

CC  
VA



**Futurefarmers**



Front and Back Covers: Futurefarmers, *Erratum: Brief Interruptions in the Waste Stream*, 2010. Photograph by Michael Bartalos. Courtesy of the artists. Above: Futurefarmers, *Erratum* (still), 2010. HD video (color, silent). 16:9, 4.18 min. Courtesy of the artists.

## **Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts**

## **Futurefarmers Errata—Brief Interruptions**

Guest Curator:  
Rebecca Uchill

Feb 9–Apr 9, 2017  
Level 1 + Level 3,  
Sert Gallery

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### **Futurefarmers**

Artists Amy Franceschini and Michael Swaine of Futurefarmers, a flexible collective of artists, researchers, designers, architects, scientists, and farmers, form the core partnership for this exhibition. The group shares a common interest in creating frameworks for, in their words, “catalyzing moments of uncertainty and confusion in productive and illuminating ways.” The collective has exhibited work at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Museum of Modern Art, and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; MAXXI, Rome, Italy; New York Hall of Science, Queens; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, among other institutions. Franceschini teaches at California College of the Arts, and Swaine teaches at the University of Washington.

### **Opening**

Thu, Feb 9, 5:30–7:30 pm

### **Performance**

De-Bugging  
Futurefarmers with  
Elaine Buckholtz and  
Floor van de Velde  
Thu, Feb 9, 6 pm

Performers: Ali Coppola, Caleb Chase, Michael Dunne, Max Farber, Genna Gmeiner, Felix Kauffman, Corinne Perrault, Nick Regan, Nick Ruhlmann, Ian Solaski, Dylan Soulard, Anya Talatinian, and Timothy Wood.

Special thanks to Robbins Library of Philosophy at Harvard University, Center for the Arts and MFA in Interdisciplinary Arts program at Northeastern University, and Stiles and Hart Brick Company for their collaboration.



# Looking for Moths: Futurefarmers at the Carpenter Center

Rebecca Uchill

## Errata

Walking is a form of inquiry, but you can only arrive at broader horizons, insights, and revelations if you're not quite so sure where you're going.... We should all walk like that, making paths, stopping on stepping stones, stumbling on the aporia, with minds full of wonder and an eye on the unknown, going onward all the way, full circle, dust to ideas to dust and more ideas left behind us in the path made by walking.

Rebecca Solnit, December 2010

The partnership of artists Amy Franceschini and Michael Swaine, under the aegis of the art collective Futurefarmers, has long taken walking and wandering as a form of inquiry in the sense characterized by journalist Rebecca Solnit in her contribution to their 2010 *Sole/Soul Sermons*.<sup>1</sup> Languishing in the pauses produced by stumbling blocks, entangling themselves in aporia along the way, the members of Futurefarmers pursue indirect, poetic paths of research into topics such as ecology, pedagogy, and collectivity. Their projects have taken various forms, including a multimedia forum for discussing climate change through the prompt of a fairy tale, convened in a Boulder park in 2007; a temporary school around a fallen tree at the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln in 2013; and the ongoing *Flatbread Society* project, focused on issues of land use, agriculture, and public space, that began with the 2012 construction of a bakehouse for bread-making on the Oslo waterfront.



Futurefarmers, *In Search of all the Errata in the Robbins Library*, 2016. Courtesy of the artists.

The Futurefarmers collective was invited to Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts (CCVA) in June 2014 by James Voorhies (John R. and Barbara Robinson Family Director from February 2014 to August 2016). Invested in exploratory facture, potent disruptions, and the etymological derivation of “err” (and its cognates) from the Latin *errāre* (to wander), the artists identified local “errors” as material prompts for artistic activation: fingerprints embedded in the red bricks in the sidewalks of Quincy Street and erratum slips correcting publication errors in the Robbins Library of Philosophy holdings. These “interruptions” reveal the human hands that make authoritative objects—literal and figurative building blocks of the constructed environment and epistemological understanding. What would it be to pause with these interruptions in form and meaning, bringing to them curiosity and wonder? During a campus visit, Futurefarmers traced the bricks to the Stiles and Hart brick manufactory in Bridgewater, Massachusetts. There they met George Holdsworth, who occasionally tests wet bricks with his fingers to check whether they have set. The artists led a group of students and faculty from Northeastern University in an intensive exercise of seeking out every correction slip in Harvard’s Robbins Library of Philosophy. Their workshop began with a “falling exercise”—an experiment in embracing the literal slippages of human error. In Paul de Man’s notes on irony he asserts, citing Baudelaire, that falling can enable a duplicate consciousness wherein one observes and laughs at oneself without hierarchies of different subjectivities: one becomes aware of oneself as human and an object in the hands of nature. It is notable that Baudelaire (and de Man) point specifically to “artists or philosophers” who experience duplicate, differentiated awareness through rarefied technical language.<sup>2</sup> A workshop like the one led by the artists of Futurefarmers, however, all but ignores (written) language. Rather than read the philosophy books, the artists’ bibliographic exploration prioritized physical over intellectual modes of encounter, with a routinized series of actions that Franceschini characterized as “haptic bodily looking.”<sup>3</sup>

On view on Level 1 of CCVA are objects, videos, booklets, and other artifacts of the artists’ interrogative wandering and performative exploration. On February 9, during the exhibition opening, the materials will be activated in a performance that uses the Stiles and Hart bricks with canvas straps as a modular mobile stage, and the library errata sheets as lyrics for a musical composition. The artists’ loose choreographic instructions (in a text on the gallery wall) refer to the search for the brick (and “George,” the fingerprint

maker), the movement exercise (falling, opening every book), as well as another local “error” that captivated the artists’ interest—a bug that stopped the machinery of a computer, currently illustrated on a description panel by the Mark I display in Harvard’s Science Center. On September 9, 1947, a moth interrupted the Mark II, which was being built and tested by Howard Aiken and Grace Hopper at Harvard. The moth was removed and taped into a logbook (now housed in the Smithsonian Institution).<sup>4</sup> While the use of “bug” to mean “computer malfunction” predates this moth, the bug in the machine is a useful trope for understanding the Futurefarmers’ method: In a conversation with art critic Claire Doherty, filmed while the CCVA project was underway, Franceschini said, “You can choose not to participate [in challenging environments] or you can find a way to kind of be a bug in a machine. That’s a line that runs through Futurefarmers.... How do you find the cracks in [a] system?”<sup>5</sup> The concept of seeking out moths pervades this exhibition in the artists’ probes and actions.

Sound one—look for moth (head up toward the clouds)  
Sound two—find a brick (practice falling)  
Sound three—open every book (smell the pages)  
Sound four—search for finger (leads us to George)  
Sound five—look for moth (some make cocoons in the soil)

## Brief Interruptions

“Hit like a Ton of Bricks.” “Hit The Bricks.” “Shitting Bricks.” These are among the “7 brick idioms” listed in *Erratum: Brief Interruptions in the Waste Stream*, a limited-edition book by Futurefarmers. The book, printed on cards encased in a cast porcelain brick, offers idiomatic expressions using the term “brick” while also using the form of the brick as an expression of repurposed infrastructures of wastefulness. This project, comprised of drawings, a performance, and a video executed and exhibited in a 2010 residency at San Francisco Center for the Book, was prompted by discussions with the artists’ longtime collaborator, scientist of psychology and the environment Jonathan E. Meuser.<sup>6</sup> Meuser has worked on envisioning alternative toilets that would dispose of minimal fresh water and utilize the nitrogen in urine as a fertilizer, offering an alternative to the fossil-fuel-driven synthesis of nitrogen currently employed in modern farming.<sup>7</sup> In response to Meuser’s critique, *Erratum* creatively “interrupts” the wastefulness of the conventional Western toilet. Pulverized high-flow toilets (sourced from a San Francisco salvage yard) gain new purpose as constructive elements—“brick” cases for letterpress-card book pages. The limited-edition books and related project materials are exhibited in the Sert Gallery on Level 3 of the Carpenter Center. Some of the *Erratum* multiples can be seen in custom wooden cases in which they were cast, surrounded by the dust and shards of one destroyed toilet. Other examples from Futurefarmers’ extensive roster of publications are available for handling and reading. Two books by Marcel Duchamp are additionally on display, opened to an erratum sheet and a “Musical Erratum” score that inspired works in the exhibition.

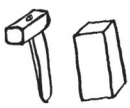
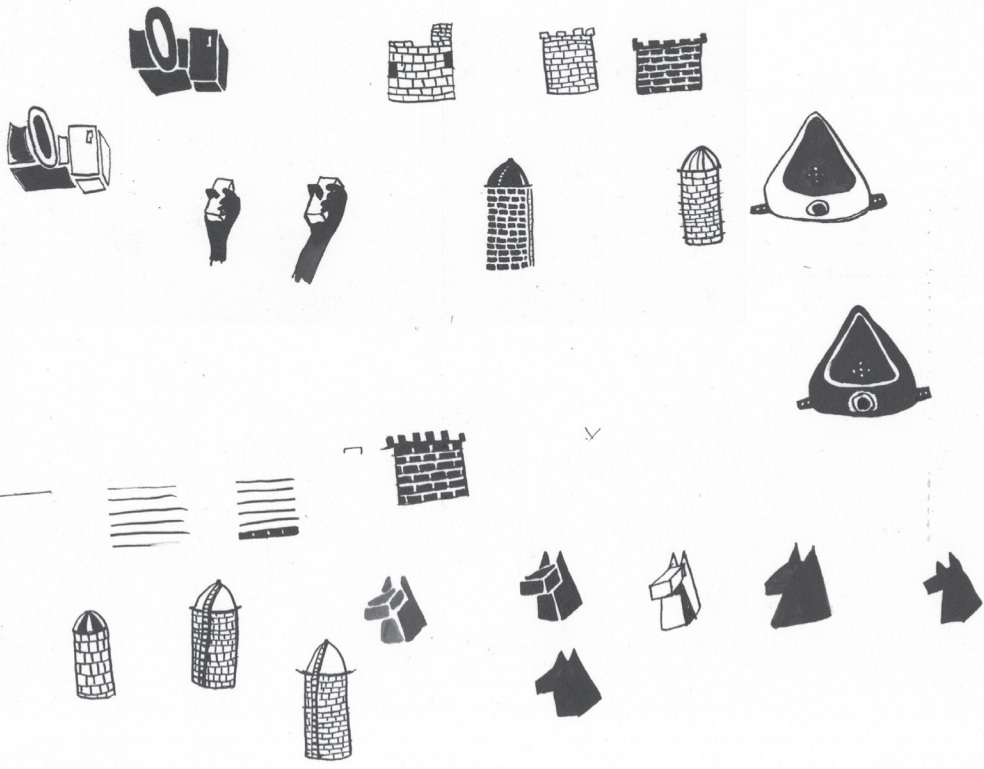






Futurefarmers, *Erratum: Brief Interruptions in the Waste Stream*, 2010. Pair of wooden brick molds, porcelain toilet shards, letterpress-printed cards. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artists. Left page: *For Want of a Nail: Eclipse*, 2014. Futurefarmer Michael Swaine with “Basket Bob” attempting to eclipse the sun with a penny in Tres Piedras, New Mexico. Photograph by Amy Franceschini. Courtesy of the artists.

The Sert Gallery is also host to objects, videos, posters, and a booklet that are part of Futurefarmers’ 2014 project *For Want of a Nail*. Commissioned for the first edition of SITE Santa Fe’s SITElines biennial, *Unsettled Landscapes*, the artwork focuses on an interruption that may be “brief” in immediate execution but possessing long-lasting and tragic environmental and social effects: the experimentation with and deployment of nuclear weaponry. Franceschini and Swaine’s response to this event involves creative reenactments of requests in two 1943 memos from J. Robert Oppenheimer’s office at Los Alamos. The first memo solicited construction of a small table and a nail for Oppenheimer “to hang his hat on”; it was followed by a repeated request subsequent to the delivery of a coatrack, reinforcing Oppenheimer’s preference for a nail in the wall. The artists invited ten actors to “assemble” and “disassemble” a table kit that they made according to the parameters outlined in the memo, which they call the *Table of Contents*. The artists also produced three variations of the office nail: one forged out of meteorite, one cast out of 1943 steel pennies, and a third formed of Trinitite, a vestigial glassy substance unique to the area surrounding the Trinity nuclear test site—the artists crushed and melted this matter in a process they refer to as “re-fusing.” In focusing on discrete objects within Oppenheimer’s legacy, the artists show how even small acts of material creation can contribute to acts with consequential impact.



PAWN



KING



QUEEN



CASTLE



BISHOP



KNIGHT

# Cocoons in the Soil

Amy Franceschini and Michael Swaine reveal the world through the fingerprints— isotopic or flesh—that have formed it. In their nails, bricks, tables, and other trenchant objects, the artists of Futurefarmers demonstrate how making can be a substantive form of inquiry. In their own words: “We (A.F./M.S.) make things. We speak through materials.... Stories are embedded in the materials in the same way that the materials are embedded in the stories. We give you both. This space between the story and the props will give your hands and mind something to grab onto. We want you to decide what to do with these.”<sup>8</sup> This artistic practice considers the often-quotidian objects that surrounded historic events, and focuses viewers’ eyes on everyday materials and infrastructures so common they typically evade visibility.

Writing of the power of aesthetics to change subjectivities and create visions for social change, art historian Sarah Lewis asks, “What is the future of how we think about so-called failure, those dubious starts and unlikely transformations?” Her answer: “By finding ways to honor them, by not letting the path out of them stay hidden, by letting them be generative, even indispensable.”<sup>9</sup> With *Errata—Brief Interruptions*, the artists of Futurefarmers invite us to regard the error, the interruption, the fall, and the failure—the bugs and cracks in the systems of making and knowing—as means of thinking about how the present world was made. In so doing, they seed questions (like the moth’s “cocoons in the soil”) about how it might also be gloriously disrupted, newly envisioned, and made open to different possibilities of creation.

Left Top: Futurefarmers, Selections from *Erratum: Storyboard*, 2010. Ink on paper. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artists. Left Bottom: Futurefarmers, Selections from *Erratum: Storyboard*, 2010. Ink on paper. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artists. Next page: Futurefarmers, Selections from *Erratum: Storyboard*, 2010. Ink on paper. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artists.

<sup>1</sup> *Sole/Soul Sermons* is a limited-edition book that was published to document Futurefarmers’ participation in the Guggenheim Museum’s *Intervals* emerging artist series. Futurefarmers was featured in this program on May 4–14, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Paul de Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 213.

<sup>3</sup> Telephone interview, December 5, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Peggy Aldrich Kidwell, “Stalking the Elusive Computer Bug,” in *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing* 20, no. 4 (1998): 5.

<sup>5</sup> “Public Art (Now): Claire Doherty talks to Amy Franceschini (Futurefarmers),” published online by *This is Tomorrow Contemporary Art Magazine* on March 9, 2015, <https://youtu.be/HUN41EAruYY>.

<sup>6</sup> Email interview, January 8, 2017. For more on

Jonathan Meuser’s collaborative work with Amy Franceschini and Michael Swaine, including a “Lunchbox Lab” for citizen science testing of algae for hydrogen production, see “Artist-as-Citizen/Scientist-as-Citizen: Futurefarmers interviews Jonathan Meuser,” in Max Andrews, ed., *Land, Art: A Cultural Ecology Handbook* (London: RSA, Arts Council England, 2006), 134–37.

<sup>7</sup> A 2013 version of this concept, rendered by designer Alexandra Harker, is illustrated at <http://www.alexandraharker.com/conceptual-work/the-eau-clair-planter-kit/>.

<sup>8</sup> Amy Franceschini and Michael Swaine, “For Want of a Nail,” in Franceschini and Swaine, eds., *For Want of a Nail* (New York: Publication Studio Hudson/Pilot Editions, 2015), 13.

<sup>9</sup> Sarah Lewis, *The Rise: Creativity, the Gift of Failure, and the Search for Mastery* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 105.



# Exhibition Checklist

## Level 1

All works courtesy of the artists unless noted below.

Futurefarmers, *Erratum Three*, 2017. Multimedia with HD video (color, silent), 4:3 on loop, 29:17 min.; inkjet photography 23 x 27 in. (framed), photography by Matthew Monteith; 1,000 bricks with canvas straps that are moved daily throughout the course of the exhibition. Bricks originally used as a stage during the opening night performance of *De-Bugging*.

Bricks courtesy of Lincoln Andrews, Stiles and Hart Brick Company.

Futurefarmers, *Erratum Two*, 2017. Multimedia with books with errata sheets; limited-edition letterpress book; custom display.

Books with correction sheets found during a workshop with students from Northeastern University. Loaned from Robbins Library of Philosophy, Harvard University.

## Level 3

Futurefarmers, *Erratum*, 2010. HD video (color, silent). 16:9, 4:18 min.

## Screening Room

Futurefarmers, *Casting Call*, 2014. HD video (black and white, silent). 16:9, 5:07 min. Commissioned by SITE Santa Fe for SITElines: *Unsettled Landscapes*.

## Sert Gallery

Futurefarmers, *Erratum: Brief Interruptions in the Waste Stream*, 2010. Pair of wooden brick molds, porcelain toilet shards, letterpress-printed cards. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of San Francisco Center for the Book.

Futurefarmers, *Forge*, 2014. From *For Want of a Nail*. Meteorite. 17 x 12 in. (framed).

Futurefarmers, *Cast*, 2014. From *For Want of a Nail*. 1943 Pennies. 17 x 12 in. (framed).

Futurefarmers, *Re-fuse*, 2014. From *For Want of a Nail*. Trinitite. 17 x 12 in. (framed).

Futurefarmers, *Nail for a hat*, 2014. Reproduction of inter-office memorandum sent from J. Robert Oppenheimer's office, Oct. 18, 1943. 11 1/2 x 8 3/4 in. (framed).

Futurefarmers, *Table for a telephone*, 2014. Reproduction of inter-office memorandum sent from J. Robert Oppenheimer's office, Oct. 18, 1943. 11 1/2 x 8 3/4 in. (framed).

Futurefarmers, *From Meteorite to Trinitite*, 2014. From *For Want of a Nail*. Ink on paper, 18 x 24 in.

Futurefarmers, *Erratum*, 2010. Set of gloves. 17 x 21 x 4 in. (framed).

Futurefarmers, *Erratum: Storyboard 1–7*, 2010. Ink on paper. Dimensions variable.

## Books

Marcel Duchamp, *Opposition et cases conjuguées sont réconciliées* (Opposition and sister squares are reconciled) (Brussels: L'Echiquier/Edmond Lancel, 1932). Courtesy of Fine Arts Library, Harvard University.

Marcel Duchamp and Richard Hamilton, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Company, 1960).

## Acknowledgments

For over two decades, Futurefarmers has maintained an interdisciplinary practice marked by dedication, focus, and sheer curiosity. The collective's inquiries involve a web of expertise from historians, scientists, and craftspeople delicately woven together by a deeply poetic sensibility. It takes a village to wander effectively.

On behalf of everyone at CCVA, I extend my gratitude to Amy Franceschini and Michael Swaine for making us part of that village and briefly interrupting the day-to-day operations of an art institution with a renewed sense of wonder. Great thanks goes to former Director James Voorhies, who originated the project, and to Rebecca Uchill for picking up the baton to steer and craft an elegant show that brings us along the artists' material investigations. CCVA's Daisy Nam and Anna Kovacs run a well-oiled machine that can and does do anything and everything. True to their collective nature and thinking, Futurefarmers brought in communities of learners and makers

from Northeastern University and the Massachusetts College of Art and Design to participate in stages of this project. Thank you to Elaine Buckholtz and Floor van de Velde, Sarah Kanouse, Bree Edwards, Gloria Sutton, Nick Brown, and their students. Special thanks to Eric Johnson-DeBaufre at Robbins Library of Philosophy and William Connor at Fine Arts Library at Harvard University, as well as Lincoln Andrews and George Holdsworth of Stiles and Hart Brick Company, who graciously supplied the materials of inquiry for Futurefarmers over these past months.

*Dina Deitsch, John R. and Barbara Robinson Family Interim Director*

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The artists would also like to thank: William Chambers, Thea Sizemore and Patrick Kavanagh of Kavamore Press, The University of Washington, Heather Watson, and Griff Williams of Gallery 16 & Urban Digital Color.

# CC VA

## **Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts**

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Gallery Hours Thu–Sun, 12–6 pm  
Free and open to the public

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### **Mission**

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts is dedicated to the synthesis of art, design, and education through the exhibition of existing works and production of new commissions. It strives to bring people, ideas, and objects together in generative ways that provide unparalleled experiences with contemporary art, ultimately enriching the creative and intellectual lives of our audiences.

### **Program**

The Carpenter Center program fosters meaningful engagement among artists, art, and our audiences. Exhibitions, lectures, residencies, publications, performances, screenings, and informal gatherings are choreographed to create a place where visual literacy, knowledge production, contemporary art, and critical inquiry seamlessly meet.

Dina Deitsch, *Interim Director*  
Daisy Nam, *Assistant Director*  
Anna Kovacs, *Exhibitions Manager*  
Daisy Wong, *Exhibition Production Assistant*

Siena Scarff, *Design*  
John Ewing, *Copy Editor*  
Linco, *Printer*



# Errata—Brief Interruptions