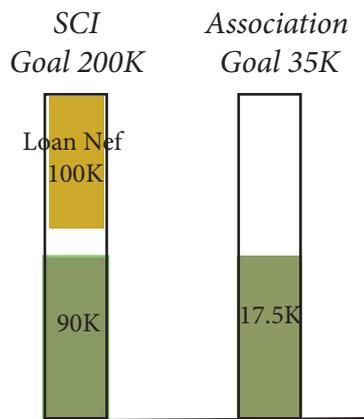

Les Moustaches

Newsletter 2

Just a little heads up on our current situation. We have succeeded in raising another 7 000€ for the SCI – co ownership of the land – and 12 000€ for the association’s work. A massive thank you to Fondation pour Une Terre Humaine who decided to trust us and sponsor the establishment of our collaborative workshop. This is what we are looking for. Trust that we will strive to reinvent our systems.



Now the other piece of news is that we are working on a loan to secure land acquisition. This is not our favourite alternative since we want to demonstrate the viability of co ownership and individual’s savings as means to support innovative projects, but we cannot leave our chances of development solely to our trust in people’s willingness to be part of new creations. We are thus working with La Nef, which is surely the most ethical bank in France and whom we trust for their investment portfolio. However, this option is simply to give us more time to create this real co ownership. Please think about the implications of your investment in our land. It is safe and allows for farming, housing and energy innovations. It is mutually beneficial and brings about new discussions based on gratitude.

I have just returned from New York where I joined forces with Theo Guillemot. Theo is responsible for the artists’ residency of Les Moustaches and he wished for us to talk with some supporting souls. The intentions were mixed. Raise more funds, connect with overseas to expand our local action and propose to artists to apply for our program. Basically create bridges. No matter how beautiful digital communication can be, sometimes a face-to-face is the only way to create long lasting relationships.

In our case, those meetings turned out very promising. We started off with Sarah Wessler who is editing a magazine called Satellite. She has long been intrigued by cultural policies and local cultural actions, covering a number of positive initiatives with the help of other editors. We sat in a little café in East Village to talk about the pressing times and the boiling needs of increased media coverage of the actions that do shape society for the better. More than just a chat, it was also a way to connect. More than an opportunity it was the feeling of connectedness that arose from the meeting. In the end, we decided to collaborate on an article about our work and to help her meet with some trail blazers scattered around the world.



New York from roof top farm

Followed an interesting discovery. Pioneer Works. A beautiful artists' residency in Red Hook – Brooklin – that took a fascinating stand by making artists collaborate with scientists in the same space. Their intention is to educate people to a new approach of arts. Basically non linear. Their means are constant happenings in their renovated factory - a mind-blowing space that combines artists' studios, a scientific lab, a gallery, a radio room, offices and permanent showrooms. By bringing together people around arts and sciences, they help trigger discussions and innovations, the results are hard to quantify but the feelings that emerge bring hope of possible paradigm shifts. This whole project is led by a young team of determined individuals and artists that certainly have the intelligence and the competences to bring about a new understanding of the arts' scene.



Arts work by Dustin Yellin

We got to visit a number of other residencies, such as Knock Down Centre, Eye Beam and ISCP. Met with the people who kick started those places and realized each time that though the physical reality of those places were a bit different, the intentions behind were similar i.e. to trigger collaboration, to establish new spaces for self expression, to bring people from different fields of work and cultural backgrounds together in order to stimulate discussions and creations. If Knock Down is certainly dedicated to events, Eye Beam has taken the direction of studios' facilities and ISCP focused on bringing as many artists as possible in the same place. Whether it was Juliana and her dedication to arts and ecology, whether it was David with his enigmatic wish to propose a stimulating space to his residents, we felt that there is an increasing desire to alter the established thinking and doing frames.

EYEBEAM

34 35th St., Unit 26, Brooklyn, NY, 11232



iscp

We dropped here and there our proposal reminding that we do not propose a result-oriented program but more a process oriented journey. If we are eager to welcome artists on our farm for 3 to 6 months, it is solely to stimulate discussions around farming and technologies that support it. Our aim is to root down the artistic pro-

cess into functional realities. Or to put it differently to make the artists' capacities beneficial to the creation of tools and technologies that support innovative farming systems. And on the opposite end, we wish for artists to trigger aesthetics while creating low-techs, energy systems or housing techniques. In the end, our intention is to bring about different perspectives together to deepen the innovation process. If I take for instance the design of an integrated rocket stove oven, we are able to work on its functionalities and make it efficient, but efficiency alone does not make the innovation full. This is where an artist's view can help in turning a functional object into a desired one. Through aesthetics, discussions about beauty, and analytical input, there is much space for transforming low-tech innovation into recognised alternative.



Rocket Stove design

This is our bet. And certainly visiting Mildred's Lane reassured us in our journey. Morgan Puett bought a property upstate New York – 3 hours away from NYC - some 15 years ago. Professional artist herself she used her network and skills in order to transform this once abandoned house into a boiling think tank/fab lab/studio/space of expression. Her perspective on arts is straightforward: it is a living process. It never settles down, it is never finished, complete. Completeness is solely in the process of growing. Therefore ends are just means to accomplish daily changes of perspectives. Her house is composed of three blocks, the bottom concrete foundation, the ground level based on polished metal and the top level based on wood work. Scattered around the main house are work in progress of artistic creations. All with the function of hosting a couple of people over spring and summer. Therefore, arts to the service of functionality. Or aesthetics in every function of the house and hosting space. Cameron - whom we met there - is a 15 months resident at Mildred's lane and his stay is focused on understanding and sparking off the bigger picture of arts and aesthetics. Apart from working on the renovation of an abandoned trailer, working on his own publications, he takes care of the space and the people that roam through it.

There is much to say about what we saw and talked about. The art of hosting, the art of taking care of people, of engaging them into a space, the art of keeping the history of a place intact and at the same time renewing it. The art of living, could it be? In India, they do have a word for this process; 'sadhana'. Even more so now, the reforestation project Sadhana Forest makes so much sense to me. It is based on integrating a space – or ecosystem - and sustaining it as we meet our own needs. It makes perfect sense today.



Arts work by Morgan Puett

Do you know the story of Detroit? It was one of our stops along the way. We were intrigued by its history. Once the power holder of the US economy, the first city to ever build highways and steel bridges, to construct the first skyscrapers and factories, Detroit was booming thanks to its steel and car industries. But after World War II, most economic players decided to delocalise their production units to other places in the world. The result was that from more than 2 million inhabitants, the population dropped down to less than 700 thousand people. And as clear as it can be, the people who left were those who could leave i.e. the middle-upper white class of the city. Hence, the city was left to its poor African American communities. Crime rate increased as all the vacant houses were left crumbling and collapsing.

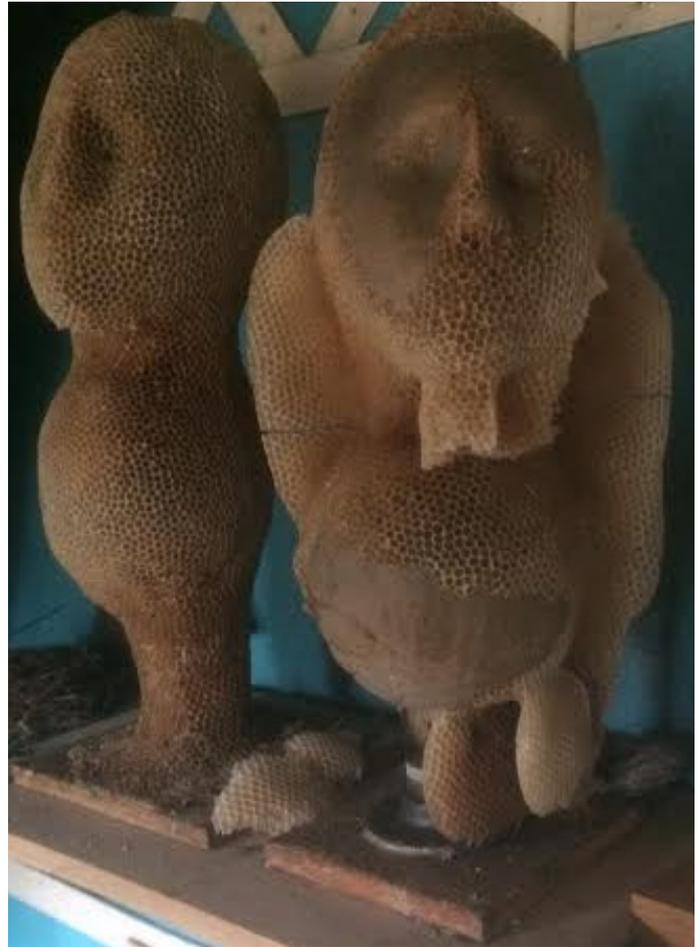
Walking through the city is of rare intensity. It feels like walking in an after war city. There is pain and violence in Detroiters' eyes, feelings of abandonment and hopelessness inscribed in their walking gestures. I have never felt this before. The experience of a city abandoned by capitalism. The results of capital evasion and employment capacities. There is so much space in between buildings. Sidewalks are not maintained and grass has taken over. One in two houses is collapsing, cars look like crippled on endless roads. The two story house where we were staying was bought for 3 000\$! This is how low the developers' hope for the city is.



But as surprising as it may seem, Detroiters are proud of their city. They have no wish to go to any other place. No wish to do anything else but pursue and sustain Detroit's history. A lot of the artists and farmers we met – check [D-town farm](#) and [Fireweed Universe city](#) - were stimulated by the challenges of the city, intrigued by its once rich history. And their attachment to their history combined with their desire to show the richness of Detroiters help in bringing at the forefront of the world's media a new model of city development. A development based on small urban farms, small artists residencies, small holders' shops scattered around the immense city, and cycling as a way to move around. A city that favours local investment and commitment rather than globalized promises, a city that looks into collaboration, collective decision making, and bartering as only means to revive history. A people that has no other place to go to – and no wish to go anywhere else – and that takes pride in building the city that it wishes for itself.

Yes Detroit was a great lesson for us. Since when there is no other place to go, how do we take over the challenge of renewing a space. How do we deal with history and its flaws, how do we meet very basic needs: housing, eating, hitting, and relationships? How do we reinvent crumbling systems? If Detroit has not yet succeeded in demonstrating a new viable system, it is certainly in the right direction. Because it is not fleeing reality. It is facing the truth about a capitalistic system that did abandon its people. And it is trying hard to grow again from its ashes with its personal and local ideas.

Detroit is a city that should make us think twice. Right in the middle of the richest economy in the world, there are pockets of incredible misery. Left apart, cast out, villains. People left in the shadows that do a work that will benefit us all. Reinventing systems when capitals run off. Portugal has been hit by the same reality, Greece is currently hit by this exact reality, and what a judgeless observer can notice is that people are resilient and know how to come up with solutions. Collective, collaborative, locally based and digitally connected. There lies resilience.



Arts work by Morgan Puett

This is the source of our inspiration. This is towards what we are working. Viable complementary tools, technologies, techniques that help us redefine new farming, housing and energy systems. The use of digital media to spread innovation everywhere in the world. To trigger this research with cultural output i.e. theories of our history. Why are we where we are today? And if 196 countries signed an agreement on Climate Change in Paris a week ago, it should simply be a reminder for us bits and parts of the civil society that the world is truly endangered by our activity – check Nature’s publication on the reality of climate change - and that we truly need to come up with solutions to alter the state of things.

To strive for what is not and to acknowledge what is already. Some people like to call me a dreamer and I cannot disagree. I look upon utopia knowing it will never be reached, but knowing too that taking that direction will materialize new perspectives and possibilities.

Until more news are coming up your way.

I wish you farewell,

Elliott