

Compost Sculpture - Ephemeral Art

ages 6 and up | 60 min

In nature, time can be observed in the organic processes of growth and decay. All materials are subject to the forces of change. Wind, temperature, light, and water all slowly erode materials, leaving markers of time. Art works are often received as static objects, outside of time, but this is not the case... they, too, change over time. Most works of art are cared for carefully to avoid the appearance of change, but ephemeral art takes advantage of time's effects on the work.

In June of 2017, Gary John Gresl embarked on a multi-year residency, *The Body Farm* at Lynden, that considers ephemerality, mortality, and the lifespan of art objects. In three small, fenced plots of land, Gresl combined the found objects that he has used—over the course of decades—to make his assemblage sculptures. They now rest on the grounds at Lynden in a “collaboration with nature.” In this work, Gresl invites us to observe the decomposition of his life's work.

Inspiration:

This virtual tour of Gary John Gresl's *The Body Farm. (2017-20)* at Lynden allows us to observe how Gary's work changes over time: <https://lynden.tours/body-farm/>

I wonder...

- What examples of growth, decay, and erosion can be observed in Gresl's *The Body Farm*?
- Can the processes of growth and decay be used as an element in a work of art?



THE BODY FARM AT
LYNDEN: AN ART
ENTROPY PROJECT
"HIDDEN LOSSES"
For INFORMATION CALL
GARY JOHN GRESL
OFFICE 414-446-8794
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Project:

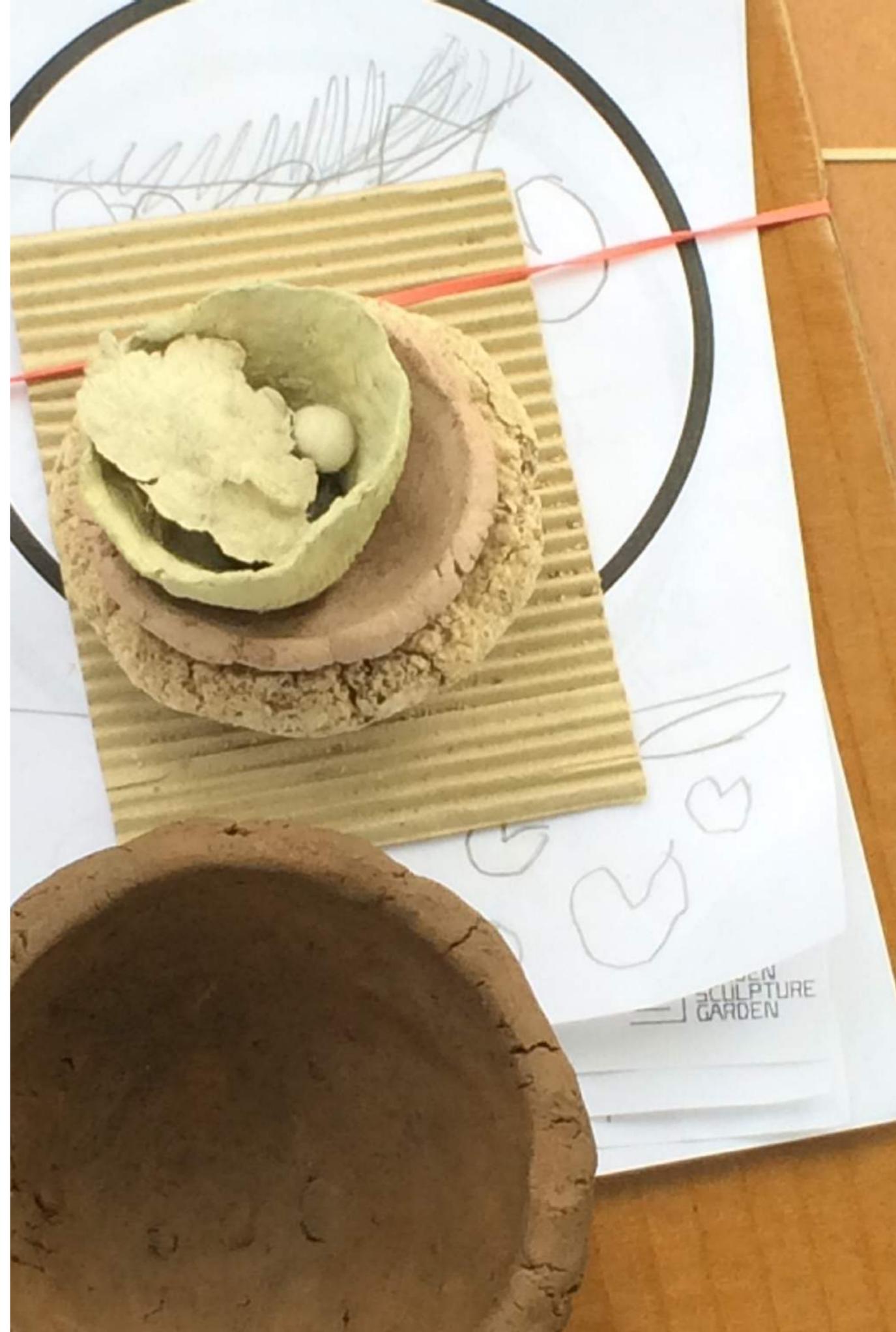
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Materials:

- Collected natural materials: Examples include moss, pebbles, sticks, grass, leaves, pine cones, flower petals, etc.
- Compost items: Examples include orange peels, coffee grounds, bones, etc.
- Seeds: Examples include seeds from seed packets or from plants (flowers, grass seed)
- Cardboard
- Newspaper
- Scissors
- Glue
- Coffee Grounds Clay
 - 1/2 cup of used coffee grounds
 - 1 cup of flour
 - 1/2 cup of salt
 - 3/4 cup of water

Making:

1. Make your Coffee Grounds Clay:
 - 1). Mix coffee grounds, flour, and salt together in a small bowl.
 - 2). Add water (small amounts at a time) and stir until the mixture turns into the consistency of a stiff clay.
 - 3). Knead clay for 2-3 minutes. If the clay is too sticky, knead in more flour.
2. Design a base for your sculpture: Using scissors, cut the cardboard to make a base for your coffee ground clay. You can design a plain base or use newspaper images to collage a design.
3. Make a sculpture. Form the clay into a ball, pinch pot, or object you saw in *The Body Farm*. Or make an assemblage sculpture using the natural materials you collected, using the clay to hold them together.
4. Embellish your sculpture with seeds.
5. Site your sculpture: Find a place outdoors to display your compost sculpture. Return periodically, as Gary has done with his sculpture, to observe how it decomposes and changes over time. Document the changes in journal drawings or photographs.





Taking It Further:

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Composting at Home: <https://www.epa.gov/recycle/composting-home>

Linda Wervey Vitamvas: *Feast* <https://www.lyndensculpturegarden.org/content/linda-wervey-vitamvas-feast>

Linda created *Feast* using local clay and an oak beam. The clay was allowed to slowly break down as it was exposed to the water in the pond, wind, and weather. What similarities and differences can you observe between *Feast* and *The Body Farm*?

Vocabulary

Compost A mixture of various decaying organic substances, such as dead leaves or manure. It is used for fertilizing soil.

Decompose To separate or resolve into constituent parts or elements; disintegrate.

Ephemeral Art Art that calls explicit attention to the idea of the transitory impermanence of life, objects and their arrangement.

Sources

Virtual Tour of Gary John Gresl's *The Body Farm* at Lynden - <https://lynden.tours/body-farm/>

Coffee dough recipe from *The Ultimate Book of Kid Concoctions* by John E. & Danita Thomas

<https://www.epa.gov/recycle/composting-home>

<https://www.lyndensculpturegarden.org>



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SCULPTURE
GARDEN