



2012 Prairie Module No. 3, by M12 Collective, photo by Donna Neuwirth

## BEYOND THE URBAN CENTER: ART IN FLYOVER COUNTRY

AN INTERVIEW BETWEEN LAWTON HALL AND ARTIST SARA DALEIDEN

Each year, a jury of arts professionals selects artists through a national request for proposals to create installations for the Farm/Art DTour. Sara Daleiden of MKE->LAX was one of the jurors this year.

MKE->LAX investigates cultural exchange between two American regions, with Milwaukee and Los Angeles as epicenters through residencies and public programs. The goal is to expand the discussion about cultural exchange across the boundaries that typically isolate ideas regionally.

Lawton Hall is a composer and artist living in Milwaukee.

**LH: As a juror for the DTour in rural Sauk County, Wisconsin, this would seem to have nothing to do with Milwaukee OR Los Angeles, two urban centers. How do you adjust your thinking about art in a rural vs. an urban setting?**

SD: Part of why I focus on regions is so there's a sense of an expansion of art and cultural production beyond the urban center, even though we tend to organize our regions through larger towns and cities. So in that way, working with the Wormfarm Institute was a great fit for me, because I'm interested in how artists respond to places they're in. That can be about how they're living and working in a place, but it can also be about how landscape and climate or other factors that are specific to a place would work its way into the work itself. All of that winds up affecting how the "social" happens in a particular place. Artists can detect what the social experience is and also what it could be for a particular locale.

In terms of my focus in Milwaukee and how that relates to a project based in Sauk County, I'm particularly interested in art and cultural projects that are responding to landscape as an experience we move through that we can't understand all at once. DTour has a fabulous way of engaging siting, as well as looking at what cultural production is for a place like Reedsburg. I really enjoy a lot of the spatial, sculptural solutions that came up in the DTour jury process, but I also enjoyed the dialogue we had along the way in terms of how any one of these projects may represent something about the land

in Sauk County, as well as concepts around agriculture and rural life.

I think it's important that Wormfarm is partnering with the Chamber of Commerce in Reedsburg and there's that acceptance that economy is a cultural layer. DTour is a spectacular experience of enjoying autumn leaves in a rolling landscape. That magnificent, sensory experience is linked to an understanding of economy, which for me is a compelling artistic and cultural statement.

**LH: You mentioned that many artists who applied for the DTour were responding to the landscape, but also economic factors about agriculture and the economy of the region. To what did they respond?**

SD: I appreciated the DTour process where artists were able to go on-site and experience specific landscapes, but also meet the farmers and landowners in the area. I can tell a meaningful relationship to the place and the people had been started with some of the proposals, which I think makes for very rich work.

Some of the throughlines that I noticed:

- A formal play with scale, history, material or use whether through engagement with architecture, like a farmhouse, or a response to a certain perspective view in the landscape.
- A tendency to comment on agriculture, our relationship with food and with everyday domestic production for which food becomes an emblem.
- A desire to encourage sustainable living and a consciousness of how we relate to the land.
- A do-it-yourself quality valuing craft and often aiming to educate participants, such as in how to grow or ferment food.

**LH: What can artists do to have a voice in this cultural moment, where "sustainability" is a big buzzword?**

SD: One of the most exciting and useful things artists can do is offer us experiences about what another lifestyle could feel like. DTour's emphasis on agriculture is something easily taken for granted in our cultural consciousness. Wormfarm Institute and the other artists involved relate through their practice to the rural production that's already going on. I also enjoy the situations that are created where we can literally feel our bodies being on the earth, or feel that we have choices about how we set up our structures, like houses. Those are all moments that aggregate to potentially address something we call "sustainability."

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