

Farmers and artists prepare for museum opening of “agriCULTURE: Art Inspired by the Land”

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agriCulture: Art Inspired by the Land begins June 9 at the Longmont Musuem | Adam Steininger



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The boundaries between art and agriculture will blur this summer as the Longmont Museum sets up for the contemporary art exhibit's grand opening of "agriCULTURE: Art Inspired by the Land" on Friday night. The exhibit is a year-long collaborative effort.

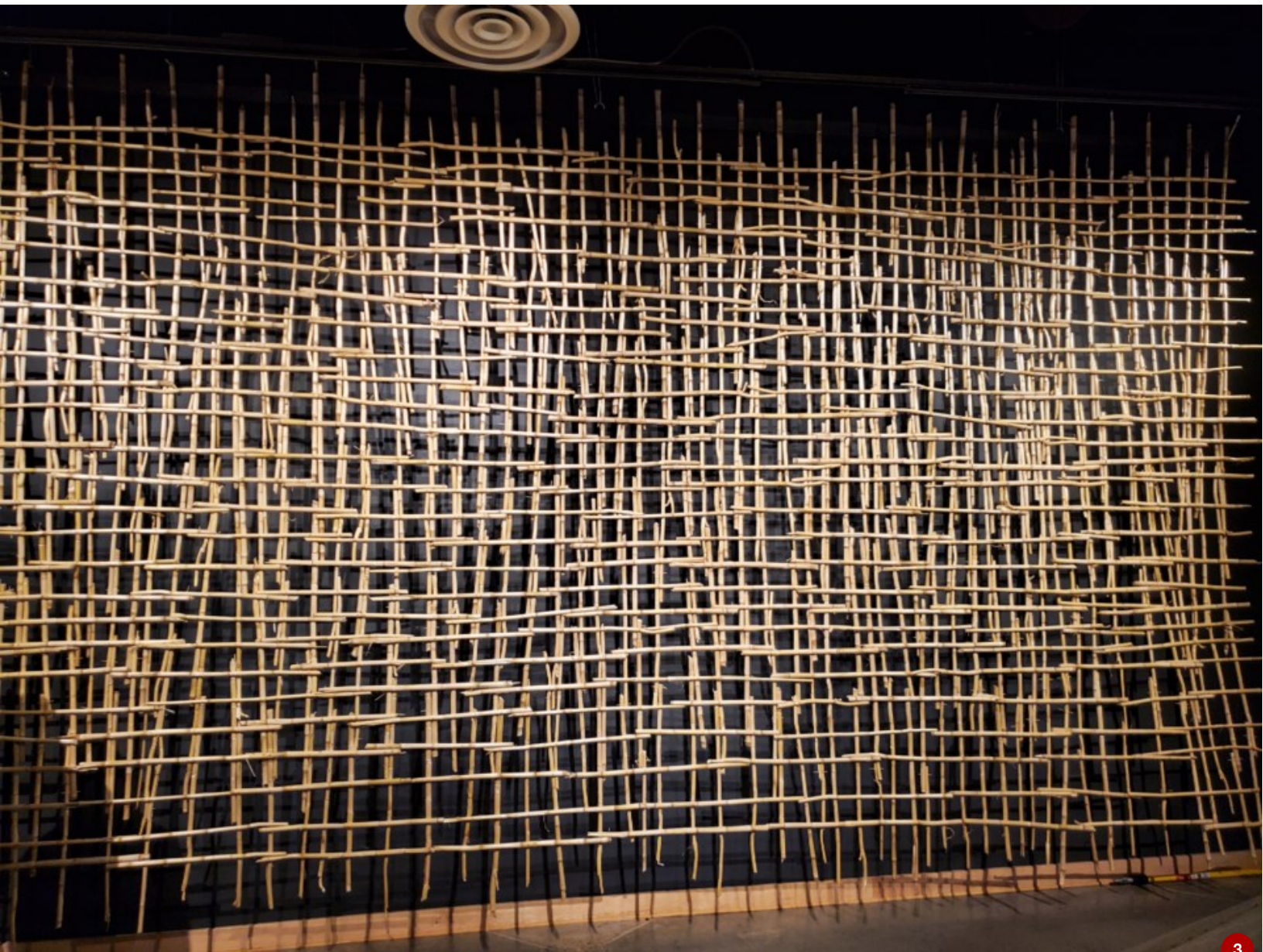
The ambitious and large-scale art exhibition brings together 18 local and regional artists paired with Boulder County farmers and explores themes of agriculture and our connection as people to the land.

The decision to feature grand-scale installations in this project was a deliberate one, shared Jared Thompson, curator of Exhibits at the Longmont Museum. He explained that the vastness of agriculture inspired him to echo this magnitude through the exhibits.

According to Thompson, the process was a fascinating journey into the world of farming for the artists, who learned firsthand from their agricultural counterparts. While summer is a busy time for farmers, winter provides an off-season window where the artists and farmers could further their collaboration.

"Farmers have a really strong connection to the land. We're trying to show those connections to the land and hopefully, help visitors explore their own connections to the land. That's kind of the thesis of the show," Thompson said.

The project, which was initially set to launch in 2021, was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, it offered artists and farmers an extended opportunity to collaborate. Since the planning stages back in 2019, the project has involved curators from multiple institutions to ensure that the diverse exhibits collectively speak to the theme. The exhibition will span six locations, including the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, orBMoCA, Ollin Farms, the Agricultural Heritage Center and Boulder JCC's Milk and Honey Farm.



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A particularly noteworthy piece was done by Patrick Marold, an artist who specifically sought to work with a commercial farm. Marold's installation uses corn stalks to demonstrate the volume of corn needed to feed cows for milk production. The installation, built in the gallery this week from a pile of corn stalks on the museum floor, put together with toothpicks, offers a visually striking representation of a cornfield. Marold's corn installation will be returned to the field once the exhibit concludes.

As visitors wander through the museum gallery, they'll encounter a vast range of mediums, illustrating the variety and creativity of the artists' responses to their farming experiences.

Denver artist Libby Barbee, born on the southeastern plains of Colorado, worked closely with Golden Hoof Farm, a Boulder County agricultural operation dedicated to building healthy soil ecosystems through a rotational farming model.

Her art installation for the exhibition, a 20-foot-tall silo from another farm, demonstrates the complex, interwoven nature of farming operations. It features changing imagery seen through the windows of the silo as it rotates, creating a sort of slow animation that represents the progression of the seasons.

Reflecting on her piece as it was being put together, Barbee said, "I've done some previous projects looking at, and interviewing farmers and ranchers about soil health. I was interested in continuing to explore soil health and the creation of healthy soil ecosystems."

Libby Barbee worked closely with her father, Ron Barbee, who engineered the rotating mechanism of the silo, this piece has become the largest in her portfolio. Its sheer size and output are evidence of her curiosity and dedication to understanding soil health and the intricate processes of agriculture.

One of the most striking installations, created by artist Nicole Banowetz, in the back of the exhibit, is a massive, fantastical piece that looks like it could be straight out of *Stranger Things* — almost as if it's emerging from *The Upside Down*.

Banowetz was paired with Esoterra Culinary Garden, a farm specializing in producing greens and is passionate about soil regeneration — rebuilding the soil's healthy microbiome. Inspired by this, Banowetz has designed a monumental, imaginary device symbolizing soil regeneration.

This piece is not just an impressive visual display, it's also interactive. Five blowers keep the artwork inflated, with a center part that needs to stay inflated continuously due to its complex shape. As visitors move around the piece, it gives the feeling of being inside a soil ecosystem, demonstrating the intricate and interdependent relationships between various microbes.

These installations are not just about creating visually appealing art. They are ambitious, physical representations of agricultural practices and concepts, with scales that can be compared to exhibits in places like the Denver Art Museum.

"agriCULTURE: Art Inspired by the Land" promises a thought-provoking journey into the fertile space where art and agriculture intersect. With the opening reception events taking place at BMoCA on June 8 and the Longmont Museum on June 9, the community is invited to celebrate this unique exhibit and explore a new dimension of artistic expression rooted in our shared natural environment.

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