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MILDRED'S LANE p. 62



Digital drawing by Jorge Colombo.
Professional illustrator Jorge Colombo often visits Mildred's Lane.
Additional work, including his New Yorker covers, can be seen at thejorgecolombo.com

HIGH WAYS AND BYWAYS

TEXT THERESA KEEGAN

Mildred's Lane is part art, part experiment, part museum, part community and fully amazing. For almost two decades this project has been inspiring, defining and engaging people - especially artists, writers, scientists and thinkers - under the tutelage of J. Morgan Puett.

Resting on a 96-acre site and nestled on the Pennsylvania, NY border in the Delaware Water Gap, Mildred's Lane embraces a holistic approach to a sense of place. It focuses not only on current people and activities, but also on those who were there in the past and those who will be there in the future.

"It's becoming a little cell that falls under utopian studies," says Puett. Who encourages a new age of curiosity that combines science, environmentalism, and transhistorical and artistic practices. "Hundreds of people convene here. It's a collective experience every day; from morning to night, we are moving. It's really about us learning a new way of living in the world—that is helping each other."

Recognized with a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2016 for her work, Puett believes in a philosophy that makes every aspect of every day an artistic opportunity at Mildred's Lane. "I don't think we need a lot of 'things' in the world in this day and age. We need ideas and to exchange more ideas in order to come to some new way of looking at the

world and working in it."

Sculptures are built and torn down; land is explored and returned to its natural state. "It's not about static sculpture," explains Puett. "It's about the art of living. There's a sensitivity and care of the environment and our relationship as human beings to each other and the person who will come after, and those who've come before."

Summer "sessions" focus on specific topics. This summer's workshops include taxidermy, beekeeping, archaeology and creating a solar-powered springhouse. However, it's in daily living where Mildred's Lane really shines. Cooking, food, cleaning, shopping all become opportunities to reconsider engagement with others, as well as the world. Next year marks the 10th anniversary for the summer sessions, which continue to fill up.

Puett started Mildred's Lane with her partner, artist Mark Dion, after their child was born in 2000. The couple sought a sense of community that they couldn't find in the demanding work of pop-up fashion events in Manhattan, which was Puett's expertise. A hostile takeover of her company in 2001 changed many things. "The things that became my passion was this relationship to the land, the landscape, to my child," she recalls. "I wanted to make a world for him and my colleagues."

The heart of Mildred's Lane is an 1800s farmhouse that was inhabited by Mildred Miller, a farmer who lived there alone in the 1900s. Exploring the site's archaeology bridges its use in modern ways, laying the groundwork for the "Mildred's Lane Transhistorical Society and Museum," a proposed land preserve for the future.

One key element of Mildred's Lane success is its inclusiveness. It has links with many art institutions and universities for residencies. People are encouraged to request an "invitation" for the popular Saturday sessions, when 40 to 50 people gather for a meal, discussion and/or performance.

The project has also actively integrated with people in Narrowsburg, NY - just on the other side of the river. The Mildred Complex(ity) offers pop-up opportunities along Narrowsburg's Main Street (with a side story), blending city and urban living for many artists. Puett believes this expansion into other communities is an essential organic outgrowth of any artistic endeavor.

"Every day is different, every year is different," says Puett, "but the more community involvement the better. It's pleasing and desired. This is not a retreat - it's very much about working and living."

Mildred's Lane is available on Airbnb.