

# ONLY BIRDS SING THE MUSIC OF HEAVEN IN THIS WORLD

Museum of Craft and Folk Art

March 23–July 7, 2012

Curated by Harrell Fletcher

## LIKE A REALLY GOOD CARROT

Harrell Fletcher

The title of the exhibition I’ve curated for the Museum of Craft and Folk Art in San Francisco is a poem by Issa, a Japanese Haiku poet who wrote in the early nineteenth century. The poem was originally used as a working title for the show, while I was figuring out what exactly the show was going to be about. I like Issa a lot, so I often use his poetry in my work. Once we figured out that the show would focus on the intersection of art and agriculture it was not clear if the title still made sense but the way that I interpret the poem is as a comment on the impossibility of trying to make “art” when “nature” does a much better job of art making. So we decided to keep the title since most of the people included in the show had connections to nature through agriculture of one sort or another. In a way, they all collaborate with aspects of the natural world rather than try to make work that is separate and more about their own individual culture.

Two years after I received my MFA from the California College of Arts and Crafts, I went back to school to study organic farming. The program I attended was at UC Santa Cruz and is called “The Apprenticeship in Ecological Horticulture and Sustainable Food Systems.” I lived and worked with forty other apprentices on a farm on the campus of UCSC. It was a really interesting experience to learn about farming and localized food distribution systems after having spent most of my life learning about how to make art and how to function in the art world. Young artists and farmers looked similar, but ideologically they are complete opposites. Artists are trained to value originality, non-functionality, individualism, and they generally all assume that if their art is shown and sold it will be the responsibility of a gallerist to handle it. Small farmers share information and ideas and if there are positive results, it is expected that others will try doing the same thing or something similar. The products that farmers produce have an obvious function (to be eaten), and functional distribution and sales are just as important as growing high quality vegetables and fruits. As a result of the focus that small farmers have had on how to market their product and because idea sharing is not considered stealing within the farm world, CSAs, farmers’ markets, and community gardens have flourished in the last few decades.

While attending the farming program, and then later working on several small farms,

I started to wonder about the possibility of applying some of the ways small-scale agriculture functions to my practice as an artist. Even when I was still in graduate school I had questioned the value of art making and said many times that I hoped my work could be as accessible and appealing as “a really good carrot.” Needless to say most of my fellow art students didn’t seem to understand or relate to what I was talking about. Regardless, I have spent the last couple of decades attempting to make artwork that is locally meaningful and accessible although none of my projects so far has actually achieved the high value I place on really good vegetables.

It has been interesting to me to observe an ever-expanding set of agriculture related art projects developing over the last several years. By that I don’t just mean art that represents agriculture, (though in the exhibition we include a few examples of that sort of thing from the past, along with an amazing series of documentary photographs from the Delano grape boycott in the 1960s). Instead, I mean

projects by artists, art related people, and organizations that are site and audience specific, participatory, and localized.

Let me lay out a little analogy that I think is useful to consider. I’d like to compare agri-

business and the commercial art world to small farming and localized art projects. In agribusiness vast tracts of land are used to produce a small number of crops (using chemicals, etc... though that part doesn’t really fit in the analogy) that are then shipped to remote locations around the country or world so that people can buy produce that may not be able to be grown locally or is out of season. Due to the time and potential damage involved in shipping, crops that are under ripe and super hardy are preferred over ripe and delicate varieties that might rot or become damaged during the shipping process. In the traditional commercial version of the art world, artists make objects in studios that they hope will be shipped across the country or world to be shown and possibly sold in galleries. The art works that are produced tend to be easily transported, and “universally understood” so that they can go to any white cube space and function and be understood in the same way. By conditioning artists into making work for this system, they wind up gravitating towards making objects, developing marketable signature styles, and creating work that isn’t literal or specific in

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## THE 1965-1970 DELANO GRAPE STRIKE AND BOYCOTT

Cesar Chavez Foundation

These photos, courtesy of the Cesar Chavez Foundation, represent part of an exhibit depicting the Delano Grape Strike presently on display at the National Chavez Center in Keene, California.

More than 46 years ago, on September 8, 1965, Filipino American grape pickers, members of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, walked out on strike against Delano-area table and wine grape growers, protesting years of poor pay and conditions. The Filipinos asked Cesar Chavez, who led a mostly Latino farm workers union, the National Farm Workers Association, to join their strike.

Cesar and other NFWA leaders believed it would be years before their fledgling union was ready for a strike. He also knew growers historically pitted one race against another to break field walkouts. Cesar’s union voted to join the Filipino workers’

walkouts on Mexican Independence Day, September 16, 1965.

From the beginning this was a different kind of strike: Cesar insisted the Latino and Filipino strikers share the same picket lines, strike kitchen and union hall. He asked strikers to take a solemn vow to remain nonviolent. The strike drew unprecedented support outside the Central Valley, from other unions, church activists, students, Latinos and other minorities, and civil rights groups. Cesar led a 300-mile march, or *perigrinacion* (pilgrimage), from Delano to Sacramento, placing the farm workers’ plight squarely before the conscience of the American people.

Following Gandhi’s example, Cesar fasted for 25 days in 1968, to rededicate his movement to nonviolence. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote Cesar, expressing

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solidarity. The fast ended during a mass in Delano with Senator Robert F. Kennedy, who said he was there “out of respect for one of the heroic figures of our time.”

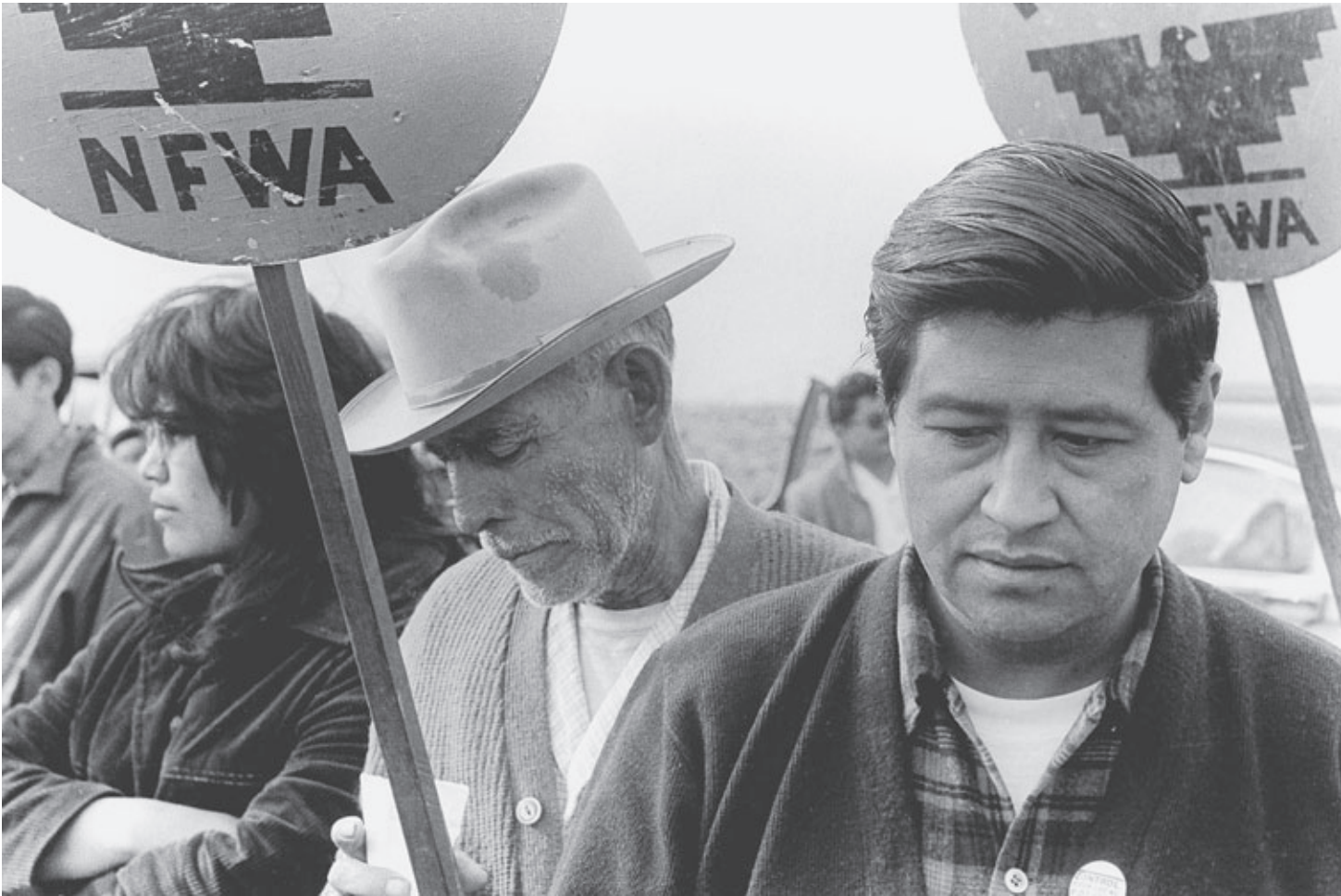
Cesar knew the farm workers couldn’t win with a strike alone. So for the first time in American history, Cesar and the United Farm Workers (the result of a 1966 merger between the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee and the National Farm Workers Association) turned to a boycott during a major labor dispute.

Hundreds of grape strikers traveled across the U.S. and Canada, telling their stories and organizing support. Thousands of supporters tirelessly helped organize the boycott. Millions stopped eating grapes. By 1970, table grape growers signed their first union contracts, granting workers better pay, benefits, and protections.

In the decades that followed, Cesar Chavez and the UFW continued using nonviolent strikes, boycotts, marches and fasts to help farm workers stand up for their rights and gather support from ordinary Americans to aid their struggles. Those efforts continue to this day through the efforts of the United Farm Workers of America and the Cesar Chavez Foundation.

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Cesar Chavez Foundation is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization founded under a different name by Cesar Chavez in 1966. It builds or renovates and operates thousands of units of high-quality affordable housing, runs a nine station educational Spanish-language radio network in four



states reaching 500,000 daily listeners and provides educational tutoring programs for under-served children as well as service learning to preserve Cesar Chavez’s legacy.

It also operates the National Chavez Center on 187 acres amid oaks and spectacular rock outcroppings in California’s Tehachapi Mountains at La Paz in Keene, where Cesar Chavez lived and worked during

his last quarter century. It includes a 7,000 square foot Visitor Center with large galleries that now features the Delano Grape Strike exhibit plus Cesar’s carefully preserved office and library, and beautifully landscaped Memorial Gardens around his gravesite. On the north grounds is the recently renovated Villa La Paz, a sprawling world-class conference and educational

center in the restored 17,000 square foot mission-style structure where Cesar held community gatherings and meetings. Villa La Paz now hosts space, resources and capacity building for civic, business, labor, community and other non-profit groups to meet and plan in the shadow of Cesar’s legacy.

For more on the Cesar Chavez Foundation, visit [www.chavezfoundation.org](http://www.chavezfoundation.org).

# PIE RANCH

Joyce Grimm

Our mission is to inspire and connect people to know the source of their food, and to work together to bring greater health to the food system from seed to table.

In 2002, three founding partners—Nancy Vail, Jered Lawson, and Karen Heisler—purchased a triangular 14-acre property on California’s San Mateo coast to establish Pie Ranch. The shape of the land, and their shared vision to create a model center of sustainable farming and food system education, inspired the farm’s distinctly fitting name.

Since 2005, Pie Ranch has operated as a working farm, hosting youth from regional high schools to participate in farm-based programs and activities. Pie Ranch also works with educators and community collaborators in diverse urban, suburban and rural settings to help students apply what they’ve learned at Pie Ranch in their daily lives. In addition, Pie Ranch mentors aspiring farmers as resident apprentices who spend a full year immersed in all aspects of farm operations and marketing.

What we do:

## GROW

Our sustainable farming practices emphasize soil fertility, biological diversity, growing for local markets, and creating a relationship-based food system. Delicious, fresh, seasonal, humane; We grow food to sustain ourselves, our community, and our environment.

On our pie-slice shaped piece of land, we grow pie ingredients including wheat for crusts, fruits for filling, raise chickens for eggs, goats and cows for milk and butter, and vegetables for healthy meals. We sell our crops at our farm stand, to local restaurants and bakeries—including

Companion Bakeshop & Mission Pie—and we have a Community Supported Agriculture program serving our Mission High School students.

## EDUCATE

### Youth Education & Leadership Development

An integral piece of Pie Ranch’s vision is to partner with youth around food and farming. The youth we work with are usually high school students from the Bay Area, Pacifica and Pescadero; however, we also serve other groups from all over the globe. Our main focus is on providing the opportunity for repeat visits rather than one-time experiences on the farm. We believe that repeat visits build upon themselves; youth connect to the land, to the staff, and to each other. Trust and respect grow as youth experience the cycle of days, weeks, months, seasons, and years.

### Farmer Apprenticeships

Pie Ranch is a unique sustainable food system education and advocacy organization. We seek to inspire and create a new generation of farmers, educators, entrepreneurs, and advocates with the knowledge and the skills to work together to build a healthy, sustainable, inclusive food system. Our work is based on the assumption that a sustainable food system can only emerge when both rural and urban communities understand and are accountable to each aspect of the system.

### Emerging Farmer Program — Apprenticeships & Internships at Pie Ranch

Our Emerging Farmer Program includes our year-long Apprenticeship Program & Summer Internship Program

### New in 2012 :

#### HomeSlice: Mission High School Youth CSA

Pie Ranch’s HomeSlice internship is an employment program committed to youth development and leadership, with the goal to grow young farmers, food justice activists and educators. HomeSlice engages high



school seniors in starting a CSA at their school with produce, grains, dry beans and eggs from Pie Ranch. This pilot program

will be the first incarnation of HomeSlice and will run from March–June 2012.



# FARM SONGS: LISTENING TO AGRICULTURE

Jen Delos Reyes

## TRACK LIST

- \* *Agriculture* 3:34 Ritchie Calder, Science in Our Lives
- \* *My Little Seed* 2:45 Ramblin’ Jack Elliott, Woody Guthrie’s Songs to Grow On
- \* *On The Farm* 4:01 Panda Bear, Panda Bear
- \* *Rice Planting Song* 1:32 Sia-weli, women of a rice planting co-operative in Gborola Music of the Kpelle of Liberia
- \* *Farm Dance* 2:40 Piatnitsky Chorus and Orchestra Russian, Folk Songs: Songs and Dances of Central Russia
- \* *Apple Picker’s Reel* 2:32 Larry Hanks Berkeley Farms: Oldtime and Country Style Music of Berkeley
- \* *Daybreak at Calamity Farm* 4:14 Gilbert Girard and Len Spencer Phono-Cylinders, Vol. 1: Edited by and from the Collection of George A. Blacker
- \* *The Seed* 3:52 Nobody & Mystic Chords Of Memory, Tree Colored See Mush
- \* *All the Baby Chickens in the Garden* 2:52 John Lomax, Jr. John A. Lomax, Jr. Sings American Folksongs
- \* *Bush Clearing Song* 3:03 Tokpa of Yanekwele, workers of a bush clearing co-operative, drummers Music of the Kpelle of Liberia
- \* *Billy’s Friendly Farm* 4:04 Peyton Hopkins, Let the Teachers Tell the Story
- \* *Making The Nature Scene* 3:01 Sonic Youth, Screaming Fields Of Sonic Love
- \* *At the Farm: Goats and Sheep* 4:14 Nicholas E. Collias, Sounds of Animals
- \* *Harvest Song* 3:11 Frantz Casséus and Lolita Cuevas, Haitian Folk Songs
- \* *Tee Roo, Farmer’s Curst Wife* 2:21 John Lomax, Jr. John A. Lomax, Jr. Sings American Folksongs



- \* *Squash Dance* 1:30 n.a. Anthology of Central and South American Indian Music
- \* *Penny’s Farm* 1:49 Pete Seeger Darling Corey/Goofing-Off Suite
- \* *The Cow in Apple Time* 0:52 Lesley Frost Derry Down Derry: A Narrative Reading by Lesley Frost of Poems by Robert Frost
- \* *Cattle Herding Song* 2:33 n.a. African Music from the Film - The Naked Prey
- \* *Burning Farm* 4:34 Sonic Youth Lost Tracks: Single B-Sides and Non-Album Tracks
- \* *Digging Potatoes* 1:09 Ellie Mao Toward World Understanding with Song
- \* *Dust Bowl* 2:20 The Magnetic Fields The Charm of the Highway Strip
- \* *Ang Gatas At Ang Itlog (The Milk and The Eggs)* 1:23 Luz Morales Folk Songs of the Philippines
- \* *The Homestead on the Farm* 2:21 Smokey Joe Miller and the Georgia Pals Old American Heart Throbs
- \* *County Farm Blues* 2:12 Son House Classic Blues from Smithsonian Folkways

- \* *Ivinda ya Mbua – Farm Work Song* 3:23 David Nzomo Work and Dance Songs from Kenya
- \* *Farm Worker’s Song* 2:42 Joe Glazer Welcome to America — Joe Glazer Sings Songs of the American Immigrants
- \* *Infinity Farm* 2:47 Lightning Bolt Hypermagic Mountain
- \* *Milk Cow Blues* 2:08 Roscoe Holcomb, An Untamed Sense of Control
- \* *A men’s work group clears a new garden* 8:45 Fifteen working men Bosavi: Rain-forest Music from Papua New Guinea
- \* *The Pasture* 2:53 Lesley Frost Derry Down Derry: A Narrative Reading by Lesley Frost of Poems by Robert Frost
- \* *Open Field* 3:17 Taken By Trees Open Field
- \* \* \*

Jen Delos Reyes is an artist originally from Winnipeg, MB, Canada. Her research interests include the history of socially engaged art, group work, band dynamics, folk music, and artists’ social roles. She has exhibited works across North America and Europe, and has contributed writing to various catalogues and institutional publications. Jen is the founder and director of Open Engagement, a conference on socially engaged art practice and herself speaks widely on Art and Social Practice at conferences and institutions around the world. She is currently an Assistant Professor at Portland State University where she co-directs the Art and Social Practice MFA. The songs that appear on this compilation were selected to reflect a wide range of cultural approaches to farming and agriculture, with a strong emphasis on American folk songs and work songs. These songs reflect a variety of perspectives on life on the land in many places around the globe. The content of these songs range from harvest, the care of animals, the celebration of bounty, to drought, and economic uncertainty.

# SOIL KITCHEN

Futurefarmers  
Amy Franceschini

Soil Kitchen was a temporary, windmill-powered architectural intervention and multi-use space where citizens enjoy free soup in exchange for soil samples from their neighborhood. Placed across the street from the Don Quixote monument at 2nd Street and Girard Avenue in North Philadelphia, Soil Kitchen inhabits an abandoned building and places a windmill atop to pay homage to the popular windmill scene in Cervantes’, Don Quixote. Rather than being “adversarial giants” as they were in the novel, the windmill at Soil Kitchen is a functioning symbol of self-reliance and literally breathing new life into a formerly abandoned building. The windmill also serves as a sculptural invitation to imagine a potential green energy future and to participate in the material exchange of soil for soup—literally taking matters into one’s own hands. This exchange provides an entry point for further dialogue and action available in the space through workshops, events and informal exchange. Soil Kitchen provides sustenance, re-established value of natural resources through a trade economy,



and tools to inform and respond to possible contaminants in the soil. Soil Kitchen was commissioned by Philadelphia’s Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy using a generous grant from the William Penn Foundation. Soil Kitchen coincided with the 2011 Environmental Protection Agency’s National Brownfields Conference. Soil Kitchen offered free pH and heavy metal testing and produced a Philadelphia Brownfields Map and Soil Archive. In addition to serving soup and testing soil, the building is a hub for exchange and

learning; free workshops including wind turbine construction, urban agriculture, soil remediation, composting, lectures by soil scientists and cooking lessons.





Original drawing of The Farm, 1974, by Bonnie Ora Sherk, Founding Director/President, 1974–80 Crossroads Community (The Farm).

Freeway interchange above The Farm.



# LIFE IN THE MIDDLE OF CONCRETE

Natasha Boas looks back at *The Farm* with PK Steffan

*I lived briefly at The Farm in the mid-eighties and we had animals running through our studio while we worked. Located under the freeway at the corner of Army Street (currently Cesar Chavez) and Potrero Avenue in San Francisco, The Farm was a remarkable rural oasis and hands-on educational farm with vegetable gardens, chickens, geese, rabbits, and goats and a pre-school as well as a library, a gallery space and rehearsal and performance space for theater and punk rock bands. Buildings in the same complex housed Survival Research Laboratories, Subterranean Records, and Cloudkick. Later in the eighties it would become exclusively an artist live/work space.*

*Artist PK Steffan taught digital arts at the California College of the Arts from 1996–2004 while living at The Farm. PK currently lives in Tuscan, Arizona and is known for quoting Baldessari: “Hopeless desire—to make words and images interchangeable, yet it is the futility that engrosses me...” PK and I reminisced recently about The Farm life.*

—Natasha Boas, MOCFA curator

NB: PK, I hear that you lived at The Farm and managed it for the founders Marilyn and Chris Goode. What years were you there and what brought you to The Farm?

PK Steffan: We were there roughly from 1994 to 2001. I found out about the Farm from the Arthouse hotline run by California Lawyers for the Arts. Back then it was just a phone hotline. I fell in love with

the space and community immediately. To this day, my wife still laughs about how I approached the owner Marilyn Goode so intensely saying “What do I need to do to move in here?” After having traveled for years, going from grad school in Tucson to Japan and then to San Francisco, I knew I was home.

NB: What do you mean here by “home”?

PKS: It felt like home because of the great community of artists living there, the fact that there was a thriving community garden in the midst of the city and because Marilyn seemed like such an incredibly interesting, kind but very direct honest individual. It was like no other space in the city. Typically there are good workspaces, or good neighbors, but the combination at The Farm was unique. It felt like a challenging but inviting environment—one where an artist could be fully engaged in the community and in their work.

NB: Can you describe the community for me?

PKS: What an incredible and productive mix of talent. There were a number of performing artists such as Mark Pauline’s Survival Research Laboratories (SRL) and Chip’s People Eater. They would do mini shows in the back including one incredible performance for a BBC documentary. The window used to literally bow inwards and





Seven Reasons, video installation, PK Steffen, 1996.

light up at night as they tested the jet engine or the flamethrower. There were teachers such as our next door neighbor who taught at the bilingual school up the street. There were artists using high tech production for video and installation. There were dancers. There were designers. There were crafts people. Everyone was busy producing something. We used to knock on each other’s doors to enlist support or expertise in what we were making or invite a neighbor to collaborate in a piece for a show.

NB: It sounds like a real laboratory situation. What about the whole technology, early Net and website activity at The Farm?

PKS: Yeah, some of my early net-based art developed there. That was the beginning of the Net as we know it. We used to project web pages up onto the walls of the spaces

one knew what I was talking about when I described a web page or how I made one.

The Net became a central part of my process as an artist and my teaching at California College of Arts and Crafts. I taught many classes on net art, creating an artist portfolio and helped out other artists like Harrell to gain a presence on the web. I used to hand out portfolios on floppy disks with a copy of Netscape 0.96 beta because most people had no clue about modems. I included printed instructions on how to install the app and locate the home page! We used to distribute Quicktime videos, images and text based pieces via online sites such as the Well and BMUG. These were the early days of Net art at The Farm...

NB: The music scene was really important at the Farm in the seventies and eighties.



Boys Mowing Lawn At The Farm, 1976, photo by Bonnie Ora Sherk, Founding Director/President, 1974–80 Crossroads Community (The Farm).

and share other artists’ work from China or Russia. Seems crazy now that I can access everything from my phone. Funny, I designed Harrell Fletcher’s first website at The Farm actually.

NB: Can you describe the “early Net days” in SF a bit more?

PKS: The video projection parties were done at a video collective that was based in a warehouse somewhere near Brannan and Third Streets. They had all the equipment that they also used in raves. I don’t remember the address anymore and their name changed every week according to the theme. The shows they did inspired me to share the web with every artist I knew. No

The Farm as a punk rock showcase by night was infamous for staging seminal eighties punk rock bands such as Frightwig, Discharge, The Descendents, The Mentors, 7 Seconds, MDC (Millions of Dead Cops), RKL (Rich Kids on LSD), DRI (Dirty Rotten Imbeciles), Raw Power, The Accused, Redd Kross, Soundgarden, The Gits, the Lookouts (Early band of Green Day drummer), Bad Brains, and many more. It was a way for The Farm to raise money along with DIY events—What was going on music wise when you were there?

PKS: No, the music shows were over by the time we moved there. From what I was told (not sure how reliable it is), there was



Two scenes from the BBC’s Survival Research Laboratories documentary *Pandemonium*, directed by Leslie Askao Gladsjo. Filmed in the yard of The Farm in 1995, it featured a large hydraulically actuated shaking and bowing cross covered in bibles that was burned with flamethrowers. Photos by Diana Coopersmith.

a stabbing at one of the last shows. Due to police crackdowns and insurance reasons, the music came to an end. I believe at that point Marilyn purchased the space since there was not enough income to run the space. I think the circus school may have been there for a while still but then they converted the whole thing into live/work in the late eighties.

NB: After speaking with one of the original founders, Bonnie Ora Sherk, I learned that The Farm was originally called Crossroads Community: The Farm because it was at the crossroads of four neighborhoods. How did the shift from community center to live-work space change the scene at The Farm?

PKS: It switched modes when it became a live/work space. It was no longer the open community space it had been in the past. People who lived there before such as the founders lamented the change. It became a community for the residents and their friends and collaborators. This was a totally different model and much smaller core group than the founders had envisioned. It wasn’t a collaborative work funded by what the group produced. We paid rent (covered by rent control yes so below market) and there was no communal indoor space except for the laundry room, hallways, front garden and community garden.

Even so, it still felt like a communal space to us. We were constantly surrounded by visitors. There was a constant stream of people coming to help out at SRL or Chip’s group for example or Sergio Becerill’s print shop clients and skateboard filming crew. During the day the yard was full of kids from the Buena Vista school across the street or people who didn’t live there but

came to hang out. It became a bit of an issue at times because of things getting stolen or new residents feeling uncomfortable when someone would climb the fence to gain entry.

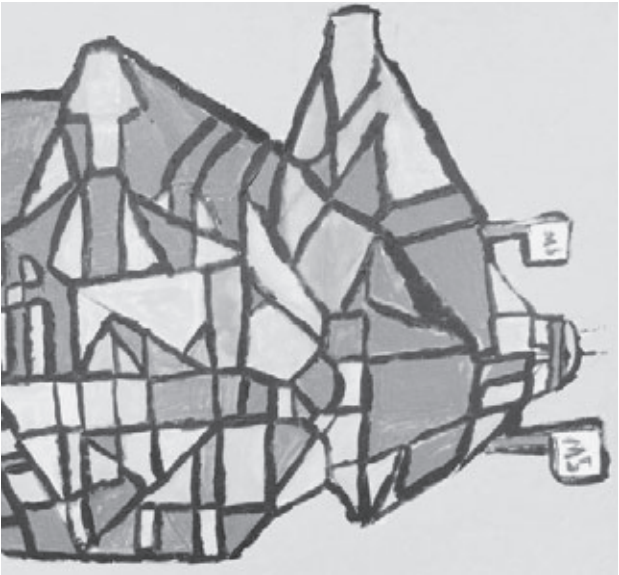
NB: Tell me about SRL and Mark Pauline—the myth of Mark is huge around The Farm and beyond.

PKS: All those machines that were used in impromptu shows, tests and rehearsals and the BBC Documentary—those were done in the yard of The Farm. I have some really good Mark Pauline stories but it used to piss him off if I shared them with anyone. I saw firsthand how they tested stuff and risked life and limb. They are fearless. Mark always took that to mean I was saying he was reckless.

NB: Fearless might be an understatement. Did the farm school still function there?

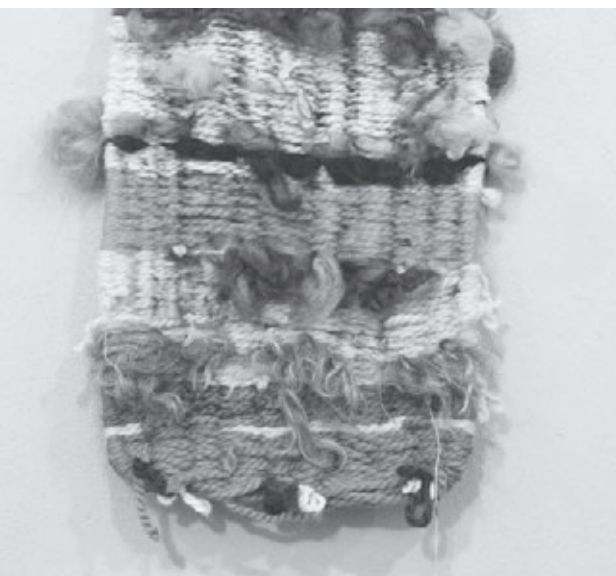
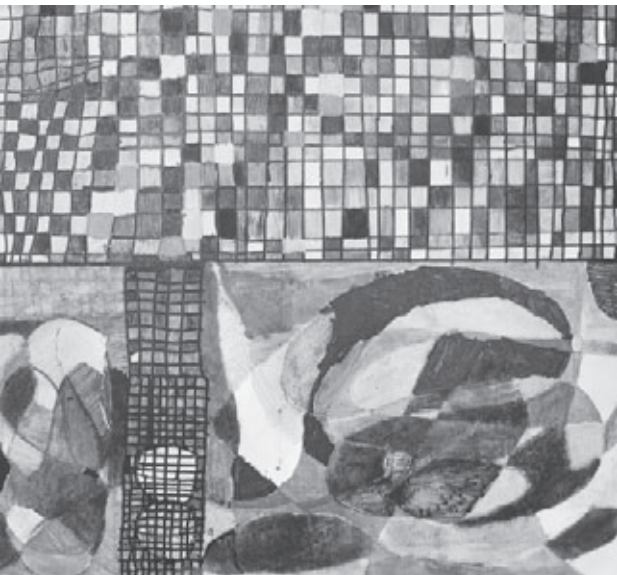
PKS: Yes, it was still going while we were there. The kids who visited from city schools on field trips contributed greatly to the sense of a vibrant artistic community. The kids’ art projects hung on the walls of the building and some of the residents taught there and contributed to lessons at the school. The school was still there, the garden continued—part of which became the public De La Raza Park. There were no animals, but the artistic residency continued albeit in a different form. We still considered it to be “The Farm” but to the founders, I’m sure it wasn’t anything like it had been.





# PROJECT GROW

*Natasha Wheat*



Project Grow is an art studio and urban farm in Portland, Oregon. In November of 2008, artist Natasha Wheat proposed Project Grow to the Port City Developmental Center, a sheltered work-shop in Portland, Oregon. It was initially an intervention in creating a new culture, economy, and labor option to what was exclusively factory-labor offered there at the time.

Sheltered workshops are places of employment that often use a “piece rate” of a penny per piece to compensate their developmentally disabled employees. They exist across the United States, as well as internationally. Customers of these factories are often military, commercial, mass transit and medical contractors such as Aramark, Haliburton and the Federal Reserve Bank.

Within nine months of its beginnings, Project Grow saw the launch of a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) from its thriving farm, and had several exhibitions of work from its artists. The artists and farmers of the program continue to earn paychecks from art sold, lessons taught, lectures given, commissioned projects, and as recognition of their efforts and contribution to the farm.

Project Grow now occupies two acres of land, on four lots within the inner city of Portland. It is home to four goats, thirty chickens, and is an ongoing collaboration between fifty artists and farmers. There is now an extensive fiber arts and woodworking program at the site of The Port City Development Center, in addition to a gallery, art studio and The North Portland Farm.

Natasha Wheat is an artist who is interested in sameness, institutional life, power structures, utopian attempts, and temporary emancipation. Her work often takes the form of situation constructions, making temporary spaces and objects that amplify or intervene in a these dynamics.

Wheat has exhibited at Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles; Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley, and numerous exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.





## FARM STORE @ MOCFA

Sadie Harmon

Farm Store @ MOCFA is an installation located within the museum shop. As a part of the show *Only Birds Sing the Music of Heaven in This World*, Farm Store @ MOCFA presents objects and books that represent artists, farmers, makers, chefs, growers, gardeners, and activists as they navigate agricultural production and use. The products and resources at Farm Store @ MOCFA are separated into several categories that each address a different aspect of agricultural production and use: farming and gardening, cooking and baking, preservation, and textiles. Farm Store @ MOCFA features books and other products produced by other participants in the show as well as products from local, regional, and national artists, writers, and makers. A bibliography for Farm Store @ MOCFA has been assembled with the help of participants in the show and will be available to the public. The goal of Farm Store

@ MOCFA is to be a central resource for visitors who are interested in getting involved in agriculture and food activism at any level. Visitors will be able to purchase products and books and bring home free resources that relate to a full spectrum of thinking about art and agriculture.

Sadie Harmon is an Oakland-based interdisciplinary artist and educator. Her work looks at the interactions between education, community, craft, and the ineffable. Currently, she is pursuing an MFA in textiles and sculpture at California College of the Arts. She has done projects at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Esperanza Community Services and the National Institute of Art and Disabilities in Richmond. In Spring of 2012 she will be artist in residence at Mercy Retirement and Care Center.



## SALINAS FARM WORKER PORTRAIT

John Cerney and Eliza Gregory

Artist John Cerney grew up in Salinas, California and displays his work to the public alongside the highways of California and the Midwest. His giant plywood cut-outs tell a story, either honoring a field laborer or amusing the passing motorists with flights of fancy.

For this exhibition, the Museum of Craft and Folk Art teamed up with Chris Bunn, a Salinas farmer who had worked with John Cerney to create a series of giant field workers back in the 1990s, to commission another mural-sized portrait to be installed in Yerba Buena Lane. John Cerney was asked to create a cut-out of a single field worker, in a typical pose. Chris Bunn invited field irrigator Jose Lepe Lepe, who has worked with him in Salinas for over 30 years, to be the subject of the painting. In the portrait, Jose oversees the irrigation of a just-planted field of lettuce.

Eliza Gregory is an artist based in San Francisco. Her work focuses on cultural anthropology, cultural identity, and community development.

Eliza went to Salinas to meet Chris Bunn, Jose Lepe Lepe and John Cerney and see the



process of this painting being made. Her interviews with the three men and her images from Salinas are available to see in *Only Birds Sing the Music of Heaven in This World*.



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content or context. If artists think about their audience at all, they think of it in general terms, not as local and unique to context, much less as actual people that they could meet and be influenced by.

In the case of localized forms of agriculture there are a few models that have been utilized by many different farms all over the world. In the case of farmers mar-



kets, local farmers come to a central place on a regular basis to sell their produce to local people. The farmers or their direct representatives can communicate with their consumers. Questions about farm conditions can be answered, suggestions can be made, the produce can be freshly harvested and ripe, the transportation can be very limited. CSAs or community supported agriculture projects work by having a group of consumers paying a farm upfront at the start of a season for a box of produce each week over several months. By paying at the start of a season the consumer invests in the farm and then receives whatever is grown and harvested by the farm. CSAs tend to send out newsletters with the shares of produce that give

updates on the farm and suggest recipes and other ideas. The shareholders are generally invited to the farm for tours and workdays so that they can have even more direct relationships with the place where their food is grown and the people who grow it. Community gardens and farms are located in urban and suburban areas and allow local people to tend their own garden plots or work with others to grow produce that is shared by the group.

What would art related projects be like if they functioned more like localized agriculture instead of commercial art world art? I don't think there is a hard and fast set of rules, but the general idea from my point of view is that there would be a relationship between the artists and the audience, which could either turn into collaborations, or at least involve audience participation. Creating projects that are specific to the place where they are made and shown would be a greater priority than making work that is general and could be exhibited anywhere and generically. The work might not take the form of an object that is easily transportable and saleable. Instead the work could be ephemeral, or very long term, it could change over time, it might be multifaceted

involving objects, events, publications, etc... It might not take place in a gallery or art context at all.

Systems create feedback loops, commercial art and industrial agriculture create certain relationships and products, localized agriculture and art projects develop different ones. I think there is room in the world for all of these systems to exist, but the problem, as I see it, is that right now the two approaches are way out of balance, and because of that, the localized versions need more support so that they can develop further.

Obviously, not all localized art projects need to be farm related, but since that is the focus of the exhibition I have organized let me describe the way I see one of the projects in *Only Birds Sing the Music of Heaven in this World* as an example. John Cerney makes large-scale paintings of farmers and farm workers and installs them in the farm fields where those people work. John does a lot of other kinds of public paintings as well, but I'm focusing on the farm ones for the show and this text. I've driven past John's paintings along Hwy 101 in the Salinas area for years, and was always intrigued about who had made them and why. It turns out that John gets commissioned by local farmers to make and install his paintings at various local farms. In some cases they function partly as advertising for the farm, in other cases they are more like monuments.

I find John's work really striking and effective. It is interesting to compare his practice to a more status quo painter. Both of them make their work in a studio context, but John's work is based on local people who he has actually interacted with—talked to, eaten meals with, taken photos of, met families of etc... When the work is finished, he installs it in a location where the subjects as well as other local people can see and

comment on it (along with millions of passersby). One project has lead to another (from word of mouth and public visibility) and John has created a substantial career that is artistically, financially, and socially fulfilling. In the case of a status quo painter they also produce work in a studio that is located somewhere—NYC, or Oakland, or Portland or anywhere else—but the work they make is generally not intended for local consumption. Instead they are making work for the international art market (this is the case even with the NYC artist who might be showing their work in NYC but they are generally making it for a generalized art world rather than their own neighborhood or community. If the work is sold it will be sold to any collector anywhere in the world as opposed to a localized one. Another point of difference is that John represents himself, whereas in the conventional art world artists are represented by galleries and a gallery system that includes publications, art fairs, museums, etc. Other localized projects take less traditional forms, but I think John's career, as an unorthodox painter is interesting to compare to the ways that painters typically attempt to work in the art world.

This exhibition includes a variety of different projects and practitioners who have all found ways to work in significant, localized ways. Rather than go into detail about all of them, I have invited each participant to represent their ideas through texts they have written, documentation and artworks of various kinds, as well as a series of public events that have been created as part of *Only Birds Sing the Music of Heaven in this World*.

—Harrell Fletcher  
Portland, Oregon  
March 1st, 2012

# FARM SCHOOL

Nolan Calisch and Molly Sherman

Founded in 2011 by artists Nolan Calisch and Molly Sherman, Portland-based Farm School is an organization that brings together the practices of farming, interdisciplinary art, and site-specific education. With a pedagogy focused on participation and applied learning, Farm School expands the possibilities of what a classroom can be. Farm School has worked in grocery stores, schools, galleries, museums, and on farms celebrating the connection between people and their places.

Molly Sherman is an artist, designer, and educator. She is the co-founder of Farm School, an organization that brings together the practices of farming, interdisciplinary art, and site-specific education. She has

worked as a designer at Project Projects in New York, with clients that include the Museum of Modern Art and Art in General, and as an educator in public schools and non-profit organizations such as the Center for Urban Pedagogy. Molly received her BFA from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and will soon hold an MFA from Portland State University's Art and Social Practice program. She is continually energized by teaching and working collaboratively.

Nolan Calisch is a farmer, photographer, and artist. He is co-founder of Farm School, an organization that brings together the practices of farming, interdisciplinary art, and site-specific education. He lives on



his organic farm in Portland Oregon where he grows food for thirty families through a community supported agriculture program (CSA). Nolan earned his BA in Film

Production from Denison University and will soon hold his MFA in Art and Social Practice from Portland State University.

## ONLY BIRDS SING THE MUSIC OF HEAVEN IN THIS WORLD

March 23–July 7, 2012  
MOCFA 51 Yerba Buena Lane  
San Francisco, California 94103  
www.mocfa.org

Curated by artist Harrell Fletcher, this exhibition explores the relationship between art and agriculture from a variety of perspectives including historical and current day agricultural imagery, alternative farming projects, and the representation of farm labor.

The exhibition is conceived with allegiances to folk art, outsider art, craft, experimental art and social practice.

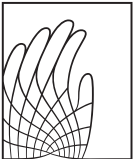
These allegiances share a kinship with activist art, social work, community art and relational aesthetics and signal a socially engaged return to art practice with a strong representational dimension. The exhibition not only presents an interesting and topical set of works, but attempts to expand the idea of what can be considered “craft and folk art” by presenting work that in many cases functions outside of the art world, while at the same time is not typical of received historical ideas of “outsider art.”

Participating artists and organizations include John Cerney, Farm School, Amy Franceschini with Futurefarmers, Eliza Gregory, Sadie Harmon, Joyce Grimm with Pie Ranch, The Farm, Natasha Wheat with Project Grow, as well as a selection of California agricultural paintings and prints from the Nelson Gallery and the Oakland Museum of California and photographic documentation from the National Chavez Center.

—Natasha Boas and Jennifer McCabe

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Museum of Craft and Folk Art