

Artist statement exploring how *Bird Feeders* relates to the 2015 ECO-Visions theme: *Intersections: Our Natural and Synthetic Worlds*.

How the Sunflowers Were Produced:

- 1) An artist goes to a local merchant* to purchase* organic mammoth sunflower seeds* from a company based in a distant corner of the country*.
- 2) The artist cultivates the seeds in the organic, pesticide-free garden* he keeps on the 19th-century farm* where he lives. The success of the garden depends upon adding water during dry spells, fortifying the nutrients in the soil annually, removing weeds, chasing off animal and insect pests, and more*. The sunflowers grow for 107 days before being harvested for the show.
- 3) The garden is located in a reclaimed section of pasture. If left unattended, the garden will revert into pasture within weeks*.
- 4) The pasture was created in the early 1800s, when the sheep and wool industries* dominated the region. Prior to being cleared, the pasture was forest. If left unattended, the pasture would become forest again, though the forest it develops into* will be populated by a radically different succession of tree species than the forest which preceded it*.

King Farm:

- 5) King Farm was a privately owned* working farm* for close to two centuries. Today it's the property of the Vermont Land Trust* and is used as a public park*, with an emphasis on programming that highlights Woodstock's agricultural and natural history* and the arts*.
- 6) In a sense, while largely materially consistent over time, King Farm has evolved into the representation* of King Farm. As such, many of its architectural assets have migrated from their original uses into reflections of their uses*, or have adopted novel functionalities altogether*, thus divorcing the structures from their mission in favor of alternative, contemporary needs*.
- 7) Recognizing this internal tension, all art objects displayed at King Farm are influenced by this dynamic.

The Installation:

- 8) The organic mammoth sunflowers will have painted wooden dowels inserted into the flower heads to provide perches for local birds and will be outfitted with wire to hang on the exterior walls of the legacy architecture at King Farm.
- 9) Viewers finding flora mounted on the exterior of an old building is disruptive to expectations* for both plants and walls.
- 10) Wooden dowels as perches provide birds a place to sit while eating the seed*, though they're entirely capable of standing on the face of the flower without them. Viewers who encounter local birds eating the sunflowers mounted to the walls bear witness to an unusual gesture*, particularly in the context of an art exhibition*.
- 11) So, the intended audience* for the sunflower feeders is avian, as they will encounter an additional food source* at the exhibition and dine onsite.
- 12) The people who visit the exhibition become the secondary audience for the artwork. Ideally, they will be provided additional wildlife experiences* during the run of the show as the birds eat the sculptures*.

13) Over time, the sunflowers will be consumed, weather, and fall apart—changing through the exhibition until they decompose and are thrown in the compost. If there's any evidence of the artwork's existence by winter, it would likely be a scrap of baling wire, which can be discarded. Does the intended decomposition* of the piece frustrate expectations* for an art installation? Is it a value judgement* that the piece becomes less beautiful as it is destroyed*? Or is the art actually the performance animating the piece throughout the autumn? Is there a boundary* between sculpture and performance? Why?

Is this Gesture Art?

- 14) Representations of sunflowers have been featured in art for centuries and are well within people's expectations* for what art is and can be.
- 15) Actual sunflowers serving both as sculptures and as food for wild birds plays with the false limits* of what art is and what art can be.
- 16) Would the induced wildlife experiences* happen for visitors to King Farm without the artist's intervention? Is a wildlife experience art?
- 17) Because the installation serves a performative, material function in addition to a visual one, is this artistic gesture activist* rather than aesthetic*? Does articulating this tension transform viewers' expectations for the 2015 ECO-Visions exhibition: *Intersections: Our Natural and Synthetic Worlds*?
- 18) How do sculptures that function as both activist and aesthetic events reflect on the definition of art in 2015? Does contemporary art need to serve both needs? Is it art if it aspires to? Is it art if it doesn't?

* *Indicates a site of slippage between the definitions of what is "natural" and what is "synthetic."*