

## Installation art on exhibit at Park Headquarters

*Large-scale piece focuses on history of uranium mining at Grand Canyon*

Rene Westbrook  
South Rim AiR Coordinator

GRAND CANYON, Ariz. - A mixed-media installation, *The Price of Entrance*, by former South Rim Artist-in-Residence Shawn Skabelund, is currently on-exhibit in the Park Headquarters lobby at the south rim until Sept. 15.

This large-scale sculptural piece reflects on the history of uranium mining at the Grand Canyon, using carefully curated materials that represent the region and this issue.



Artist **Shawn Skabelund** and daughter Chiara Rose in the Grand Canyon.

This sort of ambitious large-scale art installation is called site-specific, place-based, contemporary, mixed-media, narrative, conceptual, political installation art.

So what does that all mean?

Site-specific means that a particular art piece was designed for one particular venue, custom-created for a specific environment, exhibit space or gallery. Place-based means that the work is all about the very community/environment in which the piece is installed.

Contemporary is a category that describes art that has been and continues to be created during our lifetimes.

Mixed-media means that the materials are many and varied, and are carefully considered and selected to add to the narrative content of the art work.

Narrative in the context of a piece of art means that there is a specific story line to the work that can be read and understood after a good long look at the piece. The narrative can be read differently by each viewer, but the artist's intention is always to communicate a story or specific thought.

Conceptual means that there is a bigger meaning to the work, and that this meaning is the most important aspect of the piece.

Political means that the artist not only boldly addresses an important issue that might be controversial, but also has an opinion about it which is reflected in the work.

Installation art is a large-scale work that might fill an entire gallery or space, is inter-related and designed to tell a story.

Skabelund is a well-respected contemporary artist who lives and works in Flagstaff. He has worked in academia and has exhibited across the United States, installing more than 40 very large, very thoughtful art pieces that were specifically designed to address issues of particular interest to the host institution's geographical region. He uses non-traditional materials in his installations, including, in this case, things like pine sap and pine pollen, which permeate the exhibit with smells that also add to the narrative. A Skabelund exhibit appeals to all the senses, while also challenging the viewer to consider an issue that they may not have spent much time thinking about. His work always has a powerful message behind it - one that demands that the human race consider the consequences of our collective actions.

Skabelund was the South Rim Artist-in-Residence in May of 2012. When he arrived at the South Rim, he knew he wanted to create a big piece that addressed uranium mining on public lands, and spent the bulk of his residency doing research on the subject. He met with scientists from the NPS Science and Resource Management division, spent time in the park archives and collections, met with a local couple who once lived at the Orphan Mine site, did research in the park library, and spent a whole day in the Forest Service lands south of the park with a long-time local uranium geologist, who gave him a tour of historical and current uranium mining sites just south of Tusayan. He gathered information and ruminated and 12 months later installed the piece *The Price of Entrance* in Park Headquarters.

The National Park Service has a long and storied relationship with artists. Our first National Park, Yellowstone, was created in 1872 by Congress after representatives viewed the astonishing images sent back to Washington from the Hayden Expedition's artists-in-residence, photographer William H. Jackson and painter Thomas Moran. Through writing, visual arts and music, the arts helped create the National Parks in a very real sense.

Artists working in all genres have kept the public enthralled with what really is one of "America's Best Ideas," by creating beautiful and/or challenging work that reflects the astounding variety of our public lands. Artists also have not been shy to be critical of how our country has contributed to the degradation of our natural environment, by showing the ugly underbelly of some of our worst ideas. And contemporary artists often straddle those two intentions - with a bigger goal of contributing to our public conversation about real-world things that impact our wilderness areas.

For more information about the Grand Canyon Artist-in-Residence program, please visit our website at: [www.nps.gov/GRCA/supportyourpark/air.htm](http://www.nps.gov/GRCA/supportyourpark/air.htm). To see more of Skabelund's work, visit his website at: [www.shawnskabelund.com](http://www.shawnskabelund.com).