

# Wine Country Saddle Trees of Middletown

Reception: Saturday, February 6, 2010 at 5:00 p.m.  
Exhibit remains through February 28, 2010  
Gualala Arts Center

Lake and Mendocino Counties are not only rich in natural attributes, but share a strong agrarian and equestrian heritage as well. To highlight the equestrian nature of our counties, EcoArts of Lake County called for artists to reinterpret the traditional saddle form.

The challenge to the artists was to use a saddle tree (the armature for making a saddle) in the creation of their artwork. Seven artists responded with their interpretations, creating an astounding array of abstract sculpture. This exhibit should excite the viewer's curiosity.

For more about EcoArts and the Saddle Tree challenge, visit [ecoartsoflakecounty.org](http://ecoartsoflakecounty.org).



## Curator's Statement

One great pleasure of living in rural Northern California is the view of horses grazing on the golden landscape. The beauty and strength of the horse is undeniable, and man's attraction to the usefulness of this hardy animal was inevitable.

Many cultures adorned their horses with jewels and elaborate tack, making them a showcase of wealth and status. Assyrian warriors in the seventh century BC went on campaigns seated atop decorative saddle cloths. A frozen Scythian tomb from the 5th Century BC revealed a saddle intricately decorated with animal motifs made from leather, felt, hair and gold. Asian horsemen created a felt saddle with a wooden frame about 200 BC. This primitive saddle tree kept a rider's



weight off the horse's sensitive vertebrae, preserving the animal's well-being and prolonging its usefulness. Modern saddle makers have carried the tradition of adornment with elaborate show saddles incorporating hand worked leather and precious metals.

The Wine Country Saddle Trees of Middletown, CA provides a unique reinterpretation of a classic form. By using the 'framework' or 'armature' of a saddle, this exhibit of saddle trees draws on the sensibilities of modern artistic expression in a nod to the equestrian heritage of Northern California. Reinterpreting the useful and practical is a longstanding artistic tradition, and we asked the participating artists to take this venerable saddle form and transcend its original function.

The exhibit explores themes and concepts that are closely linked to the artist's experiences. The viewer will be struck by the widely varied interpretations in these pieces. Beauty, history, fantasy and personal struggle are some of the themes captured within the formal concerns of color, shape, and texture. The effect is an intriguing synergy of expression and purpose.

Thank you to the artists who rose to the challenge of working with such a unique form.

Karen Turcotte  
Curator