

Community Building through Art: The Case of Modern Appalachia
Mattie Wong

Bryan McNeil
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When the world thinks of Appalachia, they think of the Beverly Hillbillies, rednecks, and a place stuck in the past. These types of stereotypes, along with more extreme ones, fail to look at how Appalachia is a dynamic area that faces a unique subset of social issues related to the problems of our country at large. Through interviews and site visits this paper examines how art has become a way of building community and identity within Appalachia, and how this union ultimately helps Appalachians address the issues within their homeland. The lens of art is chosen because of the community building and social changing power the medium can have. Through the years, Appalachian art has been perceived to fit these stereotyped roles, but this capstone intends to examine how artists in the Appalachians view the complexity of their homeland and their place in it.

Modern Appalachia faces some unique struggles that have been damaging communities in the region for years. Strip mining, poverty, drug addiction, and health problems are rampant and many feel as if they are caught in a Catch-22. Because art has such a potential for addressing issues not easily addressed verbally, and has such power of inspiring creation and community within people, I have talked to several artists from the region and the director of Appalshop, a non-profit arts and community center to weigh in on their experience of being from the mountains, some of being activists within their community, and how their artwork may or may not look at Appalachian issues. By hearing their stories, this project hopes to come look at the numerous complexities of these issues and identity, as well as discuss the possibility for art to be used more frequently in Appalachia for community building purposes.

The project is divided up into three sections. The first section is a literature review looking at the history of the folk and craft revival and how this affected the state of Appalachia, song used to strengthen people during a miner take-over of a plant, and the connection between art and social justice. This background helps lay down the foundation for these interviews. The

second section consists of these interviews with people at the Southern Highland Craft Fair, three artists from Eastern Kentucky, and the director of Appalshop. Many of these interviews were in person, and so when they are, I add my own experience of the interview in order to help gain a better understanding of the situation, and the role my identity played in the exchange of ideas. Unfortunately we can not be entirely unbiased, and so I acknowledge that my worldview has shaped the way I have interpreted these interviews to some degree.

I am also using words using specific definitions. Appalachia in this paper means more often the southern part of the Appalachian mountain range, winding its way through Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia. Most of my interviews center on Eastern Kentucky in Knotts and Letcher County. The term “art” can also have some very broad meanings. Although many people to this day debate on what art is, in this paper I focus on the use of visual art, such as painting, illustration, sculpture, video, and multimedia. Beth Bingman from Appalshop briefly mentions theatre, while in the literature review, one article looks at how song brought people together.

Literature Review

Selling Tradition, Jane S. Becker

In this volume, Jane S. Becker looks at the industrialization of the craft industry in the Appalachians. The author provides some very important insight into the arts and craft revival movement, as well as the politics behind the idea of tradition and folk in a philosophical as well as a physical sense through movements and groups such as the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild.

Becker extensively explains the misconceptions of folk art and folk traditions. In the folk revival of the 1930's, folk cultures were defined in opposition to capitalist structures and ways of life that were seen as the damaging forces that plunged the country into the Great Depression. It was assumed that folk cultures and crafts were a throwback to an earlier, "purer" time where master skill and community involvement was more important than mass production and isolation. However, turning the idea of mountain craftwork into a tradition, "served to obscure the conflicts and specific histories that constituted the reality of mountain life and craft production, endowing them instead with constructed meanings that increased their market value (Becker 1998: 7)."

Folk traditions were seen as beyond the materiality of the world. This idea further propelled others outside of Appalachia to attach certain moral misconceptions about the work and the folk who created it. Folk traditions seemed to carry a sense of familial values, self-reliance, and a merger of soul and craft. These aspects, whether real or perceived, became the mainstay of the social crusade that surrounded the folk revival. This simplification also set the folk as the other, somehow outside the sphere of politics and the specific issues that concerned Appalachia. This simplification was used to make folk traditions and handicrafts easier to swallow by the middle-class consumers of folk products.

In her chapter on the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild, Becker looks at the words and actions of the guild leaders to view the larger stereotypes of the area. Guild leaders were for the most part college-educated, middle class women. Mostly from outside the area, they were associated with mountain schools and settlements. The Southern Highland Handicraft Guild became an extension of social reform and education movements. From guild leader notebooks, Becker picks up on phrases such as "purest Anglo-Saxon stock," and "bring them civilization yet save their culture (Becker 1998: 78)." This can outline some motivations of the craft movement

in that those in Appalachia were somehow seen as uncontaminated by the outside world, and, in the case of the majority of middle class America at the time, somehow the keepers of pure traditions of their ancestors, the Anglo-Saxons. They were not the mutts that one became in becoming American. One guild leader even mentioned that the speech of those in the Appalachians was “English not American (Becker 1998: 78),” attaching some value to be viewed as coming from the old country.

The Southern Highland Handicraft Guild started in the late 1920's out of the Southern Mountain Worker's Conference held yearly in Knoxville, TN. The guild was concerned with artistic standards, art and social reform, and marketing the products. It was this struggle between art and marketing that was the topic of most of the debates within the guild. As Winogene Redding put it, “It was a question of bringing back ideas from the outside world to be interpreted by their skill.” Therefore, even the art aspect of the guild was geared towards the consumer, mostly middle-class urban Americans. In this way, the traditions were “sanitized (Becker 1998:38)” into consumable goods. Becker continues with an explanation of how the fluidity of concepts such as folk and tradition made this new interpretation possible without losing the marketable word, “authentic”. Folk and tradition, like so many other words and ideologies, are socially constructed, meaning that they are not static and can change in relation to how the predominating society wants to use the terms to their advantage. Becker also references an idea by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger that the idea of “traditions” is merely a tool of social manipulation. Ideas are seen as “tradition” and static in order to promote some sort of social cohesion, express authority of people or morals, and use the idea of “that's the way things are” to say why the group should act or think in certain ways.

All that is Native and Fine, David Whisnat

Whisnat explores the politics and motivations behind the folk school movement of the 1930s focusing on three models, the one created by the Hindman Settlement School, Olive Dame Campbell, and the White Top Folk Festival. In the introduction, Whisnat explains that the movement stemmed mostly from outside the region, with the spear headers being white, middleclass, New England women who came from Victorian mindset of a privileged woman's work to be social work and bringing those less fortunate up to their standards. Whisnant describes the views of these women as coming into the south to start "psychic, educational and cultural aid stations for the bruised and dislocated victims of an advancing industrial capitalism (Whisnant, 6)." The idea of "saving" those in Appalachia and helping to create way to modernize and bring into the economy "outdated" cultural traditions, shows the good intentions of the founders, if also showing their ethnocentrism and lack of cultural consciousness. Appalachians were seen as a passive people who would need to be taught how to be "active" in terms of New England sensibilities if their culture was to survive and bring the area out of poverty. However, folk schools and the mentality behind them also highlight "the resistance to the notion of a South or an Appalachia that could (and did) give birth to and nurture progressive and radical social movements and institutions (6)."

Olive Dame Campbell is the only creator of a folk school that Whisnant has more respect for. She was the only one in his opinion who looked more closely at the specific cultural and social situations of Appalachia. However, for the most part, Campbell was "not able to see, touch, and conceive of certain things in her chosen part of the South....Except for her work with cooperatives, she remained almost completely out of touch with the more vigorous movements for social change in the 20s and 30s (178)." She created, along with her husband, the John C. Campbell folk school in Cherokee County, NC, which still exists to this day. The idea was taken

from the idea of the Danish Folk School movement, which provided education and a return to traditional culture in Denmark. However, Campbell took this inspiration further to include aspects of Danish culture, such as gymnastics and Danish dances, to the curriculum of the Appalachian folk schools. Whisnant speculates with all the folks schools that, “had the folk school version of culture been spun from native fibers, it might have been strong enough to bind the school to the community through decades of change. (168)”

In the Shadow of Ragged Mountain, Audrey Horning

This text by Audrey Horning looks at the recent archeological projects of Nicholson, Corbin, and Weakley Hollows in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. The projects, now located in the Shenandoah National Park, started in opposition to period texts claiming the ignorance and isolation of those living in the hollows. The projects site in particular the study entitled *Hollow Folk*, published in 1933. In the opening statement, several phrases parallel the ideas of the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild. “Pure Anglo-Saxon stock”, “They speak a peculiar language which retains many Elizabethan expression (Thomas and Sherman, 1933).”

Historical archeology in the hollows aimed at looking at the level of interaction those living in the hollows had with the outside world. If the written studies and testimonies from missionaries at the time were to be believed, archeologists would not expect to find items made from outside the region. However, there were considerable instances of contradictions between outside perspectives and the material culture found at the sights. For example, a toy ray gun was found at the site of a cabin, where it had been supposed that children from the hollows did not even know what toys were, much less own them.

The idea of the backward, illiterate mountain folk that was greatly perpetrated in the 1930s has persisted to this day. Horning laments the “lasting potency of Appalachian caricature in American popular history (Horning 2004: 11).” Through archeology, many of these notions have been dismissed, however, the damage done by this very strong reputation is a constant issue in modern Appalachian culture, and one artists in particular are sensitive to and react to.

Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of Resistance and Change

“Singing Across Dark Spaces: The Union/Community Takeover of Pittston’s Moss 3 Plant”, Jim Sessions and Fran Ansley

This article follows the account of Jim Sessions, a reverend from Knoxville, TN, and his wife Fran Ansley, a professor at University of Tennessee’s Law School, of the UMW occupation of a Pittston Moss Plant in 1989. This was a radical event created by miners, their families, and the community who was affected by Pittston Coal Company’s decision to pull out of the industry wide Bituminous Coal Operators Association which bargained with UMW about working standards and benefits. Pittston claimed that in order to compete with foreign markets, they should be exempt from these regulations. The result led to a reneging of miner benefits, including healthcare, for those who retired before 1974 and pressuring workers to go against hard won union victories such as working irregular shifts, and generally giving more grounds for being fired if workers did not meet efficiency standards. Two years after pulling out of this agreement and failed attempts at negotiations and strikes by UMW, the union decided that drastic action was needed for miners’ voices to be heard. The community decided to revive an old strike tactic from the early days of the union, the take-over.

Jim was asked in strict confidence to be one of the three hundred men who ended up occupying the Pittston 3 Moss Plant in Russell County Virginia because he was seen as an unaffiliated sympathizer. For this reason, the union believed that they would be able to curb violent reactions by the police or the security from the mine. Sessions explains his experience day to day, talking about the sense of community that he found first at Camp Solidarity, and then within the mine complex. Every evening, as the group of men who occupied the refinery were about to finish the day, they would climb up to the roof of the building and communicate with the supporters on the ground who gathered daily. Sessions talks about the morale boosting songs the community created and sang, and how important this artistic work was to remind the occupiers of their purpose. Old songs such as “Which Side are you On?”, an Appalachian labor song from the 1930’s and “Amazing Grace” were sung, as well as new songs created and performed by wives of the miners and the Student’s Auxiliary, the group of middle to high school students who support the miner’s actions for their rights against the coal mines.

Fran Ansley, Jim’s wife, came to support him and the other strikers during the 3 day occupation. She witnessed some of these evening singing sessions, and although she acknowledges all the “correct ingredients” it took to logistically pull off the takeover, she says, “But on the road that night, I want to tell you that it didn’t feel like correct ingredients. It felt like a mysterious and unexplainable gift of great love and power. I will never forget the look in people’s eyes that afternoon, or the sound of that singing across black space... (Sessions and Ansley, 1993:218).” This art form of singing created a community between the occupiers and their supporters that went beyond what other forms of showing support could have.

“Imagining Otherwise: Connecting the Arts and Social Justice to Envision and Act for Change,”

Lee Anne Bell and Dipti Desai

Art as an important mechanism in social justice issues is rarely explored. Art, because it can go beyond the historical and into the realm of emotion and “embodied/sensate (Bell and Desai 2011: 288)” can be seen superfluous to goals. However, it is just this inherent experience and creativity needed in art that makes the medium so relevant. In this introduction to a 2011 special edition of the journal, *Equity and Excellence in Education*, Lee Anne Bell and Dipti Desai explore the ways in which art is an important part of social justice work.

Art helps us “grasp the complex and invidious ways that systems of oppression operate” as well as recognizing the “need to engage aesthetic and sensory capacities so as to create and experiment with alternative possibilities- imagining what could otherwise be (Bell and Desai 2011: 287)”. Art elaborates on and explores the underlying hegemony in a culture, as well as asking critical questions such as how, or why. However, the most unique strength art brings to the table is the exchange and conceptualization of new social orders or approaching situations that might now have been as easily solidified verbally. These types of “alternative epistemologies (288)” allow us to explore the range of human understanding and problem solving.

One important form of art that is effective in social justices movements is the use of public art. Public art is art that is “outside formal institutions such as museums, galleries, and traditional performance spaces (Bell and Desai 2011: 290).” These spaces encourage engagement from the community and many who would be apathetic or uninterested in the piece in traditional spaces. Public spaces are important historically. Bell and Desai mention the use of public space

as a gathering place for protests or for exchanging ideas. Art in public spaces can only enhance this.

Bell and Desai also lament the turn for standardization in educational environments. There has been a growing trend to only focus on hard subjects, or merely on test-prep in the classroom. However, this has “limited the opportunities for students to critically reflect upon and become creatively involved in rethinking the many issues they and their communities face daily (290).” Art and creative processes are integral to creating strong societies that are both dynamic and try to fight hegemonic and structural inequalities, as well as blatant issues of inequality (Bell and Desai 2011).

Interviews and Site Visits

To look more closely into the effects of art in the Appalachians today, I decided to use first hand site visits and interviews. My original premises centered around what Appalachian art was, how much that definition relied on the tradition of folk art or the arts and crafts movement, and what tangible effect Appalachian art has had in the community.

Asheville, North Carolina: Southern Highland Craft Fair

My starting point was Asheville, North Carolina, the Portland of the South. That’s where I felt I could find the strongest connection between art and community. Asheville is located in western North Carolina, nestled in the Smoky Mountains. It is known for its hippies, markets, local food and vegetarian restaurants, and as being a vacation destination. Several folk schools founded during the craft revival are still thriving in the area, including the John C. Campbell folk school.

I decided to visit during the Southern Highland Craft Guild Craft Fair, held the weekend of October 20-23, 2011. There especially, I expected to find people embracing the term “folk art”. The Southern Highland Craft Guild grew out of the leadership of Olive Dame Campbell and other folk school heads, initially as a way to organize the craft production and create industry-wide standards of quality. However, as Whisnant point out, the ideals championed were those of upper middle class northerners, and the quality and styles had to stand up to these. The consumers of the folk school goods were also from New England. In order to cater to them, patterns and techniques were imported from the north, and at times the artistry was mellowed out, in fear that some themes were too distanced from the consumer base, or would upset turn-of-the-century Victorian sensibilities (Whisnant 1983).

The Southern Highland Craft Fair was held at the Expo center in downtown Asheville. Those attending were mainly white, elderly couples. A few minorities were represented, including black and latino. The artists generally fit the demographic of the attendees, although there were also a handful of younger artists. I was curious who here would consider themselves a folk artist. To my surprise I found none. To everyone, across the board, a folk artist was “untrained”, or “unskilled”. This word “untrained” cropped up with everyone I talked to, and again with a later interview with artist Jeff Chapman-Crane. Some interviewees were confused by what I meant by “folk artist”. Was the “folk” element the subject, the artist, or the region? Emily Tuttle, an artist from Hendersonville, Tennessee, admitted that her work did have inspirations from folk art in the sense of the quilting tradition. She talked about her use of cardboard from the trash to make her print blocks, and how she used the irises from her garden to make paper. She used an old technique that required the irises to boil in lye for upwards of four hours until they were ready to be hand beaten into paper (Tuttle 2011).

Emily talked about her mother had taught her quilting when she was growing up, and how that idea played into her artwork now. She was inspired by the idea of taking scraps from different places and creating a unified piece of work (Tuttle 2011). Contrastingly, one illustrator said that the folk in her work was the subject matter. She compared her work along the lines of Norman Rockwell's or Arlo Guthrie's work in the sense that she was telling stories about "the folk". The folk to her was not limited to Appalachia. One piece of hers centered on a man playing a gut bucket in New Orleans, with a young child whistling next to him.

Folk art was something that could be imitated or nuanced to, but I found no folk artists at the Southern Highland Craft Fair. As the artists mentioned, this was because "folk" carried connotations of being unskilled. However, as I was eating in one of my favorite cafes in my home of Maryville, Tennessee, I came across a business card of one woman who openly declared herself as a folk artist. Rara Schlitt grew up in Montgomery, Alabama, but had been living in Appalachia for more than thirty years. When describing who she believed were folk artists, she also used this key word, "untrained." She also said that "In the depression era, they were called hobo artists because they made art out of anything they could find, and I tend to do that also. I am also untrained. I have never had an art lesson, so I depend entirely on emotionalism and impression (Schlitt 2012)."

This connotation of being untrained led many at the Southern Highland Craft Fair to not use the word, but it seemed that stereotypes of who the folk were also played into this decision. Some of these stereotypes, discussed with artist Jeff Chapman-Crane, director of Appalshop Beth Bingman, and artist Lacy Hale, include ignorance, isolation, stupidity, laziness, and even incest (Jeff Chapman-Crane 2011, Bingman 2012, Hale 2012).

These stereotypes led the crusade into the mountains in the first place. The folk revival of the turn of the century into the 1930s happened because of the idea that those in the mountains were isolated and ignorant of the outside world. With this conception, Victorians and those during the Depression understood it to mean that somehow Appalachia was uncorrupted by capitalism and that their culture, although seemingly limited in scope, was pure and simple.

I found there was not a unifying descriptor of art created by Appalachians. Artists were painters, illustrators, multi media artists, singers, or filmmakers, but never specifically Appalachian. This, however, doesn't mean to say that many in Appalachia use their art to confront the specific political and social realities of life within the region. The most poignant example of this in my research was my visit to Jeff Chapman-Crane's home and studio in Eolia, Kentucky.

Eolia, Kentucky: Jeff and Sharman Chapman Crane

The day was rainy as I drove up from Knoxville to the Kentucky border. From there, I took small country highways along the valleys between mountains. Forebodingly and adding to the mood of the rainy day, I noticed the highway I was on was named "Kingdom Come Highway". About an hour out of Eolia I started noticing coal mining activity. The dark gray and black of mountains stripped bare and piles of coal ready for transportation blended in with the gloomy atmosphere. Towns along the way that were previously established as coal towns had a mid-century resonance to them. One mountain in particular caught my eye. The mountain was taller than the others surrounding it, and had been strip mined except for a tiny portion at the peak. I was later to learn from Jeff that this was Black Mountain, Kentucky's highest mountain. The peak had been left on the mountain unmined in a compromise between concerned citizens

pressuring the state government and the coal company. However, as part of the compromise of keeping the peak of Black Mountain pristine, while still destroying the base, the state paid the company an average estimate of what coal could have been mined in the last few feet of elevation.

Jeff Chapman-Crane's studio, Valley of the Winds Art Gallery is located in a converted house right next to his home. When I first arrived, I missed the house and started looking for a place to turn around on the narrow road. I had gone about half a mile when I came to the road's end, indicated by the large sign welcoming you to the entrance of a coal mine. I turned around and headed back to Jeff's.

The house and studio are nestled between two high ridges alongside a creek. A narrow swath of flat land exists on the south side of the creek where people lived. Jeff met me outside, along with his dog, barking furiously at the tire of my car. Jeff welcomed me into his studio, where we sat in two old comfy armchairs across from each other.

We talked at length about the Kentuckians for the Commonwealth organization, of which Jeff has been an active member.

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth is an organization that strives to provide a platform and community for the people of Kentucky to address social justice issues that affect them. The organization started after the findings of the citizen run Appalachian Land Ownership Study findings were realized in 1981. The purpose of the study was to compare land ownership to the amount of taxes paid by owners. The study concluded that coal companies were holding land out-of-state, meaning they were not subject to the same, or even any taxes like residents were. This differentiation, from an area that was so rich in resources, caused a void of tax money and contributed to the poorness of the area ("History and Accomplishments").

Following this study, Kentuckians from several coal counties organized to lobby for the changes in laws so that the tax rate would stop the loop hole that coal companies were happily exploiting. Along with this, the KTFC (at that time called the Kentucky Fair Tax Coalition), also took on the unjust law of the broadform deed. The broadform deed separated the ownership of the land and the ownership of the minerals. When strip mining technology came around, the owner of the minerals could take someone's land and destroy it without their permission because the owner of the minerals trumped the owner of the land. Many lost their land and livelihood this way, and the law, staunchly guarded by coal companies had to be changed ("History and Accomplishments"). Jeff talks about one woman, who was a lawyer, when hearing about the broadform deed exclaimed, "So they have God's rights. (Jeff Chapman-Crane 2011)."

While we were discussing the broadform deed, Jeff brought out a found poem called "Grandpa, All You Bought was the Air," created by Bob Baber, who ran for governor of West Virginia in 2011 with the Mountain Party. The found poem was Baber's grandfather's broadform deed, that outlined exactly what the mineral owned, and how much responsibility they had to the land and the owner of the surface (see Fig. 1). The text reads,

...and excepting and reserving all the coal/ and other minerals/
and other substances/ on, in, and underlying said land/ together
with the right/ of removing and taking away/ the coal and other
minerals/ and other substances/ from adjoining and adjacent land/
through any openings/ and the right to occupy/ as may be
necessary or convenient for mining purposes/ without reservation

or hindrance/ and with proper rights for ventilation/ and draining
the mines/ and all rights/ of ingress, egress, or way/ and the
privilege of constructing/ operating and maintaining railroads/ and
other roads/ in, on, under, across, and through and over the land/
without being in anyway liable/ for any injury or damage which
may be done to the land/ or water therein upon/ and generally free,
clear and discharged/ of and from all servitude to the land/
whatsoever (Baber).

While we were talking about the broadform deed, I was reminded of a sticker I had seen in the window of the convenience store down the road I had stopped in right before the interview. The sticker read, “We support coal.” After previously reading about of all the damage the coal companies had done to the area, and in light of my affirmation of such injustices with Jeff, I was very confused by this sentiment. Jeff told me that every business in town had a similar sticker, even the McDonald’s, which, although a multinational corporation, still deemed it necessary to display it. The idea of everyone having to physically display their support of coal fits with the prevailing feeling in the community. “Coal has a stranglehold, and has had a stranglehold on the economy and the way of life for a hundred years or more here. And so it’s gotten to be a way of life, you know, and people know that what jobs are available are in the coal industry, or related to the industry....(Jeff Chapman Crane 2011).”

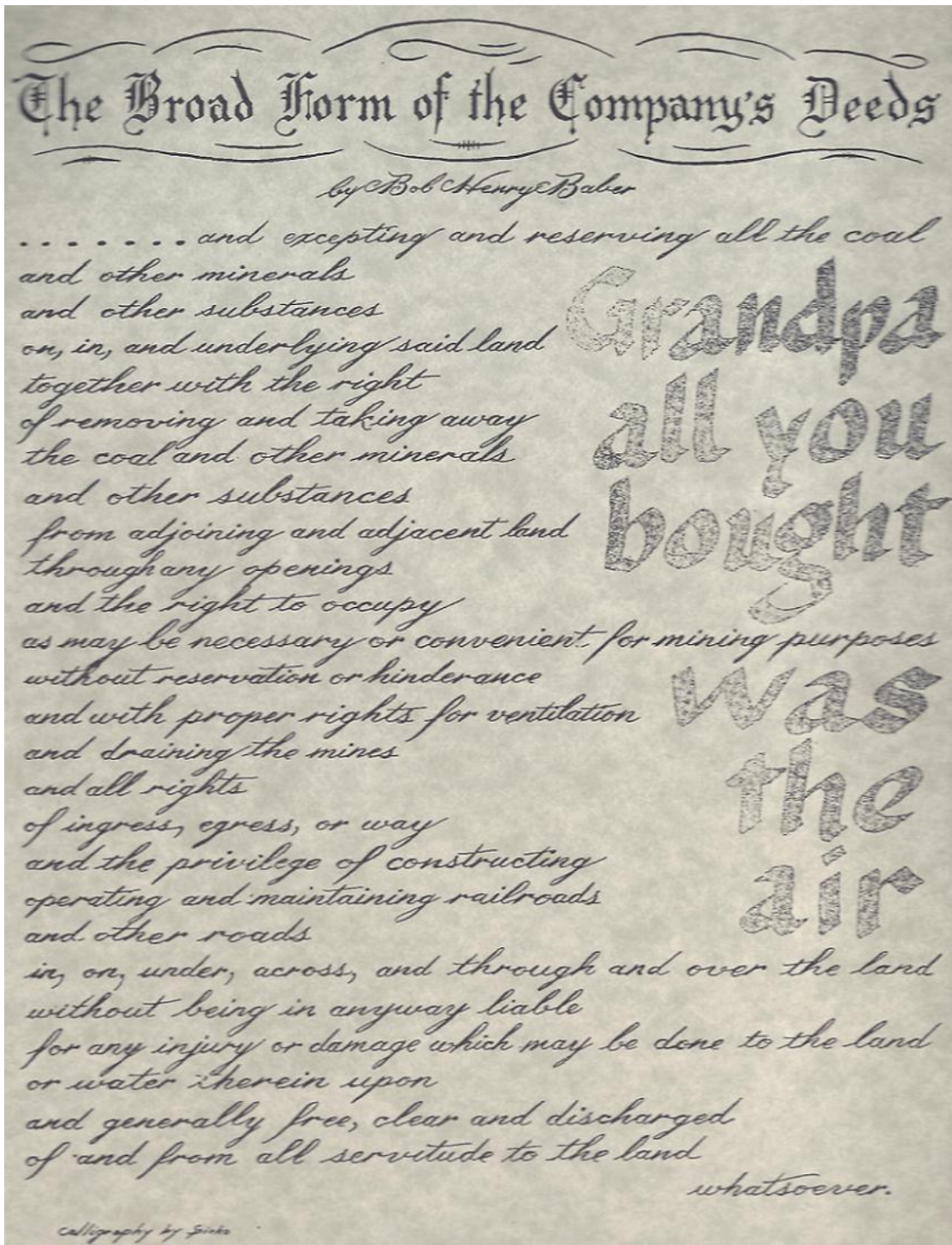


Fig. 1. “Grandpa, All You Bought was the Air.” Bob Baber. Found poem.

We digressed from the topic of coal mining, and turned to talking about his journey as an artist and as a person from the mountains. Jeff grew up in East Tennessee, but had moved to Kentucky because he felt like the mountain and Appalachian identity was stronger there and had been lost in his hometown. He discussed how he first encountered negative stereotypes of Appalachian folk, and how at first it made him embarrassed about where he came from. He recognized that the stereotypes weren't true, but the fact that people looked at him and his hometown that way made him embarrassed. He talked about how art started to change his mind and help him understand and be proud of his heritage (Jeff Chapman-Crane 2011). In particular, he talked about an art teacher he had in high school who had traveled the world in the Navy.

He would tell us these stories, as we were working at our drawings or paintings or whatever, tell us all these stories of his experiences, and a lot of times he would end his stories by saying, 'I may be a hillbilly, but I'm not a dumb hillbilly'. And it took me a long time to realize that he was telling us not to be ashamed of who we are, because of where we're from, that we have a very beautiful culture and way of life and beautiful landscape and should be proud of that (Jeff Chapman-Crane 2011).

Stereotypes of those in Appalachia include accusations of being ignorant, lazy, drug abusers, isolated, and of being involved in incest. These stereotypes have helped normalize the poverty, education and health problems in Appalachia. It is seen that because mountain folk are this way, then of course their problems have been their own fault. Coal companies use this tactic often to explain how the richest area in the US in terms of minerals could also be the poorest. The question then that many ask is "Why don't they fight against the exploitation."

Sharman, Jeff's wife, answers this question hauntingly, "But they have! But at what cost (Sharman Chapman-Crane 2011)?"

The history of those in coal country is a shaded, elusive history. Sharman tells me how she hadn't even learned about the Battle of Blair Mountain until the last ten years. The event was never covered in any history books. "How can we not claim them and know these stories?" she asks. Without knowing these histories and pasts of those who came before them, the power and spirit of these struggles have been mostly forgotten.

Jeff uses his art to address the tangible issues of living in Appalachia and specifically coal country, as well as the more intangible issues such identity. Jeff focuses on highly realistic portraiture along with highly political work. He mostly paints, but also has some sculptural pieces.

Jeff focuses on portraiture of people he gets to know in his community. He has a portrait of his wife, an intern at Appalshop, a father and his son in the community, one of the first people he met in Eolia, among others (Fig. 2). He says he uses the portraiture at times to combat these harmful stereotypes of mountain folk. One piece in particular, of the father and son, was used this way. Men in Appalachia are seen by the outside world to have many kids by many women and to not be a responsible father. The man he painted was hardworking, strong, and was there for his children. Jeff says that stereotypes are "the same story anywhere you go: wherever there's people being exploited, one of the proponents of that is to dehumanize (Jeff Chapman Crane 2011)."



Fig. 2. “Daughter of the Highlands.” Jeff Chapman-Crane.



Fig.3. “The Agony of Gaia.” Jeff Chapman-Crane.

Jeff graciously took me around his studio, showing me his most recent work on “The Agony of Gaia (Fig. 3),” a sculptural piece that had been widely exhibited in relation to coal mining practices. The studio also housed his wife’s and son’s artwork.

After talking for an hour or so in the studio, Jeff decided it would be nice to get some fresh air. We started walking across his backyard, over a bridge the Chapman-Cranes built that

was above a small stream, and sat down on two lawn chairs near the back of his property and abutting the slope of the mountain.

Here the conversation took a turn in roles. Jeff started asking me about the Occupy Movement. “I am really encouraged by this Occupy Movement because I believe they are beginning to ask the right questions.” I had been to several general assemblies and protests with the McPherson Square faction of the Occupy Movement in DC, and had other friends who were much more involved. At the time of our interview in November, Occupy was still very strong. McPherson square was covered with tents, along with a medical tent, a library, and an outdoor kitchen. Jeff was happy to hear that the movement was strong, but was concerned about the staying-power of the movement, especially since the movement had no leaders. He brought up his own experience saying, “I also know that it’s a long, long struggle, and there has to be some sort of structure to keep the energy up when it ebbs....Even with our own involvement in the KTFC, there has been an ebb and flow. There have been times when we’ve been actively involved, but then there’s times when you have to pull back and take care of yourself, or take care of raising a kid, getting them educated and all that kind of stuff.”

Sharman also mentioned this reworking of priorities, but added her perspective on the multiple identities one has throughout their lives and how some of these identities were taken in Eolia.

Sometimes I’m the artist, sometimes I’m the mom, sometimes I’m the wife of the artist, sometimes I’m an activist, and that one-hidden isn’t the right word because it’s so much a part of who I am, but, when you live here, if you’re known as an activist, people won’t even give you a chance to have a conversation. I’m very

much about building bridges, and on one hand you have to win people's trust and let them know who you are to do that, but if the barrier and the fear is so great that if they know who you are up front, that you don't even get a chance to get beyond "Hello", then there's never going to be a bridge built (Sharman Chapman-Crane 2011).

Intersecting and complex identities were the norm of everyone I interviewed, and are also the norm of people as a whole. Because of this, stereotypes fall flat and false. However, the power of stereotypes is not easily diminished and is used to dominate over others. It is also interesting to note what identities are not accepted by some in Sharman's community. She mentioned earlier in the interview that she was from Ohio, and so at times people discredit her activism against the coal companies because she "Doesn't know what it's like." Many people in the area are still connected to coal, whether themselves or someone in their family. This also plays a role into not wanting to be associated with "an activist".

Later, in my interview with just Sharman, she started talking about the intersection between her faith, activism, and art. Her activism stems strongly out of her faith because she says, "If you read any of the scriptures, whether you're Christian, or Muslim, or Jewish, there is a big emphasis on Justice....I think we are called to treat each other decently. We are just supposed to do right by each other." She recalled an instance when she was asked to write a prayer for special religious service she had been apart of. Each day had different themes, and her theme for her prayer was, "In the Valley of the Shadow of Death." She told me sarcastically that the only thing she was thinking when she heard that was, "Boy, were they here (Sharman Chapman-Crane 2011)?" Besides her faith being inspiration for her activism, faith also guides

her artistically. Her artwork centered on environmental issues and endangered animals is intended to “give voice to Creation (Sharman Chapman-Crane 2011).”

Sharman also tells me a story in which she felt stuck in the middle because of the situations with the coal mines. With clear feeling in her voice, she explains how she felt she couldn’t act out the tenants of her belief she held dear because of the way the coal company had manages to divide the community.

“I’m called to love my neighbors, and I mean that’s a very basic premise of Christianity.- I’m called to love my neighbors. I’ve got neighbors up the road a few years ago that were in danger of losing their land. The coal company was gonna steal it and put a valley fill in on part of it. Do I stand with those neighbors to help them stop that valley fill and to save God’s creation? I’ve got neighbors just down the road from them- and all of these people have faith in God- I’ve got neighbors just down the road from them that are disabled, and lease from the coal company for their property. It is written into their lease that if they say anything against the coal company they’ll lose their land. So, how do those people stand with those other neighbors, if they lose their land? Because not only do they lose their land, they have a son and a daughter-in-law that live on that same piece of land. So they all would become homeless. How can they stand against it when their son-in-law drives a coal truck? And he might lose his job if he stands against it? How do I love my neighbors that, the ones that

*are sick, that live on this piece of land, how do I love my neighbors
by visiting them because they are ill, if my car is seen in their
driveway and it becomes an issue with the coal company? How do
I love my neighbors?*

The interviews with the Chapman-Cranes were filled with discussion of the complexity of situations and identities, and the frustration of trying to help build their community in the shadow of coal mining. Jeff talked about how his identities as an artist and being from the mountains intersect in some of his pieces, especially in his subject matter of Appalachian portrait and his pieces against strip mining. Faith was another identity that was particularly important to Sharman. Faith led her to her artwork, as well as her conviction to be involved in social justice issues.

Knott County, Kentucky: Lacy Hale

To the northwest of Eolia and Letcher County is Knott County. Lacy Hale is an artist from here whose work focuses on portraits of family, friends, and people in her community. Lacy happily answered some questions I had for her over e-mail, in which she discusses being from the mountains, being an artist, the importance of art, and how these two identities coincide or differ.

Although Lacy left Eastern Kentucky for a little while, she always felt herself coming back. Kentucky was home, in a physical sense but also emotionally. She talks about her home saying, “being ‘Appalachian’ is so much more than a geographic nomenclature (Hale 2012).” She associated her home and its roots with creativity and resilience. She specifically discussed art work in the area and how “whether they perfected their craft through necessity or a need of

self-expression/entertainment doesn't matter. The people here are both tough and gentle with strong hands and creative minds (Hale 2012).” Although she was greatly inspired by the people and her home in Eastern Kentucky, she did not wish to be known as a specifically Appalachian artist.

We also talked about how negative stereotypes of the area have affected the people. She specifically touches on the idea of self-perpetuating stereotypes.

If someone is told so many times by so many different people that they are dumb, lazy, ignorant, and worthless, the person begins to believe it. I feel that Appalachians have to pull themselves up out of the holes dug for them by the media, the coal industries, etc. The population at large has to believe that they are worth something and that their voice is important. They (we) have to start believing that the area that we live in is special and we must care for it or the beautiful mountains, creeks, and animals that we know will soon be gone (Hale 2012).

Lacy also had much to say about the use of art as a community building technique. She is adamant that “communities thrive when art is one of their central concerns (Hale 2012).” She mentioned a success of a public art work that she and her brother Seth worked on. While working on the mural, “people from the community stopped to watch, ask questions, tell stories, or thank us for making a piece of public art that created such a sense of pride (Hale 2012).” Bell and Desai mention the importance of public art and how creating art in a non-tradition forum such as a museum really engages community involvement (Bell and Desai 2011: 290).



Fig. 4. “Artistic Heritage.” Lacy and Seth Hale. On the Bolen Studio Building at 85 West Main Street in Hindman, KY.

The importance of the youth was also evident in Lacy’s discussion about art creating social ties in communities. In the mountains, the economy almost entirely revolves around a few careers such as coal mining, teaching, food service, or retail. Outside of that, jobs are far and few between. This leads many youth to “go to college, get a degree and move out of Appalachia never to return.” A diversity of the economy is lacking, a heavy issue across the board with everyone interviewed. New and creative solutions must be found in order to help the number of jobs available. This creativity for future generations could be gained by embracing art. Lacy says that art would “imbue a sense of importance, purpose, and creativity in children that have no other outlets than video games and facebook (Hale 2012).”

Lacy Hale’s identities as an artist and as a person from the mountains intertwine at times and diverge at others. Her inspiration came from her home and the people in it, but she was first and foremost an artist in her work, rather than an artist specifically from Appalachia. She views the stereotypes of what it means to be Appalachian as detrimental and self-fulfilling, and

believes that getting youth involved in art could give them better purpose, and that public art in particular was very powerful in bringing people and communities together and restoring pride in their heritage.

Whitesburg, Kentucky: Beth Bingman

In Letcher County, the same county where Jeff and Sharman Chapman-Crane live, is Appalshop, a non-profit community arts center. Appalshop was started as a 1969 War on Poverty project, hoping to train area youth in multimedia skills. Now, the organization runs several types of projects, including an online project looking at the complex issue of the prison system in the US, a community radio station, a theatre project, as well as their traditional youth film projects, among others. I interview Beth Bingman, who is the current director of Appalshop.

Beth described Appalshop as a “grouping of people” concerned with using art and media to be an alternative source of information and helping people, especially youth, have their voices heard. Their youth film project helps kids in the community discover “where they are, who they are, and what they want to say about it (Bingman 2012).”

Appalshop does not take specific stances on issues, but rather prides itself on informing the community. Their projects however do allow many people to express their opinions, such as through their radio station, or from the individual projects that people create. Appalshop is a platform for which people can come together and discuss some of the very important issues affecting the area.

These issues, according to Beth, include looking at the prison system, especially because a large federal prison is supposed to be built in the area, what industries would come after coal, and organic farming, among others. Beth mentioned something that I remember discussing with Jeff Chapman-Crane as well, about how coal in the area was pretty much gone. Therefore, some of the big questions in Eastern Kentucky now center around how the economy will shift after coal, and what sort of industry it will shift to.

The films created by youth and the Appalachian Media Institute have been shown at regional and national levels, at universities and film festivals. These films seek to tell the stories of people who have lived in the area and call the area home.

Bingman believes that, although she would call the purpose of Appalshop “informing” versus “building” community, the organization brings up many questions and discussions that would otherwise not occur. Parents and relatives of children in Appalshop’s programs come to their theater productions as well as other shows their children are involved in, and in this way, more of the community participates and weighs in on issues. Appalshop’s neutral stance also helps achieve this, giving the community the means of expression and a way of looking at issues big and small from local perspectives.

Appalshop is now currently working on funding to have an old auto dealership down the road converted into artist studios. As with all Appalshop projects, this is determined on the availability of funding from grants and outside sources.

Conclusions

Appalachia has a diverse and complex set of unique issues that face the region today. These issues center around coal mining, lack of jobs, and poverty. These issues have developed

over the last hundred or more years, in which Sharman Chapman-Crane says that “the people of Appalachia went from being the most self-sufficient people to the most dependent (Sharman Chapman-Crane 2011).” Some of the cause of these issues comes from deep-seated harmful stereotypes of the area. Those from outside the area characterize the people as isolated, ignorant, and lazy, among other negative traits. These ideas came about and are kept alive for a reason, says Appalshop director Beth Bingman (Bingman 2012). Both Jeff Chapman-Crane and Lacy Hale point to the coal industry benefiting from these stereotypes, because it naturalizes and legitimizes the exploitation of the people and the land (Jeff Chapman-Crane 2011, Hale 2012).

In terms of identity among the artists, most did not want to be identified in specific correlation with Appalachia. The term “folk artist” in particular was seemingly taboo, with the same explanation of a folk artist being untrained in each case. And, although Jeff Chapman-Crane tackled many issues of the region in his work, his identity was still solely as an artist or painter rather than specifically an Appalachian artist (Jeff Chapman-Crane 2011). There seems to be some sort of disconnect between the two identities, or a purposeful delineation of such. This could have to do with how personal art is to many artists, and so for this reason it seems presumptuous to be creating art in the name of a certain region. However, I also suspect that this separation also subconsciously frees the artist from always addressing their art from simply one of their identities, and one in particular which is not well viewed by those outside the region.

All of those interviewed did agree that art was an important form of building community. Jeff and Sharman use their art to give voices to those who do not have voices, and Appalshop continues its work in the same vein of helping people tell their stories. Lacy Hale touched on the importance of public art in building and engaging community (Hale 2012), while Jeff Chapman-Crane discussed how art can portray personal experiences in a very meaningful way as to

critically and creatively assess situations (Jeff Chapman-Crane 2011). Beth Bingman from Appalshop echoed this by talking about their youth film projects, in which Appalshop hopes to provide the tools for them to discover where they came from, who they are, how they fit into their home, and what they want to say about it (Bingman 2012).

In Eastern Kentucky specifically, many concerns stemmed from what would happen after coal. Both Jeff and Beth mentioned how coal had as little as five to ten years left in the area. Once coal is gone, a huge economic gap will occur, and an opportunity for restructuring life in the mountains. Bringing art and creativity back into the economy and the lives of the people during this time could potentially greatly change the future of the area for good.

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