

Evolution of A Living Library

A LIVING LIBRARY[®]

founder

"Sherk is a practical visionary whose work crosses the boundaries between fine art, landscape, design, educational/social/ecological planning and economic development. Her ideal future includes a technologically linked network of ecological, site and culturally sensitive communities."

Constance Lewallen
Senior Curator, Berkeley Art Museum



"Running Through the Woods"
Scene from: "Living In the Forest - Demonstrations of Atkin Logic,
Balance Compromise, Devotion, etc."
1973

de Saisset Art Museum, Santa Clara, California

Bonnie Ora Sherk

Bonnie Ora Sherk
is an environmental
architect, planner,
educator & artist
who is a pioneer
in bringing the
experience of
nature to the urban
population. She has
consistently explored
ecological systems
as microcosms
and laboratories
for nurturing
interdependent living.



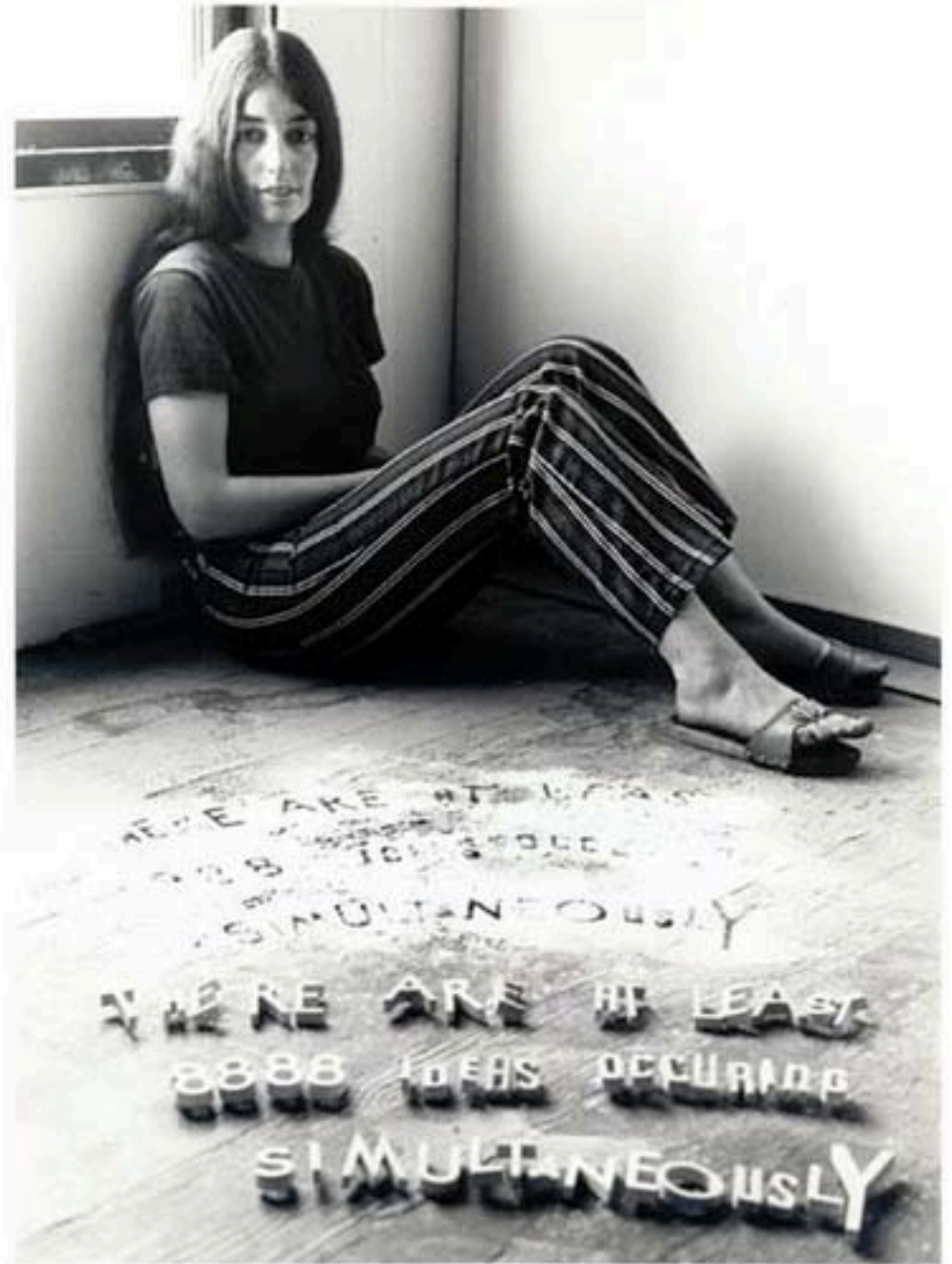
Original Proposal - Drawing & Collage for Crossroads Community (the farm) 1974 [\[click to zoom\]](#)

RECIPE for CONCEPTUAL ART, 1970

Bonnie Ora Sherk's work is a dramatic departure from the ideas which form the basis of traditional art. All of her contributions - as a critical thinker, environmental innovator, public advocate, teacher and gardener, involve Living Art, reinforcing the indivisible links between culture, ecology and technology.



From "Grosgrain" - Artist's Book 1973



Box of flour with light bulbs. Just add water.

Parks That Hop, Skip and Moo

Freeway Sprouts a Park

A Day's
Bloom of
Public Art

By Thomas Albright

"Public art" used to refer to a mural or outdoor sculpture. Now it usually means something like Bonnie Sherk's three "portable park" projects, the first of which flowered all day yesterday over a four-and-a-half arm on the top deck of the Central Freeway overlooking Market street.

Motorists over the Oak street on-ramp ascended a gentle rise to be suddenly confronted with a surrealism-come-to-life scene — a strip of live turf, a row of ten palm trees and a penitential, grazing Garryowen calf — set against the panoramic sweep of the city skyline.

There also was Miss Sherk, in a long, brightly printed gown, and a hurried team of Highway Patrolmen, who spent much of the day frantically waving on rubbernecking motorists, and newspaper and television crews trying to gain access to a press-conference gathering scheduled for the site yesterday morning.

The park itself had been given a highway commission permit.

Huzzels and all, Miss Sherk's floating park project — financed by a \$1000 first award in a competition sponsored by the San Francisco Museum of Art's Society for the Encouragement of Contemporary Art — is a refreshing, delightful addition to the new form of public art



Motorist heading toward Ferry Building on Market could see palm trees peeping over freeway

exemplified by such previous events as Miss Henderson's evening of light-digital-abstracts in the sky, and Paul Crowley's city-wide light show conducted last year from Twin Peaks.

This kind of art uses a highway, a street, a neighborhood or an entire city as the artist's "medium," and it is designed to physically involve — or blow the mind — of anyone who happens along, suspecting or otherwise.

Artistically, Miss Sherk's out-park have one foot in

recreation, with its jarring juxtapositions of incongruous images, and the other in the new, ecologically-oriented art that attempts to alter conventional perception of the natural or urban environment.

In everyday life, the portable parks have as their clearest precedent the old-fashioned publicity stunt. But there is an artless, ingenious simplicity and sincerity about Miss Sherk's idea which remove it from that class category.

The basic set was sched-

uled to be rolled up early this morning and will be re-erected for the day at a more accessible site on a pair of islands at the bottom of the freeway's Mission-Van Ness off ramp. Indian Valley Dark Pigeons, the bovine attraction of yesterday's park, will be replaced by three calves and a coop of chickens, and picnic tables are also scheduled to go up. Tomorrow and Sunday, the park will cover the block of Maiden Lane between Grant Avenue and Buckton streets, the last stop on its itinerary.

As early as 1970 she installed several **Portable Parks** on elevated freeways and downtown streets of San Francisco, bringing sod, palm trees, picnic tables & cows to bemused drivers & pedestrians. She created these bucolic oases as public Art, because she was not interested in just having objects confined in a museum.

In the history of American freeways nothing like it had ever happened. A young San Francisco artist, Bonnie Sherk, planted a temporary oasis with roll-up turf on the James Lick Freeway with the blessing of the State Division of Highways, if not the Highway Patrol, which ticketed cars of the media attending the on-location press conference.

Society for Encouragement of Contemporary Art, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Bonnie Sherk, winner of Society's first SECA Vernal Equinox Award.

RECIPE for FUNCTIONAL ART, 1980

Sitting Still No. 1, San Francisco,
California 1970

**Performance by
Bonnie Sherk**
appearing formally dressed
and seated in a stuffed chair
seated in a flooded dump,
facing moving traffic which
became the audience
for the performance.

Her desire is to create an art
that is based on confronting
life. Sherk confronted the
flow of life around her by
sitting in a chair for
extended periods of time
in environments often
bizarre in nature.



*1/3 Reason + 1/3 Intuition + 1/3 Passion.
Add two handfuls of humor. Blend and mold.
Set in motion, and wait for synchronous tones.*



"Cover Girl"

1981

In her 1971 performance
◆Public Lunch◆, elegantly
attired, she was served a
catered lunch in an adjacent
cage in the Lion House at
the San Francisco Zoo at
feeding time, demonstrating
the parallel between human
and other animal behavior.

Also in her cage was

A caged rat◆

A cage within a cage

Within a cage◆



RECIPE for ECOLOGICAL
TRANSFORMATION, 1990



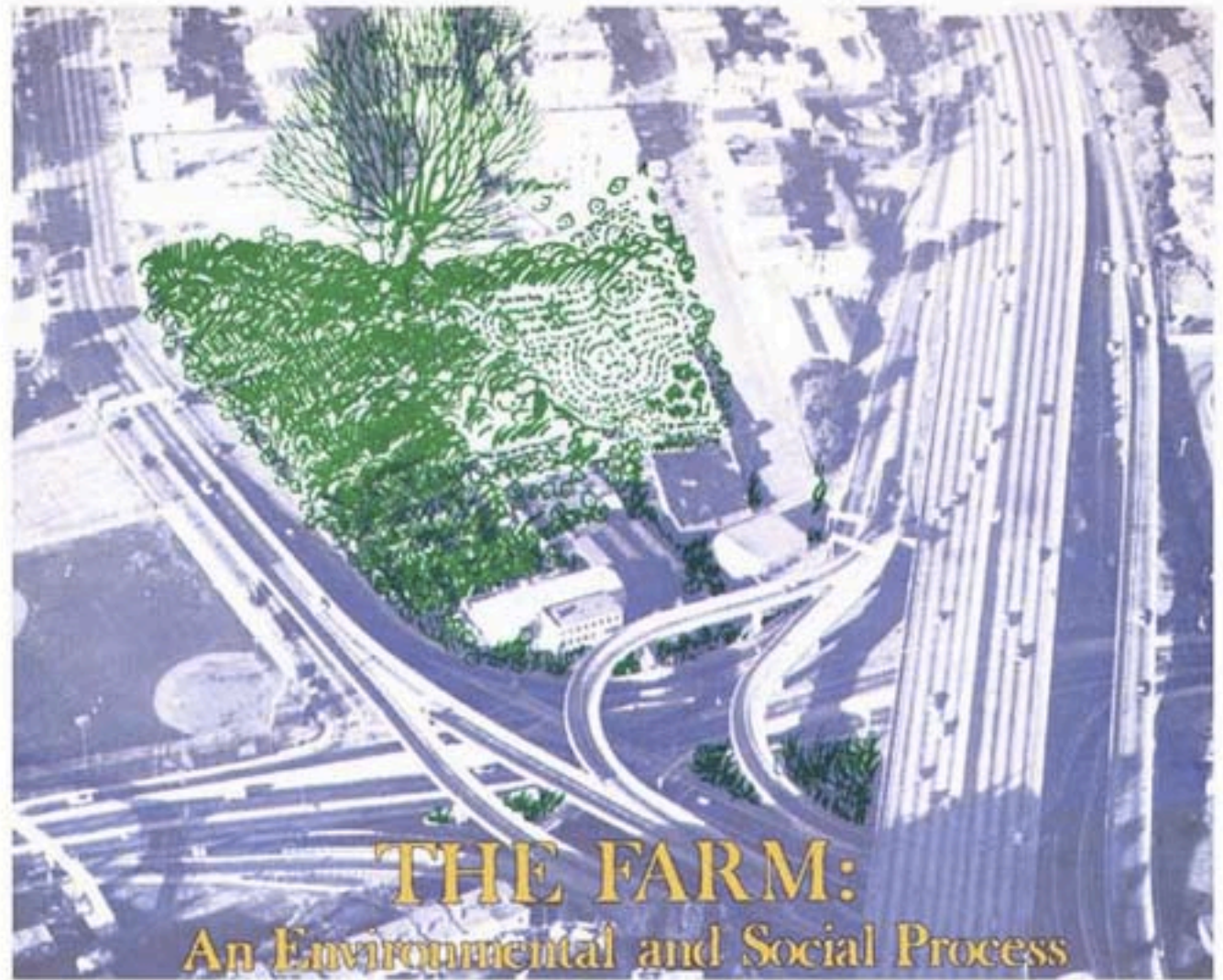
Portrait of Plame 1972

Sherk is perhaps best known for *Crossroads Community / The Farm*, one of the first Alternative Art Spaces in the country, which she founded in 1974 and directed until 1980.

Located on seven acres adjacent to the intersection of several freeway overpasses in San Francisco, *The Farm* was the home of domestic animals who lived in *The Raw Egg Animal Theater (TREAT)*, and vegetable and flower gardens.

It included a state preschool, performance events, dances and community gatherings. Neighborhood residents, as well as the art community, were invited to participate in *The Farm's* interdisciplinary, environmentally oriented activities.

The Farm transitioned into a new city park with community gardens.



*Think globally, Act locally. human, ecological, economic,
Use all your local resources: historic, technological & aesthetic.*



Baby Rat In My Hand 1972

◆ From 1974-1980 Bonnie Sherk spent all her energies founding and directing what is the Farm the most ambitious and successful work of ecological art in the country. Because of The Farm's scope it is impossible to summarize, but its most interesting aspect is its fusion of art with other functions. Sherk is concerned to integrate the human creative process ◆ art ◆ with those of other life forms. She is fundamentally a visionary, albeit an earthy and practical one who manages to found and maintain this huge-budget near fantasy. The Farm itself looks like the real thing; it has none of the antiseptic



from: *Portable Parks I-III*, Bonnie Sherk, San Francisco 1970

sweetness of fake farms in zoos ◆ it smells of manure and mud. The garden or park is a potent metaphor for public art. Both imply continuity, an overlay of past on present, or of cyclical stability on growth and variety ◆ with memory as compost.◆

From: Gardens ◆ Some Metaphors for a Public Art

Lucy Lippard, *Art in America* 1981
Institute of Contemporary Art, London Catalog 1980
Overlay 1982

*Integrate, stir, dance together.
Add compost, seeds, sun, and water.*

*Sing aloud, laugh, cry, love,
& join together on-line*

Building To Last-Architecture As Ongoing Art

Unused land under a city freeway interchange has been transformed into a farm. Here urban children have a chance to raise animals and learn gardening. The Farm is a place for social art, as a model of a microcosm of nature and the beginning of a framework of open spaces that will connect neighborhoods, schools, parks."

Herb Greene
Architectural Book Publishing, New York

The Flower Unfolding



Proposal for "New American Green" Olympia Fields, Illinois, 1992

RECIPE for EDUCATION as an
ECOLOGICAL SYSTEM, 2000

Sherk has expanded ideas first developed in The Farm in her recent collaborations with architects, engineers and educators to design large, vital and interactive *Living Libraries*, of cultural and ecological diversity. She speaks of these as public experiential learning laboratories that demonstrate interconnections between systems: biological, cultural and technological.



from: *A Living Library for Bryant Park, NYC* photo-montage, 1983

Experience is everything:
Choose a site.

*Learn everything about it -
past, present and future.*



A LIVING LIBRARY

A new model for Global Electronic Interactivity and Networking in the Garden

from Visible Language
The Luminous Object: video art/video theory
Rhode Island School of Design, 1995

Bring the community together & work with the children and adults of all ages

Make a participatory land plan, process & community program?



technology

public

nature

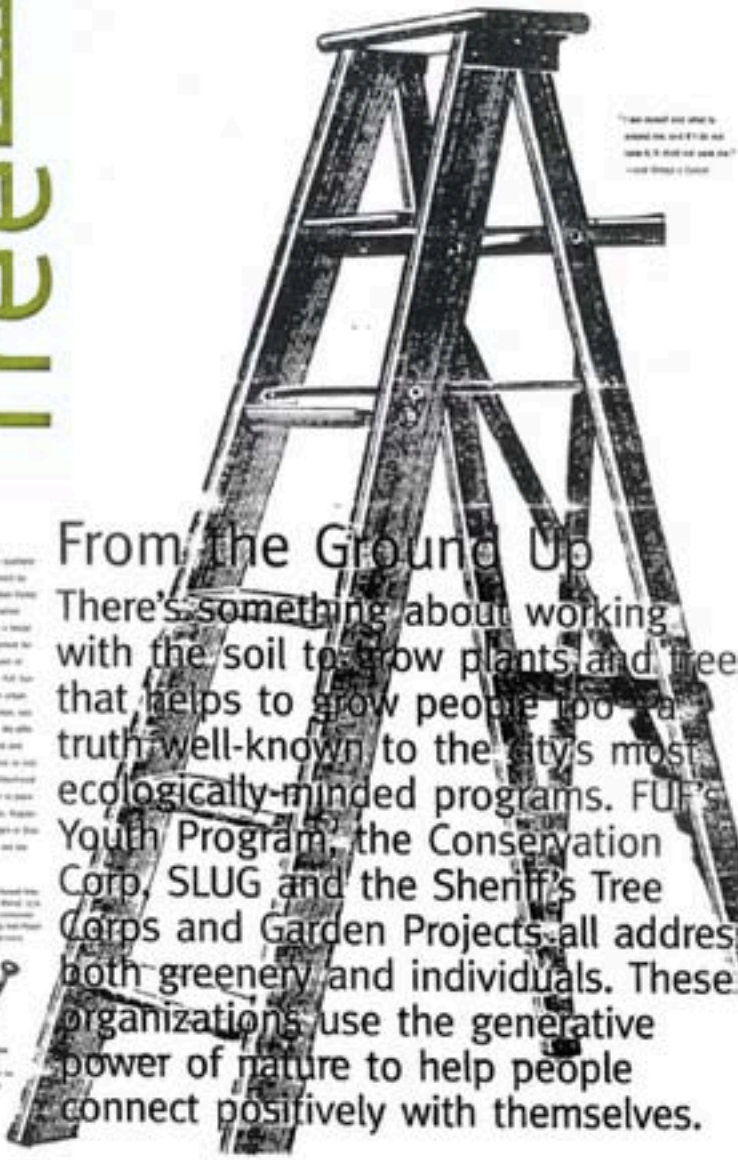
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education

Sherk's project concerns the development of an interactive living library that promotes greater understanding among people and allows for the integration of diverse cultural and ecological forms around the globe. Her project has been to locate such a library in a site specific public land, and in so doing, to conceptually transform and transvalue the use of urban space. Sherk is especially sensitive to something that is easily overlooked, namely, that in our society we have a limited cultural repertoire for what public space can or ought to be. Especially in America, public spaces are often meant to be vacant zones that surround buildings like moats. Reclaiming these urban deserts is central to her work as an artist.

environment

TreeSCAPES



*"Tree SCAPES and other to...
...and the...
...and the...
...and the..."*

From the Ground Up

There's something about working with the soil to grow plants and trees that helps to grow people too - a truth well-known to the city's most ecologically-minded programs. FUF's Youth Program, the Conservation Corp, SLUG and the Sheriff's Tree Corps and Garden Projects all address both greenery and individuals. These organizations use the generative power of nature to help people connect positively with themselves.

Tree SCAPES is a quarterly publication produced by Friends of the Urban Forest to provide information and education on a broad range of topics related to trees and green spaces in our urban forests. FUF has thousands of trees under its management, and we're proud to offer training, technical and practical assistance to our clients and neighborhood groups who want to plant and care for trees. Regular newsletters appear in the 10 neighborhoods we serve.



The watering can...
...and the...
...and the..."

The OMI/Excelsior Living Library & Think Park was dramatically enhanced last year on December 2, when hundreds of students from the three schools joined Friends of the Urban Forest volunteers and the Urban Tree foundation to plant almost 200 native trees and other vegetation on two of the streets bordering the site. Additionally, weedy, unused ground between Denman and San Miguel has become a bright, organic vegetable, flower, and herb garden, orchard and classroom. Soon student's artwork will be displayed along the fences, visually linking the schools. The students also designed and built a sculptural water feature. Polychromed labels for the recently-planted trees will soon display their Latin names, common names, plant culture and function.

James Denman Middle School, Balboa High School and San Miguel Child Development Center sit on nine contiguous acres in San Francisco's Excelsior District, near Oceanview, Merced and Ingleside. The area used to be a fertile river valley where the Muwekma Ohlone Native Americans once lived and historic farms once thrived. It is now home to diverse cultures of people, but the area looks very bleak and barren. The Living Library has begun an urban transformation



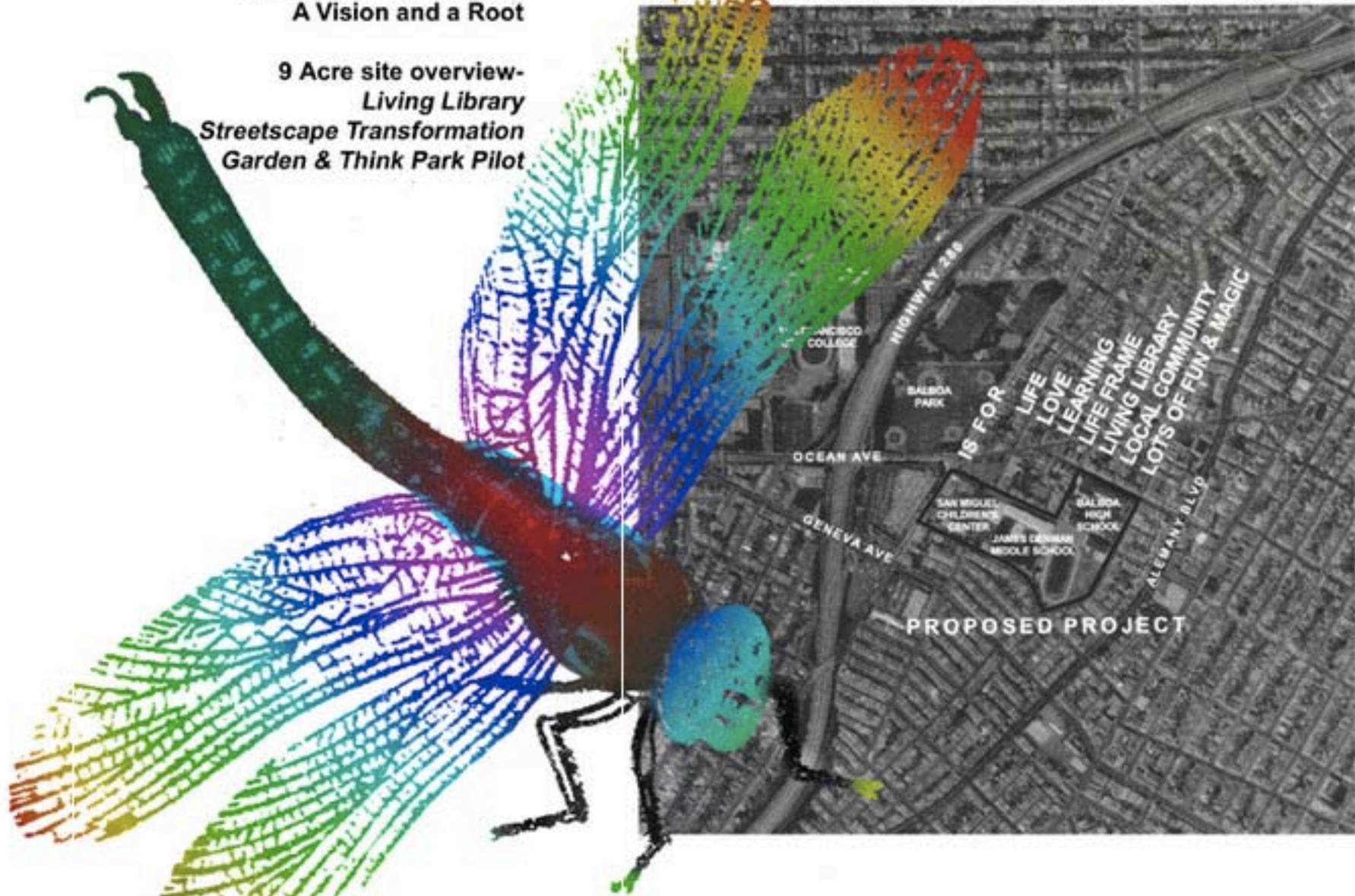
Incorporate math, science, history, language arts, art & technology & bring it all to life.

Plant trees & seeds, Add water, network &

What can crack cement?
A Vision and a Root

9 Acre site overview-
Living Library
Streetscape Transformation
Garden & Think Park Pilot

OMI / EXCELSIOR LIVING LIBRARY & THINK PARK



*Wave your magic wand.
Think positive thoughts &*

*Watch it grow! Then link electronically
to other sites globally &*



*Experience all of the interconnections
between people, places, ecologies & phenomena.*

In

A SEARCH for NEW HEROES, The Smithsonian asked Bonnie Sherk, who was her most important teacher?

The different species of domestic animals that I lived with in the early seventies - chickens, rabbits, rats, fish, birds, and a pig, I named Pigme. I learned their habits, language, and communications with each other and the other species. Mostly, because of them, I learned about whole systems and the interconnected forms of nature. I really first learned about ecology from the animals and I also learned much more deeply about art.

Bonnie Sherk,
Founder of *A Living Library*,
a project of *Life Frames, Inc.*

Bonnie Ora Sherk

◆Most Outstanding Healing Artist 2001◆
ARTS AND HEALING NETWORK

We feel that Bonnie Ora Sherk's work is inspirational to all. The conception of *A Living Library* will act as an important catalyst for positive change in the new millennium.

Marion Rockefeller Weber
Arts & Healing Network Founder

Each year the Smithsonian Computerworld Chairmen's Committee nominates individuals who use information technology to improve society for the inclusion in the Smithsonian's Innovation Collection.

A Living Library became part of the Permanent Research Collection of the Smithsonian. Steven P. Jobs, Chairman of Apple Computers, Inc., nominated *A Living Library* for the Smithsonian Computerworld Award 2000 in the category of ◆Environment, Energy, & Agriculture.◆



*See and learn about the world and the universe
- & all its resources - past, present, and future.*