

environmental art for collective consciousness





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Published in conjunction with the exhibition



California State University, Fullerton Nicholas and Lee Begovich Gallery 31 August through 4 October, 2013

Published by
Nicholas and Lee Begovich Gallery
And Grand Central Press

Printed by Permanent Printing, Ltd., China

Distributed by Ginko Press, Inc. 1321 Fifth Street Berkeley, CA 94710

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ISBN 978-0-935314-91-5

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### DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

Mike McGee

Concern for man's relationship to nature and the well-being of the planet has, perhaps since the cave paintings at Lascaux, been an integral part of the artist's lexicon. As humankind has increased its capacity to impact the earth and scientists have increasingly expressed alarm about that impact, it makes sense that artists have increasingly engaged our relationship, on both a micro and macro level, to the planet. As Patricia Watts points out in her articulate essay for this publication, addressing these issues coalesced into an identifiable, albeit elusive to define, movement in the 1960s and 70s. Ego/Eco takes a fresh look at the this phenomenon, combining work by original participants such as Helen and Newton Harrison, who began exhibiting as a husband and wife team in the 1960s, and new views on these subjects by younger artists such as the artist collective Fallen Fruit.

Much to their credit, cocurators Allison Town and Emily Tyler organized an exhibition of works that are esthetically stunning and intellectually engaging while inspiring us to consider the planet and environment in which we live. I want to thank all the artists who participated in the exhibition.

I especially extend a heartfelt thank you to Nicole Dextras. In addition to participating in the exhibition, she was an artist-in-residence who collaborated with the curators, students, and staff at the university's Fullerton Arboretum to engage the community and create works using beautiful organic materials grown on campus.

I thank Greg Dyment, Director of the Fullerton Arboretum, and his staff for their thoughtful and energetic involvement in the project. I also thank the models who volunteered for Dextras' project, including my wife, Andrea Harris-McGee, whose charisma and commitment to arts engagement inspired her draft into the cause. By their very nature, all of our projects involve collaborations, but this project involved an unusually large number of people. To that end, the exhibition curators effectively coordinated all the parts of the project with tremendous support from the Begovich Gallery, including Marty Lorigan, Preparator; Jackie Bunge, Gallery Programs Curator; and Art Department staff. Finally, I extend a note of congratulations to the exhibition curators for the success of this project.

# CURATORS' STATEMENT

Allison Town and Emily D. A. Tyler

EgolEco: Environmental Art for Collective Consciousness invites viewers to engage in a global conversation about human relationships with the earth, encouraging individual reflection and collective environmental mindfulness. We hope that viewers will be empowered to evaluate and change ego (self) and eco (environment) partnerships in their own lives through self-evaluation, sustainable practices, community involvement, and the strength of collective consciousness.

To understand the complex role one must take on as a steward of the environment, it is necessary first to evaluate the self from all angles. We ask viewers to remain aware of how they view each work in this exhibition and how their own interaction influences their understanding of the artist's message. In remaining aware of the act of perceiving—thinking about thinking—an individual can become more actively engaged and open to the critical digestion of ideas.

The term "collective consciousness" is used by sociologists to explain how autonomous individuals identify with a larger group through shared beliefs and attitudes. We live in an era in which mobile technologies and social media outlets make this kind of sharing exceedingly easy. The ease of anonymity, mobility, and speed with which people access information can drastically divert one's ability to focus attention on an individual issue and carry through with effective action. So, what does our contemporary collective consciousness look like? Is it in our power to reform? We propose that in order to remediate a collective consciousness, it is essential to revitalize human relationships and community.

EgolEco encourages commitment to the slower digestion of ideas and to real action and participation rather than apathy. While the gallery space functions to enhance viewers' understanding of collective consciousness in regard to global environmental sustainability, the artist-in-residency collaboration and associated programming events generate the means for community engagement and meaningful action, which extend beyond the gallery setting and into our local environment.



# EGO|ECO LOGIC

Patricia L. Watts

Nature is the art of which we are a part. — Nils-Udo

After two decades of consideration about what to name this kind of work—art inspired by the Earth and Land Art movements of the 1960s and 1970s—ecoart, ecological art, and environmental art have become the most common labels. Now, could you get a roomful of artists and curators to agree on what type of art this is? Can it be performance-based work? Is it environmental restoration? Or what about painting and sculpture? These are questions that at least one hundred artists, art historians, and curators who have engaged in an online dialogue, called "ecoartnetwork," have continuously debated since 1999.

Ruth Wallen, one of the dialogue's founders, summarized for the network a collective definition: "Ecological art, or eco-art, to use the abbreviated term, addresses both the heart and the mind. Ecological artwork can help engender an intuitive appreciation of the environment, address core values, advocate political action, and broaden intellectual understanding." During my participation with the network, since its inception, I have remained committed to the idea that all artworks in any medium that focus on environmental issues can be considered ecoart. However, a few dialogue members who have written their PhD theses on ecoart

insist that it consists primarily of work that remediates or restores a specific site in the landscape and that it does not include objects.

It was Lucy Lippard who first acknowledged, in her book Overlay (1983), a new movement of artists who were ecologically conscientious. "Ecological art—with its emphasis on social concern, low profile, and more sensitive attitudes toward the ecosystem—differs from the earthworks of the mid-1960s."2 The emerging artists she referred to saw the potential to work outdoors, to collaborate with scientists, and to create "art" that was mostly invisible. One of the earliest examples of this "new" work was Alan Sonfist's Time Landscape, sited in lower Manhattan, which was conceived in the mid 1960s and fully realized in 1978. It consists of a vacant lot, which he transformed into a living monument of precolonial indigenous trees. Yet, after thirtyplus years of this type of restoration-based work and of more recent (since the millennium) smaller-scale socialpractice and dialogic artworks in the urban public sphere, there is also - and always has been, and always will be the desire to contemplate the art object.



Suzanne Lacy, a socially engaged public artist and editor of the book *Mapping the Terrain* (1995), who named this movement of art in the public sphere New Genre Public Art, has pointed out to me on several occasions that, before ecoart, disciplines known as Activist Art and Community Arts were practiced. These movements also represented a form of engagement with the public and advocated action for social and environmental betterment. However, this type of participatory art focused more on the process through which the art engaged the public than on the subject matter, an important distinction that was recently examined in an essay by Scottish artist Andrew Schrag.<sup>3</sup>

Another example of this yet-unnamed ecoart movement is Bonnie Sherk's *Crossroads Community (the Farm)* of 1974–80, a collaborative work done in San Francisco that was an environmental statement about the lack of connections to nature in the urban environment. *The Farm*, which was sited underneath a freeway interchange, was considered a community arts project and alternative space. At the time, Earth Art or Land Art was acknowledged, but a separate category for ecoart had not yet been established.

The more recent name for art in the public sphere that seeks to effect social change is Social Practice; in fact, several art departments nationally offer academic certificates and degrees in this field. So, has Community Arts been coopted by Social Practice? Or is it different? And can ecoart be considered its own movement, or is it simply Social Practice focused on environmental issues? And can more traditional object-based arts be a part of this dialogue? In 2010 Sam Bower of Greenmuseum summarized a wide range of labels applied to ecoart, and he feels we need as many perspectives as there are approaches.<sup>4</sup> And although many of us in the art

world understand the evolution of Community Arts and the current development of Social Practice, the desire, among both artists and curators, to retain the object—remains a dilemma. It is a unique opportunity in both commercial and nonprofit gallery settings to create a safe haven where an object relation can be developed to consider the grand scale and consequences of environmental devastation.

We are all ego-driven beings, and no matter how successful we are at recycling and at growing our own food, we are continually faced with our own desires to communicate through tools (objects, if you will), such as computers and smartphones, and to travel around the world. These instruments and activities expend natural resources and counter our wish to walk lightly on the planet. And who's to say, even with a large movement of people moving off the grid (which Lucy Lippard did when she moved from New York City to New Mexico several years ago), that seven billion of us (and counting) could live modern lives sustainably? Hasn't James Lovelock, the scientist and prophet of doom who proposed the Gaia Theory, already decided that it's too late, or almost too late—that we can't reverse what has been done and should consider all acts of remediation useless? One of his famous quotes is "Let's make hay while it lasts." However, in 2012 he backtracked to confess, "I was an alarmist about climate change."5

In the exhibition *Ego/Eco: Environmental Art for Collective Consciousness*, cocurators Allison Town and Emily Tyler selected a wide range of works that fall under the many categories of ecoart. Some of the installations and environments created by the artists were documentations or representations of projects that originated at a different time and place. Included were nine of Fallen Fruit's maps

of neighborhoods in Los Angeles where fruit trees grow in public spaces or hang over fences and sidewalks, and fifty of Green Patriots' climate-change posters from the 2010 New Activism competition. On view also were an oversized handmade book by Helen and Newton Harrison (1984) with painted photographic images of lagoons, and an ongoing series by Jim Cokas of "visual poetry," including letterpress broadsides. Conceptual sculptures by Allison Moritsugu, Andre Woodward, Jacci Den Hartog, Terry Berlier, and Esther Traugot included a variety of objects: paintings on log segments, a network of steel and audio speakers mounted on a large redwood slab, paintings on modeled paper on steel, plywood representations of tree rings, and fiber-covered tree roots and seeds. A series of framed archival inkjet prints of vast amounts of toothpicks, paper bags, and plastics, all by Chris Jordan, were displayed, as well as a photogravure series of scientific surrealist narratives by Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison. The two most interactive of the works included Vaughn Bell's hand-size biospheres, which visitors could adopt after signing adoption papers, and Nicole Dextras' Urban Forager dresses, which integrated live plants cultivated from the Fullerton Arboretum during her artist residency, including edible fruits and vegetables that the public was invited to sample and care for by watering.

At this point in my understanding of the evolution of this type of work, and with the knowledge of the dramatic shift of baselines related to the environment since the 1960s, I have come to the conclusion that art alone cannot save the planet nor can I as an individual. That said, I do believe that the actions, in all forms—public, private, and professional—of each and every one of us collectively are going to make the real difference. I'm not sure how this groundswell is to happen, but I'm certain that it will not be from a narrowly

defined art movement. It will probably take an increased level of consciousness across large populations that only some apocalyptic event could inspire—but hopefully not. In the meantime, exhibitions such as Ego/Eco capture the heart of what environmental art, ecological art, or ecoart is about, as it seeks to connect with arts patrons both inside and outside the museum setting, where artworks both ephemeral and object based can be contemplated and digested on one's own time.

Patricia Lea Watts Founder/Curator, ecoartspace Graduate of the CSUF Exhibition Design Program, Class of 1992

- 1. http://www.ecoartnetwork.org.
- 2. Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory (New York: New Press, 1983), 229–30.
- "The Artist as Social Worker vs. the Artist as Social Wanker," http://conflictsocialconflict.wordpress.com/2013/11/28/ the-artist-as-social-worker-vs-the-artist-as-social-wanker/.
- 4. "A Profusion of Terms," Greenmuseum website, 2010, http://greenmuseum.org/generic\_content.php?ct\_id=306.
- 5. MSNBC Interview, April 23, 2012, http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/\_news/2012/04/23/11144098-gaia-scientist-james-lovelock-i-was-alarmist-about-climate-change.

# COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS:

### THINKING ABOUT THINKING

Emily D.A. Tyler

It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see. — Henry David Thoreau

According to art critic and writer John Lane, we have reached an "artistic crisis," which requires the redefinition of art in contemporary society. Lane states, "The five-hundred-year-old Humanistic tradition of art for the elite, art cut off from society, from nature and the sacred cannot serve the needs of our future society." Environmental sustainability is fundamentally important to future society. It is the promise of a future. If the arts are viewed as a means for communicating meaningful experiences that resonate over time and across disciplines and cultures, then in theory the arts should also be acknowledged for holding value as a model for sustainability.

Lane also addresses concern about the alienation of creativity or the artist within ourselves<sup>2</sup> as playing a major role in the current "crisis." A 2010 *Newsweek* article, "The Creativity Crisis," identifies the fostering of creativity as imperative in the fight to change human neurological patterns for accommodating new ways of thinking.<sup>3</sup> Based on studies conducted in the United States that utilized "the gold standard in creativity assessment"—the Torrance Creativity Index—the article explains that while new generations evidence increased intelligence (known as the Flynn effect), a reverse trend has been identified for American creativity scores.

Facing implications of "artistic crisis," "creativity crisis," and "environmental crisis," there has never been a more vital time to examine the role of art in society. How has the cultural value of the arts changed over time? Can art bring about social transformation or does it simply reflect larger sociopolitical shift?<sup>4</sup> Can the arts inspire a new ecological worldview?

To even begin to tackle a response to these lofty questions, it was essential to examine aspects of how the past has informed the present. Of particular inspiration to the development of *EgolEco: Environmental Art for Collective Consciousness* were dialogues presented by curator Harald Szeemann (1933-2005) and curator, critic, and historian Hans-Ulrich Obrist (b. 1968), both of whom introduced new paradigms for artists and their viewing audiences beginning in the 1970s.

Szeemann is often acknowledged as innovating the contemporary model for exhibition-making. Promoting cross-disciplinary art, nonchronological exhibitions, and experimental museum spaces, Szeemann helped initiate a change in the relationship between artists and their artwork. For an exhibition of conceptual art in 1971, Szeemann chose works "because of their pictorial and plastic qualities or their intensity of method, concept, intention,



obsession." This approach signaled a shift of interest away from a result: instead, the activity and process of the artist became prioritized above that of the medium.

The artworks exhibited in *EgolEco* reflect a commitment to cross-disciplinary approaches and intensities of method, concept, intention, and obsession. The exhibition acknowledges a critical examination of not only the relationship between artist and artwork, but also unique relationships with viewers. Highlighting the act of viewing contemporary art—awakening awareness of the significance of a responsive relationship—in turn urges us to think about how we think.

According to contemporary artist, educator, and theorist Tim Collins, a major cultural value of art lies in "its ability to question the canon, the rules, the principles and standards that both confine and authorize the thinking of other disciplines." Many neuroscientists assert that consistently participating in creative activities allows for those participants to "recruit their brains' creative networks quicker and better," enabling the analysis of new and different perspectives. Through an inherent ability to straddle the line between divergent and convergent cognition, the arts occupy a privileged position for promoting creativity and problem solving. As the *Newsweek* article suggested, *how* we think matters. An effort to bolster the creativity factor in our everyday activities should be embraced if our society aspires to envision a new ecological worldview.

Obrist asserts his own arguments for assimilating art into everyday life. He proposes that viewing art is a cultural activity and, according to one source, he believes that "with the subtraction of normal barriers and boundaries associated with the exhibition of art, the viewer's experience of the work is purified, and [their] access to it increased." Art that functions in a manner similar to everyday human activity creates diversely open-ended experiences in which emotional sentiment and poignancy are activated through viewer participation.

The artists included in *EgolEco* take the physicality of viewers into careful consideration; many of them challenge the notion that spectatorship is rooted in a polarity between an observer and the observed. This distinction starts to become porous when viewers are encouraged to be active participants in the works presented inside and outside the gallery setting. The curators and artists in *EgolEco* advocate the idea that community-based forms of artistic practice help develop a sense of collective authorship and the possibility for the mediation of new social meaning. Encountering art in this social context might change current attitudes held by viewers, enabling them to envision a larger reality beyond the sum of their individual experiences.

EgolEco assigns value to the thoughtful digestion of ideas, slow technologies, human relationships, and participation in cultural activities rooted in compassion, action, and community. The potential for envisioning environmental remediation and a new ecological worldview may lie in the ability to embrace a more progressive integration of creativity, art, and society. A society that is willing to take creative risk, forge new connections, and cross disciplines and cultures consciously and collectively will be able to positively change its relationship with the environment.

#### **Author's Note**

I carry forward with me many of the legacies of my previous Quaker school education, including a passion for championing stewardship of the environment and valuing time for thoughtful reflection. As life proves progressively more complicated and as I fall forever victim to the limits and cadence of technology, I find myself increasingly drawn to the idea of taking pause for reflection. Actively engaging in decelerated and thoughtful digestion is something that many people take for granted. But it is within these moments we are more likely to make meaningful and empathetic connections.

- 1. John Lane, A Snake's Tail Full of Ants: Art, Ecology and Consciousness (Devon, U.K.: Green Books, 1996).
- 2. Lane, A Snake's Tail...
- 3. Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman, "The Creativity Crisis," *Newsweek*, July 10, 2010, http://www.newsweek.com/creativity-crisis-74665
- 4. This particular question, posed by Lippard, is part of a larger discussion about the role of contemporary art and globalization. Quoted by W.T.J. Mitchell, "World Pictures: Globalization and Visual Culture," in Jonathan Harris, ed., *Globalization and Contemporary Art* (West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), Part 4, Ch. 16, p. 285.

- Quoted in Kaldor Public Art Projects, accessed March 23, 2011, http://kaldorartprojects.org.au/project-archive/ harald-szeemann-1971
- "The Future: Could it be Ecohumanist Arts?," in Robert France, ed., Healing Natures, Repairing Relationships: New Voices on Restoring Ecological Spaces and Consciousness (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).
- 7. Bronson and Merryman, "The Creativity Crisis."
- 8. "Divergent thinking is a thought process or method used to generate creative ideas by exploring many possible solutions." (Wikipedia, accessed April 10, 2013)
- 9. "Convergent thinking is a term coined by Joy Paul Guilford as the opposite of divergent thinking. It generally means the ability to give the 'correct' answer to standard questions that do not require significant creativity. It is the type of thinking that focuses on coming up with the single, well-established answer to a problem." (Wikipedia, accessed April 10, 2013)
- From the website for the The European Graduate School, accessed March 23, 2013, http://www.egs.edu/faculty/ hans-ulrich-obrist/biography/

# TERRY BERLIER

As innovations alter how we perceive and interact with the world, are we coming closer to or farther from understanding each other and the world around us? In continually mining this question, I find the memory of time and history preserved in the natural environment surrounding us as a major theme in my practice. The traces and clues discovered in this investigation reveal quasi-cyclical patterns of the past and remind us at the same time to question how we might use that evidence to move forward ethically.

Terry Berlier is an interdisciplinary artist who works primarily in sculptural, installation, and sound-based mediums. Kinetically inspired, often environmentally focused and interactive, Berlier's work investigates how the passage of time and the construct of history mediate our understanding of ingenuity and progress.

The installation *Long Time I* is composed of what resemble 27 crosscut sections or growth rings of a tree evenly spaced and suspended in midair. The layers gradually extend through space to reflect the physical implication of time—the projection of "long time" and long-term thinking, into the past and into the future.

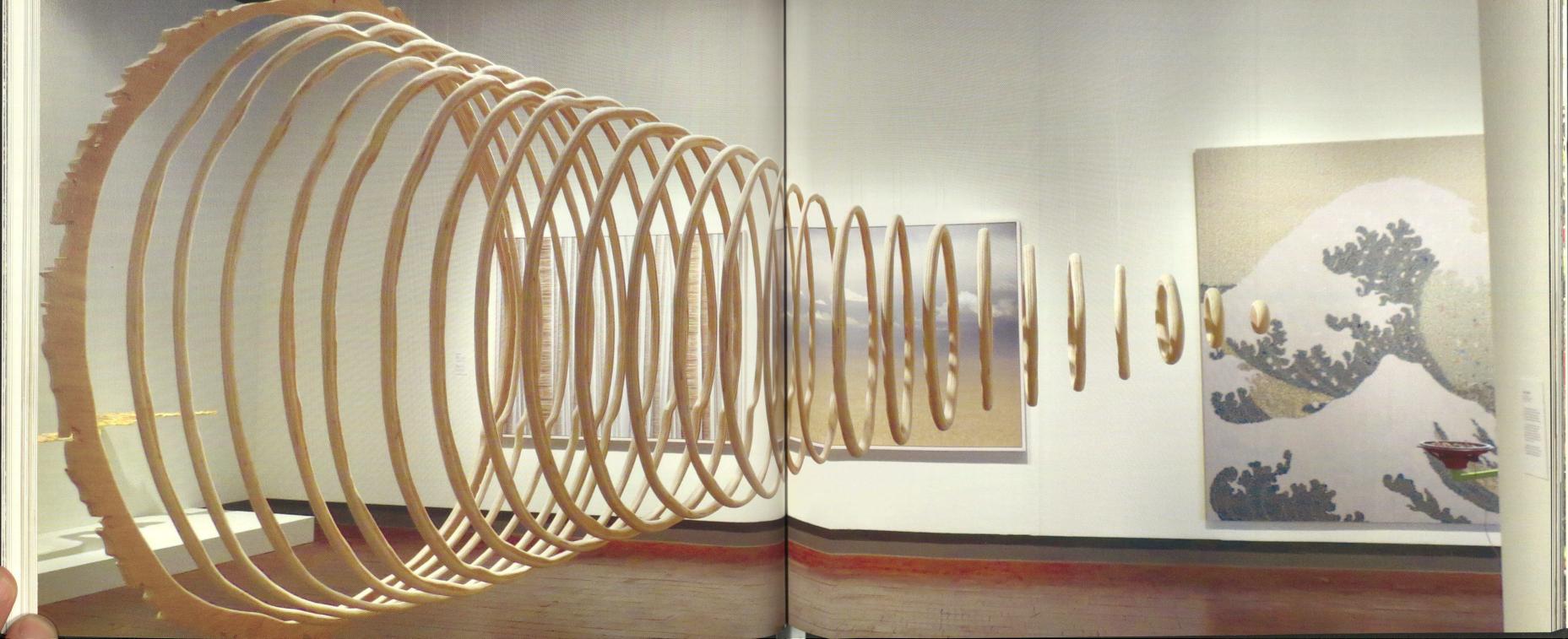
Wonderfully playful and profound, *Long Time I* demonstrates Berlier's concern with cultural memory and environmental ethics. The piece encourages viewers to slow down and discover new vantage points while circumnavigating the piece. The elegant configuration also evokes the time flow of natural processes. Through the act of viewing this piece, the participant experiences the pace of a human life juxtaposed with the cadence of nature.

### **Biography**

Terry Berlier earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and a Master of Fine Arts in Studio Art from the University of California, Davis. Berlier has exhibited in numerous solo and group shows nationally and internationally, at venues in New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Los Angeles, Sacramento, Australia, Spain, Norway, and Israel. She has been awarded numerous fellowships and residency programs, including a 2012 Artist-in-Residence, Lademoen Kunstnerverksteder (LKV) in Trondheim, Norway, and a 2011-12 Recology Artist-in-Residence Program in San Francisco, California; she received the Kala Art Institute fellowship and residency for 2009-10 in Berkeley, California, and a 2010 residency at the Hungarian Multicultural Center in Budapest, Hungary. Berlier lives in Oakland, California, and teaches Sculpture at Stanford University, Palo Alto, California.

Pictured on opposite and the following page: **Terry Berlier** | *Long Time I* | 2009 | Plywood, monofilament | 48 x 48 x 72 inches | Photographs by Glynis Brown









### EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

### Vaughn Bell

Pocket Biospheres for Adoption Installation and Performance | 2004-Ongoing 26 acrylic spheres filled with soil, moss and ferns collected from the artist's home state of Washington; accompanied by adoption papers and caretaker booklets Dimensions Variable (2-inch diameter spheres) Courtesy of the artist

### **Terry Berlier**

Long Time I | 2009 Plywood and monofilament 48 x 48 x 72 inches Courtesy of the artist

#### Jim Cokas

The Conversation | 2010 Hard Maple, granite river stones, and archival digital print 8 x 11 x 11 inches Courtesy of the artist

Mike Burwell: Your Land (Broadsides series) | 2011 Signed, limited edition giclée and letterpress poetry print 13 x 10 inches Courtesy of the artist Bob Hicok: The Maple (Broadsides series) | 2010 Signed, limited edition giclée and letterpress poetry print 13 x 10 inches Courtesy of the artist

Jane Hirshfield: Late Prayer
(Broadsides series) | 2013
Signed, limited edition giclée and letterpress poetry print
13 x 10 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Dorianne Laux: Cello
(Broadsides series) | 2007
Signed, limited edition giclée and letterpress poetry print
13 x 10 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Joseph Stroud: Homage to the Presence of the Mystery Among Us (Broadsides series) | 2009 Signed, limited edition giclée and letterpress poetry print 13 x 10 inches Courtesy of the artist

#### **Nicole Dextras**

Urban Foragers Documentary | 2013 Video documentation of the artist and her series, Urban Foragers {house of ecodrifters} at California State University, Fullerton 7:25 minutes Courtesy of the artist

Mobile Garden Dress Performance
(Urban Foragers {house of eco-drifters}
series) | 2011
Willow, woven Tule, cattail and basketry
reed, canvas, cotton, corn husks, Peruvian
peppers and a variety of edible plants
Dimensions Variable
Courtesy of the artist

Nomadik Harvest Dress Performance
(Urban Foragers {house of eco-drifters}
series) | 2012
Baltic Birch, bamboo, moss, canvas, cotton,
repurposed wool sweaters, a variety of local
fruits and vegetables, stove and porcelainon-steel pot
Dimensions Variable
Courtesy of the artist

Traveling SeedBomb Dress Performance and Installation (Urban Foragers {house of eco-drifters} series) | 2013 Cedar, Baltic Birch, hand-painted canvas, seed packets, and seedbombs Dimensions Variable Courtesy of the artist

The Mandarin Princess
(Little Green Dress Projekt series)
Fullerton Arboretum Installation | 2013
Organic materials foraged from the
Cultivated living collection at the
Fullerton Arboretum
48 x 24 x 24 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Dame Dracaena La Puente
(Little Green Dress Projekt series)
Fullerton Arboretum Installation | 2013
Organic materials foraged from the Desert
and Cultivated living collections at the
Fullerton Arboretum
48 x 24 x 24 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Queen Gabriella San Nicholas
(Little Green Dress Projekt series)
Fullerton Arboretum Installation | 2013
Organic materials foraged from the
Woodlands living collection at the
Fullerton Arboretum
48 x 24 x 24 inches
Courtesy of the artist

### **Fallen Fruit**

A collaboration of artists David Burns,
Matias Viegener and Austin Young
Neighborhood Fruit Maps (select maps) |
2004 - Ongoing
Inkjet prints on banana leaf fiber paper.
Nine California neighborhoods selected:
Claremont, Venice Beach, Bel Aire, Echo
Park, Sherman Oaks, Sunset Junction,
Larchmont, Pasadena and Silver Lake.
11 x 8.5 inches (each)
Courtesy of the artists

A collaboration of artists David Burns, Matias Viegener and Austin Young Double Standard | 2008 High definition video 30 minutes Courtesy of the artists

### **Newton & Helen Harrison**

Book of the Lagoons | 1985 A handmade book of 45 pages; handpainted photographic images and pen on paper 21.5 x 55.5 x 2.75 inches (open) Courtesy of the artists

Book of the Lagoons (select pages) | 1985 Two pages; hand-painted archival photographic images on paper 20 x 24 inches (each) Courtesy of the artists Portable Orchard: Survival Piece #5
(blueprint) | 1972-73
Architectural rendering on vellum of the original installation commissioned by California State University, Fullerton 24 x 36 inches
Collection California State University, Fullerton

Portable Orchard: Survival Piece #5 (detail) (Photographic documentation) detail | 1972-73 Photographic documentation of the original installation commissioned by California State University, Fullerton 72 x 59 inches Collection California State University, Fullerton

### Jacci Den Hartog

Trip to Big Sur | 2009
Acrylic on paper-based polymerized modeling medium and steel
23 x 121.5 x 34.5 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Rosamund Felsen
Gallery, Santa Monica, CA

### Chris Jordan

Gyre | 2009 Archival inkjet print 96 x 132 inches Courtesy of the artist