



# HUNGER, PHILADELPHIA

AN ACTIVE INSTALLATION BY J.J. McCRACKEN

ADDENDUM TO THE EXHIBITION CATALOG

## the *Hunger* project: 2009-2010

*Hunger* was a site-specific, multi-phase project (including two exhibitions and an artist residency) that examined hunger from a global perspective while it responded and contributed to the local community hosting its art-exhibition phase. Calling attention to need as an under-discussed issue in society, the *Hunger* project juxtaposed plenty with quality, immediate gratification with sustainability.

Earth material was dug locally and made into voluptuous but nutritionally-barren cast vegetables, some of which were consumed as performative activity in an art installation during the exhibition *Hunger, Philadelphia*. The remaining clay was recycled into plates that homeless children drew vegetables upon. The drawings/plates were sold to raise money for the homeless shelter through the exhibition/fundraiser, *Earth To Table*. The project was resolved as patrons used plates to serve food in their homes and as planning began for the construction of a greenhouse that would supply fresh produce year-round to the shelter.



images: above, left to right—J.J. McCracken, J.J. McCracken, Jeff Guido, Sol Levy; facing—Janine Parziale







images: above—Janine Parziale; facing—Eric Snyder

*Hunger, Philadelphia* used geophagy (clay eating) as a launching point for a visual poem about need. Geophagia occurs worldwide, and is practiced for a variety of reasons from medicinal to traditional. The behavior is problematic only where people suffer severe food crisis, when clay becomes a substitute for food. While otherwise valued for its toxin-binding capabilities, clay can also absorb nutrients, flushing them from the body and rapidly advancing malnutrition. Activity on the lower level of *Hunger, Philadelphia's* installation included incessant, excessive consumption of clay casts of vegetables—a non-nutritive food substitute.

The air was thick with the smell of baking bread as models moved through this barren landscape. A soundscape emanated from the bowels of the building, produced by a live band on the basement level of the gallery. Its vibrations moved up through the thick carpet of dead sod on the floor and were felt bodily as one traversed the space.

images: below & facing—Janine Parziale





The upper level of the gallery featured a community space in which a garden thrived, offering mature fruits and vegetables for visitors to eat, reflecting Philadelphia's very active urban farming movement.



The garden was a place to decompress and discuss the issues surrounding hunger raised by the geophagy performance on the floor below. At the close of the exhibition, the garden was donated to Stenton Manor, a homeless shelter for families in a blighted Philadelphia neighborhood. There, it would offer shelter children and senior citizens living in the surrounding neighborhood a place to gather and learn about growing food.

images: below—Janine Parziale; facing, above—Andrew O'Donnell; below—Eric Snyder







images: above and facing—J.J. McCracken

In the months following the exhibition, *Hunger, Philadelphia's* materials were recycled and sent back out into the community in new form: a half-ton of clay and sand was donated to Stenton Manor to build a bread oven and the rest was made into plates. Stenton children were joined by children in other regions in drawing food from the garden on plates. A fall exhibition, *Earth To Table*, doubled as a fundraiser for Stenton. Drawings/plates were sold to raise money to build a greenhouse, so that shelter residents could grow food year-round.





image: above—*Earth To Table*, J.J. McCracken, 2010



**For more information, visit  
[www.JJMcCRACKEN.com](http://www.JJMcCRACKEN.com)**

**For a copy of the exhibition catalog,  
contact The Clay Studio: (215) 925.3453  
or online at [www.theclaystudio.org](http://www.theclaystudio.org)**

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*Hunger, Philadelphia* was exhibited at the Painted Bride Arts Center in support of the 44th Annual Conference of the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA).

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The *Hunger* soundscape was designed by Inner Loop (Marc Blackwood & Joe Herrera, Washington, DC) for *Hunger, Philadelphia*.

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image: Andrew O'Donnell

