

Sarah McCartt-Jackson

Dr. Tim Evans

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The Invasion of the Scarecrows and Community Aesthetic Perspectives

Begin with the hollow splinter of straw poking out from a rectangular bale. On this bale rests several orange pumpkins, a variety of long and slender yellow squash, wheat-brown gourds, and fake, oversized sunflowers. A miniature, foot-long white picket fence marks the corner of the scene. Next to the bale, a small push-wagon yields a bushel of yellow mums that spring out of a miniature oil barrel. Notice now the weather-beaten boards of a gate in the background. See the dangling red Christmas lights strung on the gate. In the middle, sitting on the bale, a life-size scarecrow opens his arms in the traditional T-stance. Nevertheless, this scarecrow wears overalls, a floral hat, a cape-like garment made of plastic bags, and a bandanna around his neck. Next to him, a sign reads, "Finders Keepers Consignment, Located in Lower Level." Pan out and notice the storefront where the scarecrow passes his October days in front of the Scottsville Antique Mall ([Figure 1](#)¹). Pan out more and observe the downtown square of Scottsville, Kentucky, which consists of four block corners situated around a four-way stop sign intersection ([Figure 1a](#)). A scarecrow peers out from each block corner, each sidewalk, and each island of grass. There are nearly 100 scarecrows within a one square mile radius. This is the Scottsville-Allen County Invasion of the Scarecrows.

Initiated four years ago in October 2007, the Invasion of the Scarecrows event allows Scottsville-Allen County businesses to participate in a contest whereby the businesses build a scarecrow or autumn scene, competing for various prizes. Jointly organized by the Scottsville-

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Allen County Chamber of Commerce, the Heart of Scottsville, and the City of Scottsville, the Invasion serves primarily as an event to attract area residents to the downtown square for shopping, dining, and other economic boosting activities. The scarecrows come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes, colors, and styles, and they remain on the square from October 1st until the last Saturday in October.

Located in the south-central portion of Kentucky, Allen County consists of approximately 20,000 residents, with Scottsville, as the county's largest town and county seat, consisting of approximately 4,400 residents (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). The county comprises mostly rural land, used primarily for agriculture. Through the Invasion of the Scarecrows, Scottsville strives to attract citizens of the city as well as other residents from Allen County, Warren County, and the Glasgow area (Boler 2011). However, the Invasion appears to serve an additional communal function outside of commerce booster efforts. As I interviewed participants and residents, and as I observed the Invasion events, I began to understand the multivocality of these scarecrow scenes. Recall the Finders Keepers Consignment scarecrow described above. In its *assemblage* and location, it seems to be one part folk art, one part community art, one part billboard.

Scholars have studied events like the Invasion in several ways, and these approaches have informed my fieldwork on scarecrows as folk art. First, the scarecrows generally do not exist solitarily; they usually appear among a grouping of items specially chosen to create what I call a "scarecrow scene" to use my interviewees' term (Ben-Amos 1976). Jack Santino considers these scenes "the folk *assemblage* of autumn" (1994). Although Santino focuses primarily on the *assemblages* in front of individual houses, the Invasion exists within a different public display context to which we can apply some of Santino's analysis. For example, if the front of the house is the canvas for the *assemblage*, by extension, the storefronts and downtown square of

Scottsville are the canvas for the Invasion (Santino 1992:158). More importantly, Santino (1995; 1996; 2004) recommends these objects of public display are worthy of studying.

Additionally, Santino (1994; 1995) has offered interesting ideas about festival, public display, and seasonal cycles. Considering Allen County as a mostly agricultural county, life and death imagery, symbolism, and seasonal contexts could emerge as potential foundations for a study of the scarecrows. While I consider the “dichotomy of rural and urban, natural and built” as it exists in Halloween and other autumn displays only briefly, this dichotomy arguably corresponds to the city of Scottsville in the broader context of Allen County (1994:162).

Santino further understands scarecrows as “scarecrows brought to the city” having “more to do with planting and growth than with harvest” (1992:162). With more extensive fieldwork, I might be able to perceive these scarecrows as symbolic gestures, but for the purposes of this discussion, I find they have more to do with creativity and art than with symbolic representations of planting or growth. However, I do draw upon Santino’s notion that “it is not the dummy on the porch or the pumpkin on the front stairs...that constitute the work of art but rather all of these together” (1992:158), adopting his use of *assemblage* in art for the scarecrow scenes.

Similarly, Lisa Gabbert’s examination of a winter snow and ice sculpture carving competition confronts issues in authenticity and tourism, community, and touristic commodification of place (or, more accurately, the commodification of place due to the occasion of tourism) to encourage democratic approaches to conserving culture (2011). While Scottsville has changed over the past 50 years as industry has increased, it has remained relatively stable as far as agricultural use. Gabbert’s analysis, though, offers an ethnographic model for how to begin to understand festivals whose roots stem from boosterism and chambers of commerce.

Finally, much literature involving community festivals has focused on public display. According to Roger Abrahams, the Invasion would fall under the category of public display as a “planned-for public occasion” with “actions and objects invested with meaning and values” (1981:303). Likewise, Leslie Prosterman’s examination of Midwestern county fairs explores sense of place and aesthetics to analyze how scholars can situate ordinary festivals, like the Invasion, in the realm of art (1995). Both are “public display” in that they enact meaning for a particular group of people and for various publics. Further, the aesthetic criteria by which someone judges art can change according to public and private spheres (Prosterman 1995) as evident in the aesthetic criteria of judging the Invasion scarecrows.

Thus, previous works have demonstrated how the scarecrows in the Invasion function as both art and artifact. They have confirmed these scarecrows are not only worthy of study, but also are an important aspect of understanding identity and art in relation to community activities. Are the Invasion scarecrows art or advertisement? Chamber of Commerce boosterism or countywide community promotion? Are the scarecrows unique to Scottsville or do they belong to a larger realm of holiday art? To understand better the decorative and artistic aspects of these scarecrow *assemblages* and scenes, I view them in the economic, communal, and contested contexts in which they appear and to which they belong. I will try to understand how the scarecrows and autumnal scenes, stemming from a booster campaign to enhance downtown economy, induce a form of community art or aesthetic unique to the Invasion event and residents in Scottsville, Kentucky. I look primarily at the criteria by which scarecrow organizers, builders, and judges comment on their personal aesthetics in relation to the larger competition of the Scottsville-Allen County Invasion of the Scarecrows.

Contest Rules

A committee organizes the Invasion of the Scarecrows event, with members representing the Scottsville-Allen County Chamber of Commerce, the Heart of Scottsville, and the City of Scottsville. Each year the committee determines a theme around which the event centers (though, according to interviews, the participants largely ignore the theme). Local businesses, clubs, nonprofit organizations, and churches work through the Chamber of Commerce to enter their scarecrow concept into the contest through an application process, which consists of submitting to the committee the business name and scarecrow entry theme (see APPENDIX A for 2011 entrants). There is no entry fee. During election years, those running for office also enter the competition (Boler 2011).

The scarecrows must be up on the square by the official start date, which is the Friday before the first Saturday in October, and they must be down by the last Saturday in October. The committee also insists that the scarecrow be family-friendly and appropriate for all audiences to view (Boler 2011). Furthermore, the committee determines the location of each scarecrow based on the theme and expected dimensions of the scarecrow entry. Most of the positioning occurs the day before the official start date when the committee members “kind of eyeball” the location depending on the size and the number of parts required for the scarecrow scene (Boler 2011). There are no size limits.

The scarecrows commonly face toward the center of the square. The intersection and square are closed off for one Saturday, giving people a chance to view the scarecrows better. This street closure coincides with the “50s and 60s Night,” which is the kickoff to the Invasion of the Scarecrows on the first weekend in October (though this year it was held October 8). This event features food, music, games, dancing, and the Invasion award ceremony. Judging occurs

the day before this kickoff event. In 2011, there were 13 awards, one per category (see APPENDIX B to view 2011 categories and winners). The committee determines the prizes each year. In 2011, the winners won “trophy stakes” with their winning category written on it that they could stake in the ground next to their winning scarecrow. They also won “downtown dollars” in sums from \$10-\$30, redeemable at local participating businesses on and around the downtown square (Boler 2011). Finally, each winning team receives a certificate with the year and the category for which they won.

Evaluation

Heart of Scottsville Director and Invasion committee member Jamie Boler asked members of the Scottsville Art Guild to judge the 2011 Invasion scarecrows. Art Guild members Pamm Douglas and Sharon Woodward volunteered as judges. Pamm and Sharon had had no experience with the scarecrows other than as observers in the previous three years.

On the day of the judging, Friday, October 7, Pamm and Sharon met with Jamie who gave them a list of the scarecrow entries, scarecrow locations, and categories they would be judging for winners. They also talked briefly about how to judge. Jamie then walked with them around the square while Pamm and Sharon judged the entries together. They said it took them approximately one hour to view all the entries.

Interestingly, many inconsistencies in judging arose. First, Sue Shaver, Chamber of Commerce Executive Director and Invasion committee member, told me “judges are from out of town,” though Pamm and Sharon both live in Scottsville (2011). Additionally, the judges and organizers hold different opinions on the principal criteria for judging (discussed later). I found that although there appears to be a community aesthetic constraining entries to some extent

(mostly the criterion of “family-friendly”), judging criteria varies between individuals based somewhat on their attitudes toward the purpose of the Invasion event, the scarecrows as art (or not as art), their relationship to the community, and their relationship to the event (organizer, builder, or judge).

Organizers

Heart of Scottsville director Jamie Boler serves on the committee for the Invasion of the Scarecrows event and participates in making a scarecrow to represent his employer (Heart of Scottsville) and his art studio (The Red Elephant). His aesthetic criteria develop from several aspects of his participation in Scottsville life. He is a resident of Scottsville, an employee of a business on the square, an owner of a business located on the square, a community leader who serves in several volunteer capacities, and a participant in the Invasion event. He views the event personally, economically, diplomatically, and competitively. Consequently, his criteria derive from each aspect of his life, resulting in what I consider democratic or inclusive criteria.

First, Jamie judges the scarecrows primarily based on his conviction that the principal purpose of the event resides in its ability to attract people to the square, boosting local commerce. Yet, as a community leader, he also recognizes the community-building value the event has come to encompass.

The purpose of the event four years ago when it started... was to create something that was going on in the square and stayed there for a long period of time to attract people to come to the downtown to pull more foot traffic. So, and it also was twofold in that not only did it attract people to the downtown, it encouraged local business people to be involved as well. (Boler 2011)

Because of this “twofold” view, Jamie believes judging the scarecrows is “not anything really strict” (2011). He instructed the judges *not* to look at how much the entry resembled a scarecrow

because many people build scarecrows many different ways (Boler 2011). Therefore, the use of straw is not a main criterion, nor is it very important to Jamie's perspective. Instead, he says,

I told [the judges] not to look at how it was built or how much it actually resembled a scarecrow but more or less like the scene, and the message they were trying to get across with their scarecrow or with their little scene and how well they did that and try to place it into that category. (Boler 2011)

More specifically, to Jamie, a "scene" consists of a story or message that all of the parts—not merely the scarecrow alone—tell to the viewer. If this *assemblage* references the business, then it succeeds on yet another level. When asked for an example of a good scarecrow, Jamie replies,

I like looking at the ones and they kind of tell a story or you can kind of see the business through the scarecrow. I remember Smokeshack Barbecue ([Figure 2](#)) had one set up up here and they had a wolf sitting there with a grill and then there was a little black box and it was a slaughterhouse—it kind of sounds awful!—and then there was three little piggies ([Figure 3](#)) there on the other end. But I thought that one was really good. And I thought it was very ironic that they won the cutest. . . . I like being able to look at them and see what the businesses was or see what kind of story they're trying to tell. You know, very well put together. (Boler 2011)

Jamie's draw to scarecrows that allude to their business corresponds to his participation in the community as a business owner and director. Moreover, when asked for an example of an inappropriate or bad scarecrow, Jamie says he has never seen one he would deem inappropriate on the square during the Invasion, but he would consider drunken scarecrows or "two pumpkins used for butt cheeks" as inappropriate for the Invasion (2011). When he says, "You wouldn't want to walk around with your family or kids to see that on the square," Jamie highlights that to him, an inappropriate scarecrow has less to do with materials or style and more to do with lack of family-friendly appeal.

Moreover, Jamie's opinion on the scarecrows as art speaks to his judging aesthetic criteria. He articulates that the scarecrows, events, and scenes are both art and entertainment in the community.

I think if you had interviewed four years ago when it first started it was just something fun to engage the community and get them interested in the downtown area. But I know the gentleman, [Gary Mathis], that we worked with on our scarecrow, you know, he has like a certain art to building them. You know he has a system and was taking photos, and documenting how to build a scarecrow, you know, so you could almost teach a class on how to build a scarecrow. So I think there's a certain art to it.

I think it's gotten to the point now to where people enjoy it so much. I know myself, just this being the second year, you know, we're already talking about next year. What could we do different? Could we build something in a different way that might work better? So I think that it's more now than what it was. I wouldn't just call it—it is fun for people to do, for business owners and a good way for them to be involved, but a lot of people want to win, too, so they'll push themselves to try to build better or to find a new way to build. I think, I would consider it a type of art. (Boler 2011)

Thus, Jamie considers the scarecrows and scarecrow scenes art because people enjoy it (respond to it), the scarecrows require participants to solve technical problems in the act of creation, and the event cultivates creativity. Jamie simultaneously comments on the economic function of the contest when broaching the topic of art. He sees the event as multivocal—beneficial artistically *and* economically. Perhaps because of his view that the scarecrows (and art) can—and should—include as many businesses and groups in the community as possible, Jamie's criteria for judging scarecrows allows him to be more inclusive. For example, Jamie emphasizes several times that he does not believe a “good” scarecrow requires straw. Instead, a good scarecrow is “almost a kind of free-for-all” (2011). It does not need to relate to autumn or Halloween themes, but good ones “represent the business they're built for” (Boler 2011).

Finally, Jamie's aesthetic criteria emanate from his personal feelings about the Invasion event. He enjoys the attention it brings to the square, and he enjoys seeing people around the square. Ultimately, Jamie's aesthetic criteria indicate his role as organizer, creating a democratic view of “good” and “bad” entries as well as an economic view of downtown stimulus. As a business owner (The Red Elephant studio) and employee of a downtown business (Heart of

Scottsville), Jamie's criteria also stem from his personal investment in the square and the attention the Invasion draws to the area. Moreover, his role as resident resonates personally.

My personal favorite is just once they're all up and the square's decorated, it's the aesthetics, just the feel of the square. It's very welcoming, it's very warm, and so many people just come to see it. It's awesome just to see people walk around and enjoy with their kids.... It just kind of creates a hustle and bustle around the downtown. (Boler 2011)

When reviewing his criteria, Jamie looks for a "good scene" that is "very business-specific," "interactive," family friendly, provides a good photo opportunity, and has figures that "are put together really well" (i.e., made well technically) (2011). He says Sonic won "Best Scene" because it met all these criteria, according to him ([Figures 4 and 5](#)). Jamie's appreciation of Sonic's scarecrow scene illustrates how his criteria reflect his role in the community as resident, business employee, business owner, community leader, and Invasion participant.

Scarecrow Artists / Builders

With over 100 entries in 2011, many people participate in the construction of the scarecrows. Typically, scarecrow builders come from the businesses and organizations the scarecrows represent. For example, Jamie builds his scarecrow for his art studio, The Red Elephant. This year, Jamie worked with city planning commissioner (and Invasion committee member) Gary Mathis on a large Ghostbusters-themed scarecrow scene ([Figure 6](#)). Through interviews, I found that these scarecrow builders or artists have different aesthetic criteria by which they judge their own work and the work of others. Gary participates in the Invasion because he says, "I live on the square; I'm one of the few that do live on the square, so I'm part of that community. That's my neighborhood so I thought it was important to participate in the neighborhood project" (2011). A very active participant, he works with several businesses each

year to complete different scenes. Again, like Jamie, his community roles as resident, community leader, and builder shape his aesthetic criteria.

Jamie learned how to create scarecrows mostly by working with Gary, who has participated as a builder in the Invasion for all four years. Gary and Jamie experiment with different materials and building techniques, depending on their creations. Jamie says,

Like with the milk jugs, we decided to just try something new. We had seen a couple of people use milk jugs so we thought we'd give it a shot... The cinder blocks—instead of staking my guy into the ground, I thought I would try to anchor it to cinder blocks so I didn't have to put him near the flowerbed if I could sit him in the middle of the sidewalk or something like that, and that worked out pretty well.... And then each year we just kind of try to experiment with something new to see how it would work or if it doesn't work just can it and not do it again. (Boler 2011).

Similarly, Gary uses different materials depending on the type of scarecrow they are building.

Gary stresses the creative process of solving technical problems to create a scarecrow from drawing paper to reality. Because of this, Gary values the creativity and experimentation process.

Most important to this process is building the frame. Gary says,

My basic idea is to build a frame ([Figure 7](#))... I've had some light wood that I was able to scrounge from my dad. It's light basswood and so it's lightweight but yet it's strong enough to hold a frame. And so what we do is we build a network of frames of arms, legs, and bending them into shape. The first year we started with just two steel poles and a cross brace across that. (Mathis 2011)

Today, Gary and Jamie try to determine a way to make the scarecrows stand alone. Jamie

describes the building process similarly:

Usually I'll do a little sketch up or mockup of what it's going to look like, and this year we decided...we needed to go as big as we possibly could. That's why it was like 25-foot tall.... Gary gets this type of... soft wood that we use to frame the bodies of the scarecrows. We use it, it's really easy to cut and put together but also it's easy to kind of create joints for like arms and limbs and stuff so we can pivot elbows or legs if we need to. So we usually always try to use it.... Once we get the frame done..., we will cut the chicken wire and then shape it around the wooden frame to create the appearance of a leg or an arm or something like that ([Figure 8](#)). Once we get the chicken wire attached to the wood... you dress it. This year we were able to find one-piece jumpsuits, which were

great, because trying to put clothes over chicken wire is a nightmare. The less clothing you actually have to put over it the better. (Boler 2011)

In describing their building process, both Jamie and Gary imply their aesthetic criteria arise, at least in part, from their ability to successfully manipulate materials to make their creations sturdy, durable, and lifelike. Because they know how to make a scarecrow, they value innovative construction processes, creative use of materials, and techniques other builders use in their scarecrow and scene handiworks.

For example, Jamie says the County Clerk's Office (who used license plates to make their scarecrow) won the category "Best Use of Materials" because they were "able to use something new, something different that nobody had really used before and it also at the same time speaks to the Clerk's Office" (Boler 2011). Gary reiterates the importance of innovation in materials as a criterion for his personal aesthetics as a builder. While Gary's basswood helps him make bendable joints and lightweight frames, the use of license plates for the entire body originates new materials in a new form. They also both liked the Express Tire & Lube scarecrow scene, which was made of muffler pipes welded together ([Figures 9](#) and [10](#)). Neither Gary nor Jamie requires straw as part of their aesthetic criteria.

Interestingly, Gary admits, "Traditionally, we probably ought to use more straw.... We use it as backdrops more or less. We use it as props. You see a lot of hay bales being used as a scene or a wall.... There's ways that you can incorporate [straw] into [the scene]" (Mathis 2011). Ultimately, the use of straw interferes with one of Mathis's chief criterion—durability. He suggests a good scarecrow can stand alone, withstand weather for a month, and maintain its initial appearance. Therefore, Gary says, "We still use the basic scarecrow concept. There's a frame when you do a scarecrow. And basically what we're doing is we're just modifying that frame. And so I think we go to the frame more than we do to the straw" (Mathis 2011).

As a builder (and, I suspect, as city planning commissioner), Gary values “unique construction building” or interesting building techniques that he can identify as having taken effort and time to create. He works on his own creations for about two months prior to the event, and he gains much enjoyment from it. His aesthetic criteria, then, imitate his appreciation of the creative process. He likes to see that others have enjoyed the process, too. According to 2011 scarecrow judges Pamm and Sharon, Jamie alone chose Rodline Petroleum for “Best Scarecrow” ([Figure 11](#)). Though Pamm did not like it, Jamie appreciated that it had “an actual working oil rig that moved up and down and the oil coming out.... That was the first time I had ever seen somebody do the head that way [with faces from the workers at the business]” ([Figure 12](#)) (Boler 2011). Similarly, Gary liked “the work and the functionality of it. They actually had it where it was pumping oil or a liquid that looked like oil being pumped out of it ([Figure 13](#)). It’s impressive the work they put into it” (Mathis 2011). Effort and functionality partially reflect Gary’s technologically and architecturally oriented mind as evidenced through his profession.

Like Jamie, Gary, as city planning commissioner, values scarecrows that manifest qualities of the businesses to which they correspond. Because of this, during the planning process of their Ghostbusters theme, Gary and Jamie “wanted to tie into the businesses as well. So one guy was the inspector ([Figure 14](#)), which represented my role as the city inspector as well as the planning commission and Lindsey Wilson did a professor ([Figure 15](#))” (Mathis 2011). Jamie contributed a red elephant to represent his art studio, The Red Elephant ([Figure 16](#)). Moreover, Gary believes a good scarecrow scene will tell a story through different elements combined to work together. Not only does he combine the businesses represented in one scene (*bricolage*), he also combines accessories or props to get people to interact with their scene. By staging their

Ghostbusters scene so that people had to walk “through” it between characters, Gary believes he successfully fulfilled the criterion of interactivity.

That’s the interaction because we’d have people on one side playing with the Ghostbusters and on the other side they’d be in front of the Stay Puft marshmallow man ([Figure 17](#)) getting their pictures because he was so much taller than them. Then they had the vault and we tried to put some interactive tools or games on the board ([Figure 18](#))... and Lindsey Wilson was actually in the book, so there was a story about that ([Figure 19](#)). And then there was another detail that people probably some didn’t see too much, but we had actually the ghost of Lindsey Wilson up in the Lindsey Wilson building ([Figure 20](#)). And so we had four different elements going on so we were trying to get people to interact with them as much as possible. (Mathis 2011)

Interaction, like innovative use of materials, requires the scarecrow artist to work creatively with materials to combine seemingly disparate parts to create a cohesive whole. In terms of displays and identity, Robert Gluck suggests that interactive installations can serve as a catalyst to exploring “multi-level relationships” of traditional cultural identity (2005:37). Interactivity presents the user with “a means of reflective expression” evoking a response or reaction from the participant, much like art (Gluck 2005:37). Though Gluck focuses his work on studies of soundscapes and identity, he argues that interactive installations help shape and confirm “identity” in terms of “a sense of belonging” to a group (2005:42). Thus, while the scarecrows represent the businesses they depict, they also represent how the business belongs to Scottsville-Allen County.

Another aesthetic criterion that arises from Gary and Jamie as builders is that of believability. Gary measures wood for his frames by using his own bones as a guide to ensure correct—or believable—proportions in relation to moveable joints. Not only does this make it easier to dress the scarecrows, but it also involves the use of the humanoid figure. For the “People’s Choice” category, people at the October 8 event voted for their favorite scarecrow through a ballot system with boxes set up around the square. Jamie believes (and Gary agrees)

one reason “A Biker’s Prayer” ([Figure 21](#)) won was that “it was very well built. Like proportion wise. The mayor stopped and spoke to the scarecrow a couple of times.... It was really just well built together. Very easily mistakable for somebody kneeling on the square” (2011). Because they know and value how to make a proportionate scarecrow, they consider that scarecrow to be “well built.”

Aside from personal aesthetics, scarecrow artists and builders have a different perspective on the competition aspect of the Invasion of the Scarecrows. Yet, as a community leader like Jamie, Gary expresses a diplomatic view of the competition:

We really want to participate. We’ve been lucky to come away with a few awards over the last couple of years, and that’s fun too. But the thing is we share that because we all work together on it. That’s the key to it. I think the competition is key to having a lot of people that really really want to win something because they put a lot of time and effort into it and, you know, some people put a lot of money into it, more money than I’d ever think of putting into one. (Mathis 2011)

Hence, Gary values winning not for winning’s sake, but for the recognition of having worked hard and as a team. As a city business employee (I conducted the interview with him in his office), he later emphasizes the economic benefits of participation when he says, “It’s good for the businesses because they can be noticed on the square. It shows their enjoyment of the community and their participation in the community and that’s what we really are after” (Mathis 2011). Also like Jamie, Gary finds it difficult to determine an example of a “bad scarecrow” because “everyone has their own ideas on a scarecrow” (Mathis 2011). However, both Jamie and Mathis agree that effort is important—something with which Pamm and Sharon also agree.

Finally, Gary views the Invasion as a community art event, especially in relation to particular scarecrows. Like Jamie, Gary views the scarecrows as art because they affect people emotionally, they require time and effort, and they are creative.

There's been some really interesting things. For example, like a couple years ago, when I was talking about the Dr. Seuss characters that were done, they were definitely artwork. She put a lot of time and effort into them and was able to do that. Some of the faces have really got a lot of character to them as well... Of course, it's a simple art. You know, we have people come to look at them, just to be amazed at them, get pictures with them, photo opportunities that are there. I guess that's about as close to art as we can do. I mean, we don't have big expensive artists that we can do a big sculpture or something like that. But these are good representations and fun characters that people can relate to. And I think that's what's important about the art event is relating to what you've got going on there and trying to come up with something that people enjoy seeing and doing. (Mathis 2011)

Gary extends his idea about the art event, saying it functions as a community-building event. He says,

It was an idea to get people to visit.... It just relates that we have people that are interested in their town, want to enjoy it.... We have people that are dynamic and have great ideas and come together and work together. And so I think that what it relates to is that we're proud of our town and we want to show it off. (Mathis)

Mathis implies the event fosters community and shapes identity of "our town" and pride in "our town." *Identity*, fundamental to folklore scholarship, belongs to theories with relation to expressive culture whereby folklorists explore how artistic expression reflects and induces identity formation and perpetuation and vice versa (Oring 1994). Beyond expressing his aesthetic criteria in terms of how he belongs to the community, Mathis expresses that the event itself succeeds because it features the town—and its identity—as a whole.

Judges

Scottsville Art Guild members Pamm Douglas and Sharon Woodward answered the call to volunteer as judges for the 2011 Invasion of the Scarecrows. They judged each entry on October 7 while walking around together with Jamie. He provided them with the 13 categories within which to judge. Although he says he offered them some verbal criteria such as "creativity and staying on the theme" (see "Organizers" above), Pamm and Sharon say they focused on

judging as artists since the committee asked for Art Guild members (Douglas 2011; Woodward 2011). Much like Gary and Jamie based their judging criteria on their roles within the community, Pamm and Sharon based their aesthetic criteria for judging on their recognized role as artists. Neither had been involved in the Invasion other than as observers prior to 2011.

As previous observers, one of their main criteria was originality. They did not judge favorably for scarecrows they had seen in previous years. For example, both Pamm and Sharon enjoyed the overall look, quality, and “cuteness” of the “Don’t Let the Bedbugs Bite” scarecrow scene ([Figure 22](#)) from Blankenship and Son Pest Control, but they had seen it before in 2010.

Linked to this criterion of originality, Pamm valued being surprised or encountering the unexpected. For example,

Like one was from a machine shop and they had welded pieces together to make a big spider and all ([Figure 9](#)). And I thought that was cute, but I expected that from them. I liked the ones that were unexpected. Like the vet had one where there was a straw dog sitting on top of the veterinarian and pulling his teeth ([Figure 23](#)). It was a reverse of what happens to the animal when you take it to the vet. So I liked those things that kicked it up a notch and made me think. (Douglas 2011)

Interestingly, Express Tire and Lube (the scarecrow Pamm is referencing in the first part of her comment) was one of Jamie’s favorite scarecrows. Despite the fact that Pamm and Sharon did not vote for it, Pamm said, “Jamie added it. There are a couple things Jamie added to it. And I thought Jamie sort of got caught up in what the business was” (Pamm 2011). Both women noticed how most the scarecrows related to a business, but they did not judge based on that criterion (whereas Jamie and Gary did).

Another interesting contrast between Gary and Jamie and the judges emerged when I asked about what makes a good scarecrow. Pamm replied,

I like to see straw. I like for it to be what it’s supposed to be and then go a step further with it.... It had to have straw. Some people got lost with that. They wanted to stuff it,

stuff the straw inside a shirt or pair of pants. I wanted to see the straw first. Then I wanted to see what they could do with it. (Douglas 2011)

Neither Jamie nor Gary—who valued the use of innovative materials—employ straw in their aesthetics criteria. Initially, Pamm did not like the County Clerk scarecrow made out of license plates because it did not have straw. She says, “To me that is kind of going out on a limb, but we thought the County Clerk using the license plate, that was really good. When I first saw that, I thought, uh. But then I thought that was a good use of materials” (Douglas 2011). Here, Pamm reconsidered her criterion and made an exception for innovative use of materials.

On the other hand, when asked what an inappropriate or “bad” scarecrow would be, both Pamm and Sharon concurred that the Department of Social Services scarecrow ([Figure 24](#)) was inappropriate. According to Pamm and Sharon, this scene featured “children lined up to a window” and a sign that read “Who’s your daddy?” offering DNA testing. Sharon said, “Can you imagine a child walking up to that?” Pamm thought it was so offensive, she said, “I would have eliminated that one. It was like pornography in a Disney movie. That’s how bad I felt about it” (Douglas 2011). Like Jamie, Pamm and Sharon consider an inappropriate scarecrow to be one that is not family friendly.

Pamm also did not favorably judge the gorier entries like “one with an operation where they were pulling their insides out and you know, maybe the kids liked that one, but I didn’t much care for that one” ([Figure 25](#)) (Douglas 2011). Thus, even if they thought an entry was creative, their primary criteria were the use of straw and the presentation of a polished scene that showed effort. This criterion based on effort stems from their community roles as artists as evidenced by their discussion of scarecrows and art. Pamm thinks of art “as an idea that you make something and then you’re challenged by it, good or bad. So in that sense, [the scarecrows] challenged me. But it’s not an ongoing thing” (Douglas 2011). Sharon agrees that they “saw that

artistic eye working on some better than others” and concludes, “I think they are [art]”

(Woodward 2011). Pamm stipulated that for the scarecrow to be art,

the makers had to have the idea, and then they had to run with it. Some looked to me like it was just ‘OK we’re going to put something in the show, you know, this afternoon, let’s get it together, and they’ll judge us in the morning.’ And other people looked like they really worked it through and painted and did stuff. I like the creative process. I like the journey as well as the destination. (Douglas 2011)

To be art or artistic, then, requires the presentation of effort and creativity. Because of this,

Pamm and Sharon commented on what they believed was the most artistic scarecrow (although that was not a judging category). They chose the Ghostbusters scene assembled by Jamie and Gary. Sharon recalls,

Jamie had his where it was a huge—it was Ghostbusters ([Figure 26](#)). And it went up the wall. I mean it stopped traffic. I mean it was the height of the building. And then they played the music, the Ghostbusters music with it. And then their studio is called The Red Elephant, so they had a red elephant there dressed up as a Ghostbuster. It was so big it got people’s attention. And then it had stuff in the windows. That was real clever. That stood out that they had taken the time to create that. I liked the creative process. (Woodward 2011)

Effort as a principal criterion proves, to Sharon and Pamm, that the builders put emotion into their work. Moreover, effort demonstrates a desire to present quality work. Pamm, who has decided to create a scarecrow for next year’s Invasion, says, “I like the competitive edge of it. But then I’m sort of competitive in my art. I like that. That’s the fun it. You want to do your best, but you also want to beat everybody else. That’s just human nature. It’s fun” (Douglas 2011). Sharon agrees that the competitive aspect “is probably the catalyst that gets those creative juices flowing” (Woodward 2011).

After discussing art and the scarecrows as an art event, Pamm clearly articulates her personal aesthetic criteria by which she judged.

And I didn’t like the ones that were sloppy, that it was like it was thrown together. If you had a scarecrow and he had on a shirt, then you want the sleeve to fit and the little hands

to stick out and all that. But when it was just thrown together and he couldn't even sit up, I just kind of glazed over that one. Because it's the artist in me that is looking for you to make it a little more refined so that it's different, it stands out and gets my attention. I don't like sloppiness in art.... I want it to have color. And I want it to have theme. And I want it to be put together well. And I want it to speak to me. (Douglas 2011)

This description seems also to illustrate Pamm's criteria for her own work as an artist. While Pamm and Sharon, as artists in the community, do not necessarily consider the scarecrows as fine art, they judge them by the same standards they hold for what they consider to be fine art. They thought the "refined" entries that were "put together well" epitomized the best submissions. For example, Pamm said, "You know how Smuckers has the little sandwich? They took like burlap and they made a face on it, stuffed it, and then stitched around it so it looked actually like a Smuckers sandwich, and they stuck that on a scarecrow ([Figure 27](#)). Now we liked that" (Douglas 2011). Likewise, Sharon said, "The Sonic was one of my favorites ([Figure 4](#)). That was really put together well. That was kind of refined" (Woodward 2011).

A final criterion was that of memorability. Both Sharon and Pamm mention the Smokehouse Shack scarecrow several times throughout in the interview. In fact, all the interviewees mentioned the Smokehouse Shack ([Figure 2](#)) more than once. Sharon explains the scarecrow's success: "It wasn't that elaborate. It was just clever and cute and caught my eye. I still remember it. Every time I go out there [to Smokehouse Shack] and eat, I think of it" (Woodward 2011).

Overall, Pamm and Sharon say they are happy with their judging choices. Pamm says the event is "just like being in an art show.... Everybody wants to get in, and you want to make a good presentation" (Douglas 2011). Their role as Art Guild members in the community informed their aesthetic criteria for judging the scarecrows.

Conclusion

I commonly encountered positive comments about the Invasion of the Scarecrows event and its function beyond commerce and boosterism. The scarecrows as art make a statement to the community at large, “a statement about belonging” (Santino 1992:166). Pamm believes the event “pulls the community together” (Douglas 2011). Sharon says, “It may even cause kind of a closer relationship within the business as they work on those together. Everybody looks forward to it” (Woodward 2011). Moreover, she suggests, “It shows that as a small community how that community can work together to create a really super event. Maybe this is more characteristic of a small city.... It’s pride” (Woodward 2011). Jamie iterates, “It’s just so much fun. The atmosphere it creates here and just that time of year. It’s awesome” (Boler 2011). Likewise, Gary discusses how the popularity has led to increasing numbers of participants over the four years (Mathis 2011). While I approached my fieldwork with the assumption that the Invasion of the Scarecrows operates as a community art event that unites community members through artistic expression, I found the reality to be more complicated. Each community member embraces their own idea of the scarecrow aesthetic, often based on their relationship to and role within the community.

By examining their verbalization of those criteria in relation to diverse identity contexts, I found that at least among these four participants, criteria by which they judge the scarecrows depends on perspective. In fact, I found the most contentious aspects of judging occurred between judges (i.e., Pamm and Sharon versus Jamie, although Jamie was not technically a judge). Jamie added categories and more than once chose a scarecrow to win that Pamm and Sharon did not choose. It would be interesting to interview other participants and scarecrow

artists to examine other community roles. How would a math teacher judge the scarecrows? How would a stay-at-home mother?

It would also be interesting to examine the scarecrows from the viewpoint as advertising or marketing for businesses. Gabbert (2011) and Bendix (1989) argue that regardless of economic value of the event, studying the event is valuable in terms of studying the participants' purposes and intent. Whether or not the competition attracts more commerce or economic viability, the community has created a tradition in Scottsville with a continuing future.

Moreover, considering the event from the perspective of a festival of life and death as Santino has done might yield different criteria in the context of a contemporary world. The scarecrows might convey symbolism inherent in Allen County, a primarily agricultural area. They might be vestiges of a past that city leaders revive to celebrate their history; or they might be celebratory symbols of the county's agricultural present.

Just as the scarecrow scene can be analyzed from different perspectives—from straw to humanoid figure—, so too can the aesthetic criteria by which people judge those scarecrows. My research has shown that in the case of a small town competition among local businesses, organizations, churches, and clubs, often the judge's role in the community affects their aesthetic or "eye," reflecting those roles in their preferred criteria.

Now, imagine the downtown square of a small town. Picture a red-and-white awning shadowing the large plate-glass windows of a storefront. Step closer until you can read the sign that says, "Blackbird Boutique" ([Figure 28](#)). Notice two blackbirds, ten times larger than life, one lying in a huge nest, and the other perched on a bale of straw ([Figure 29](#)). Do you see mums and gourds? Do you see downtown dollar signs? Do you see chicken wire? So much depends upon a scarecrow shaded by a storefront, beside the white pumpkins.

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APPENDIX A

Official “Invasion of the Scarecrows” applicants 2011, from Jamie Boler, Heart of Scottsville.

Business	Entry Theme
Midwest America FCU	Moo Cow
WVLE / WLCK	Rock & Roll Lives On
Wags	Pet Groomer
Reflections Salon	Boo Tee Full
Rodline Petroleum	Black Gold
Ann Marie Davis, DMD	Tooth Fairy
Morehead Insurance	Racing Flag Lady
Faith Baptist Church	Rev. Scare E. Crow
Christ the King Catholic Church	Moses
Faith Coalition	Coming Together for our Community
Raggedy Ann’s	Raggedy Ann
Allen County Library	Humpty Dumpty
Allen County Clerk’s Office	“Fall” in the County Clerk’s Office
J. M. Smucker Co.	Unstoppable Kids Clubhouse
Junior Achievement	JA for Kids
ACSHS Class of 2012	Crows of 2012
ESB (branch on the square)	Racer
Sonic	Cornfield Drive In
Girl Scouts	100 th Year 2012
True Gospel Fellowship Church	A Biker’s Prayer
Blankenship & Son Pest Control	Don’t Let the Bed Bugs Bite

Animal Hospital	Happy Halle-tosis
Softball Booster Club	State Champs
Enchanted Celebrations	Hansel and Gretel
A. C. Child Support	Caring for Allen County Kids
Cub Scout Pack 212	Scouts Campsite
Scottsville Fire Department	Firemen Never Sleep
T. W. Crow Funeral Home	Old Crows
Daymar College	Hands on Training
Harstons Collision	Franken Painter
Relay for Life	Relay Runners
White Plains Baptist Church	Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep
Bloink Chiropractic	Knot You Say? We Can Help
Dyer & Associates Realty	Let Us Scare You to Go Buy a Home
A. C. Sheriff Department	Jeff Cooke, Protect & Serve
ESB (East Main branch)	Fall Scene
Lindsey Wilson College	Ghostbusters – Professor
Planning & Zoning	Marshmallow Man
Red Elephant Studio	Ghostbusters
KY Repertory Theater	The Show Must Go On
Bluegrass Cellular	?????
ESB (Lois Moore Drive)	Fall Scene
Linda’s Furniture	Window Scenes and Lounge Crows
McDonald’s	Mr. McLoving It
Smokeshack BBQ	Slaughterhouse Wolf
Farmers National Bank	?????
Express Tire & Lube	Pumpkin – Horse – Spider

Creative Children's Learning Center	Caring for Your Little Scarecrows
Classic Cleaners	Dress to Impress
Curl Up 'N Dye	Beauty School Dropout
Stovall's Prescription	Scarecrow Scene
Quail Hollow Candles	Scent with Love
Young's Electric	Man on Pole
Antique Mall	Rockin' with the 50s
Medical Center	Care Crows
City of Scottsville	Mayor Welcome Scene
Haven 4 Change	Flipping Lives Around
Urgent Care	The Headless Doctor Is Here
Southern Financial	Window Scene
Grubbs Tex & Accounting	Fall Scene
Finders Keepers Antique Mall	Gone to the Birds
Jacks Lawn Service	Mower Man
YMCA	????
Extension Service	Quilt Trail Witch
Goads Funeral Home	Scarecrow Scene
Mark Huntsman	A Day at the Dentist
US Bank	Football Player
South Central Bank	Charlie Brown Scene
Blackbird Boutique	Window Scene
Chamber of Commerce	Chamber Maids
Chamber of Commerce	Ballerina
City of Scottsville and Chamber	Horn of Plenty Scene

J. M. Smuckers	Fall / Halloween Scene at Plant Site
Purple Morning Farm	Window Scene
Betty's Florist	Window Scene
Photography by Heather	Window Scene
Dollar General Store	Use Your Brains – Shop Dollar General
Edward Jones Investments	Scarecrow Fall Scene
Today's Fashions	Window Scene
Jimmy's Furniture	Window Scene
Los Mariachis	Sidewalk Scene
The Citizen-Times	Scarecrow Paper Man
Hobdy's Florist	Storefront Scene
Scottsville Conservatory	Music Man
Dr. Harston Heart Clinic	Wizard of Oz

APPENDIX B

Categories and 2011 Winners, from *The Citizen-Times*, October 20, 2011, (14, 23–24).

Category	Winner
Scariest Scarecrow	Jacks' Lawn Service (Figure 33)
Cutest	Smokeshack Slaughterhouse (Figures 2 and 3)
People's Choice	"A Biker's Prayer," True Gospel Fellowship Church (Figure 21)
Internet Favorite	Daymar College (Figure 32)
Best Scene	"Cornfield Drive," Sonic Drive-In (Figures 4 and 5)
Best Photo Op	"Happy Halitosis," Scottsville Animal Hospital (Figure 23)
Best Use of Materials	Allen County Clerk's Office
Best Business Citywide	Express Tire & Lube (Figures 9 and 10)
Best Scarecrow	Rodline Petroleum (Figures 11 , 12 , 13)
Most Creative	"Kids Clubhouse," The J. M. Smucker Company (Figures 27 and 34)
Funniest	Harston Heart Clinic (Figure 35)
Best Window	Photography by Heather
Best Witch	"Quilt Trail," UK Cooperative Extension Service (Figures 30-31)