

# *The American Farm Bill*

SEPTEMBER

7<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007

WORK BY ALEXANDRA HAMMOND  
BLUESPACE, SAN FRANCISCO

When my great grandmother decided to leave Switzerland at age 11, her family wanted to find the place on earth with the deepest soil. As the story goes, the two choices were Southern Siberia and Central Illinois. Peoria seemed like a better place to settle than Novosibirsk. None of the kids grew up to be farmers. They moved to California.

When my grandfather left Northern England as a teenager, he dreamed of leaving his mut-ton-fat-on-toast, coal-dust childhood to start a dairy near the irrigation canal in Modesto. Then the Depression hit, and he had to be an accountant, writing music on the side.

When my parents left the city in the '70's, they wanted to find a place to grow gardens, kill chickens, and design solar neighborhoods. Their kids would be able to listen to "Heart of Darkness" read aloud against the white noise of crickets and coyotes. Even Yolo County was changing.

My work is concerned with the intersections between quietly disparate elements. I am interested in enigmatic landscapes and false identifications, visual moments that refer to a different story than the one actually being illustrated. These objects strive to describe the simple wildness of the truth, to uncover the magic in what is predetermined, machine-made, or unremarkable.

The work collected in "The American Farm Bill" explores land-bound aspects of the American Dream. This concept is linked to the utopian ideals of Agrarian Democracy, rural self-sufficiency, and growing prosperity. Both reformers and defenders of current farm subsidies employ this populist language of the American heartland in defense of their positions. Reformers decry the inability of small farmers at home and abroad to compete with corporate agribusiness. Defenders cast these same corporate farms as the struggling family businesses that ensure national food security in the face of world trade, market forces, and the violence of natural disaster.

Assumptions about wholesomeness, abundance, and independence are all at stake. Is wholesomeness defined by brand names that are recognizable, standardized, and geographically homogenous, or by products that are usable in more immediate and varied forms? Is independence the ability to buy pre-made products at low costs, or the ability of producers around the world to sell their goods in a truly free market?

These questions underlie the work on display. Lonely landscapes show signs of advanced industrialization. Controlled leisure scenes are threatened by signals of sunburn and decay. Horses are only for rich people and poor ranchers. Glossy, dangerous, and comical by turns.