

YOLOARTS' ART AND AGRICULTURE PROJECT A CONNECTION MAKING A DIFFERENCE BY DANIELLE THOMAS

[YoloArts](#) is in good company with two dozen communities across the nation having been recognized as a leader in weaving the arts into economic development. This recognition comes in the form of a grant from [ArtPlace](#), a new and innovative public-private collaboration formed to accelerate creative placemaking across the United States, an emerging approach to economic development as a promising way to increase the vitality of communities and help them grow.



Artist at Slaven Ranch

YoloArts received this recognition for its [Art & Agriculture Project](#) (aka: Arts & Ag Project), a program offering artists an innovative venue from which to create as they visit selected farms and create art in their respective mediums. Farmers are given the opportunity to make the work they do more visible through farm tours to artists and through the resulting artwork created, and the community is offered a thoughtful and heartfelt glimpse into the two diverse worlds of art and agriculture with the annual culminating art farm exhibit of the Art & Ag Project. This exhibition and “art harvest” encourages viewers

to appreciate both local artists and farmers, while raising community awareness on the importance of farmland preservation – a value that ties the diverse county together.



Day at the Market – Linda Walsh

Not only am I fascinated by the interactions of people with each other, their families and nature, but I love great food. As a result, it was a delightful experience to design and paint these pictures. Each of the Yolo County Farmers Markets present an opportunity for consumers to interact directly with growers and producers to learn the qualities of the products and to search out bright, colorful, healthful and flavorful food for themselves and their families. The markets are also a great venue for families to get together, relax, have fun, listen to music, and try new and fresh foods and products.

– Linda Walsh

The ArtPlace initiative is led by eleven of America's top foundations working in conjunction with the [National Endowment for](#)

[the Arts](#) and seven federal agencies. Its aim is to drive revitalization across the country by putting the arts at the center of economic development. ArtPlace announced its first round of grants on September 15, 2011, investing \$11.5 million in 34 locally initiated projects in cities from Honolulu to Miami. Each project supported by ArtPlace was selected for developing a new model of helping communities thrive by strategically integrating artists and arts organizations into key local efforts in transportation, housing, community development, job creation and more. As a small county arts council, YoloArts successfully competed for national recognition of its vital, exciting program rooted in art and agriculture.



Artist working on her inspiration at Rominger Vineyards

Yolo County has been a long-time leader in farmland preservation and preventing urban sprawl between cities, as evidenced by the farmland that surrounds each community within the county. Yolo County is also a leader in organic farming, is home to the nationally recognized Davis Farmers Market, rice processors and the Port of Sacramento exporting rice around the world, a soon to be built olive oil pressing plant, a tomato cannery, numerous wineries and vineyards, an almond and walnut processing factory, numerous seed research facilities, and thousands of backyard gardeners and hundreds of artists.

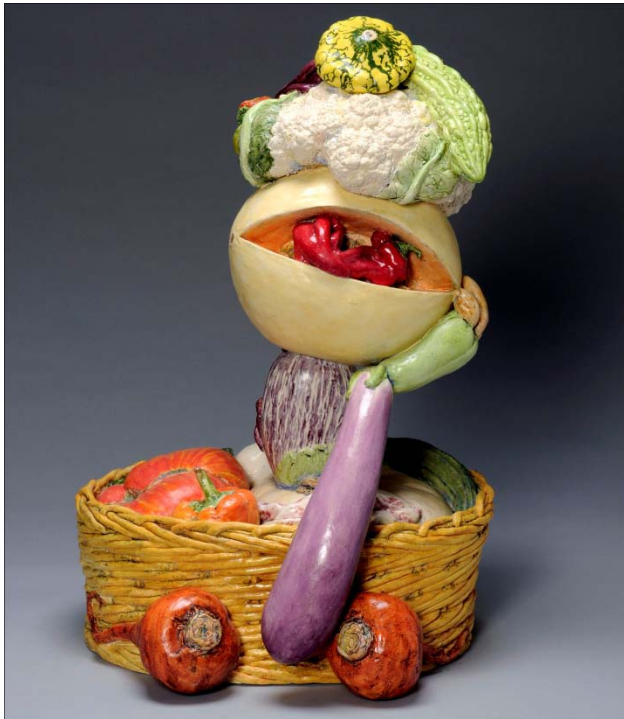
While many artists live in locations traditionally considered inspiring - along the sea, among the redwoods, in a large city - the agricultural landscape surrounding each community in Yolo County can be equally inspiring. For artists living amidst this land, but unable to legally access private farm property, the YoloArts *Art & Ag Project* provides a connection by cultivating a dialogue between artists and farmers. The result is found in quality artwork emphasizing and documenting inspiration arising from the farms and fields in every region of the county. This art/farm connection supports YoloArts' core mission to foster communication among artists and business and in this case, the agri-business. The types of farms visited range from small organic vegetable farms, to larger 'traditional' farming operations growing wheat, seed crops and processing tomatoes.



Artist Julie Haney (right) with Laura & Paul Barger of Barger-Keasey Farm in Davis. Haney painted the Barger's barn on a farm visit and the Bargers "harvested" it at the 2011 Art Farm fundraiser.

The Art & Ag Project is coordinated through a partnership of YoloArts, the [Yolo Land Trust](#) and the [Davis Farmers Market Foundation](#). The missions of each group are complementary and encompass advocacy for art, land preservation,

and awareness of local food production. The Art & Ag Project's work is guided by a memorandum of understanding between the three organizations. The advisory committee meets four times a year to evaluate the project's development and provides vision for project's enhancement, growth and accountability. It is made up of representatives from partner organizations the Yolo Land Trust and the Davis Farmers Market Foundation, an artist, a farmer, the project coordinator, and the executive director and a board member of YoloArts.



The Dreamer – Linda S. Fitz Gibbon

The bounty of produce in Yolo County infuses my work as a ceramic artist. I am inspired by the sensuousness and time enveloped nature of fruits and vegetables found in the markets and in my own garden and combine their forms to create figures in the still life and trompe l'oeil traditions.

– Linda S. Fitz Gibbon

The Dreamer is one of four public art commissions administered by YoloArts Art and Ag Project funded by a grant from The James Irvine Foundation. The Art and Ag Collection will go on tour throughout Yolo County in the spring of 2012. The commission includes works by Tracy Thomas of West Sacramento, Alejandro Rubio of Davis, and Linda Walsh of Woodland.

Designated by Yolo County to partner with the California Arts Council through the [State-Local Partnership](#) Program, YoloArts works to connect a wide array of young people, individual artists, students, performers, art supporters, as well as political and economic stakeholders to the growing and diverse art culture in the County. Additionally, being a grantee of the California Arts Council's [Creating Public Value](#) and [Artists in Schools](#) Programs has provided support for the Art and Ag project by offering the means for infrastructure stabilization; supporting our website's evolution; supporting technical classes for artists; and supporting an art education program in several of our school districts with large populations of underserved students. Overall, our small organization benefits tremendously from the network and expertise found through the California Arts Council, its staff and programs.

The Art and Ag Project complements an overall county-wide vision of economic development rooted in agriculture. Art is being seen, both locally and nationally, as a viable contributor to attracting and retaining human capital and creating a vibrant community and is igniting a new understanding of the arts' role in the local economy. The agricultural land around us defines our sense of place in Yolo County; our palates are inspired by the local food we



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consume, and a growing art scene throughout the county feeds our souls. The Art and Ag Project strives to unite all three.

It is the mission of YoloArts to cultivate and advocate for the arts; advancing art education in schools and communities; to increase participation among underserved populations; and to foster communication among artists, business, education, government and the citizens of Yolo County.

Photo credits in order presented: *Artist at Slaven Ranch* – Janis Parnell; *Day at the Market* – Linda Walsh; *Artist at the Vineyard* – Janis Parnell; *Artist Julie Haney with Laura and Paul Barger* – Tracey Thomas; *The Dreamer* – Linda S. Fitz Gibbon.

YoloArts receives funding from the California Arts Council's State-Local Partnership, Artists in Schools, and Creating Public Value Programs. For further information, please contact the appropriate [program](#) staff specialist.

