

My Transient Life
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I've been driving the tractor here on the alfalfa fields. I also harvest garlic, collect eggs from the chicken house, help take care of the sheep, weed, water, probably I'll prune the fruit trees later. This is the deal, I work twelve hours a week in exchange for my own room (a nice big room), and the run of the rest of the house here on this 30-acre farm about a half hour south of Portland, Oregon. But the reason I'm here is to put together a show for the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, and to work on two public art projects for the City of Portland. I'm kind of a transient artist/farmer type person, or at least that what I've been doing for the last six years or so.

In graduate school at the California College of Arts And Crafts in Oakland I started my own library. I checked out my own collection of books to people inside of the larger school's library. I built my own room and everything. Then another student, Jon Rubin, and I started our own gallery in a borrowed vacant retail building a few blocks from the school. We called it Gallery Here and had the space rent-free for over a year. We wound up doing everything, making press releases, gallery sitting, and creating the shows which were all about aspects of the neighborhood we were located in. One of the shows was about a man who owned a rug store, another about garage sales, others were about a garden, and a cement boat that had been built in a vacant lot.

After school finished I lived in a house with three friends while working part time at a Middle school in Oakland. I'd always been interested in farming so I ordered away for a booklet listing work exchanges on farms in New Zealand. Somehow I had to go to another contentment--working on a farm in California didn't seem possible at the time. I flew to Auckland, met up with a couple of friends who had been teaching English in Japan and hitchhiked to a communal farm about four hours away. The place was like paradise, truly incredible, little kids running around naked, little birds practically landing on us, fruit growing everywhere, an amazing estuary to swim in, the best homemade bread I'd ever had, but the people there had broken into two factions and hated each other. The tension was too much, so we took off after a couple of days of picking plums. We hit another three farms as we traveled south, all of them incredible and incredibly flawed in some way or other. In Christchurch my friends and I split up and I headed out to a Rudolf Stiener farm/school for developmentally disabled adults. I loved it there, made close friends with several people with Downs Syndrome, and

ate eggs for almost every meal with another worker from the Netherlands named Igor.

When I got back to the Bay Area the idea of paying rent didn't seem very like a good idea, partly because the idea of working at anything other than my own projects didn't seem appealing. Instead I lived out my truck for a few months and then went back to school to study organic farming at UC Santa Cruz. I was one of forty apprentices in the Ecological Horticulture and Sustainable Food Systems Certification Program. We all lived in tents on a farm on campus for six months and learned while working. On the weekend I drove back to the Bay Area and did projects with Jon Rubin. We took the idea of site-specific art that we had developed while working on Gallery Here and applied it to other venues. One of the first projects was a show at the Richmond Art Center in which we worked with the three hundred city workers who had cubicles in buildings all around the Art Center. We borrowed personal photographs, office plants, desktop objects, coffee cups, etc. and put them on display in the gallery. The office workers said that after seeing the show they views their cubicle spaces in a really different way than they had been able to before.

When Santa Cruz ended I moved to Fairfield, Ca for three months to work on a public art project. As part of the process I decided to live in various local residents' guestrooms, which turned out to be a bad idea. I met lots of nice people but I didn't like having to watch TV with them when I was done working. Jon and I made large scale painted portraits of people I met and put them up along highway I-80. The city had inmates from the local jail help us install the portraits. When we finished the inmates asked their van driver to take them out of their way back to the jail so they could see the portraits from the freeway. Caltrans told us that about a million cars a week drove by that spot.

After Fairfield I moved to a farm on Mt Barnaby in Marin County and lived with my girl friend Vera in a tiny cabin that had once belonged to the actor Klaus Kinsky. He had a larger house up the way but had died there about five years before we moved in. I always imagined him stalking around in the forest looking angst ridden and screaming periodically. I worked part time on the farm and continued doing projects with Jon at various places around the Bay Area. We did a show in a mall with Larry Sultan called People in Real Life. The mall gave us a vacant store and we made what looked like a store but was really a show about people we met there at the mall. One of the pieces was based on a display of underwear boxes we saw in a men's clothing store. We decided to make our own underwear boxes but put regular people on them, and on the backs of the boxes each person told a little story about their body--scars, weight issues, birthmarks, hair loss, that sort of thing.

At the farm on Mt Barnaby there were two dogs named Thesbee and Leroy, they would come over to the cabin for visits and sometimes go for walks with me, but they weren't dogs like I was used to from the city, they were more like other people or animal characters in a children's book who would stop by for tea . We mostly grew garlic and artichokes at the farm, but had a little of everything else too. I'd harvest vegetables fresh for every meal and never had any left overs. The water came from a well and was stored in a water tank that was pretty easy to get into so I was drinking a lot of extra minerals and things with all the wild animals that would fall in there and drown.

Eventually the commute from the farm got to be too much for me and for a summer I moved to Orinda to work on a show with Jon in Walnut Creek, (both Suburbs of San Francisco). I lived in an in-law apartment built into the basement of a house on an acre of land. In exchange for rent I dug out old culvert pipes and drainage ditches, and then would work on the show which was all about things we experienced in Walnut Creek, parking tickets, weeds, real-estate ads, etc.

I got into the Headlands artist residency program in Marin and moved out there in time to use one of their huge studios to build some of the pieces for a big show with Jon and another artist Mark Thompson. The show was called the Boy Mechanic and was all about Mark's life and interests. We built various things including a life sized section of a zeppelin out of ironing board material, plywood representations of trees that had died or were cut down on Mark's property, a row boat cut into three parts and a video of Mark flying in his backyard--really Jon and I were carrying him on our backs as we walked around, but we digitally removed ourselves.

Later that summer Jon and I went up to Seattle for a month to work on a show about a local ten-year-old boy named Gregory. We made him a video headcam to wear as we went out and did various things. We then edited the footage and projected it on six video projectors in the gallery. We also made Gregory a miniature soccer field in the back of the gallery. Gregory wrote a list of rules on the wall. It was actually a really fun game, you could play off of the walls like racquet ball. The show was up during Gregory's vacation so he spent a lot of time there at the gallery hanging out and challenging visitors to soccer matches--which he always won. During that time I was living in the guestroom of a board member from the Art Center. Her husband was a therapist and had his office in the room adjoining my bedroom. In the afternoon if I was working in my room I couldn't help but over hear the therapy sessions. It was weird stuff, but I can't really remember any of the specifics now.

I went back to the Headlands and put together a little library for them, this time all of the books came from past residents, books they had written while they were there or had been reading and left behind. I also started programming a salon lecture series. I wound up living there and having a small studio for over a year. I also started a couple of little gardens, but whenever I left no one else would water the plants so they mostly died.

All along this time I had been working on another project with my friend Elizabeth. She had introduced me to Creativity Explored an art center for developmentally disabled adults in the Mission District of San Francisco. First we volunteered there then started a Xerox magazine called Whipper Snapper Nerd. Each issue was devoted to one artist's work from the center. We made eight issues and a little book of 138 fears written by Michael Loggins one of our favorite artist that we met at Creativity Explored. Eventually the project got turned into an exhibition that was shown in SF, LA and NYC. I continued to work on projects with some of the students from CE, one of them was with David Jarvey who has Down's Syndrome. David has always claimed that his disability was caused while on a mission to the Forbidden Zone on an early Star Trek episode. He said that he and Captain Christopher Pike were both damaged on Talos 4 by space aliens, but that if he could get back there they might be able to give him the illusion of being "normal" again. Elizabeth and I worked with David, and video editor Alexis Van Hurkman to digitally simulate a trip to Talos 4 for David. We shot him and Chris Johanson, who came along as David's sidekick, on a blue screen and superimposed them into scenes from the Forbidden Zone Episode. We showed the video as a projection along with some related drawings and sculptures at Yerba Buena in SF and at the same time at Alleged Gallery in NYC.

I wound up receiving a very strange grant to go work in a corporation outside of St. Paul, MN. as their artist in residence. I was given a studio apartment to live in and a cubicle to work in, along with about a thousand other cubicle workers. I thought I was going to maybe make a movie with the employees, but somehow that didn't really happen, instead I wasted a lot of time trying to get things to happen. I did install a web cam in the CEO's office window so that I could broadcast the view over the Internet for all of the employees to share, but as soon as I left they took it off the air. During my five months in St. Paul I flew out of town seven times, I just had to get away from being in that cubicle.

I went from there to Portland to do a PICA residency. I drove by myself the whole way with just one four-hour break to sleep in my car. There were no motel rooms available throughout the whole state of Montana. The Portland residency was nice. I started in a hotel downtown, then moved to a house up in the hills,

and ended in a house on the east side in a neighborhood build around four rose gardens. Mostly I just went for walks and did a few drawings and suffered over a failing relationship. I was there for about two months. The plan was that I'd come back the next summer and do a show that was partly based on my residency experiences. And in fact that what I've done. The show opened a few weeks ago and one of the main pieces came out of a walk I went on last summer. I came across this set of three lawn sculptures in someone's front yard. There was a frog and a boy on a log with his hands folded in his lap and a man on a log with his hands folded in his lap. They were really striking and curious to me. Months later I went back to see the lawn sculptures and to my surprise the boy was gone and the man had his head and legs broken off. I knocked on the door of the house to find out what had happened but no one was home, then a neighbor came up and told me the sculptures had been vandalized, and that everyone was very sad about it. The next time I was in Portland I went over and knocked on the door again this time a woman answered, she told me her name was Joan. I asked what had happened to the lawn sculptures, she told me to come in and showed me that the boy was being kept in the living room for safe keeping. She said that the man was found about a block down the street and that his head and legs were completely destroyed. I said that maybe I should fix it or something, but then had another idea to create a whole new set of lawn sculptures just like the original ones except based on the real people who lived in the house and the neighborhood. I came back later and talked to the whole family about it and they were a bit perplexed by my intentions but then warmed up and so later I came back and photograph them and other members of their family and friends and neighbors. Then I worked with a local sculptor and we made sculptures from the pictures of everyone with their hands folded in the laps and had them sitting on logs. I painted them and they're in the show along with the originals, but when that's over I'm going to put them all Joan's front yard, sort of a response to the vandalism that happened there in the first place.

Between now and last summer I also did a short residence at the Oxbow School in Napa. It's a semester long art program for High School juniors from around the world. While I was there the entire student body consisted of 14 kids and 13 of them were girls. I had them do a different assignment everyday. They made their own shoes, wrote their entire life story, build a functional globe out of household materials, that sort of thing. Oxbow was good place to stay, I got three meals a day and my own little house and everyone was really nice.

I also went to Amsterdam and taught a class there for a week at a place called Das Arts. Sort of the same thing as Oxbow, but for post graduate students from around the world. In that case I just had a hotel room and two meals a day, but it was still pretty good.

Then at some point I sublet a small studio apartment in San Francisco for four months while I taught classes at the three different schools. That was the only time I paid rent in six years.

In a week or so I go back to the Headlands for a month to do a project where I sort through and organize all of my belonging that have been stored in my parents attic during my transient life. After that I go to Minneapolis to do a show and a public art project, then I go back East to do some lectures, at some point I'm going to Albuquerque for a print making residency, after that I go to Houston to start working on a show there. I guess I'll just keep going for awhile. I don't really know what else to do. My hope is to eventually buy a piece of land of my own and build a house, or maybe there will be a house on it already, but that's the plan to just keep moving around until I actually get a place of my own someday.