

**Federal Project No. 2**  
Re-examining America

**Hole in One**

How the humble hole punch changed how we think about the Depression, and how it can deflate corporate narratives today.

INFO →



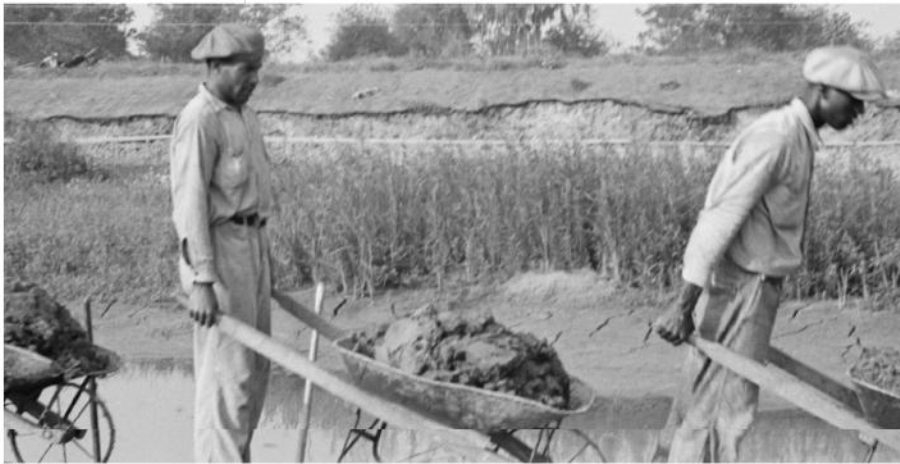
THEN

Roy Stryker, 1935–43  
Washington, D.C.



NOW

Kirsten Stolle, 2018  
Asheville, North Carolina



THEN

Roy Stryker, 1935–43  
Washington, D.C.

If the words “Great Depression” conjure dramatic black-and-white photographs of farmworkers, migrant laborers, and rural families, you can thank Roy Stryker. As head of the photography department at the Farm Security Administration (FSA), Stryker had full control of crafting the perspective of the project, editing and curating the final images for publication. He chose images that engendered empathy for the suffering and highlighted the importance of President Roosevelt’s New Deal.

His methods, though, verged on draconian. Those images that didn’t make the cut—perhaps because they had poor exposure, undesirable content, or did not fit the prescribed narrative—were “killed” by a simple hole punch, saving time and money (or so Stryker thought) by letting the lab technicians know not to print them. By preventing select images from ever being printed, Stryker shaped the tone of discourse and influenced how many Americans would view the era. It has been estimated that Stryker ruined up to 100,000 negatives in this fashion.





Meat testing in Prince George's County, Maryland, 1935. Courtesy of Library of Congress



A picket line, New York City, 1937. Arthur Rothstein / Courtesy of Library of Congress

Stryker occasionally destroyed negatives from his FSA photographers that he deemed too provocative: he dispatched a shot by Ben Shahn that captured police brutality on film, as well as images Arthur Rothstein shot inside a brothel. But, mostly, his choices were coldly pragmatic. No matter what the reason for their images' rejection, the holes understandably angered the artists. Recalling the practice in [an interview](#) with the Archives of American Art in 1964, Shahn stated that "Roy was a little bit dictatorial in his editing and he ruined quite a number of my pictures." When Shahn got fed up with this, he recalled, he "shot [his] mouth off" to Stryker about his hole punching. "He learned, then, not to do that," said Shahn, "because this was an invaluable document of what life was like."



A flooded Ohio River, Louisville, Kentucky, 1936. Courtesy of Library of Congress



Sharecropper's children, 1935. Arthur Rothstein / Library of Congress

Stryker ran the FSA photo project from 1935 to 1943. In later years he tapered off his mutilation of negatives, likely as a result of protestations from photographers; still, the hole-punched negatives remained in the archive. Photographer Edwin Rosskam, speaking with the [Archives of American Art](#) in 1965, called the practice "barbaric."

"I'm sure that some very significant pictures have in that way been killed off," he said, "because there is no way of telling—no way—what photograph would come alive when."



A line for food at a camp for flood refugees, Forrest City, Arkansas, 1937. Walker Evans / Courtesy of Library of Congress

The Library of Congress has digitized many of Roy Stryker's killed negatives, and I was immediately drawn to the black dot created by the hole punch. When printed, the hole punch appears as a small black sphere hovering over a face or a rural landscape. The dark round circle, randomly punched, reads as a contemporary mark, echoing interventions by artists such as Yayoi Kusama and John Baldessari.

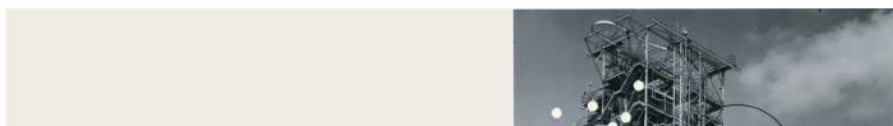


*Aerial Farmland* , collage, archival pigment print, 2018.

My work as an artist examines the influence of chemical companies on our food supply and the connection between corporate interests and public health. In the same way Stryker crafted the narrative of the Great Depression through photo editing, chemical companies such as Monsanto and Dow Chemical frame their stories through the curated photos they publish online. Their websites feature striking images of sunny fields and healthy crops, noticeably obscuring their own polluting history of chemical manufacturing. They position themselves as modern agricultural companies, supporting farmers and acting as sustaining stewards of the land, while actively concealing their pesticides' decades-long toxic impact on the soil.



*Canola Fields* , collage, out-outs, archival pigment print, 2018.





Soybean Rows , collage, hole punches, ink, archival pigment print, 2018.

The FSA documented huge swaths of American life, but I've chosen to examine one sector—chemical companies—in this collage project, titled *Our Roots Run Deep*. I'm particularly interested in how chemical companies curate their images to deliberately conceal their pasts. The project repurposes contemporary photographs and historic press photos, and employs a variety of circle interventions to collapse the distance between past and present narratives.



Haystacks , collage, archival pigment print, 2018.

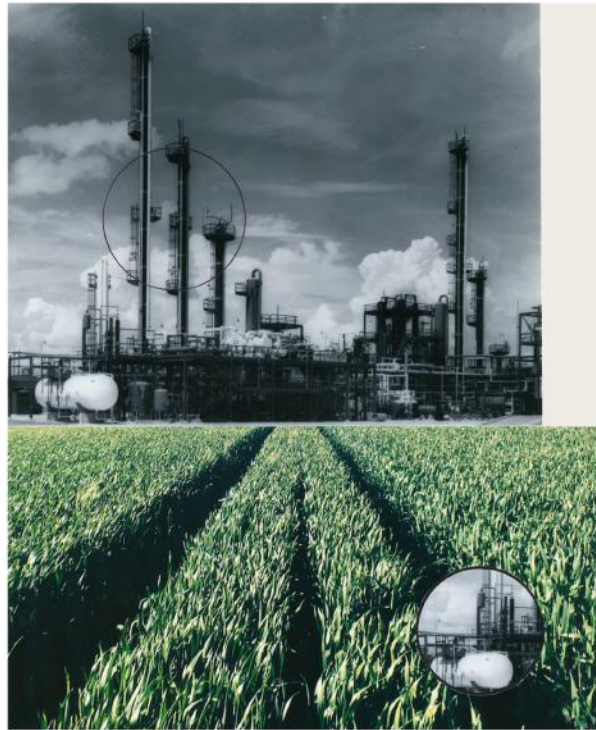
The black dot found in Stryker's hole-punched negatives serves as a compositional tool throughout the project. Black-and-white photographs of chemical factories are situated against color photographs of fields of corn, soy, canola, wheat, and alfalfa. Cutouts, hole punches, collaged spheres, and ink circles are introduced and serve as viewfinders, a resting point to focus the eye. It is this back-and-forth between bleak chemical plants and fertile farms that underscores the industry's false narrative.



Cornfield , collage, pastel, archival pigment print, 2018.

“Our Roots Run Deep” is also a tagline currently used by Dow Chemical telling their story of seed development

Dow Chemical telling their story of seed development, farmer support, and allegedly sustainable solutions to preserve the environment. But, of course, there is more to the story. Dow and Monsanto's promotional images project an idealized version of farming; by choosing photos with strong emotional impact, they aim to give the impression that they are feeding the world and protecting the planet. By creating a direct and truthful relationship between their actions and the consequences, *Our Roots Run Deep* spotlights persistent corporate greenwashing and reveals the chemical legacy of these companies.



*Smokestacks*, collage, ink, archival pigment print, 2018.

*Kirsten Stolle* is a visual artist working in collage, drawing, and mixed media. Her research-based practice is grounded in the investigation of corporate propaganda, food politics, and biotechnology. She has recently shown her work at NOME Gallery, Berlin, and the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, North Carolina, among many others.

## EXPLORE FEDERAL PROJECT NO. 2

### ON THE ROAD IN SEARCH OF SOUL

By David Alekhuogbe

The black Southerners who joined the Great Migration wanted to leave oppression behind—not their beloved family recipes. Their traditions would redefine American cooking.

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## THE PIONEER WOMEN

By Lindley Warren Mickunas

For young women who grow up on the family farm, there comes a time to make a choice—should I stay or should I go?

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## LIFE BEYOND BARS

By Jasmine Nyende

The Works Progress Administration funded the creation of public works like dams, bridges—and more than 30 prisons and jails.

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## THE MEASURE OF A MAN

By Xavier Schipani

As Depression-era art centered on the heroic male figures rebuilding America, Paul Cadmus infused his public work with overt expressions of gay desire.

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## THE SHAPES OF THINGS TO COME

By Mildred Beltré

Before many Americans had ever seen an abstract painting, the WPA commissioned artists to create large, avant-garde murals—for installation in a public housing project.

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## WINDOW SHOPPING

By Ken Solomon

Conspicuous consumption plummeted during the Great Depression, but the fantasy of big spending remains a part of the American dream.

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## MAKING HEADLINES

By Laura Kina & Yasuo Kuniyoshi

The relentless churn of daily news can feel like a burden—especially for those who don't see themselves represented in it.

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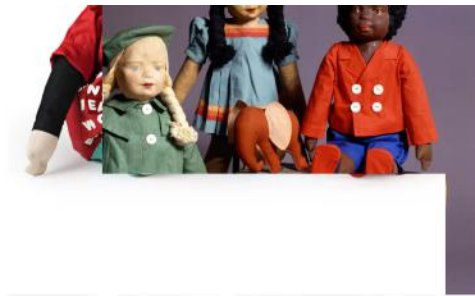
## CHILD'S PLAY

Handmade dolls embodied marginalized workers' desire for autonomy—and, now, the plight of children at the United



States' southern border.

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## THE VISIBLE MAN

By Edward Cushenberry

Telling, and preserving, the stories that reveal what it's really like to be black in America—from Ralph Ellison's classic novel to now.

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## THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF THE MOTHER

By Koak

During the Depression, the government encouraged men to get back to work—and women to stay home.

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## SHELTER IN PLACE

By Rosalind Fox Solomon

The most iconic image from the Great Depression centers on rural poverty—but then, as now, the misery of homelessness was compounded in America's cities.

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# SONG OF THE MISSISSIPPI

By Rev. Sekou

Heartbreak defines the human experience. And nothing can break your heart like your own country.

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# ON THE FACTORY LINE

By Christopher Payne

Finding moments of beauty and elegance in industrial labor.

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# A QUEEN IS BORN

By Natalie Keyssar

A local beauty pageant can be about more than just looks. It can also reveal how a community wants to be seen.

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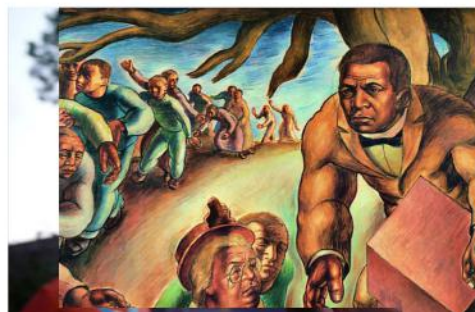


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# WHEN ART IS AN ACT OF PROTEST

By Carlos Javier Ortiz

A summer of activism in Chicago reminds us that in order for history to be taught, it must first be recorded.



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## HOLE IN ONE

By Kirsten Stolle

Harnessing the power of the humble hole punch, to either create narratives or deflate them.

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## WHAT'S YOUR AMERICAN DREAM?

By Zora J. Murff

Gordon Parks and the pursuit of happiness as a black American.

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## PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

By MGMT. design

Updating the iconic posters of the Works Progress Administration.

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## IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL



# LEAVE

By Gabriella Demozuk

During the New Deal, Southwest DC was razed to create a "model city" for federal workers. Now the area is being redeveloped again, this time into a gentrified urban playground.

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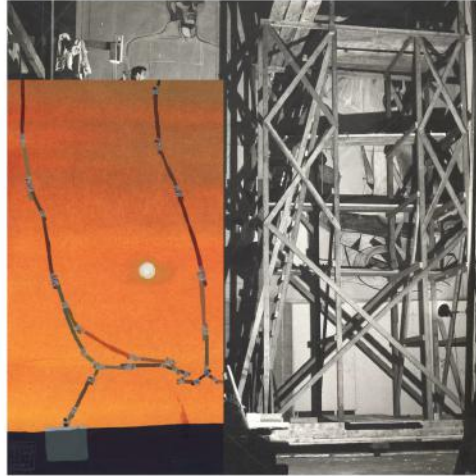


# PROPOSALS FOR A MONUMENT

By Balint Zsako

Public art has the power to show us what we want to see—or reveal what we deserve.

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# A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

By Alec Soth

A photograph of a home speaks volumes about the inhabitant, even when they're not included in the shot.

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# BACK TO THE MUSIC, BACK TO THE GAME

By Sofia Valiente

A visit to the juke joints in the Florida Everglades where migrant laborers could go to relax.

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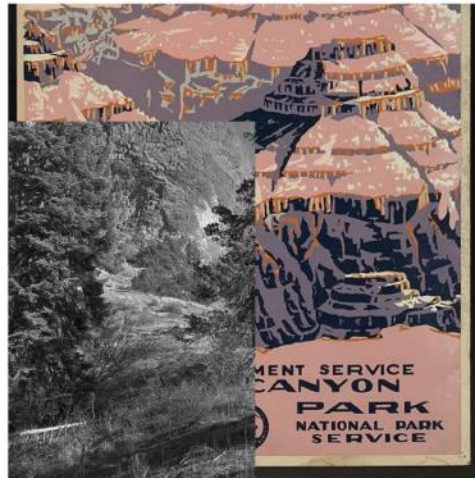
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## THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND

By David Benjamin Sherry

During the Depression, the federal government urged Americans to visit the country's natural wonders.

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## THE EXQUISITE CATALOG OF A CROW FAIR

By Wendy Red Star

Wendy Red Star brings illustrations from the Denver Art Museum's card catalog to the Crow Nation's annual gathering.

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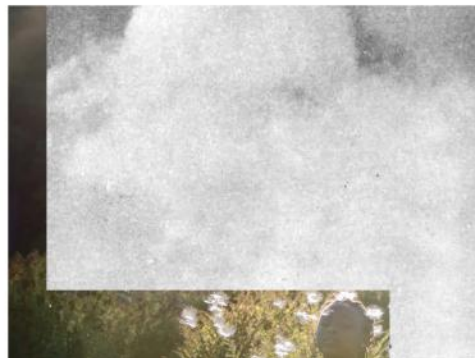
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## THE AMERICAN GUIDE TO THE NEW VERMONT

By Shane Lavalette

Shane Lavalette follows the refugees who have made their home in the whitest state in the nation.

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## STOOP LIFE AND SURVIVAL

By Patricia Renee Thomas

Documenting a life of a neighborhood means covering street life in all of its joy and pain.

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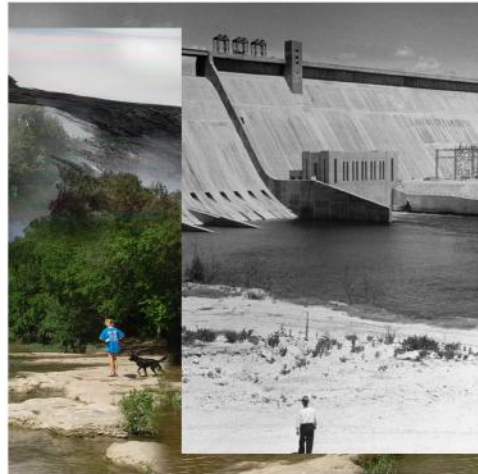
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## HOT, WET, AND OUT OF CONTROL

By Barry Stone

The history of Texas's power struggle with water.

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## THE AFTERLIVES OF SLAVES

By Damon Davis

Snapshots of a life after slavery, and an imagining of a world without bondage.

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## PORTRAITS OF HARD LIVING IN AMERICA



By Justine Kurland

The faces and places of a forgotten swath of American life.

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## SHE WORKS HARD FOR THE MONEY

By Laura Elkins

During the Depression, women were advised to "sing for their supper" as a way to survive hard times.

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## HANDS ACROSS AMERICA

By Keith Miller

Manual labor can be hard and exhausting, practical and poetic.

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## WALL TO WALL

By Peter Krashes

Public murals are contested spaces, where retellings of history and new visions of the future fight for prominence.

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## SHARING THE GREAT OUTDOORS

By Tommy Kha

Tennessee's once-segregated parks turn over a new leaf.

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## SIGNS OF BOOM AND BUST

By Mark Steinmetz

Mark Steinmetz drives the streets of the city's fast-growing urban sprawl.

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## AFTER THE CURTAIN CALLS

By Tim Davis

Fulfilling the American dream of standing under bright lights while your friends and neighbors applaud.

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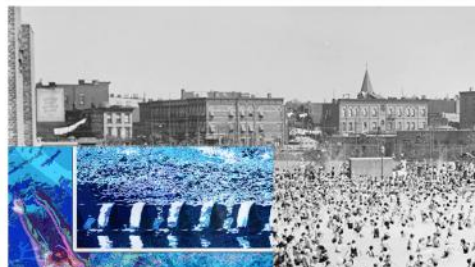


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## THE MANY LIVES OF MCCARREN PARK POOL

By Peter Rostovsky

Beloved, abandoned, then beloved once more, a Brooklyn pool transforms



alongside its neighborhood.

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## THE PEOPLE OF THE LAND

By Brendan George Ko

Dust Bowl migrants had to pull up roots. Native Hawaiians are strengthening theirs.

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## LETTING SLEEPING CHILDREN LIE

By Leanne Shapton

Leanne Shapton reconsiders motherhood after seeing a photograph of children asleep during a square dance.

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## THE CYCLE OF A WOMAN'S LIFE

