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**Of Land & Local**

Burlington City Arts and Shelburne Farms

Burlington, Vermont

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“But the cows are the real artists!”

This remark, tinged with indignation, was tossed at Vermont based sculptor Nancy Winship Milliken from an audience member during a panel discussion on art and the environment held in the main gallery of Burlington City Arts (BCA). Encouraging dialogue is an integral part of the public programming to accompany *Of Land and Local*, the annual collaborative exhibition between the BCA and Shelburne Farms. Milliken was moderating the discussion while seated in front of *Intensive Rotational Grazing*, her 28 x 8 ft. installation, mounted on 7 panels, running the full length of the gallery wall. Smiling, Milliken embraced the idea of her cow collaborators since it was their muddy, earth-caked hoofs that left tracks of their movement on the canvas covered panels now gracing the gallery as art. The work was created during Milliken’s 2017 residency at Bread and Butter Farm in Shelburne, VT. Moving the cows from one pasture to the next several times a day is an environmentally sound farming practice called “intensive rotational grazing.” Milliken successfully captured the remnants of that movement and transformed them into a provocative work of aesthetic power reminiscent of abstract expressionism.

Now in its fifth year, this iteration of the BCA’s *Of Land and Local* was a first for curator Heather Ferrell. Assisted by gallery coordinator Ashley Jimenez they continued last

year's focus on the theme of watershed. Taken broadly, the 16 artists included have chosen to address the theme through investigation of a sense of place and have explored ideas concerning conservation, commodification, and conflict surrounding water's role in our survival both as individuals and in cultural communities. In the past, all the artists had strong ties to Vermont. This year 5 artists come from outside the state.

Interdisciplinary artist Georgie Friedman hails from Boston. Known primarily for her large-scale video installations projected on building facades, her single-channel, site-specific HD video, titled *Sea Like a Mirror*, 2017 ran without sound on rear projection window film across the back wall of the first floor gallery space. Subtle, immersive, and meditative, it gives the viewer an opportunity to contemplate human fragility in relationship to natural elements.

*Everyone Whispers Under the Stars*, 2017 is a collection of color photographs in response to the Vermont landscape by James Scheuren, a recent arrival to the state. Considered separately, 3 large vertical prints of a night sky seem dripping with wetness and 1 large orange tinged impressionistic landscape, perhaps a double exposure, is quite lovely. An equally large portrait of a seated young woman dressed in a 2-piece bathing suit with a brilliant green top, nipples showing, staring with a Mona Lisa like expression is startlingly disconnected from the other images. Six additional, small (approximately 9"x12") snap-shot like portraits of random people are clustered together between the larger photos. As a whole, the effect appears to be a disjointed conundrum. Why this work is included in the exhibition is also a mystery.

Collaborative learning is at the core of multi-media artist Hope Ginsburg's work. Far ranging in its implications for the future of our species on the planet, her video projection, *Land Dive, Bay of Fundy*, 2016 is visually arresting and utilizes an ominous soundscape, like a dirge. We watch in slowly escalating horror while 4 scuba divers in full gear sitting cross-legged, backs to the sea, are oblivious while a rising tide gradually subsumes them, their seaweed encrusted heads slipping below the surface.

The acrylic works on paper of Vermont artist Elizabeth Nelson are all landscape inspired, painted from memory, in response to her artist residency in Iceland. The purely decorative, abstract, acrylic on canvas paintings of Charlie Bluett envelop you in watery tones like a soft mist and provide the least intellectually challenging work of the show. In contrast, political confrontation and environmental activism are the motivating forces driving the photography of John Willis whose 7 dramatically composed photos in *Mni Wiconi, Water Protectors Series 2017* document the protests against completion of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

Brian Collier is a man on a mission. An unabashed environmental activist, his *Unlawning America*, 2017 succinctly describes that mission in two words. Collier's piece consisting of single channel video, pigment prints, botanical specimens, biodiversity enhancement disks, unlawning site signs, has a high school science fair aesthetic, providing a response to a pressing environmental problem, but raises a question: is it art? Some artists, like Milliken, Ginsburg, and Friedman effectively manage to do both.

