



BIOGRAPHY

Futurefarmers is an international collective of artists, activists, researchers, farmers, and architects who work together to propose alternatives to the social, political, and environmental organization of space. Founded in 1995, it serves as a platform to support art projects, an artist in residence program, and the various research interests of its members. Futurefarmers use various media to deconstruct systems, visualize and understand their intrinsic logics, and offer more sustainable alternatives. Such systems may involve food, public transportation, or education, and their productions have included temporary schools, books, bus tours, and a bake house. Their work has been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; MAXXI | Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome; the New York Hall of Science; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Middleheim Museum, Antwerp; the Sharjah Biennial 13; the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge; and Artes Mundi 7, Cardiff; among others.

Futurefarmers: Out of Place, in Place is organized by Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and curated by Lucía Sanromán, director of visual arts.

Futurefarmers: Out of Place, in Place, is made possible, in part, by the National Endowment for the Arts. Support is provided by the Changing the Ratio Circle of Advisors: Abundance Foundation, Berit Ashla, Diana Cohn, EMIKA Fund, Jennifer C. Haas Fund, La Mar SF, Rekha Patel, Catalina Ruiz-Healy and Jonathan Kevles, Vicki Shipkowitz, and Meg Spriggs. Additional thanks to the Salvage Fund at the East Bay Community Foundation and the Facebook Artist in Residence Program.

YBCA Exhibitions are made possible, in part, by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Panta Rhea Foundation, Mellon/American Council of Learned Societies Public Fellows Program, and Meridee Moore and Kevin King. YBCA Programs are made possible, in part, by The James Irvine Foundation, with additional funding by National Endowment for the Arts, Grosvenor, and members of Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts is grateful to the City of San Francisco for its ongoing support.



The Andy Warhol Foundation
for the Visual Arts, Inc.

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA) is one of the nation's most innovative contemporary arts centers. Founded in 1993, YBCA's mission is to generate culture that moves people. Through powerful art experiences, thoughtful and provocative content, and deep opportunities for participation, YBCA is committed to creating an inclusive culture that awakens personal and societal transformation. YBCA presents a wide variety of programming year-round, including performing arts, visual arts, film/video and civic engagement. YBCA venues include the Forum, Screening Room, Galleries and the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Theater. For tickets and information, call 415.978.ARTS (2787).

YERBA BUENA
CENTER FOR
THE ARTS

701 MISSION ST
SAN FRANCISCO
CA 94103
YBCA.ORG

Cover image: Courtesy Futurefarmers.

Interior image: *Futurefarmers survey 1994-present*, 2018. Photograph by John Foster Cartwright.



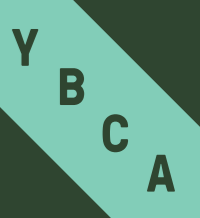
FUTUREFARMERS OUT OF PLACE, IN PLACE

YERBA BUENA
CENTER FOR
THE ARTS

APRIL 20-
AUGUST 12, 2018

1ST FLOOR
GALLERIES

YBCA.ORG
#FUTUREFARMERS



FUTUREFARMERS AND LUCÍA SANROMÁN IN CONVERSATION

This interview was conducted on April 6, 2018 between Amy Franceschini, Michael Swaine, and Lode Vranken of Futurefarmers and Lucía Sanromán, director of visual arts at YBCA.

LUCÍA SANROMÁN: The exhibition starts with a map, a network, a drawing, a diagram of most of the people and some of the places that have been part of Futurefarmers’ history. Then there are the rocks that many “phantom farmers” mailed in, prompted by Amy and Michael, that in a way stand for them. Why are we looking at the constellation of Futurefarmers in this way?

MICHAEL SWAINE: The rocks are all the people who can’t fly here for one reason or another, or had a connection years ago. It’s a whole range of people and rocks.

AMY FRANCESCHINI: Some of the rocks represent phantom farmers who haven’t worked with us in person in many years, but continue as geographically displaced collaborators. We have a mutual tool- and knowledge-sharing relationship, and they are all alive and essential in the work on display here.

LS: This method is also a way of looking back. I sense in you sometimes an ambiguity, or unease, about looking back to what Futurefarmers has been. And yet there is also this recognition—when you’re asking the phantom farmers to send the rocks, or when you’re drawing the map—of what has been accomplished.

AF: We are ambivalent about the exercise of retrospection. But it has allowed us to look at our work in a new way. In looking at our entire body of work, we can see common concerns among the projects. It feels more like one continuous entity where all the projects orbit around one another, and therefore are always present.

LODE VRANKEN: It seems that instead of finishing, the projects become even more unfinished and complicated and related to other projects as they go along. An impossibility of ever finishing becomes clear.

AF: There’s an uncomfortableness to being on the “stage” of the exhibition. We are

most comfortable in the doing, the research, the stumbling. But a survey is a great exercise because it allows us to reflect and see things we couldn’t while “in the moment” of the various situations and actions. It is a distillation. We have to describe what we’re doing, which I think is very healthy.

LV: Maybe the problem with the exhibition is that it wants to present something as if it’s final, over. But most of the presented projects are in one way or another still ongoing, or are the seeds for the next project to come.

LS: You have also introduced two characters, a pair of “donkeys” whose role is retrospection, research, looking at artifacts not presented in the show. And they are theatrical characters that stand for your resistance toward the process of surveying your own work.

AF: The donkey figure in the survey show embodies, in part, a stubbornness around being represented, in the sense that the representation creates a fixed-ness. It frames it, which makes it feel like there was a *start* and a *finish*.

MS: But it’s all still going. I’m hoping the teakettles can make one aware that the moment is right now: you need to be present right now, the teakettle is going off right now.

LS: The teakettles are part of *Speculative Machine*, a piece commissioned for this exhibition that uses the gallery as a place for prototyping, thinking, acting, around and about fog—its harvesting, connotations, metaphors, and so on. The teakettles will be used to “make” fog by bringing water to the boiling point, making a kinetic performance of sorts.

AF: The teakettles are a presence, they are a place—they present variation—of time and sound. There is a “dailyness” to the teakettle that resonates with our work and an absurdity in its relation to a long history of global trade. The teakettle presents this tension, often present in our work, between “dailyness” and “globalness.” Their collective whistling, made up of this field of teakettles in the gallery, is in and of itself a cry, like that of the donkey. Is it of resistance or celebration or mourning? This moisture produced by this field of kettles is

ephemeral: it’s fog, mist, a smell.

As a “speculative machine” the project asks, what is “speculation” and what is “machine”? In our earlier work we were more excited about technology, and the amplification of our means through technology or the new machines. As time has gone on we have become more apprehensive about it, and the machine has become more of a relational mechanism. So, I hope there’s a critique of the machine here, in the use of word “speculation.”

MS: We don’t know exactly what this speculative machine will be or what it will do. It is proposed as a “fog harvesting” mechanism, but perhaps more metaphorically. We’re hosting Galileo’s Smoking Club one Sunday a month in the gallery at YBCA, where I imagine things will become clear as part of the ongoing conversation. Same with the teakettles, the stage, the sails. We will have a conversation, and this will generate some sort of need, and the *Speculative Machine* will be the outcome of these now-unknown needs. I’m happy that it’s an unknown punctuated by small actions. I like this act of taking apart a sewing machine, for example, which is one of the actions during the exhibition. I also like that a sewing machine is a tool that Futurefarmers has used for a long time.

LS: What exactly are the donkeys supposed to do with this and the other elements of the show? Who are the donkeys?

AF: The donkey is kind of an unformed, undomesticated beast, a beast of burden. They inhabit the survey portion of our show as a kind of analog machine and are given a set of instructions to carry out—for instance viewing documentation and research footage related to our work, logging data, enacting or activating the teakettles, and most importantly taking smoking breaks.

MS: Some of it depends on how the teakettles play out, and the divide between Gallery 1, which presents the survey, and Gallery 2, where the new project is produced over the course of the exhibition. Do we want the donkeys to focus on Gallery 1, or do we want them to be messengers between then and now?

AF: We have personas for the two donkeys,

inspired by the European mime troupe Mummenschanz, in which two mimes wear surrealist masks and choreograph absurd situations. Here, one donkey is practical and tries to mimic the other, who makes fun of the first. In a way, these donkeys mimic the roles of Futurefarmers.

LS: In going through this process with you all, I realized that I had a lot of misconceptions about Futurefarmers. For example, you’re known for projects involving interventions into, or creating alternatives to, food systems, and knowledge production and public policy related to land use. I had assumed that you always started with the end result in mind, and proposed an alternative solution to solve something in a larger broken system.

MS: First misconception. Futurefarmers and efficient systems do not go together.

LS: Futurefarmers is an inefficient system of friends.

AF: There’s an efficiency to the inefficiency.

MS: There’s a positive outcome to inefficiency.

LS: You are actually a germ or a virus in the system that comes in from the outside.

AF: I like to think of it as recalibration or de-regulation as a means to re-regulate. You’ll never get away from regulations. For example, we were riding our bikes here yesterday, and Lode commented on how biking has improved in San Francisco. We have green stripes down the street now, and protection from the cars. You can almost space out when you ride to work. Whereas in Brussels, it’s crazy to bike because there’s no system. But without a system you have to negotiate more, and you’re more awake. It reminds me of the one part of Nicolas Bourriaud’s book *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) that resonated with me: “The ATM has become the transit model for the most basic social functions, and professional behaviors are modeled on the efficiency of the machines that are replacing them. The same machines now perform tasks that once represented so many opportunities for exchanges, pleasure or conflict.”

LV: If there is no system, you have to create alternatives through agreement. There is a need for togetherness when

there are no regulations. In the process of being together, new rules will emerge. Is this a lack of a system or a creation of a new system?

MS: I think this relates to a term we don’t like: “social practice.” I don’t want to solve a problem for someone else, which is one of the tropes of social practice. I want to create a situation where we have to try to solve something for ourselves with others. We are problem solvers, but not in a linear way.

AF: For instance in Oslo with the first bakehouse for *Flatbread Society*, none of us knew how to build a baking oven, so we all attended a workshop. There was no master in that scenario, so everyone felt they had agency. Then it’s not about making the oven anymore, but about being in a place where something is happening with others. The not-knowing is scary, but it’s part of the process, because it forces us to articulate what needs to happen for a moment in relationship to others. A great quote by the Quebecois sociologist Jean-François Blanchette, in her *The Bread Ovens of Quebec* (1979), illustrates this beautifully:

The bread oven is not merely a bread oven. Ovens are used for other culinary and domestic purposes as well. As a material product of a particular culture, the bread oven is also related to the economic, social, linguistic, psychological, religious, and other cultural subsystems. Far from being simply an object, the bread oven reflects a technique, a physical environment, a standard of living, a spatial organization, indeed a whole way of life. It reveals a great deal about the perceptual and conceptual schemes of the people using it. The oven may therefore be considered a total cultural fact.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Ongoing
GALILEO’S SMOKING CLUB
SUNDAYS (APR 22, MAY 13, JUN 17, JUL 8, AUG 12), 4-6PM
FIRST FLOOR GALLERIES
FREE with gallery admission

Observe monthly planning meetings for Sea to Sutro and the creation of *Speculative Machine* (2018). Each meeting will have a unique thematic focus, and throughout the discussions, members will experiment with various media that evoke smoke.

Offsite
SEE LEVEL
SAT, MAY 5, 7PM
BAY VIEW BOAT CLUB
489 TERRY A FRANCOIS BLVD.
FREE; RSVP REQUIRED

A selection of short films captures the poetics of the bay through the ephemera of fog, maritime traffic, tidal dynamics, and interdependent ecologies, revealing the fluctuating history, precarious future, and the abstract beauty of our waterways.

SEWING MACHINE DISASSEMBLY
THU, MAY 17, 5-7PM
FIRST FLOOR GALLERIES
FREE

A giant, rusty Singer 5-9 sewing machine will be disassembled, cleaned, and reassembled with working parts over the course of the exhibition, to become fully functional once again, and used in the creation of the fog-harvesting machine.

SPECULATIVE MACHINE
THU, JUN 21, 5-7PM
FIRST FLOOR GALLERIES
FREE

Visitors are invited to join Futurefarmers to become fog harvesters in a playful activity that tests fans as fog makers, in order to create a weather system inside YBCA.

ELECTROMAGIC FOG
THU, JUL 19, 5-8PM
FIRST FLOOR GALLERIES
FREE

Trans-universal constellation bolwerK combines parascientific history, anthropology, and technology to introduce participants to the electromagnetic spectrum and how radio and farming metaphors intertwine.

Offsite
SEA TO SUTRO
SAT, AUG 4
FROM YBCA TO MOUNT SUTRO
FREE

A one-day procession where groups of people walk through the streets of San Francisco from YBCA to Mount Sutro, becoming a metaphorical body of fog rolling through the city.

SEWING MACHINE REASSEMBLY
BEGINS SUN, JUN 17
FIRST FLOOR GALLERIES
FREE with gallery admission

After being disassembled in May, the Singer 5-9 sewing machine will be put back together, intermittently, over the course of several weeks, beginning with the June 17 meeting of the Galileo’s Smoking Club.

YBCA IN THE CITY — CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Visit these sites of creative transformation rooted in food justice and developed over years of YBCA’s commitment to community partnership and civic coalitions.

TNDC TENDERLOIN PEOPLE’S GARDEN
324 LARKIN ST. (AT MCALLISTER ST)

Bessie Carmichael Elementary School students’ artwork enlivens the exterior fence and interior garden signage at this vital community garden next to the Asian Art Museum and facing City Hall.

DALDAS GROCERY STORE
200 EDDY ST. (AT TURK ST)

In collaboration with teaching artists and neighborhood residents, YBCA Youth Fellows developed original artwork, including neon signage depicting fruits and vegetables now available at one of Tenderloin Healthy Corner Store Coalition’s converted stores.

For more information on YBCA’s work with community, go to www.ybca.org/ initiatives.