the trees.

The inside of these spheres were painted with a phosphorescent paint and when the sun goes down they have a soft glow for a few hours before their light fades away. *Starfloats* can be viewed at the end of Dyke Road where the trail entrance is.

Koivukangas told me that one of the next projects she'd like to take on is to photograph DNA patterns. Her playful curiosity will lead her on many new journeys I'm sure—ones that in her words will be "sparkling a chord of magic, of wonder, of awe."

*Mary Gazetas is a founding director of the Richmond Fruit Tree Sharing Project, instructor, artist and writer. Her column appears every weekend in The Richmond Review.*