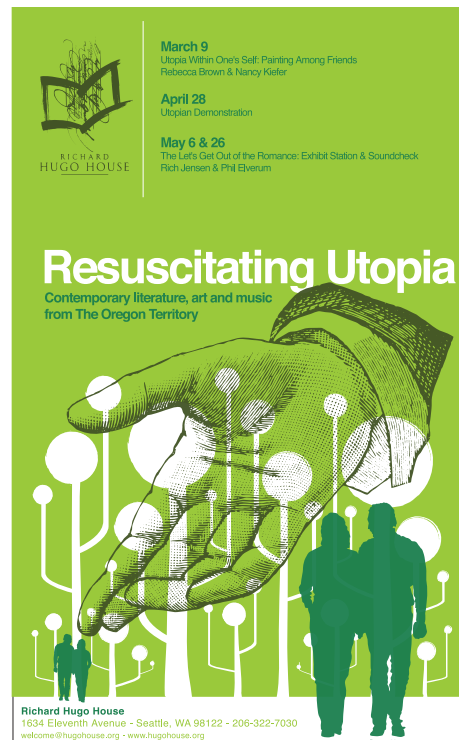


Resuscitating Utopia

Contemporary Music, Literature, & Art from the Oregon Territory

In the spring, I'm presenting a series of performances addressing the idea of utopia as reflected in Northwest Art. In March, writer Rebecca Brown will collaborate with visual artist Nancy Kiefer to look at the Northwest Mystic Painters. In April, the series will look at the communal experiments of the 1960s with a utopian demonstration and reading by former Seattleites Novella Carpenter (a survivor of an Idaho hippie childhood) and Raymond Mungo, whose memoir, Total Loss Farm was described recently in The New York Times as "the best, and surely the woolliest, book written about that era's communal living and back-to-the-land movements." In May, Rich Jensen a writer and musician who has been involved in a number of utopian enterprises, will collaborate with Phil Elverum, a musician from Anacortes who has recorded music as The Microphones and Mount Eerie. Although west coast art includes too many conversations to simplify into one classification, all of the art has evolved in a recently settled region. In the west, in this no place, everything is new. In this vacancy, a statement of meaning such as a novel or painting or recording suggests a proposition: this is how life in the West might be lived. Art in the Northwest cannot help but be utopian. While Thomas More's 1516 work Utopia, meaning "no place" in Latin, was not the first work of its nature, it is from his work that the genre of utopia became self-conscious. A utopian work is both criticism and manifesto. The utopian work also questions the



terms of a society's self representation. In a naturalistic style things are intended to be represented as they are. Skykomish has problem with muddy streets because in 1870, Skykomish had a problems with muddy streets. However in an allegory, Skykomish may represent an earthly place and therefore has earthly problems, such as deep, sticky pockets of black, sucking mud in its streets. Allegorical work has an internal logic independent of the natural world. Allegorical works encompass a number of artistic methods, including surrealism, satire and utopian. Utopian work as a no place offers a vision of how the world

might exist. Utopian work, then, is a model or map, a commentary on the world in which it is created. However, the genre of utopia isn't merely a critical response, but has the aim of restoring society to an Edenic state. The inhabitants of a utopia are restored to their whole, essential and natural selves. In growing up, we often feel before puberty sets in a sense of wholeness and oneness with the world. As puberty progresses and more adult expectations accumulate, the golden age of childhood gives way to the more fractured and confusing world of adulthood. Restoration of naivety and wholeness lies at the root of Utopia.

Much of our regional art seeks to restore its audience to the Golden Age. Sometimes a Great Notion by Ken Kesey, The Honey in the Horn by H.L. Davis, Housekeeping by Marilyn Robinson confront the possibility of creating paradise in the relatively blank slate of the Pacific Northwest. The attempt to unite both conscious and subconscious worlds lays at the heart of Northwest painters such Emily Carr and Guy Anderson. Northwest music, too, has gone hand-in-hand with utopia. K Records founded in the early 1980s by Calvin Johnson offered the proposition that culture does not need to depend on outside validation. In "Indian Summer," Johnson sang:
"Croquet and Baked Alaskas
We'll come back for Indian Summer."



Nancy F. Kiefer is an artist living in Seattle. Her last exhibit, "Prayers to Take the Husk Off Light," included 40 of the 100 portraits of heads she painted between 2001 and 2003. Kiefer has received two Artist Trust Gap Grants, one for a series of paintings on paper entitled "History of Cheerleading" and one for a multi-media project in which she combined her poems and paintings. She currently exhibits at Gallery 110 in Seattle.

March 9th
DIY Utopia: Painting and Writing
among Friends
Rebecca Brown & Nancy Kiefer

Rebecca Brown author of this sentence: "In the interest of security, we agreed to put out your eyes and burn out the insides of my ears," among others that have been compiled into books such as *THE END OF YOUTH* and *EXCERPTS FROM A FAMILY MEDICAL DICTIONARY* has collaborated with visual artist Nancy Kiefer on a show about Northwest Painters such as the late Wesley Wehr, Gaylen Hansen, and others in a conversation called: *DIY Utopia: Painting and Writing among Friends*. Their newly published book, *WOMAN IN ILL FITTING WIG* will be on hand.

Rebecca Brown's work was described in *The Guardian*: "Her gift of veering so close to the bone creates a brilliance of revelation about death, life and love." Brown has written 10 books, including novels, stories, memoir, a play and a libretto for a dance opera. She has recently written texts in response to work by visual artists Barbara Thomas, Randy James, Helmi Juvonen and Nancy Kiefer. She also makes collages out of books.



April 28th
Utopian Demonstration
Raymond Mungo & Novella Carpenter

A Utopian Demonstration and reading with two writers who have endured utopias. Raymond Mungo, author of *TOTAL LOSS FARM* and a former Seattleite returns to Seattle with Novella Carpenter (survivor hippie parents and a back-to-the-land childhood in rural Idaho) talk and read about the utopian experiments of the 1960s and 1970s.

Still febreezing the scent marks of hippie identification forty years after

the fact, Novella Carpenter is a product of utopian-minded parents. She is a writer raised in the Northwest but now lives in the ecotopian world of the San Francisco Bay Area. In a nod to her agrarian roots, she does something called guerilla farming in abandoned urban areas. Essays have appeared in *The Unsavvy Traveler*, *The Stranger's Guide to Seattle*, and *Split: Stories From a Generation Raised on Divorce*. She coauthored *Don't Jump*, the Northwest Guide Winter Blues Survival Guide. She currently writes a syndicated column about alternative cars and car culture.

Raymond Mungo was born in a howling blizzard in February, 1946, in one of those awful mill towns in eastern Massachusetts and lived to tell about it. Mungo is the author of more than seventeen books including *Famous Long Ago*, which is being adapted for film by Antidote Films, the producer of *Thirteen* and *Laurel Canyon*, and *The Station Agent*. Mungo lived in Seattle in the 1970s, where he owned a small press, bookstore and generally did everything possible to avoid working including serving as a Writer-in-Residence for the City of Seattle. In 1997, he completed a master's degree in counseling. He lives with his husband in the LA area tending principally to HIV infected patients and the severely mentally ill.



May 6th and 26th.

The Let's Get Out of the Romance:
Exhibit Station & Soundcheck.

Rich Jensen & Phil Elverum

Rich Jensen and Phil Elverum present a month-long utopian experiment and audio conversation. They will occupy the gallery space at Hugo House for the month, beginning at an opening on May 6 (Soundcheck) and final presentation of their results on May 26th at 7:30. Jensen is a writer and entrepreneur who has been engaged in various utopian businesses in the Pacific Northwest since the mid-1980s including K Records, Sub Pop, Up Records and now Clear Cut Press. Elverum, from Anacortes, has recorded music as The Microphones and Mount Eerie. His albums include THE GLOW, PT2, and IT WAS HOT, WE STAYED IN THE WATER.

The artists will use the Gallery as a Composing Desk. Wall-sized panels will be attached temporarily to the existing walls of the gallery. The panels will be covered with white paper etched with page templates for a coffee table book that Phil and Rich will compose during the three-week interval from opening to Soundcheck. The topic of the book-template will focus on the deflation and crash of various utopian aspirations as the artists have

experienced them. Phil will draw from the production history of five particular record albums. Rich will look at the social groups he moved in over the last twenty years and how their emotions were modulated by technology. They will rigorously chart their personal observations onto a kind of visual space-time co-ordinate system that will overlay the book-template grid. They are describing a communal atlas of utopian despair? Could be. When it comes Soundcheck time they will move the Book Panels from the gallery walls into the Studio/Theater where they will become the raw compositional material that informs the Soundcheck program. Among other things, the Soundcheck will be a collaborative author-audience-interviewee-er chat show for this: the Northwest's latest lifestyle-book sensation. They will use the launch of the gallery exhibit to explain the nature of the Soundcheck event, their use of the gallery and ways for the audience to participate.

Rich Jensen is the publisher of Clear Cut Press. He has been involved with a number of utopian enterprises including K Records, Sub Pop and Up Records.

Phil Elverum records music as both The Microphones and Mount Eerie. His

most recent albums are Mount Eerie, Singing from Mount Eerie, and Live in Japan Recorded Feb 19th, 21st and 22nd, 2003.

Thanks to:

4 Culture and the Paul Allen Family Foundation or support for this program.

