

Strange Invitation

Strange Invitation: It's All Beginning

Strange Invitation continues Franklin Street Works' blurring of the boundaries between participation and creation, taking the organization's inquiry into the nature of the "open-ended" artwork to another level. This project is fecund — an exhibition that is constantly morphing and growing organically through conversation and action. The participants explore multiple themes (the natural environment, public art in the city, and generative public organizations), while functioning as independent yet interrelated moving parts and fuelling new components through dynamic exchange. *Strange Invitation* began with a different approach to exhibition structure and a desire to investigate some of the relationships between art and activism that are happening throughout the country today. In the beginning, I invited three participants with the understanding that they would, in turn, invite a collaborator to join them — a framework designed to encourage improvisation and experimentation. This structure promotes, and often requires, collaboration by asking that virtually everyone involved be willing to integrate into larger constructs — ranging from the gallery installation itself to public interactions that could possibly change the physical qualities of the exhibited artworks.

Strange Invitation (also the title of a Beck song) brings together three collaborative teams that have designed engaging installations, interactive hubs, and programming. The invited participants bring multiple and variously informed viewpoints to the exhibition, but each collaborator is steeped in an understanding of how contemporary art can interface with grassroots and community-oriented projects. I invited the following people: Reanimation Library founder Andrew Beccone; artist/activist Andrea Reynosa; and Flint Public Art Project director Stephen Zacks. They invited, respectively, the following collaborators: artist Pradeep Dalal; ecoartspace curator Amy Lipton; and artist collective Flower Tour. In addition to their understanding of contemporary art, the *Strange Invitation*

participants bring to the exhibition their knowledge of urban planning, library science, and environmental activism, connecting contemporary art with issues that are integral to the natural, urban, and organizational environments that make up our daily lives.

My curiosity about the relationship between contemporary art and sustained grassroots activism in the U.S. was sparked, in part, by some of the same texts that informed the mission of Franklin Street Works — especially texts on “Social Practice” and “Relational Aesthetics,” movements that often produce seemingly in-progress works and purport to encourage interaction. These artistic practices can be tricky — at times, their claims of concern with action and audience interaction can seem unrealized or merely symbolic. For example, how much does it really affect a community when an artist inhabits a gallery only for a day, then hops on an airplane to go home or on to the next gig? One pivotal text that sparked *Strange Invitation's* genesis is “The Behaviors of New Media: Towards a Post-hype Hostipitality Aesthetics,” published in the now defunct *Art Lies* magazine. In this essay, Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook explored the pros and cons and the “hype” around Relational Aesthetics. The authors adopt Jacques Derrida’s “useful notion of ‘hostipitality,’ where hostility is barely concealed beneath the surface-level hospitality,” arguing that some art institutions “uncomfortably” host participatory art projects “where the audience has to be restrained from relating too much” (*Art Lies*, No. 67, Fall/Winter 2010). With *Strange Invitation*, critics, artists and cultural workers who are currently examining or seek to reexamine these types of concerns come together in a laboratory situation that explores the very idea of the exhibition as an experiment. This exhibition also encourages a rethinking of the role of “inviting” installations. No unifying answer is expected, yet our collaborators actively consider both the opportunities and the pitfalls presented by participatory art situations in the projects exhibited here.

While the “usual suspects” of relational aesthetics — such as Rirkrit Tiravanija, Carsten Höller, and Thomas Hirschhorn — are

important to the context of this project, artists and organizations not readily associated with the movement (who are perhaps critiquing its very precepts) are brought together to foster new perspectives on an approach to art and exhibition making that by now has been thoroughly legitimized. With vigor and enthusiasm, Franklin Street Works presents audiences with new art situations, but keeps in mind critic Claire Bishop's admonition that Relational Aesthetics art seems "to derive from a creative misreading of poststructuralist theory: rather than the interpretations of a work of art being open to continual reassessment, the work of art itself is argued to be in perpetual flux. There are many problems with this idea, not least of which is the difficulty of discerning a work whose identity is willfully unstable. Another problem is the ease with which the 'laboratory' becomes marketable as a space of leisure and entertainment."

Lastly, but importantly, *Strange Invitation* is an extension of Franklin Street Works' mission to inform audiences about and engage them in contemporary art. This exhibition is part of our continuing efforts to investigate post-studio and social-practice approaches to art making. By teasing out aspects of the often mysterious art world and exploring a variety of trends in greater depth, we aim to provoke dialogue and to point out that even dominant trends in contemporary art are questioned from within the field. The hope that this understanding will encourage Franklin Street Works' audiences to develop agency as informed viewers and valued contributors to conversations about art's many roles in a complex world.

-- Terri C Smith, Creative Director, Franklin Street Works

STRANGE INVITATIONS for DIGGING DEEPER

From April 6 - June 16, the Franklin Street Works in downtown Stamford, Connecticut. will become a hotbed of radicalism. The art works are radical, but visitors can be assured that there is no cause for alarm. None defy religious taboos, or violate social decorum, or disobey legal mandates. The culture-shifting actions assembled for this time period offer the homey appeal of gardening and farm stand development, the support of a youthful workforce, the investigation of heritage food production, and alliances with community organizations. Nonetheless, these congenial actions subvert a quadruple set of targets, destabilizing social values that are so fundamental to contemporary culture that they are often accepted as 'givens'. When these courteous incursions are combined, they comprise a sweeping make-over of prevailing human attitudes and behaviors.

ART RADICALISM

The projects presented in this exhibition earn the adjective 'radical' because they pay little heed to the principles of art production and appreciation registered throughout the annals of Western art history. Some of these artworks sprout, grow, mature, and die. Others persist in the intangible realm of information exchange, confidence building, and an expansion of conscience. Thus, the creative processes that are employed to produce these works are irrelevant to conventional studio art practices. Furthermore, the interface between these art works and the public diverts attention from aesthetic contemplation, formal analysis, and emotional stimulation and directs it into the realm of actual interactions among people and their ecosystems. This means these works are not amenable to being marketed, collected, and preserved. Even standards and means of assessment are rendered inoperable. The works assembled for this exhibition demand the construction of new principles of art criticism, new criteria of merit, new categories of artistic skill, and

new historic references.

GARDENING RADICALISM

Even when gardening is not undertaken by an artist, and despite its popularity, it constitutes a radical act within contemporary culture. This is because, after the Industrial Revolution, every cottage garden became a deviation from a norm. For the first time in human history, small scale food production ceased to be a necessary form of food production. Gradually, food production has become dominated by institutions - government, media, industry, science, and engineering. The toxic outcomes of this alliance might be traced to their shared assumption that any manipulation of organisms and their habitats to maximize productivity carries positive outcomes.

Cottage gardeners, by attending to their own nutritional needs, conduct a radical alternative to this institutional take-over. Radicalism is reinforced by heeding the well-being of entities situated at both ends of the food chain. Gardeners care about the people being fed by agricultural output. They care equally about the farm animals, wildlife, and habitats being affected by its production. Evidence abounds that populations at both ends of this spectrum are being endangered by large scale agricultural production. According to a study published in the Journal of the American College of Nutrition,¹ even 'fresh' foods are being depleted of their nutritional values. The study reports that between 1975 and 2010, vitamin C in broccoli diminished by 75.1%; iron in kale is down 22.7%; vitamin A in carrots is down 24.6 %; vitamin C in cabbage is down 22.1%. The ill effects of these nutritional drains on human health are glaring. They are associated with a litany of illnesses that include diabetes, obesity, allergies, cancers, autism, and ADHD. This health crisis is having such a profound impact on children that Robyn O'Brien, author and food activist, refers to these youngsters as "Generation Rx".

1 Dirt Poor: Have Fruit and Vegetables Become Less Nutritious? April 27, 2011 <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=soil-depletion-and-nutrition-loss> -

Numerous causes are cited for the diminished nutritional value in industrial produce: pollution, pesticides, fertilizers, thinning ozone, loss of topsoil, and the decline in the quality of seeds, air, soil, and water. Further evidence indicates that re-fortifying foods with vitamins, minerals, and amino acids does not fully compensate for these deficiencies. Gardeners can attest to the fact that life is not reducible to chemical formulas; its creation is a wondrous process during which inert matter is sparked, energized, and then transformed in ways that remain mysterious.

The gardening protocols undertaken by small scale gardeners are as diverse as the individuals who conduct them. Nonetheless, all gardeners extricate themselves from the oppressive regime of food dominance by mega food producing corporations. The practice could be suitable for a Manifesto or Declaration of Independence stating its ideals:

- Gardeners develop self-sustaining activities. They do not rely on global dependencies.
- Gardeners tend to biological organisms. They do not exploit the productive capacity of these organisms.
- Gardeners cooperate with insects, fungus, and bacteria. They do not suppress them.
- Gardeners demand familiarity with their foods during growth, cultivation, harvesting, and preparation. They do not consume anonymous foods produced in remote locations.
- Gardeners minimize the use of machines and energy efficient tools. They do not participate in society's addiction to fossil-fuel and engineer-driven means of producing and distributing food.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH RADICALISM

Artists engaging in community outreach enhance the creative productivity of others, not themselves. Solo explorations aimed at developing a personal style are replaced with interactions with community members who may have little relationship to art, and who may not be aware that the activity they are being invited into is a work of art. These artists replace creating tangible art objects for dispensing skills, knowledge, and, most significantly, inspiration and opportunity. The outreach efforts at Franklin Street Works include urban planning, library science, environmental activism, and education. As catalysts of positive change, protests and accusations are eliminated from their repertoire of tactics. These artists are optimists and pragmatists. They scale their ambitions to their capacities and expect to generate observable results.

If their forms of radicalism were to be written into a Manifesto or A Declaration of Independence, they would disrupt multiple norms of contemporary society:

- We foster community cohesion through inclusiveness. We do not support self-centered behaviors and exclusionary policies.
- We create opportunities for others to be productive in the belief that all entities benefit from cooperation and sharing. We do not foster competition and rivalry.
- We offer mutual aid and cultivate generosity. We do not seek personal fame and gain.
- We design projects that vitalize communities for the long run. We do not sap their resilience to gain short-term advantage.

ENVIRONMENTAL RADICALISM

Environmentalism is a radical culture-shifting enterprise because its concern for the well-being of the planet dislodges the prevailing pursuit of 'self-interest', 'self-fulfillment', and 'self-expression'. Such entrenched attitudes currently define most peoples' identity and establish their aspirations. Environmentalism's radical transformation of these fundamental values occurs in two phases. First, it replaces 'self' with 'community'. Second, it expands the definition of 'community' beyond fellow humans to encompass all forms of life - observable species that inhabit the planet's water, air, and soil, as well as the multitudes of micro organisms that occupy these regions. Identity, aspiration, and responsibility are thereby propelled into regions above, below, and beyond 'self' to encompass the entire biosphere.

Such consciousness of co-species habitation of Earth recalibrates the standard reference points by which humans define ourselves. Measures of time exceed individual life-spans. Recognition of space expands beyond our bodies and our homes. Indicators of success surpass our individual well-being. Security is no longer a personal affair. However, personal responsibilities and management regimens are not omitted. They simply expand to include other humans and diverse species.

SUM UP

By pursuing an independent route to physical health and mental well-being, the artists at FSW lay stake to their own destinies. But beyond these personal advantages, their humble actions become towering symbols of reform. Artists who cultivate gardens or empower communities are cultural 'free radicals'. As in the biological realm, these free radicals instigate change on the modest level of the microcosm. But as their actions accumulate, they gain the capacity to instigate systemic changes – potentially reforming attitudes that are oppressive and behaviors that are endangering. Such artists want nothing more than to trade in their maverick status and welcome the masses to join them in

these pursuits. Dr. Gene Sharp, the renowned political scientist who has dedicated his life to the study of non-violent resistance movements, would honor their efforts.² He asserts that power structures rely upon their subjects' obedience; if subjects do not obey, leaders have no power.

Linda Weintraub, March 2013

2 Sharp, Gene, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*, 2010. Albert Einstein Institution.

Reanimation Library

The Reanimation Library is a small, independent presence library^{1*} open to the public. It is a collection of books that have fallen out of routine circulation and have been acquired for their visual content. Outdated and discarded, they are culled from thrift stores, stoop sales, and throw-away piles, and given new life as a resource for artists, writers, cultural archeologists, and other interested parties.

The Reanimation Library was established in order to

- build a collection of resources that inspire the production of new creative work
- pan for gold in the sediment of print culture
- draw attention to the visual and textual marvels in seemingly ordinary books
- encourage collaboration among human beings
- call attention to the generative potential of libraries
- contribute to our cultural commons and gift economy
- explore pathways between digital and analog worlds

You are invited to join the library in these endeavors.

Over time, libraries have enjoyed a special privilege of determining which published materials are deemed culturally valuable and worth preserving. Materials that are kept within a collection are

1 * Presence library is a mistranslation of the German word for Reference Library, Präsenzbibliothek. It is employed because the library is a non-circulating collection that exists in the physical world.

largely considered to be more useful than those that are removed. Books and other materials are removed from collections for a variety of different reasons: space is in short supply, materials become physically worn, information becomes outdated, and new editions are produced. Whatever the ultimate (and presumably sound) motivation for weeding a collection may be, one result is that a tremendous amount of printed material disappears from the public realm once it leaves the public library.

The Reanimation Library is particularly interested in the loss of visual information that accompanies the process of weeding. Collection development policies generally assign little weight to the visual dimension of a work, unless that work happens to be graphically driven (i.e. a book profiling a visual artist, graphic design, or similar materials of an explicitly visual nature). Most library collection development policies prioritize the acquisition of items that contain currently relevant textual information, and replace items where that information is lacking or out of date. This protocol, coupled with the continual production of newer editions, creates a growing fossil record of outdated books—a veritable feast for image archaeologists. The Reanimation Library is actively engaged in building a collection of materials that are rich in visual information regardless of the currency of their textual content. The library serves as a repository and, more pertinently, an access point for such materials.

Artists, historians, writers, musicians, and scholars ground their creative and intellectual work in the images, ideas, words, and sounds of previous generations. Pastiche, collage, and sampling are fundamental tools of contemporary creative activity. The Reanimation Library presents a fertile environment for patrons to engage with the work of the past in creative, recombinant ways. Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan's first law of library science states that "books are for use". The Reanimation Library believes that a book's intended use is not its only use and encourages visitors to find—and share—their own uses for the books in its collection.

Andrew Beccone, Reanimation Library Founder

Reanimation Library Checklist

Counterclockwise from right of gallery door:

Pradeep Dalal

Matter (ASI/Lothal), 2013

Digital C Print, Edition of 5+ 2 AP, 34.5 x 22 inches

Courtesy of the artist

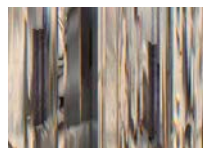


Pradeep Dalal

Matter (LKA/Ramkinker), 2013

Digital C Print, Edition of 5+ 2 AP, 19 x 13.5 inches

Courtesy of the artist



Pradeep Dalal

Matter (ASI/Nalanda), 2013

Digital C Print Edition of 5+ 2 AP, 21 x 16 inches

Courtesy of the artist



Pradeep Dalal

Matière/Matter (Anni Albers), 2013

Nine Xeroxes, "Tactile Sensibility" from *On Weaving*
by Anni Albers, Wesleyan University Press, 1965.

Courtesy of the artist

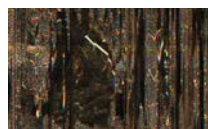


Pradeep Dalal

Matter (Marg/Tagore), 2013

Digital C Print, Edition of 5 + 2 AP, 38 x 25 inches

Courtesy of the artist



Pradeep Dalal

Matter (Pras/AK/Jejuri), 2013

Digital C Print, Edition of 5+ 2 AP, 24.5 x 15 inches

Courtesy of the artist



Digging Deeper

Digging Deeper at Franklin Street Works presents six artists who are exploring the real world implications of small-scale farming and raising community awareness about our food systems. Their varied practices include growing food, cooking food, raising animals for food, and engaging communities about local food production as well as instigating new artist-based economies.

For these artists the act of cultivation, growing, and by implication educating have evolved to a deeper level of activism where the boundaries of real world and art completely disappear. Life, art and agriculture converge and new paradigms evolve regarding the growing, production, distribution and consumption of food. These artists present us with the possibility for transforming cultural and political attitudes surrounding our capitalized and industrial-based food systems. In its place they advocate for an organic, regional, and local approach which each of the artists in this exhibition are manifesting in their own lives.

The role that art can play in these investigations is no longer a question. A global art movement related to the relationship of art and the natural world has evolved over the past 40 years. Artists in the late 1960's and 1970's such as Agnes Denes, Patricia Johanson, Hans Haacke, Dennis Oppenheim, Bonnie Ora Sherk, and Newton and Helen Harrison are the pioneers of this movement that has been growing steadily ever since. The explosion of artists working today in the realm of food and farming coincides with a larger cultural awakening regarding the ills of our present system such as the distances food travels to supermarket shelves and the effects of that on climate change. A host of problems include: the lack of biodiversity in mono-cultural farms, the loss of top soil and nutrient-poor soil, the abuse and poor conditions of feedlot and factory raised animals, the conversion of farmland into housing and the waste of un-harvested crops. Artists are now farming, not only to raise their own food in order to become self-reliant and to eat more healthily but also to offer alternative and sustainable

approaches within their local communities.

Museum and gallery exhibitions related to sustainability, food and farming have increased ten-fold since the first one in 1968. *Hybrid Fields* curated by Patricia Watts at the Sonoma County Museum in 2007; *Down to Earth: Artists Create Edible Landscapes* curated by Amy Lipton in 2009 at the Schuylkill Center in Philadelphia, PA; *Eat LACMA* curated by Fallen Fruit at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2010; and *Green Acres, Artists Farming Fields, Greenhouses and Abandoned Lots* curated by Sue Spaid in 2013 at the Contemporary Art Center in Cincinnati, OH, are only a few recent examples. Art spaces such as Franklin Street Works are helping artists to share these much needed alternatives and to provoke thinking about the future we want to see turn into a reality.

Joan Bankemper's *Seed Money* illustrates a bouquet project that was first realized in 2004 at the Bellevue Hospital, New York City. From 2000 to 2005 Bankemper, working with the title of horticultural therapist collaborated with recovering alcoholics and drug addicts. Starting in the spring the patients and Bankemper grew flowers from seed and created a massive cutting garden. This action merged horticultural therapy, art therapy, design and economics to create a successful healing platform. When the flowers were peaking they designed beautiful bouquets and made a festive flower cart. The cart was installed in the hospital entrance foyer and the clinic patients sold these flowers to visitors who were visiting the infirmed. This project created capital for the patients as well as propagated emotional well-being for all parties involved. In 2009 **Joan Bankemper** established The Black Meadow Barn, "a place where culture and horticulture meet" in Warwick, Hudson Valley, NY.

Habitat For Artists (HFA) installed one of its signature 6 x 6 foot art studios outdoors at Franklin Street Works. HFA builds small, temporary, reusable art studios in a variety of locations. The studio at FSW will be transformed into a potting shed/ greenhouse which will be used to propagate seeds and plants for a small

garden in collaboration with Hudson Valley Seed Library and Fairgate Farm. As in all HFA studios – the interior and exterior space will be provided for interaction by artists, individuals, and families during the course of the exhibition. Presented in the gallery is a variety of artwork from the Hudson Valley Seed Library Art Pack series and actual seed packs as well as photographs of HFA projects that reflect previous collaborations with local CSAs, gardens, urban agricultural, and environmental organizations.

Andrea Reynosa is an artist-farmer who actively aims to rally citizens to spark an interest in food production and to offer ways to get people involved. Reynosa's project *Franklin Street Heritage Garden and Farmstand*, takes inspiration and instruction from her Big Eddy Farmstand project in Narrowsburg, New York, 2012. The Franklin Street Heritage Garden and Farmstand project will focus on mapping the food-shed of the Stamford region as a curatorial tool for garden and farm stand development with an overlay of youth workforce development, heritage food investigation and production, creation of a marketing identity and sales strategy.

Jenna Spevack's "domestic microfarms" such as *Kitchen Table*, explore the value placed on food and artistic social practice through interactions with gallery visitors. Spevack started experimenting with apartment-sized farming by converting her bookshelf into a mini greenhouse. She designed an efficient, sub-irrigated system for growing energy-packed edible plants (microgreens) in small, urban spaces. To suggest a feeling of domesticity household objects were modified to house the microfarms. For example: a dresser, a suitcase, a chair, a kitchen cabinet, a desk, etc. were adapted with a planter and lights. As an urban agricultural design project, she envisioned a way to grow food in an anthropogenic landscape for all strata of citizens, but as an art project, she hopes to facilitate conversations about what we value: convenience vs creative effort, regenerables vs disposables, neighbors vs strangers. *Seeding the City*, a collaborative map drawing, encourages Franklin Street Works visitors to participate and support local, urban agriculture at Fairgate Farm in Stamford.

LEAF TEAT CURD RIND, 2011 by **Elaine Tin Nyo** is a visual poem that presents the transfiguration of grass to a soft-ripened goat cheese. Originally exhibited in 2011 as a time-based installation, the process was chronicled in a slideshow (of the photos exhibited here) atop a repurposed wine cellar where, during the course of the exhibition, fresh goat cheese made by the artist will ripen and develop a bloomy rind. The alchemy of digestion is considered at several stages: grass by goat, goat milk by rennet, curd by bacillus, cheese by human.

Let Us Eat the Colors of Nature's Spectrum by **Linda Weintraub** consists of twenty-six foods harvested from her gardens, preserved through canning, and arrayed according to the color continuum they suggest. She comments, "Gardens expand the definition of fertility far beyond the production of edibles. Their fertility nourishes the full complement of categories that account for humanity's interactions with the material world. By heightening awareness of life's vulnerabilities and its resiliences, gardening enters the realm of the sacred where life is continually experienced as mysterious and wondrous." Weintraub's work in this exhibition, introduces a fourth category of material interaction – one that offers bountiful opportunities for sensual, aesthetic delights.

Amy Lipton, Curator

Digging Deeper Checklist

Counterclockwise from bottom of stairs:

Hudson Valley Seed Library
Seed packets, (2009 – 2013)
Courtesy of the Hudson Valley Seed Library



Simon Draper
*Habitat for Artists Studio Projects
with Farms and Gardens*, 2009 – 2012
Color photographs
Courtesy of the artists



Linda Weintraub
Let us Eat the Colors of Nature's Spectrum
2012 – 2013
Vegetable and fruits, glass canning jars
Courtesy of the artist



Jenna Spevack
Kitchen Table, 2012
Mixed media
Courtesy of the artist and Mixed Greens



Elaine Tin Nyo
LEAF TEAT CURD RIND, 2011
Portfolio of six, ed. of 10
Archival digital print
Courtesy of the artist



Andrea Reynosa
Deep Water, 2013
Steel and laser print
Edition of 12
In collaboration with Noah Packard Design
Courtesy of the artist and Noah Packard Design



Joan Bankemper
Seed Money, 2013
Photographs, wooden stand,
ceramic vase, cut flowers
Courtesy of the artist



Jenna Spevack
Seeding the City, 2013
Mixed media
Courtesy of the artist and Mixed Greens



OUTSIDE:

Simon Draper
Habitat for Artists (potting shed and
greenhouse structure), 2013
Courtesy of Habitat for Artists, Green Up,
and the Hudson Valley Seed Library



Andrea Reynosa
*Franklin Street Heritage Garden
and Farmstand*, 2013
Courtesy of the artist and seeds provided
by Hudson Valley Seed Library



Flint Public Art Project and Flower Tour

Flower Tour: Displacement of Contemporary Art Worlds

Flower Tour is a group of young artists that emerged in tandem with Flint Public Art Project during its pilot phase of experimenting with ways of engaging the city. Beginning in the summer of 2011, Cinthia Montague and Candice Stewart appeared at our earliest events for downtown Flint's second Friday Art Walks. We were testing ways of activating the street using light, projection art, and performance: images of the two dancing on the sidewalk and in the windows of a 19-story condemned high-rise played a key role in communicating how temporary public art could transform perception of places and produce new experiences of the city

Flint Public Art Project draws on several disciplines in an effort to transform the city's image and identity, activate disused sites, connect places, and amplify the local culture. We use the term public art as shorthand to include both post-Fluxus, Situationist-influenced forms that emerged during the 1970s and 80s, but also more broadly to include contemporary design, architecture, urban design, and planning. The insider art-critical discourse on relational, participatory, and social-practice art has always seemed like a sideshow next to direct experience of immersive works like Pierre Huyghe's *Streamside Day Celebration* or Tino Sehgal's *This Progress*. Participants do not necessarily require art-historical terminology to understand the work or gain anything new from it, although we, too, often use these terms to encourage collaborators to explore a range of possibilities for contemporary art other than painting and sculpture.

As an emerging group, Flower Tour combines several media—fashion design, performance, ceramics, photography, video, and installation—to bring unexpected bursts of color and excitement wherever they appear in public space. The Flower Tour concept developed after the artists, joined by photographer Michelle

Nemeth Puckett, began wearing bright flower hats coordinated with their dress and taking pictures with people they encountered. They started selling and giving away flower hats to participants, and later created Bloom The Traveling Shoppe as a pop-up store and a dedicated space to appear and sell work in during Art Walks. Flower Tour are one of many cultural producers in Flint whose work inspires us, and who we're encouraging to find new ways of engaging audiences there and throughout the region, connecting with contemporary practices in the field, as well as networking with markets and audiences outside of Flint.

We value work that engages people on the street and in public space in critical, fun, conceptual, and provocative ways. Anything that takes art off of the gallery walls, off the building surface, and into an interactive dialogue with the public opens up a radically new set of possibilities. We are interested in the city and the built environment as a space for producing art. We are also interested in reconciling the impetus to produce socially and economically valuable effects with aesthetic motivations of artists, who sometimes produce the best work—and the most economically generative work—when they don't have social or political aims.

How to reconcile these contrary motivations: creating work that is stimulating and unconstrained by a boring intentionality, and producing work that has real social and economic consequences, improving the quality of life in cities and the experience of residents. The two are not really at odds. We want to move the most innovative work from cosmopolitan centers where it contributes to a concentration of wealth and inflated real estate values into places suffering from disastrous economic conditions. We have found this "detournement" to be immensely satisfying and intellectually stimulating. The invitation to bring Flower Tour to Stamford is an exciting reversal, displacing the best contemporary work from Flint and seeing what happens when you launch it into the world. We cannot say what the consequences of these displacements are yet; we can only say that it has been

enjoyable for us and meaningful for our partners to work in this way, and that there are small signs that it is producing its intended effects.

Stephen Zacks, Curator

Flint Public Art Project and Flower Tour Checklist

Stairwell:

Flower Tour

Floriography, 2013

Crepe and tissue paper

Courtesy of the artists: Candice Stewart,
Cinthia Montague, and Michelle Nemeth Puckett



Black Box Gallery:

Flower Tour and Flint Public Art Project

Flint Public Art Project Presents Flower Tour, 2013

Site-specific installation

Courtesy of Flint Public Art Project, Ariel Yelen,
and the Flower Tour artists: Candice Stewart,
Cinthia Montague, and Michelle Nemeth Puckett



Hallway:

Flower Tour and Stephen Zacks

Stephen Zacks interviews Flower Tour, 2013

Video

Courtesy of Flint Public Art Project and the
artists: Candice Stewart, Cinthia Montague,
and Michelle Nemeth Puckett



About the Artists

Joan Bankemper was born in Covington, Kentucky in 1959. She received a B.F.A. from Kansas City Art Institute, Missouri and an M.F.A. from the Maryland Institute College of Art, Mount Royal Graduate School, Baltimore.

The artist's ceramic mosaic vessels grow out of 15 years of commitment to creating urban gardens with the help of surrounding communities. She has worked on projects in New York, Boston, Palermo, Italy and San Antonio, Texas, among others addressing the relationship of people to nature as reflected in the contemporary urban landscape. Her garden projects are not ordinary or formal gardens; they range from restorative healing herb gardens, to gardens based on the shape of the human body, to planting 600 giant sunflowers, which grow from the ruins of a Southern flour mill. For each of her garden projects, the artist worked within a conceptual framework, each a kind of sculpture in nature.

The artist's work has been shown in many venues, most notably Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California and the Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan. Her work has also been exhibited in many garden venues such as Wave Hill, Bronx, New York; Abington Art Center, Jenkinton, Pennsylvania as well as extensively in Italy. (www.hoffmangallery.com)

Andrew Beccone, an artist and librarian, is the founder and director of the Reanimation Library. He received his Masters in Information and Library Science from the Pratt Institute in 2005. In addition to coordinating the library's ongoing New York-based activities, he has organized temporary branch libraries in Carlisle, PA; Chicago; London; Philadelphia; Providence, RI, and Joshua Tree, CA. Upcoming branches will be established in Los Angeles and Mexico City. He lives in Brooklyn.

Pradeep Dalal is an artist and writer. His work was recently included in the exhibitions “Picturing Parallax: Photography and Video from the South Asian Diaspora” in San Francisco and “Exchanging Glances” at Chatterjee & Lal in Mumbai, as well as two shows in New York: “Vision is Elastic. Thought is Elastic” at Murray Guy and “Fifty Artists Photograph the Future” at Higher Pictures. Pradeep has also exhibited at the Herter Art Gallery in Amherst, Aljira Center for Contemporary Art in Newark, TART in San Francisco, and Orchard and PS122 Gallery in New York. His photographic work is included in *Blind Spot 43*. Pradeep’s essay “A Bifocal Frame of Reference” is forthcoming in *Western Artists and India* (Thames and Hudson, 2013). He is a recipient of the Tierney Fellowship, and holds an MFA from ICP/Bard College and a MArch from MIT. He is on the faculty at the International Center of Photography and the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts at Bard College.

Simon Draper was born in Wales and currently resides in Cold Spring, New York. The reuse of materials and objects has been a recurring theme in Draper’s work, and recently he has started to incorporate older artworks and other artist’s works into his own. He believes his shed pieces embody more lyrical ideas and allow people the opportunity to dream. Draper studied at the Bath Academy of Art in Wiltshire, England and also at the Cooper Union in New York. He has exhibited his works in numerous solo and group exhibitions including Meditation, Dedication, and Prayer at Van Brunt Gallery in Beacon, New York and Six American Artists at Anna Carnadona Gallery in Alba, Italy. (www.habitatforartists.org)

Flower Tour is a collective of Flint-based artists that bring life to cities using contemporary art strategies such as performance, sculpture, and a travelling shop. Flower Tour focuses on creating interpersonal art experiences that integrate the observer into the artwork. Formed by the duo of performance artists, Candice Stewart and Cinthia Montague, the collective aims to spark

thought about art as a means to revive, change, or enhance the nature and mood of communities. They have taken their art bombing, which involves the marching of wearable art and mounting of installation pieces, to cities in Michigan, New York, and Connecticut. Flower Tour is currently the artist-in-residence at Red Ink Flint, a not-for-profit arts organization in Flint, Michigan. A contributor to the Flint Public Art Project's Free Cities events, the collective also recently installed mass flowers at the Free Cities benefit in Brooklyn, New York.

The Hudson Valley Seed Library grew out of a germ of an idea at a small town library in the Hudson Valley region of upstate New York. Over the past nine years, the idea has grown and blossomed into an online seed library focused on the Northeast and a full seed catalog for all gardeners. Today, the Seed Library has its own seed farm where open-pollinated seeds are grown, saved, and packed by hand. There are close to one thousand seed library members and thousands more buy our unique Art Packs and heirloom seeds every year. Seed Library gardeners can feel good about their seeds because we care as much as you do about preserving genetic diversity and saving seed stories. (<http://www.seedlibrary.org>)

Amy Lipton is New York director and curator of ecoartspace*, a bi-coastal non-profit organization that creates opportunities for addressing environmental issues through the arts. With ecoartspace and as an independent curator she has organized numerous exhibitions for museums, galleries, sculpture parks, environmental centers and in the public realm. She has written for books and publications, frequently organizes panel discussions and gives lectures on art and its relationship to the natural environment. Lipton was co-curator of *Ecovention* at the Contemporary Art Center in Cincinnati, Ohio (2002) and co-published the accompanying 160-page exhibition catalogue. In 2004 she curated *Imaging the River* at the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, NY. Recent exhibitions include E.P.A, *Environmental*

Performance Actions at Exit Art in New York City (2008); *Down to Earth* at the Schuylkill Environmental Education Center in Philadelphia, PA (2009); *Nurturing Nature* at Concordia College in Bronxville, NY (2010), *Beyond the Horizon* at Deutsche Bank 60 Wall Gallery, New York City, (2011) and *It's the End of the World as We Know It* at Ramapo College Galleries, NJ (2013) Her curatorial project *BiodiverCITY* was part of the 5 x 5 public art project in Washington D.C., presented along with 4 other curators by the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities and the National Cherry Blossom Festival (2012).

* Since 1999 ecoartspace has collaborated with over 150 arts, educational and environmental organizations to produce more than 40 exhibitions and over 100 programs. They have worked with more than 400 artists in 15 states nationally and 8 countries internationally. Currently ecoartspace is developing a media archive of video interviews with artists, a K-12 curriculum guide and a collection of exhibitions ephemera for research purposes.

Elaine Tin Nyo is a conceptual artist and omnivore. Ms. Tin Nyo translates the tradition of genre painting into new media. Since the early 1990s, food has been a vehicle for the artist to explore issues of mortality and responsibility. Using performance, video, photography, cooking and writing, she reframes the everyday rituals of food and its preparation so we may reflect on the inherent beauty and value of the seemingly unimportant moments of our lives. In addition to her visual arts background, she has learned at the side of home cooks and restaurant chefs and collaborated with farmers and butchers on three continents. Now based in New York, Tin Nyo has received project support from the Bronx Museum, Seoksu Art Project, Franklin Furnace and The Phillips Collection, among others. Her photographs, food, videos, installations and performances have been presented at New Museum, Deitch Projects, Creative Time, Färgfabriken, Brooklyn Museum, Josée Bienvenu Gallery, Postmasters Gallery, the French Culinary Institute and other venues. Her project "This Little Piggy" received a Creative Capital Grant in 2013.

After co-founding Smack Mellon (Brooklyn, NY), artist, activist and farmer **Andrea Reynosa** has immersed herself into the life of her new community in Narrowsburg, NY, generating numerous projects and programs that interact with the environment, community and family. She established SkyDog Farm in 2000, a lifestyle experiment involving sustainable agriculture, permaculture, heirloom gardening, child rearing and forest stewardship.

Her engagement as legislator and grant writer for the Town of Tusten, where she served as a Councilwoman in 2012, allowed the Big Eddy Farmstand project to develop into a dynamic experiment involving sustainable food production, the cultivation of a rural youth workforce and an increase in local environmental awareness.

Landscape is a central theme in her work, whether in the form of artistic, social, civic or ecological practice such as the Flow events-artistic gatherings on the Upper Delaware River and Catskill Mountain Park celebrating pure water, the SkyDog Supper Club-a monthly community educational forum centered around issues of Home Rule and Land Use policies or the more formal, stylized rendition of a field of buckwheat emerging out of composted horse manure spelling the word *Water* in Water Garden, 2011. The earth's processes and our human interaction with the environment has long been a primary focus.

Reynosa is currently involved in various community, environmental and artistic enterprises including the creation of a demonstration "chinampa" on SkyDog Farm through her interaction with 'chinamperos' and agriculturists in Xochimilco, Mexico exploring traditional Meso-American farming technology innovated before Aztec times.

Jenna Spevack is a Brooklyn-based artist, designer, educator and advocate focusing on issues of sustainable ecology and human interaction. Her current work merges her varied titles through projects and practices that support resilience in the shifting natural and social-political landscapes. She has a BFA

in Printmaking from the State University of New York at Buffalo and an MFA in Painting/Printmaking from the Rhode Island School of Design. Her work has been shown in one-person and group exhibitions nationally and internationally, including Mixed Greens, NYC, Hendershot Gallery, NYC, Sanlun Yishu, Beijing, Mucius Galéria, Budapest, White Columns, NYC, Art in General, NYC, Artists Space, NYC, Monya Rowe Gallery, NYC, Arts Center of the Capital Region, Troy, NY, Albright Knox Gallery, Buffalo, NY, and Panorama City, Zurich, Switzerland among others. (<http://jennaspevack.com>)

Linda Weintraub is a curator, educator, artist, and author of several popular books about contemporary art. Her recent writing explores the vanguard intersection between art and environmentalism. The title of the newest book is TO LIFE! Eco Art In Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet, was just published by the University of California Press; it is the first college level eco-art text book. Weintraub's previous books on eco-art include the series, Avant-Guardians: Textlets in Art and Ecology (2007). It includes EcoCentric Topics: Pioneering Themes for Eco-Art; Cycle-Logical Art: Recycling Matters for Eco-Art; EnvironMentalities: Twenty-two Approaches to Eco-Art. Weintraub established Artnow Publications in order to apply environmental responsibility to the books' material production.

Weintraub is also the author of In the Making: Creative Options for Contemporary Artists and Art on the Edge and Over: Searching for Art's Meaning in Contemporary Society. She served as the Henry Luce Professor of Emerging Art at Oberlin College, and as the director of the Edith C. Blum Art Institute located on the Bard College campus where she originated fifty exhibitions and published over twenty catalogues. A sampling includes: Process and Product: The Making of Eight Contemporary Masterworks, Landmarks: New Site Proposals by Twenty Pioneers of Environmental Art, Art What Thou Eat: Images of Food in American Art, and The Maximal Implications of the Minimal Line. Since leaving Bard College Weintraub co-curated an internationally

touring exhibition entitled “ANIMAL. ANIMA. ANIMUS” with Marketta Sepalla. Her most recent curatorial project was at the Dorsky Museum at State University of New York at New Paltz entitled “Dear Mother Nature”. The exhibition invited artists to create a gift for Mother Nature that reflects Her current needs and their relationship to Her.

Weintraub received her MFA degree from Rutgers University. She maintains a homestead on an eleven-acre property in upstate New York where she actively applies the principles of Permaculture to food production, land management, and energy generation. She is living in the eighth home that she and her husband designed and built. It is an innovative, efficient industrial galvalum structure.

Stephen Zacks is a reporter, theorist, and cultural producer based in Greenpoint, Brooklyn and a native of Flint, Michigan. A journalist trained in cultural studies, political and social science, and philosophy, he applies a pragmatic standard to reporting on art, architecture, and urbanism.

Zacks has contributed to the *New York Times*, *Monocle*, *Village Voice*, *Popular Science*, *Metropolis*, *Architectural Record*, *Print*, *The Architect’s Newspaper*, *Blueprint*, *TARP Architecture Manual*, and *RIPP Magazine*. His international reporting includes coverage of Israeli architecture in the West Bank, master planning in Dubai, landmarks preservation in Kosovo, the no-man’s land in Nicosia, public art in Panama, the graphic resistance in Serbia, and political art in South Korea.

He founded and co-produced Bring to Light/ Nuit Blanche New York from 2010 to 2012 and co-directed the Collective: Unconscious performance space on the Lower East Side from 1996 to 2002.

He is currently writing [A Beautiful Ruin: The Generation that Transformed New York, 1967-1985](#), a narrative nonfiction book about New York during the period leading up to and after the mid-70s fiscal crisis, reporting for *The Architect’s Newspaper*, *Architectural Record*, *Metropolis*, and *Popular Science*, producing

and directing the Flint Public Art Project, and writing commentary at Heroes & Charlatans.

Zacks received an M.A. in Liberal Studies from the New School for Social Research in 1999 and a B.A. in Interdisciplinary Humanities (History, Philosophy, Anthropology) with honors from Michigan State University in 1994. He has received awards from the New York State Council on the Arts, the Graham Foundation for the Advancement of Fine Arts, ArtPlace, the MacDowell Colony, and the Warhol Foundation.

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