

*The Hatchery: East of Fresno* is a contemporary art exhibition featuring work by forty-four US and international artists in an unusual venue: a three-hundred and seventy-seven-acre compound abandoned by two failed intentional communities. The property and its central building, now known as "The Hatchery," have become a seasonal arts destination, making *The Hatchery: East of Fresno* the latest realization of purposeful community.

Located near Badger, California, approximately 54 miles east of Fresno, the ruined compound stands in stark contrast with its setting in the foothills of the spectacular Sierra Nevada mountains. The curators hope that by pointing the way "east of Fresno" the compound can again become a significant site of experience, as it was in its heyday, and lending the directional a sense of destiny.

*The Hatchery: East of Fresno* is the second exhibition in the ongoing creative use of this property in its present, dilapidated state. Last year's show, *The Hatchery: Free Range*, was the cooperative effort of twelve California artists with a vision for the site as an arts venue.

This year, drawn to this rural backwater by the pathos of its prior history as a former Synanon drug rehabilitation center and later a Muslim religious community and charter school, artists from various disciplines have made work in direct (or oblique) dialogue with its unique layered past. Several of the pieces are installations that have been made onsite within the last two months.

The site has been a veritable ghost town since it was last abandoned in 2001, and visiting it has become a fascinating experience. Ten years of human neglect have encouraged nesting birds, mushrooms and moss, and cattle seeking shade, overtaking structures intended for people. Human histories are physically layered throughout the space—schoolbooks, homework, lesson plans on walls, the remains of a recording studio and a commercial kitchen, carefully chosen design. It is an archeological dig, but the ruins are of our own time. The visitor gets a clear sense that things didn't work out: what happened here? What went wrong?

For artists, it is a venue unlike any other—ruined, huge, open for so many interpretations, no rules, no restrictions—to explore, exhibit in, and interact with. The social, physical, and natural layers become lenses through which art is made. The artists of *East of Fresno* are invited to confront and elucidate the lingering questions, and possibly invoke new ones. Provocative, disturbing, and eye-opening, it's a sensory and psychic adventure for artist and viewer alike.