

Media contact: Karen Simonian, Wexner Center, 614 292-9923 or ksimonian@wexarts.org

OHIO STATE PROFESSOR MICHAEL MERCIL INSTALLS *VIRTUAL PASTURE*

In another art project focused on our relationship to the natural world, artist and Ohio State art professor Michael Mercil has installed ***The Virtual Pasture*** outside the Wexner. *The Virtual Pasture* is Phase Two of his "agri/cultural" project for The Living Culture Initiative in the Department of Art, in partnership with the Wexner Center for the Arts and the Social Responsibility Initiative in the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (Phase One was *The Beanfield*, 2006–08).

The 500-square-foot project site is located outdoors on the west side of the Wexner Center along College Road. It includes a white post-and-rail fence, livestock forage grasses, apple trees—and, as its centerpiece, **a virtual flock of Shetland sheep**. An outdoor video monitor links to a 24-hour live video feed from a sheep grazing pasture at the Stratford Ecological Center in Delaware, Ohio (just north of Columbus). **Mercil brings the sheep in the flock visit to graze in the pasture outside the Wex the first Monday of each month from about 10 am to 3 pm.**



Notes Mercil, "As it unfolds over time and through several phases, the project entertains such questions as 'Where, when, and how do we encounter farm animals now?' And, 'How might we reestablish contact with those living creatures with which we still share deep mutual dependence, but which we have made invisible in our daily life?'"

Wexner Center Director Sherri Geldin says, "With this project, the center finds itself in partnership with unexpected colleagues across campus as a result of an artist-based initiative that draws upon the expertise of a non-arts discipline—in this case, agricultural sciences. We think this project will provoke thought and spark much debate."

The Virtual Pasture will likely involve an on-campus livestock auction and a video documentary of the entire project. Educational events for various ages are being planned as well.

More info: <http://www.michaelmercil.com/virtualpasture1.html>

The Living Culture Initiative

The Living Culture Initiative is an ongoing series of projects coming out of the OSU Department of Art that reflects the founding of OSU as a land-grant college with a curriculum of the "agricultural, mechanical, and liberal arts." Mercil and his partner Ann Hamilton (also on the faculty of Ohio State) launched this initiative to highlight the university's role as a producer of culture (as well as agriculture). "We asked, 'How might the Department of Art generate a more grounded awareness of the university as a model of and for culture at large?'," Mercil says.

The Social Responsibility Initiative

The Social Responsibility Initiative started in early 2005 in Ohio State's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences to forge new ways of thinking about socially responsible food production, land use, and environmental practices. The interdisciplinary effort has brought together non-traditional collaborators from across campus, re-establishing connections among food consumers, food producers, and the broader community.

About Michael Mercil

An associate professor in the Department of Art at Ohio State, Mercil has also been a visiting artist or lecturer at, among other institutions, the University of Akron, Meyers School of Art; Virginia Commonwealth University; the Minneapolis College of Art & Design Institute for Public Art; Harvard University Graduate School of Design and Antioch College. Professor Mercil's artwork has recently been included in both solo and group exhibitions organized by Socrates Sculpture Park, New York, the Columbus Museum of Art, the North Dakota Museum of Art, Grand Forks; the Fabric Work and Museum, Philadelphia; and the University of Virginia Art Museum, Charlottesville. In 2001 he completed a piece for the newly renovated Ohio Stadium recruiting lounge. Currently, Professor Mercil is working with artist Ann Hamilton on a public project for the new central public library in downtown Des Moines, Iowa. They also worked together with landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh on projects for Battery Park City in New York City and on the award-winning design for the Allegheny Riverfront Park in downtown Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Other awards include Ohio Arts Council, Greater Columbus Arts Council, McKnight, and Jerome Foundation Fellowships. An occasional contributor to *Places* magazine, he also has contributed writings to *Public Art Review*. More info: www.michaelmercil.com

