



By ADAM McDOWELL

If you want to coax a hearty laugh out of Louise Larivière, tell her you thought the boreal forest was in South America. She's actually heard that one before, a fact that for her underscores the importance of the documentary projects she has led in order to raise awareness of the dark, dewy green band that wraps around 1.7 billion hectares of the northern hemisphere — including 290 million hectares in Canada, or about 32% of the country's total area.

"I'm absolutely flabbergasted with the fact that people don't know there's a boreal forest over their heads when we all live in this country called Canada. This is, for me, unbelievable," says Larivière, who has captained several voyages into the forest to bring back breathtaking images, still and moving, of what some people up north call simply the Land.

Starting on Friday at Toronto's Harbourfront Centre, the work of nine photojournalists (including sometime *National Post* contributors Kazuyoshi Ehara and Chris Young) will illustrate the majesty of the Land for urban-dwelling visitors. Called Respect, the project has an uncomplicated aim: reminding people — or indeed teaching them for the first time — that the forest exists.

"We're journalists. Basic-

ally what we do is inform people using photographers," Larivière says over the phone from her company's Montreal office. "I think there's a lot of awareness to be done. This is an awareness program."

Though she acknowledges that environmental problems have inconvenienced the hunters and trappers the project has met in the North, "We do not advocate. That's very important."

Still "licking her wounds" two days after arriving from the latest leg of the journey, a difficult hop through Northern Ontario, she adds, "We are there to simply bring the North to the South. That may sound simplistic."

Delivering such a simple message has proven surprisingly complicated at times.

Larivière developed the Respect project through her company, Boreal Communications — with the financial support of Montreal-based retail project management and construction company Sajo — and served not only as narrator and producer of the accompanying documentary but also as the day-to-day troubleshooter. That meant finding windows to fly from place to place during a rainy northern spring, to say nothing about conditions for photography.

"It was frustrating, but you know what? Phillip Wilmer, who's the pilot who's been

with me for three years, would grab the photographers in the least window of opportunity and say, 'Let's go up!'"

In three years of boreal forest flights for her company's ongoing project, Larivière has learned to favour photojournalists over art photographers for sheer ruggedness.

"You know, sometimes in the Canadian art world, they look down on photojournalists because they think they cannot produce anything but pictures of press conferences. This is completely false," she says. Meanwhile, photojournalists cope with adverse conditions. "When you work with a news outlet, you cannot say, 'Sorry, but I didn't like the light, so I didn't bring you any pictures.' You'll get fired."

And while that job, once again, is merely to inform people about the Land, it wouldn't hurt Larivière to know the Respect project made people care more about what happened to it.

"If you meet a girl and you happen to get to know her better and you fall in love, what's the next thing you're going to do? You'll want to protect her to make sure she's all right. It's the same with the forest."

Respect opens to the public tomorrow on the grounds of Harbourfront Centre, 235 Queens Quay W., Toronto, and runs until Oct. 12.

National Post

AVENUE

Back to the Land

The curator of a new photo series on Canada's North considers the exhibit an awareness program



IMAGES COURTESY BOREAL COMMUNICATIONS / HARBOURFRONT