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CSW Update Newsletter

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Cultural Politics of Seeds: Preivew of the Symposium on May 17th

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Cultural Politics of Seeds

PREVIEW OF THE SYMPOSIUM ON MAY 17TH

How have particular communities of women and issues of gender, ethnicity, and race shaped social movements related to edible and medicinal seeds?

 ORGANIZED BY Allison Carruth and Rachel Lee, “The Cultural Politics of Seeds” symposium will look at how gender, ethnicity, and race shape contemporary cultural and political movements related to seeds. Conceived as a forum for integrating research, policy, activism, and art practice, this event will include day-long event with 3 panels and two keynote talks and a related art exhibit at UCLA’s Art/Sci Center featuring Fallen Fruit, the Los Angeles-based art collaborative. By bringing together farmers,

artists, academics, and political organizers, the symposium demonstrates that to adequately examine seeds’ diverse functions in culture, taking a multifaceted approach is fundamental.

“Moving into a century of 9 billion people and unprecedented pressures on the environment, there is nothing more important than how we will feed ourselves and the sustainability and equity of that enterprise,” says Glen M. MacDonald, Director and Distinguished Professor at the UCLA Institute of the Environment

How have developments in both genetic engineering and commodity markets influenced seed stocks and the biodiversity of seeds propagated around the world?

How are globalization and global climate change impacting the cultivation, propagation, and sharing of seeds in particular regions /cultures?

and Sustainability about the upcoming event. “Here is a thoughtful and multifaceted exploration of that challenge.”

Participants in the symposium come from across the country, including farmers, artists, academics, and political organizers. Several participants take several of these titles. For example, Stephen S. Jones, a professor, collaborates with graduate students to develop wheat for organic and small farms that are underserved by traditional research programs. Elaine Gan, an artist, lecturer, and Ph.D. student studying Film & Digital Media, is working on a multimedia web project that maps different varieties of rice and the ways in which they bring together (for better and worse) biocultural entanglements and political economies. Artist-writer-critic Mathias Viegner will give a presentation on “Feral, Wild, Domestic and Social.” The symposium will include an installation by Fallen Fruit (David Burns, Matias Viegner, and Austin Young) at UCLA Art/Sci Center + Lab (see the related article on page).

The event’s diverse presenters illuminate the inter-connections between individuals’ experiences working with seeds, and broader social and cultural systems. For example, Lucilia Martinez will give a co-presentation about her family’s development of a successful maize farm with ethnoecologist Daniela Solieri.

Solieri works collaboratively with scientists and practitioners to analyze small-scale, local food systems, identifying key biological and sociocultural processes that may increase their resilience.

The symposium will examine the ways in which seeds lead to the creation of social, political and artistic movements that intertwine with issues of gender, ethnicity, and race. It will explore how seeds become entangled with issues such as globalization, global climate change, and developments in genetic engineering and commodity markets. Finally, it will provide a forum for integrating research, policy, activism, and art practice.

According to Carruth, “The symposium brings together an exciting group of scholars in the fields of cultural geography, gender studies, comparative literature, anthropology, environmental studies and science, and plant science along with the three co-founders of LA-based Fallen Fruit as well as longtime urban agriculture and food justice activist Tezozomoc. We are fortunate to have had support from across campus to make this interdisciplinary conversation on the cultural politics of seeds possible.”

“The Cultural Politics of Seeds” symposium is part of CSW’s multi-year “Life (Un)Ltd” research project, which is addressing the question of what impact recent developments in

Schedule

8:45 to 9 am	WELCOME by Allison Carruth
9 to 10:30 am	SESSION 1: featuring Akhil Gupta, Rebecca Tsosie, and Elaine Gan. Discussant/Chair: Rachel Lee
10:45 am to 12:15 pm	SESSION 2: David Cleveland, Allison Carruth, and Anne-Lise François. Discussant/Chair: Jessica Lynch Alfaro
12:15 to 1:30 pm	LUNCH BREAK
1:30 to 3 pm	SESSION 3: Daniela Soleri, Lucilia Martinez, Tezozomoc, Lindsay Naylor. Discussant/Chair: Anne McKnight
3:15 to 4:45 pm	KEYNOTES: Stephen Jones and Matias Viegner. Chair: Ann Hirsch, Discussant: David King
4:45 to 5 pm	CLOSING REMARKS
5:00 to 6:30 pm	RECEPTION IN ROLFE COURTYARD

All sessions take place in the Presentation Room of the Charles E. Young Research Library.

the biosciences and biotechnology have had on feminist studies. In this year, the group, led by Principal Investigator Rache Lee, is exploring the rich connections between food, ecology, propagation, and metabolism.

Cosponsors of the symposium include University of California Humanities Research Initiative, Institute for Society and Genetics, Division of Life Sciences, Division of Humanities, Division of Social Sciences, Institute of American Cultures, Department of English, Institute of the Environment and Sustainability, School of Law, Chicano Studies Research Center, and Charles E. Young Research Library.

The Cultural Politics of Seeds will take place May 17, 8 am to 5 pm in the Charles E. Young Reference Library Presentation Room.

For more information, visit: <http://www.csw.ucla.edu/events/the-politics-of-seeds>. To RSVP, visit: <http://culturalpoliticsofseeds.eventbrite.com>.

SESSION 1

Seed Genetics and Seed Sovereignty

Akhil Gupta

Farmer Suicides: Seeds of Discontent?



Akhil Gupta is Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Center for India and South

Asia (CISA) at UCLA. His areas of interest are ethnography of information technology, the state and development, anthropology of food, environmental anthropology, animality, space and place, history of anthropology, applied anthropology; India and South Asia. Professor Gupta is currently doing a long-term field project on call centers in Bangalore.

Elaine Gan

Considering Rice: Mapping Differential Temporalities



Elaine Gan is an artist and lecturer/PhD student in the Film & Digital Media De-

partment at University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC). She is also a fellow of the UCSC Science & Justice Research Center and a member of the advisory committee for Interdisciplinary Arts at New York Foundation for the Arts. Her research experiments with visualizing multispecies temporalities as a means of opening up new modes of ethico-political engagement across incommensurabilities.

Rebecca Tsosie

Indigenous Peoples and First Foods: The Cultural Landscape of Food Sustainability in an Age of Bioengineering



Rebecca Tsosie is a Regent's Professor at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State

University and a member of the Faculty of Philosophy in the School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies. She is also a faculty affiliate for the American Indian Studies Program. Tsosie has published widely on doctrinal and theoretical issues related to tribal sovereignty, environmental policy, and cultural rights.

Rachel C. Lee

Chair/Discussant



Rachel C. Lee is Interim Director of the Center for the Study of Women and Associate

Professor of English and Gender Studies at UCLA. She is Principal Investigator of the Research Project, Life (Un)Ltd and member of the University of California Humanities Research Institute's working group on Feminism and Technology, which explores info- and bio-technology in relation to feminist pedagogy. She is editing a special issue of the online journal, *The Scholar and the Feminist*, on "Race, Feminism, Biotech, and Biopolitics" (Fall 2013).

SESSION 2

Local Knowledge and Global Food Networks

David Cleveland

What Farmers Know: Local Seeds and Knowledge in a Globalized World



David Cleveland is a human ecologist who has done research and

development project work on sustainable agriculture with small-scale farmers around the world. He is a professor in the Environmental Studies Program, University of California, Santa Barbara. Cleveland's research and teaching focus on the relationships between small-scale local agrifood systems and environmental benefits, conservation and enhancement of crop genetic diversity, and food sovereignty.

Anne-Lise François

"The Loves of the Plants": Rereading Romantic Botany in an Age of Honey-Bee Colony Collapse



Anne-Lise François is Associate Professor of English

and Comparative Literature at UC Berkeley. Her current teaching and research focus on the convergence of literary and environmental studies. In areas as diverse as contemporary food and farming politics and debates on climate change and the temporality of environmental violence, she continues to seek alternatives to Enlightenment models of heroic action, productive activity, and accumulation.

Allison Carruth

Seed Banks & Seed Networks: Narratives, Images, Infrastructure



Allison Carruth is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at UCLA.

Her current book project, "The Transgenic Age," examines how biotechnology has shaped and been shaped by contemporary environmental discourse, as evident in speculative fiction, bioart, green architecture, and food activism.

Jessica Lynch Alfaro

Chair/Discussant



Jessica Lynch Alfaro is the Associate Director of UCLA's Center of Society and Genetics and

coeditor of the journal *Neotropical Primates*, a publication of Conservation International. She is a biological anthropologist whose research centers on the evolution of diversity in socially learned behaviors, mating strategies, and social structuring in neotropical primates.

SESSION 3

Sowing Mesoamerica: Maize, Migration, Resistance

Daniela Solieri and Lucilia Martínez, *Maize and Migration, One Family's Story*



Lucilia Martínez (*above right*) is a Zapotec farmer from the Central Valley of Oaxaca, in the state of Oaxaca, in southern Mexico. She is an accomplished and respected farmer who is known for the quality and diversity of her maize varieties. **Daniela Solieri** (*above left*) is an ethnoecologist working collaboratively with scientists and practitioners in small-scale, local food systems to understand the implications of knowledge and practice for those systems, including crop and food diversity, risk assessment and response to a changing climate.

Lindsay Naylor
Sowing the Seeds of Resistance: Maiz Criollo in Highland Chiapas



Lindsay Naylor is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Geography at the University of Oregon. In her research, Lindsay uses agriculture and food production as a lens to examine power relations and spaces of resistance. Her dissertation work is focused on the everyday lived experience of autonomy and food sovereignty in subsistence and fair trade coffee producing communities in Chiapas, Mexico.

Tezozomoc
Xinachtli: Myth and Life in the Meso-American Diaspora



Tezozomoc is the Vice-President of the South Central Farmers Health and Education Fund, a non-profit organization that assists in the development and education of organic farmers in Central/Southern California. He is also the manager of the South Central Farmers Cooperative, LLC, which operates as a worker-owned cooperative in Buttonwillow, CA. He has also worked to organize a network of organic farming cooperatives throughout Southern California and has provided trainings to other groups forming cooperatives.

Photo Credit: Tezozomoc by Jennifer Cockrall-King / www.foodgirl.ca / *Food and the City* (Prometheus Books, 2012)

Anne McKnight
Chair/Discussant



Anne McKnight teaches in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures and the Institute of the Environment and Sustainability at UCLA. She writes about prose fiction, film, social movements, post-natural systems, and sex/gender issues as they play out in the built environment, especially in the cities of Tokyo and L.A. She also teaches both formal and informal courses on Japanese/Angeleno food systems and globalization. A Master Gardener, she cofounded the Green Grounds collective in South Los Angeles, and has a collection of “retro” Japanese seeds that she shares.

KEYNOTE SESSION

Unruly Seeds and Heritage Foods

Stephen S. Jones

Kicking the Commodity Habit:

The Value of Being Grown

Out of Place



Stephen S. Jones is a Professor and the Director of Washington State University's

Research and Extension Center in Mount Vernon, WA. He has been breeding wheat since 1991. Together with his graduate students he develops wheat for organic and small farms that are under served by traditional research programs. He teaches graduate courses in advanced classical genetics and in the history and ethics of genetics.

Matias Viegner

Feral, Wild, Domestic and Social



Matias Viegner is a writer, artist, critic, and instructor at California In-

stitute of the Arts, who does solo works as well as working collaboratively in the fields of writing, visual art, and social practice. He is a co-founder of Fallen Fruit, a participatory art practice focusing on fruit, urban space, and public life. Fallen Fruit is an art collaboration of David Burns, Viegner, and Austin Young. Their work has been exhibited at major institutions throughout L.A. and internationally.

Ann Hirsch

Chair



Ann Hirsch is a Professor in the Department of Molecular, Cell, and Developmental Biology at

UCLA. She studies the interaction between nitrogen-fixing bacteria (alpha-rhizobia) and legumes such as alfalfa, pea, and soybean in order to determine why this interaction occurs exclusively with certain plants.

David King

Discussant



David King is an avid gardener and the chair and founder of the Seed Library of

Los Angeles. King has taught gardening and horticulture at UCLA Extension and UC Cooperative Extension. He has been with The Learning Garden at Venice High School for over ten years. He has written the LA Garden Blog for over three years.

Fallen Fruit

IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF SEEDS SYMPOSIUM, THE FALLEN FRUIT
ART GROUP WILL EXHIBIT AT THE ART/SCI CENTER + LAB

HOW DO PEOPLE ENGAGE WITH FRUIT, and how does fruit engage with us? In what ways does fruit erect or problematize social boundaries? How can fruit bring people together, or tell us about the lives and behaviors of individuals? If fruit is endlessly intertwined with social and cultural politics, how can it become a means of positive change? These are some of the many questions raised by Fallen Fruit, a long-term art collaboration between visual artist David Burns, artist-writer-critic Mathias Viegner, and portrait photographer-video artist Austin Young. Viegner will speak about one of the collaboration's latest projects at the "Cultural Politics of Seeds" symposium hosted by CSW on May 17. Concurrently, an exhibition by Fallen Fruit will open at UCLA Art/Sci Center + Lab.

Fallen Fruit began when the members of the group mapped fruit trees growing on or over public property in Los Angeles and it remains one of their core projects. In order to map local fruit, they explore neighborhoods to which they have been invited, creating maps of all the publically available fruit. The maps are hand-drawn and distributed free from copyright as jpgs and PDFs. Several of these maps will be on display at Art/Sci.

Since first embarking on the fruit mapping project, the collaboration has expanded to

include serialized public projects, site-specific installations, and happenings in cities throughout the world. Fallen Fruit's projects cover all media (including photography, video, wall-paper, and the internet). Through its happenings and museum exhibitions, the group takes particular interest in working with public space and those who travel through it.

At the symposium, Viegner will talk about Fallen Fruit's pending public art project titled "Feral, Wild, Domestic and Social," a one-quarter-acre watermelon patch in the center of

Two of Fallen Fruits' many public fruit maps, which are available for downloading from their website (<http://fallenfruit.org>). The group has mapped neighborhoods in Malmö, Sweden, Guadalajara, México, and many sites in the Los Angeles area including Silverlake, Larchmont, Long Beach, and Echo Park.

a small town in rural Alabama. During a brief residency in Fall 2012, the group learned that watermelons had once grown on vacant lots throughout the town, partly as the result of people spitting watermelon seeds in the vicinity. Over the years the lots became bare as the result of industrially produced seedless mini-melons (called, ironically, “personal melons”), sold in supermarkets nationwide. “Mother Patch” will be a public watermelon patch in which visitors will be encouraged to “spit their seeds” as they please, in the hopes that the land’s legacy of natural, community rooted watermelon production may begin again.

“This narrative links to the variety of feral stone fruit we’ve found growing in Copenhagen, Northern California and Santa Fe, New Mexico,” says Viegner, in correspondence. “These plants have a symbiotic relationship with us, but a happier one than feral dogs or cats. We’re interested in this kind of peripatetic communal culture that not only links communities but also plants, animals and humans in significant relationships.”

In addition to creating public spaces and events built upon the growing and harvesting of natural fruit, Fallen Fruit comments on the broad social implications of these events (and fruit in general) through the use of mixed media. Fallen Fruit’s 2008 video *Double Standard*,



currently featured on their website, exemplifies how the collaboration melds real time public happenings with various forms of media in order to chart different ways in which fruit functions in society’s social and geographical structures, illuminating issues of sexuality, race, class, and the mediation of “public interaction.” The video juxtaposes unedited footage from two video cameras, documenting one of Fallen Fruit’s Neighborhood Fruit Forages, an event at which people gathered to take a tour

As part of their exhibition at Art+Sci, Fallen Fruit will screen “The Loneliest Fruit in the World” (2010), a video that came out of a residency in Tromsø, Norway. While there, they learned about an area where arctic berries grow without human involvement until they ripen—when human arrive to pick and eat.

At the Fall Fruit website (shown above), visitors can get instructions in how to participate in “The Banana Hotline” project (part of TEDActive 2013), download maps, watch videos, or get information on forages, projects, and exhibitions.

of Los Angeles, exploring public places where fruit grows. The videos are overlaid with a text block of comments from a short public television video of the same event that was posted on YouTube. The comments range from insightful to homophobic and racist, creating what the group’s website calls “an alternative, cynical narrative to the events.” The Neighborhood Fruit Forage was an effort to bring people

together and consider the roles that fruit plays in public urban space. *Double Standard* incorporates the event with mixed media in order to challenge participants’ and viewers’ experiences. Fallen Fruit’s website points out that the video probes “at the correspondence between the public walking on the tour and the anonymous public of the internet.”

This year, the group was also invited to do a project with TEDActive. They devised “The Banana Hotline,” wherein the public is invited to follow a set of instructions, record a memory, and email the audio or video to the group, who will then put together “a living monument of sound.”

The exhibit at Art+Sci will also include *The Loneliest Fruit in the World* (2010). This video portrays the human activities, interactions, and explorations that spring up around a stand of arctic berries growing near Tromsø, Norway: “Against a beautiful, spare landscape peppered with tiny blueberries,” according to the website description, “the video follows a group of Norwegians who while picking negotiate the relation between solitude, gleanings and company.”

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Photo credits: All images are from the Fallen Fruit website.

For info on about the UCLA Art/Sci Center + Lab, visit:
<http://artsci.ucla.edu/>