

THE EAST HAMPTON STAR

SHINES FOR ALL

Thursday, September 27, 2012

Now Boarding: The Ark Project

Nova's Ark Project wants you.

The late Nova Mihai Popa — sculptor, painter, thinker — created an open-air museum on Millstone Road in Bridgehampton, and “he badly wanted the community to enjoy the beauty of the art in this glorious setting,” said Tundra Wolf, the project’s executive director, who, with her partner Luna Shanaman, is picking up where Nova left off.

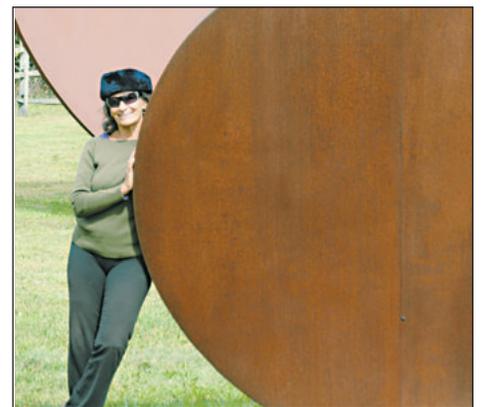
The artist’s vision will further become reality on Saturday, when the Ark Project hosts twilight tours of the 95-acre farm and sculpture park. “It will give people an opportunity to see the art in several dimensions, lighted against the backdrop of what we hope will be a gorgeous sunset,” said Ms. Wolf, who, with Mr. Popa, bought the property 20 years ago after they fell in love with its natural beauty. Guests will ride in a 10-seater vintage wagon driven by Cowboy Brett, “who brings a little bit of the Wild West to the Hamptons.” To facilitate conversation among visitors, Ms. Wolf would like everyone to wear a name tag, while they enjoy music and light refreshments. The event will begin at 6 p.m., and costs \$15.

Through her nonprofit, TerraNova, Ms. Wolf said she hopes to raise enough money to make the site more user-friendly, with guides for visitors and more comprehensive walking paths. She would eventually like to offer regular weekend visiting hours. “Maybe it will happen by spring,” she said hopefully.

“Just because Nova is gone doesn’t mean he’s not creating,” said Ms. Wolf, a New York City native who met Mr. Popa, a Romanian, in Central Park “decades” ago. “He left extraordinarily detailed sketches and plans.” Every piece of his sculpture, she said, is an artist’s proof, all of which are recreated in limited editions by on-site staff. There are over 40 sculptures on the grounds, including several new ones up to 34 feet in height, strategically placed throughout the property, not to mention horse barns on a polo field.

“Nova intended that although the pieces are separated by space, they should be viewed together,” Ms. Wolf said. “I knew Nova for so long, I can surmise the location where he might have wanted a new piece to be erected.”

Much of Mr. Popa’s work is spherical — the most naturally occurring form in the



universe — involving bodies as large as planets to as small as atoms. His art is grounded in nature, physics, and anatomy, but it seems simple and accessible. “At heart, he was a scientist and social philosopher who wanted to relate his art to the universe,” said Ms. Wolf, who lives in a Nova-designed, environmentally friendly elliptical house on the property. “People have their own interpretations of the art. What’s important is that they relate to it.”

The artist called the place the Ark as an obvious reference to Noah’s Ark; instead of animals, his concept was to encapsulate human experience and scientific knowledge in the sculpture park.

A work called “Astronauts,” while reminiscent of a modern version of the enigmatic Easter Island head statues, is “a tribute to the most incredible explorers of our time,” said Ms. Wolf. And although “Orion” looks like a “jack” from the children’s game, it’s actually an interpretation of the constellation. Mr. Popa’s commissioned art is displayed in China, Italy, and throughout eastern Europe.

“Nova sought to give a soul to raw steel, and so it is the most common material he

used in his sculptures,” said Ms. Wolf. “He did the same with his concrete, wood, marble, and fiberglass works.” Although he embraced the open-air museum concept, many works can be found in renovated barns scattered throughout the grounds. Possibly the most awe-inspiring pieces are found in the “Blue Barn,” where six three-dimensional canvas works coated with fluorescent paint come to life under a black light. The largest, which measures 11 by 16 feet, illustrates a colorful beach scene lined with dozens of hand-sewn canvas figurines. “These took years to make,” Ms. Wolf said of the art in the Blue Barn.

Mr. Popa also built miniature models of practical futuristic cities. “Those, we hope to have ready for presentation next year,” said Ms. Wolf.

Because of its tranquility, she calls the property “a territory of spirit.” She envisions guests coming there not only to get to know each other, but also themselves. She frowns on cellphone use while on the grounds. “Look up. Look around you,” she said. “This place is really worth your enjoyment.”

Morgan McGivern Photos