

PHOTOGRAPHY REVIEW

The Natural World, in Peril and in Its Full Glory

By ROBERTA SMITH

"Ecotopia," the edifying, entertaining and ecologically aware exhibition that opened last night at the International Center of Photography, means to get your attention. Near the entrance a looming, oozing black form threatens to engulf the show, like some leftover Valdez sludge trucked down from Alaska.

This enormous dollop is the first of several that punctuate the galleries. All are made, appropriately, of a lightweight, petroleum-based insulation material called Tubolit, widely used in the construction industry. An environmentally sound replacement for asbestos, Tubolit is recyclable, but it also offers further proof that the dependence on oil, foreign or otherwise, ranges far beyond gasoline.



Michael Falco for The New York Times

Harri Kallio's carefully reconstructed dodo birds, part of "Ecotopia."

Ecotopia

International Center of Photography

Erupting from walls and doorways, lining windows and viewing rooms, and providing shelves for video screens and computer monitors, the meandering Tubolit globs manage to evoke not only sludge, but also toxic topiary, exotic rock formations and Flintstone-era habitats. Their symbolic versatility befits an exhibition in which nature is, by turns, magnificent, cute and enduring, while also increasingly dangerous and endangered, thanks to the widening scope of human indifference and exploitation.

"Ecotopia" is the center's second "triennial of photography and video,"

Continued on Page 5