

Gordon Brent BROCHU-INGRAM \* [studio@gordonbrentingram.ca](mailto:studio@gordonbrentingram.ca)  
KEXMIN field station, Salt Spring Island, Canada

2016 April presentation HEAD Geneva University of Art & Design  
Trans – Mediation, Education, Haute École d'art et de design Genève



## ***The Tree Question:***

Field research & cultivation practices in  
community-based public art in an age of ecological crises



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Since the 1982 intervention by Joseph Beuys, the *7000 Eichen – Stadtverwaldung statt Stadtverwaltung* / **7000 Oaks – City Forestation Instead of City Administration**, tree planting, and cultivation more generally, have increasingly become contemporary art practices.



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*Joseph Beuys 7000 Eichen –  
Stadtverwaldung statt Stadtverwaltung /  
7000 Oaks – City Forestation Instead  
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Employment of such cultivation interventions, as contemporary art, have nearly always used as a way to challenge particular notions and demarcations of the 'public', on one hand, and experiences of communities, landscapes and ecosystems, on the other hand.



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Such a set of oppositional tactics  
often contrasts itself  
professionalized landscape  
architecture more often employed  
to re-enforce the status quo of  
public space.

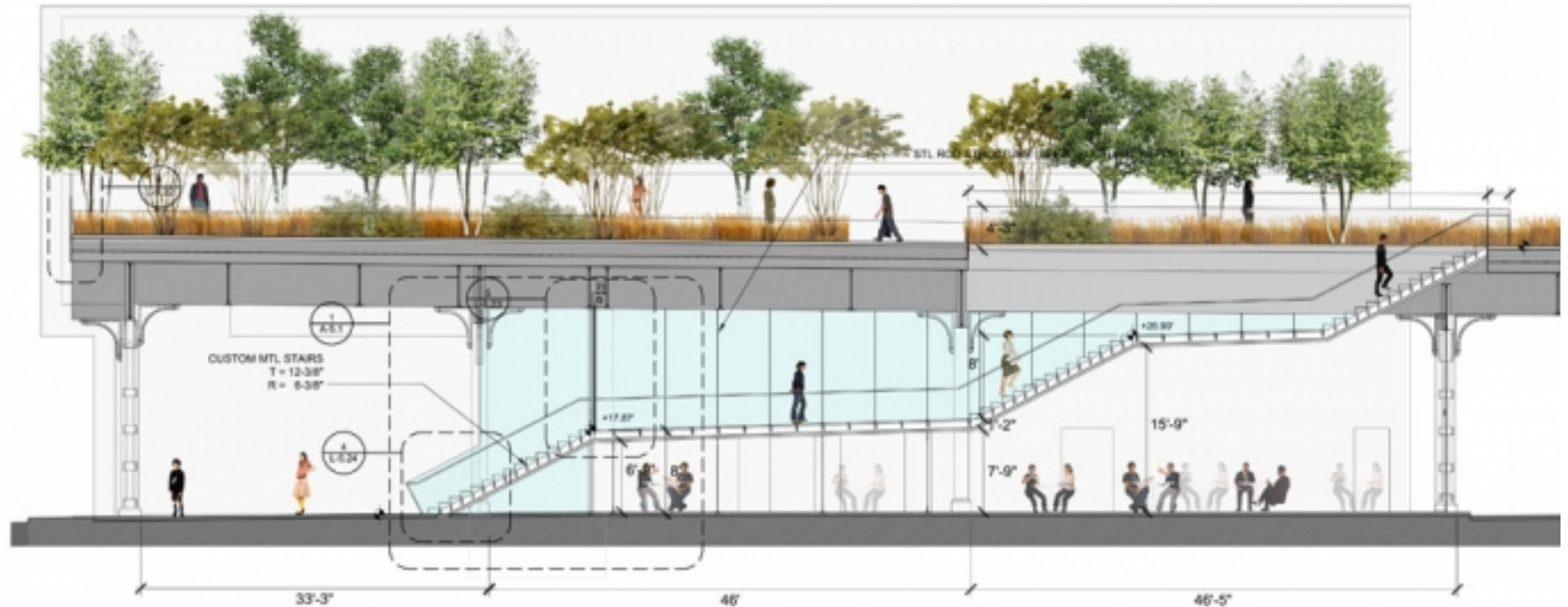




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landscape architecture detail involving multiple designers,  
The High Line, New York, New York circa 2012



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And since documenta 7, a raft of  
experimental artists have rifted on  
notions of agriculture (and  
silviculture, horticulture, and  
permaculture) as visual culture





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most notably Alan Sonfist (et al 2014, Landi 2011), Ron Benner (2008), the Fallen Fruit collective (Goodyear 2012), and Sam Van Aken (Brooks 2014).







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Alan Sonfist \* Time Landscape (1965-1978-Present)





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Alan Sonfist \* Time Landscape (1965-1978-Present)



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This text is part of Parks' Historical Signs Project and can be found posted within the park.

Landscape artist Alan Sonfist (1946- ) created Time Landscape as a living monument to the forest that once blanketed Manhattan Island. He proposed the project in 1965. After extensive research on New York's botany, geology, and history Sonfist and local community members used a palette of native trees, shrubs, wild grasses, flowers, plants, rocks, and earth to plant the 25' x 40' rectangular plot at the northeast corner of La Guardia Place and West Houston Street in 1978. The result of their efforts is a slowly developing forest that represents the Manhattan landscape inhabited by Native Americans and encountered by Dutch settlers in the early 17th century.

Alan Sonfist \* Time Landscape (1965-1978-Present)



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Alan Sonfist, “Myself Becoming One with the Tree,” 1969



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Ron Benner 1991 'Native to the Americas' London, Ontario





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Ron Benner, "Growing Histories", 2010, Sherbrooke, Québec





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*Fallen Fruit*



Fallen Fruit Collective, Los Angeles <http://fallenfruit.org/>





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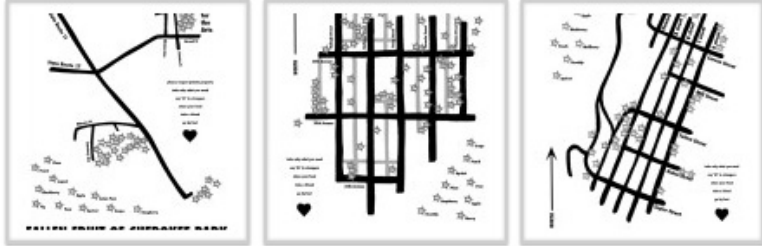
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## Fallen Fruit

### Public Fruit Maps

*Public Fruit Maps*, dimensions variable, 2004 – ongoing

One of Fallen Fruit's core projects is to map neighborhoods to which we are invited, mapping all the fruit trees that grow in or over public space. The maps are hand-drawn and distributed free from copyright as jpgs and PDFs. They are regularly reproduced in the media and have been exhibited in museums and gallery exhibitions internationally. The dimensions of the maps are variable and range from 8" x 10" to 40" x 60". This is an ongoing and ever-expanding project.



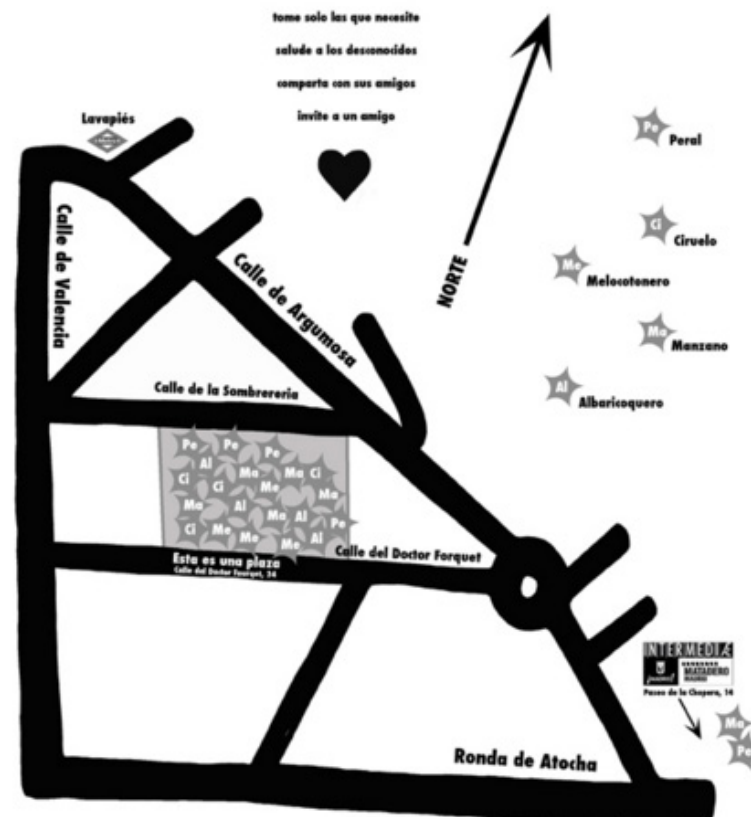
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**FALLEN FRUIT de INTERMEDIÆ**  
para más información fallenfruit.org. ¡conozca sus frutas!  
**MATADERO-MADRID, SPAIN**

Fallen Fruit Collective, Los Angeles <http://fallenfruit.org/>





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photo: Amber Seeley

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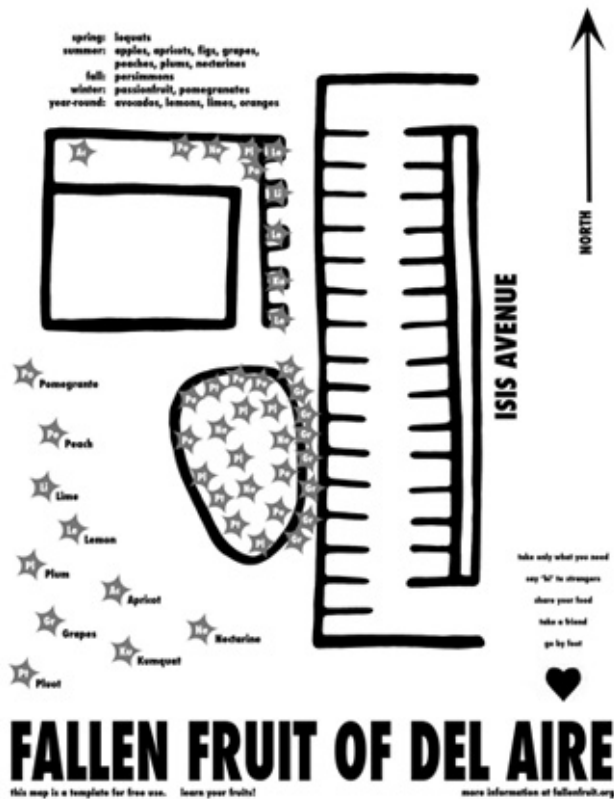




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Sam Van Aken – Tree Of 40 Fruit (2008-present)

[www.treeof40fruit.com](http://www.treeof40fruit.com)



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But precisely how 'contemporary' are such tree planting 'works' and how are associated practices and conceptualizations changing as ecological crises intensify, as cultural signifiers shift, as access to scientific information increases, and as data sources and paradigms diversify?



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And how do these Western and often Eurocentric aesthetic movements, involving trees and urban space, construct relationships with recoveries and practices of indigenous communities often at odds with modernity?







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Duane Linklater 2012 Untitled (A Blueberry Garden for Bard College)



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WEN,NÁ,NEĆ

2015 Gordon Brent BROCHU-INGRAM 150 cm x 68 cm





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One point of inquiry is provided by Claire Bishop's 2012 note that, “Beuys drew a conceptual line between his output as a sculptor and his discursive / pedagogic work” (page 245), the latter including his tree planting.





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But if cultivation is more of a conceptual disruptor and teaching opportunity than part of artistic production to produce an art work, why does the aesthetic importance of trees for interventions in public space continue to increase?







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A more problematic and indefinite set of questions derive from the divergent and shifting uses of tree planting in contemporary culture.





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For example, there is no sign that the 1982 intervention in Kassel was intended to contribute to carbon sequestration or to conserve local habitat and species, or to build community through sharing fruit as in the recent tree planting work in Los Angeles of Fallen Fruit.





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Today, it would be difficult to plant a tree, as a contemporary art work, without professed relationships to countering climate change, gentrification, and homelessness and contributing to carbon sequestration, food security, and social equity.





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So like painting, drawing, and sculpture, the basic 'materials' of tree planting, however organic, are infinitely pliable -- as long as respective organisms and ecosystems can survive and be part of public space. There is an implicit aesthetic of survival.





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salmon smoking rack bean trellis 2015-16 Gordon Brent BROCHU-  
INGRAM (with Alex Grünenfelder) 6 meters x 12 meters x 5 meters



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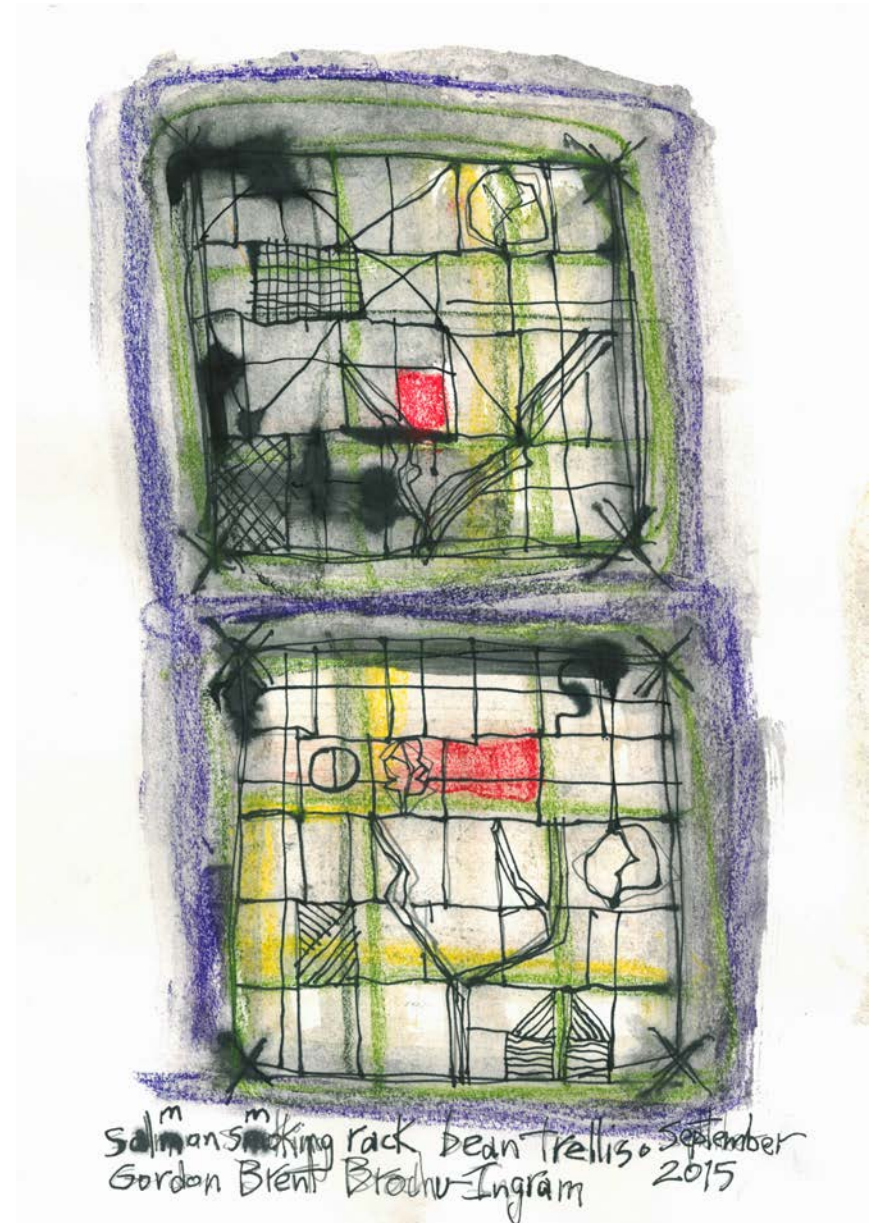
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salmon smoking rack bean trellis

2015-16

Gordon Brent BROCHU-INGRAM  
(with Alex Grünenfelder)

6 meters x 12 meters x 5 meters





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What are the diverse roles of science in these forms of artistic research? In particular, how does tree-planting-as-contemporary-art challenge, expand, and re-enforce broader art movements such as,







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various forms of community  
participation as art (embodied in the  
work of  
Suzanne Lacey  
and  
Martha  
Rosler)?





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Martha Rosler, *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, 1975, performance,  
video, still



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# scientific experimentation as in 'wetware' and biological modification?

Artist Beatriz da Costa (creator of the Pigeonblog), Christopher Kim and scientist Tau-Mu Yi gave an introductory session in their ambitious project of using living organisms as sensors for urban pollution.



[http://we-make-money-not-art.com/wetware\\_hackers/](http://we-make-money-not-art.com/wetware_hackers/)





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# traditional knowledge and other indigenous experiences?



castle & ingram 2014 camas, *Camassia leichtlinii* regrowing after  
fire, Salt Spring Island 1 meter x 2 meters



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# relational aesthetics as new forms of education and community aesthetic engagement? and



Suzanne Lacy's 2012 Three Weeks in January is a performance of her 1977 piece "Three Weeks in May" that brought hidden experiences of rape to the public's attention.





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# micro-urban tactics that transform multiple publics?



Santiago, Chile intervention for placemaking circa 2015





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Or do the heightened skills and artifice required to sufficiently manipulate a site in deteriorating environments, to insure that trees will thrive, represent another kind of cultivation of culture that signals a new and more tenuous phase of the “Anthropocene” (Wark 2015)?



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2015 Oct 15 Pacific crabapple, *Malus fusca*, with this site prized  
and stewarded by the Tsawout, 1 meter x 2 meters,  
Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram





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2015 August 7 chokecherry, *Prunus Virginiana*, with this site  
prized and stewarded by the Tsawout and Cowichan, 1 meter x 2  
meters, Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram





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In other words, are the creative perspectives and practices of contemporary artists, particularly collaboratives and collectives, increasingly necessary to keep ecosystems, communities, and public spaces ‘alive’, diverse, and evolving?



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To view image on screen, adjust "Ad width" to measure 2.5" wide (check with ruler and by adjusting view percentage) then STAND BACK from the monitor 10 ft. to represent 100' viewing.

**OUTFRONT**  
media

mock-up for the 'crabapple' installation, CoastalCity bus shelter series, City of Vancouver Public Art Program, castle grünenfelder ingram, 1 meter x 1.5 meters

ac'alus f, we'op 蘋果男  
 Pomme のリン-ナガリ

Pomme (apple)  
 (Mitsubishi Electric)

1. The Pomme (apple) is a very popular fruit in Japan. It is also a very popular fruit in Germany. The Pomme (apple) is a very popular fruit in Japan. It is also a very popular fruit in Germany.

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