

On The Survival Pieces, 1970-72  
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A Beginning about 40 years ago  
Then one step led to another

It happened  
It was 1969-70  
More likely 70 than 69  
When we took the decision to do no work  
That did not in some way  
Benefit the ecosystem  
Although it took  
Some years to fully grasp  
What an ecosystem was  
We had been reading  
About the damages  
That factory farming did to topsoil  
Wherever it was practiced  
In 1969  
This was mostly new information  
There was also the matter of massive  
Human settlement taking place  
In floodplains and wetlands  
Where topsoil used to be replenished  
By the process of flooding  
And was enriched year by year

So one of us  
Began to [make earth](#) from clay and manures  
Mostly chicken and cow  
Some horse and a bucket of worms  
But we did not forget sewage sludge  
And other organic material  
And of course some wheelbarrow-loads  
Of sand and water mixing as the farmers  
had taught us

Over time this vile-smelling mix  
Turned into the smell and taste  
Of an ancient forest floor  
Then the other one of us  
Began planting in it  
And this process of performing and acting  
Became the genesis for the survival pieces  
Which were done in part very seriously  
As urban farming works  
Where we as artists taught ourselves  
And anyone else who was willing to learn  
How to feed ourselves through our  
own labour

However there was  
A second layer or motif in this work  
Which had portable orchards and  
potato patches  
Worm farms and fish farms  
Flat pastures and upright pastures  
Yes, there were certain ironies  
As our work set out to show  
To the general public  
Hopefully even schoolchildren  
And especially to museum personnel  
How to take care of themselves in a  
future world  
With possibly diminishing food supplies  
And now

A little less than 40 years later  
Appears with Global Warming and drought  
To be upon us  
We also had in mind  
A level of irony  
Addressed to our artist colleagues in New York  
In the late 1960s and early 1970s who  
Were making fluorescent light operations  
As form  
And multiple box structures  
As form  
And even piles of earth  
As form  
We took  
For instance  
An array of boxes  
With similar configurations  
And planted farming systems in them  
Which with lights in similar configurations  
Could grow things

That is to say  
We chose to introduce into our work  
A blatant utilitarianism  
Some people saw this as Fluxus-like  
Particularly in *Fish Farms in the Desert*  
Others saw it as more Dada-like  
Still others as boringly polemic  
Even in one event  
A fish farm was taken as pure sensationalism  
Although a few friendly souls  
Picked up on our serious intent  
Which was about urban farming systems  
As both prophecy and practice  
And the beginnings  
Of ecosystemic understanding

Thereafter  
One thing led to another  
The [portable fish farm](#)  
Evolved into a crab farm  
And a work entitled [The Lagoon Cycle](#)  
[Portable Orchards](#) led to [forest works](#)  
And the early [Hog Pasture](#)  
First evolved into  
The restoration and generation  
Of grasslands  
Then at the first [Art Park](#) near Niagara Falls  
And thereafter  
Into [The Endangered Meadows of Europe](#)  
Objections to the settlement of floodplains  
Led to [watershed works](#)  
And [river restoration](#) works  
And with global warming as a theme  
Appeared here and there  
Until later we came to do such works  
[Peninsula Europe](#)  
[Greenhouse Britain](#)  
And most recently to pieces entitled  
[The Force Majeure](#)

Now these works and others  
Over the past almost 40 years  
Although somewhat simplified  
Can be seen in some detail  
Mostly in order  
In virtual space  
By whoever is interested