

FARMED

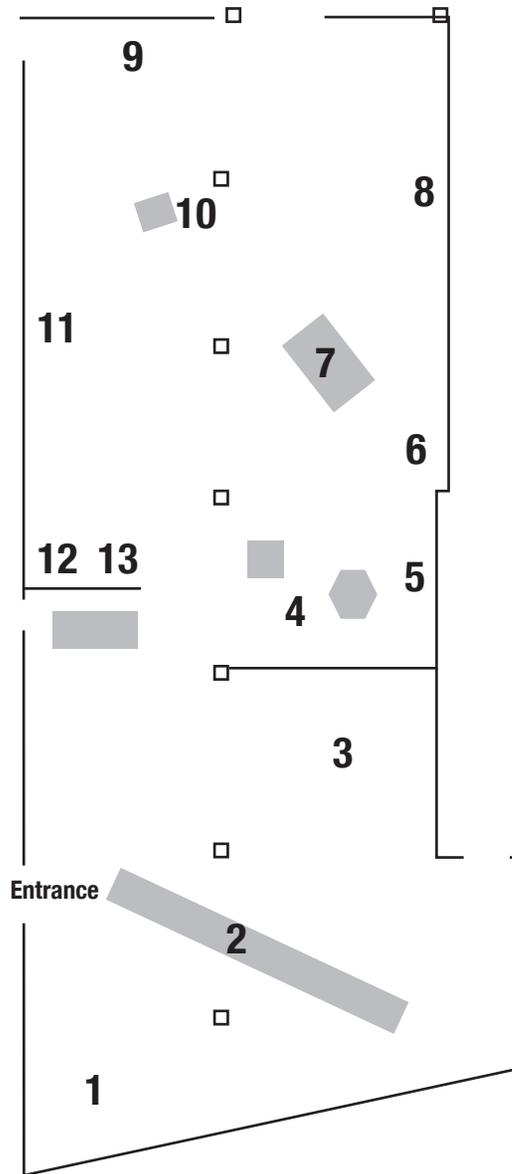
The New Agronomists

Michael Mercil, Arzu Ozkal & Nanette Yannuzzi, Sara Rabinowitz,
and Amy Youngs

May 13 – July 10, 2011



OBJECT CHECKLIST



- 1 Amy Youngs**
Building a Rainbow, 2011
mixed media
- 2 Resource Table**
Feel free to take and contribute agriculturally related reading material.
- 3 Michael Mercil**
Ladder for Fruit Tree, 2003
painted wood and hardware
- 4 Sara Rabinowitz**
Spun-lo, 2011
silkworms, laser-cut boxes, mulbrerry leaves, wood table and shelf system.
Spunlo is a collaboration iwth Nicolas, Mandy and Zoe Economos.
- 5 Sara Rabinowitz**
The Osage Dye Works Central Cleveland Harvest, 2011
natural dyes on silk
The Osage Dye Works is a collaboration between Beth Whalley, Brittney Campbell and Sara Rabinowitz
- 6 Michael Mercil**
The Living Culture Initiative, 2007
digitally printed banner
- 7 Michael Mercil**
Easily Built Dam, 2003
painted wood, hardware, rocks and twigs
- 8 Arzu Ozkal and Nanette Yannuzzi**
Mission: Cleveland Land Mass, 2011
3-D video shot in Mid-Town Cleveland
- 9 Michael Mercil**
Covenant, 2011
digital video traler for full-length documentary projected on barn door
- 10 Michael Mercil**
Fleece Tying Box, 2003
painted wood, hardware, twine and wool
- 11 Michael Mercil**
Inventive Men, 2003
enamel paint on wood floor moldings
- 12 Michael Mercil**
The Living Culture Initiative: The Virtual Pasture, 2007
digitally printed banner
- 13 Michael Mercil**
Gate That Won't Sag, 2003
painted wood and hardware

Christopher Lynn
Executive Director, SPACES

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Thomas Jefferson had a vision of the United States as an agrarian society—one that relies upon agricultural production as its primary means of support rather than banks or manufacturing. Seeing farmers as the backbone of civilization, he stated: “Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bands.”¹

There is something to be said for working with plants and animals for one’s own food, clothing and shelter. A bond is created to a location and its possibilities. Rather than living a nomadic lifestyle, one has to set down roots. Certain varieties of plants and animals are better suited to particular climates and soils, so the strengths and limitations of an area must be intimately understood. Responsible agriculture is a symbiotic relationship with the land, climate and inhabitants.

As with all things dealing with land and the human body, agriculture has become highly politicized. Territorial lines are drawn, property is owned, resources are unequal, and governments regulate rights and trade. It can’t be just as simple as utilizing vacant land to create food. Land must be legally occupied, sale and trade of goods are regulated, there is oversight of the treatment of land and animals, and then there are the issues surrounding Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs).

This exhibition address themes of the production of food and goods through farming. This is by no means a comprehensive view of the issues surrounding agriculture and agronomy. But each artist has a take on the various facets of these issues.

Michael Mercil’s work is both about agriculture and is also direct agricultural practice. Since 2006, Mercil has been “farming” a plot of land belonging to the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, OH. Beginning with a beanfield, Mercil eventually moved on to native grasses and sheep. By bringing food production to the center of an urban campus, he makes something visible that is often invisible. The film trailer for *Covenant*, screening on the north wall of the gallery, is a documentation of this project.

Running parallel is another project dealing with the myths of farming. *Inventive Men* utilizes the dying art of sign painting often employed by roadside farm stands or grocery stores to transcribe excerpts from “Handy Farm Devices and How to Make Them,” a manual from 1909 for the manufacturing of simple farm equipment. The manual is replete with diagrams and anecdotal writing about life on the farm. *Inventive Men* reeks of the historical romanticism of farm life. Mercil has then taken some of the diagrams from the book and recreated them in crisp detail so that they begin to resemble modernist sculpture. A dam, a ladder, and a gate are aesthetically rendered to a point that their functionality is questioned, much in the same way that the hand-painted anecdotes abstract the real function of the advice.

Arzu Ozkal and Nanette Yannuzzi collaborated on a piece staged in Mid-Town Cleveland. Playing off of Cleveland’s recent history of vacant urban land and property, *Mission: Cleveland Land Mass*, is a wry commentary on the nature and expanse of abandoned land in the city of Cleveland. Using 3-D technology, the artists urge

viewers to experience the obvious, the familiar and the ignored through the distorted lens of the camera. When Neil Armstrong landed on the moon on July 1969 the world viewed the incomprehensible from their living rooms. Echoing this, *Mission: Cleveland Land Mass* presents the “first steps” in a visual exploration of Cleveland’s abandoned land and potentials.

Sara Rabinowitz’s *Spun-Lo* project is the second iteration in *Continuous Process, perfect mile by mile inch by inch*. Spun-Lo was originally a subsidiary company to the Industrial Rayon Corp. of Cleveland, Ohio. In its new form, Spun-Lo is a peace operation under the direction of Nicolas, Mandy, and Zoe Economos and Sara Rabinowitz. Together they have set up a new silkworm nursery feeding on Cleveland’s excess Mulberry leaves. Using a model outlined in the US Congressional report “In Relation to the Growth and Manufacture of Silk” dating from 1828, silk will be cultivated throughout the duration of this exhibition. Visitors are invited to take home a few silkworms to raise and contribute to the resulting Cleveland Strand. After all cocoons have been harvested, the fiber will be mailed back to Sara Rabinowitz to spin into a single thread to donate back to the City of Cleveland.

Working under the auspices of the Osage Dye Works, Beth Whalley, Brittany Campbell and Sara Rabinowitz present *The Cleveland Spectrum*. The three artists conducted a dye hunt followed by extraction May 7-10, 2011. Color swatches featuring dyes extracted from plants from around SPACES are displayed along with an accompanying flag dyed from these elements. Sara’s agronomical approach deals not in the cultivation and domestication of her environment, but a utilization of the naturally occurring elements. More information can be found at <http://www.continuousprocess.net>.

Amy Youngs’ *Building a Rainbow* is an installation that transforms waste into a colorful indoor water feature that grows edible plants. Waste streams of uneaten food, old tea-bags, newspapers already read and throw-away plastic household objects are turned into lettuce, basil, wheatgrass and herbs. The plants live in plastic containers sourced from thrift stores and they are fed by nutrient-rich water recycling throughout the system. All nutrients come from food and paper waste that is transformed by composting worms within the system.

These works provide access to possibilities within responsible farming. How did we come by our clothes, homes and food? Are we leaving sustainable practices for our children? How self-sufficient can we be? How respectful are we to the elements that provide for us? In a consumer- and corporation-driven society, some of the best changes we can make are in our spending habits. Support local, grow your own, purchase from responsible companies, check the labels and be informed.

In addition to the artists in the gallery, SPACES tips its hat to all of the artists outside the gallery who are working to come up with innovative approaches to healthy plant and animal growth and public distribution. This includes, but is not limited to The Countryside Conservancy, E4S, Ohio City Farm, City Fresh, Gardens Under Glass, and the George Jones Farm and Nature Preserve. Northeast Ohio is doing a tremendous amount of work around local food consumption and responsible farming practices.

Boyd, Julian P., Charles T. Cullen, John Catanzariti, Barbara B. Oberg, et al, eds. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950-) 8:426.

ARTIST BIOS

Michael Mercil

Michael Mercil lives in Columbus, Ohio where he is Associate Professor and Chair of Graduate Studies in the Department of Art at The Ohio State University. Her received an M.F.A. degree from the University of Chicago in 1984, and his B.F.A. from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design in 1978.

Mercil's artwork has recently been exhibited at Socrates Sculpture Park, New York City; the Columbus Museum of Art; the North Dakota Museum of Art; the Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia; and the University of Virginia Art Museum. In 2006 he planted The Beanfield--a project in partnership with the Wexner Center for the Arts, the OSU Department of Art Living Culture Initiative, and the Social Responsibility Initiative in the College of Food, Agriculture, and Environmental Sciences. His public commissions include Teardrop Park in New York City, and the Allegheny Riverfront Park in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania--both with artist Ann Hamilton and landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh.

Mercil's awards include an Ohio Arts Council Fellowship, a Progressive Architecture Citation Award, a McKnight Foundation Visual Arts Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts Artist Design Fellowship, and a Jerome Foundation Visual Arts Fellowship. He has been a visiting artist and/or lecturer at the Myers School of Art, University of Akron; Virginia Commonwealth University; the Minneapolis College of Art and Design Institute for Public Art, Harvard University Graduate School of Design; and Antioch College. A former contributor to PLACES magazine, Mercil's writings have also appeared in TriQuarterly, and Public Art Review.

Arzu Ozkal

Arzu Ozkal's practice can be grouped under the interpretation of body and its relationship to the environment. She makes attempts to emancipate the body from social and cultural norms and suggest ways to distance one from the limits imposed on the society by totalitarian establishments—question dogmas, traditions, laws, and patriarchal value systems through videos, public interventions and performances.

Ozkal is a Turkish born media artist and designer. She received her M.F.A. from the Department of Visual Studies at University at Buffalo, SUNY and B.F.A. in Graphic Design from Bilkent University. She has exhibited broadly in exhibitions and festivals across the US and in many countries including Germany, Spain, France, Russia, and Turkey.

Since 2008, she has served as a Visiting Assistant Professor of New Meida at Oberlin College, where she teaches, organizes events, and contributes to curriculum development in the Art Department.

Sara Rabinowitz

Sara Rabinowitz is currently the Fibers Coordinator and Visiting Professor in the Fibers Department at the University of Oregon. Previously she was a faculty member at the Cleveland Institute of Art in the Fiber and Material Studies department.

Rabinowitz has exhibited with Prospect I, New Orleans, LA; Reinberger Gallery, Cleveland Institute of Art, Cleveland, OH; Betty Rymer Gallery Chicago, IL; Sculpture Center LIC, NY; Project Space, Chicago, IL; Dan Tague Giola Gallery, Chicago, IL;

Base Space, Chicago, IL; Dirt Palace, Olneyville, RI; Woods Gerry Gallery, RISD, Providence, RI; and The Arcade, Providence, RI.

Her work centers around fibers and weaving as a means to and metaphor for social interaction. Recently she has been raising silkworms and humanely harvesting their silk for her practice.

Nannette Yannuzzi

Nanette Yannuzzi received her M.F.A. from The University of California, San Diego, during which time she was also a fellow at the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program. She received her B.F.A. from The Cooper Union School of Art and Science, and an Associates Degree from Bucks County Community College. Her work has been shown in the United States, South America, and, most recently, the Middle East, Istanbul, Turkey).

Yannuzzi has been working on gathering the intimate details of daily life as artist and mother. Yannuzzi seeks not to critique domesticity, but to understand it through the accretion of its artifact. Time is a key element in the artist's work, both in its gestation and its expression. Her series Action:Collections from 1994-present is the artist's attempt to document life in alternative, unedited means. Whether collecting her own washing machine lint, her son and daughters nail clippings, daily drawings produced within a finite period of days, audio feed from a recorder worn at her waist as she went about her work over the course of a month, Audio Days, 2000; or time-based images collected over several months from two stationary cameras positioned within the artist's home, Video Days, 2000). Time and experience in Yannuzzi's art is understandable as evidenced in each and every choate artifact, the personal, evocative, and intimate evidence of life.

Yannuzzi has collaborated with many artists and writers who share concerns and interest in art, the environment, labor, and value. Within her course, Art and Environment, and in collaboration with enrolled students, she has created several public art works. "Fields" is a bas-relief mural on the north and west face of a straw bale building at the New Agrarian Center in Oberlin; completed with Green builder Chris Fox. The second, an arbor, in collaboration artists Kristopher Perry and Ayla Zeimer. Most recently, 2010) she co-curated an exhibition, Relief Valve, at The New Agrarian Center/George Jones Farm, with artist Arzu Ozkal. The 14 selected art works, by artists throughout Turkey, provide insight into land use, biodiversity, and recent controversy over genetically modified foods in Turkey.

Amy Youngs

Amy M. Youngs creates biological art, interactive sculptures and digital media works that explore the complex relationship between technology and our changing concept of nature and self. She has exhibited her works nationally and internationally at venues such as the Biennale of Electronic Arts, Perth, Australia; Te Papa Museum, Wellington, New Zeland; John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin; the Tweed Museum, Duluth, MN; Circulo de Bellas Artes, Madrid, Spain; the Visual Arts Museum, Pace Digital Gallery, New York, NY; the Art Institute of Chicago's Betty Rymer Gallery, Vedanta Gallery, Northern Illinois University Art Gallery, Chicago, IL; Blasthaus,, San Francisco, CA) and Works, San Jose, CA). Her artwork has been reviewed in publications such as, The Chicago Reader, Toronto Star, San Francisco Bay Guardian, RealTime and Artweek.

Youngs has published several essays, including one on genetic art in the journal Leonardo and another on art, technology and ecology in the international art

publication *Nouvel Objet* in 2001. Her work was profiled in the recent book, *Art in Action, Nature, Creativity & our Collective Future*. She has lectured on her work widely, including at Columbia College, Chicago, IL; the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston, Massachusetts; the Australian Center For the Moving Image, Melbourne, Australia) and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN) and has participated in panels at professional conferences such as the Women's Caucus for the Arts and the College Arts Association. In 2002, Youngs was awarded an Individual Artist Fellowship Grant from the Ohio Arts Council. Youngs received a BA from San Francisco State University, graduating Summa Cum Laude and Art Student Honoree of her class. She was awarded a full Merit Scholarship to study at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she completed her M.F.A. in 1999. Youngs is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Art at The Ohio State University.

THANKS

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