

Artists Will Oldham and Elsa Hansen chosen as NPAF's 2017 Artists in Residence at Hawai'i Volcanoes

Songwriter Bonnie 'Prince' Billy and Elsa Hansen come to Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park for unique performance

HAWAII VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK, HAWAII, USA, December 12, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The park, along with the non-profit National Parks Arts Foundation (NPAF) announced today that Will Oldham, who records and performs under the name Bonnie 'Prince' Billy, whose songs have been sung by Johnny Cash, Marianne Faithful and others, and his wife, textile artist Elsa Hansen, will both be the park's December 2017, Artists-in-



Will and Elsa Oldham (photo by Christian Hansen)

Residence. Oldham is also an actor, most recently seen in *A Ghost Story*, and has a brand new record of Merle Haggard songs called *Best Troubador*. Elsa Hansen Oldham is an acclaimed fabric artist who works with quilts and embroidery, to make janus-faced works which are unmistakably folk art and also interface philosophically and comment on the modern life.

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Will Oldham

One of America's most eloquent enigmas, Oldham has written, sung, and performed some celebrated music for nearly 30 years, working in the past under shifting qualifications of the word Palace, like Palace Brothers, Palace Flophouse, Palace Songs or Music, but now plays as Bonnie Prince Billy, which he likes both for what it evokes & and the sound, but also because he wants the user experience to be informed by a certain intelligent awareness of what may be at stake, or isn't, in this exchange: “It is one nom-de-guerre

adopted, Bonnie Prince Billy, precisely in order to remind or inform the kids that the ‘self’ isn't really in play here. The business demands a name, and the name ought to be confused with brand, with self, with definition of origin, and with none of the above. If and when the music becomes a part of a public awareness, the lines that bind it to earth can be considered cut and attribution issues fall away.”

Hansen Oldham, who shows her work at the Dickinson Roundell Gallery in New York, creates in stitchwork a post-mythical fantasy baseball roster where historical figures like Lincoln can co-exist in montage with minor celebrities, the famed and the tiresome, an actor with his performances, and in one work, Chinese artist and activist Ai Wei Wei with the famous, fabulous pioneer Kentuckian Daniel Boone. Stitching is a practice, something that one does, but also leads down other paths: “I think of

my work as archival, memorial and play. I especially love the archival aspects of it and how it relates to other fiber art both ancient and current. I love that quilts can last for a very long time.” Though generally she works on her own, she loves that she can be part of a community and tradition of people who do their own textile work, in a communal way. Kentucky ‘impacts my work because here I am surrounded by fellow quilters and embroiderers. Some of us have a weekly quilting circle which is a lot of fun. There is also a strong embroidered quilt tradition in Kentucky called “Crazy Quilting” which is very inspiring.”

Both Will and Elsa are originally from Louisville, KY, and call it home again, returning after time spent as nomadic persons in New York and Los Angeles. Says Oldham: “I was raised in Louisville, KY. If we bust my years into rough thirds, the first third was spent in Louisville, the second third out-and-about, and this third third back in Louisville.” What does this community bring to their creative life? “Living and working here, where I’m from, helps connect present work to a lifetime of experience and emotion. There’s not a daily competitive stress that might come with life in a larger city. I’m not competing to earn my living, because living is relatively manageable here, and I’m not in competition with my community here because our goals here are varied and the rewards, locally, are not monetary or even universally desirable.”

The pair plan a joint multimedia performance at the Park, while Will plays some songs, Elsa will sit on stage and the audience will watch her stitch while video magnifies her hands and live stitching work. This is an experiment, even though Hansen Oldham feels like the repetitive movements are a certainly tonic for the mind and the body, they both are curious whether this effect translates in public performance. Says Hansen Oldham, “I was drawn to embroidery as a hobby that quickly became an obsession. “It’s very physical,” she says of stitching, “but it brings total stillness to your mind, because you don’t have to think about anything, really.” And adds Hansen Oldham: “This will be my first live stitching experience. I have previously considered embroidery to be a private art form but I am very excited to perform it publicly.”

Though this is Elsa Hansen’s first time ever in Hawai’i, Oldham has been to Hawai’i and even to the Park before. This residency is part of a process of getting to know the state which has become a fond and ongoing experience of attachment for the songwriter. Says Oldham, “I came to Hawaii for the first time with a small curiosity. From the first moments in the state, that curiosity bloomed and burgeoned. I guess I felt that I had a recognizable identity, some weird authority that let me participate in all that I was seeing and experiencing, balancing what was familiar with what was absolutely foreign. When I saw that red-white-and-blue interstate sign that signified AMERICA to me, even when nothing else I initially saw was at all familiar, I started to feel like I belonged. Even if the way that I belonged was in part in the tradition of ‘innocent’ invader, still there was a space for me.”

This sort of unique opportunity to spend a month living and working in a number of the nation’s most amazing parks was designed by NPAF to be quite the contrast to the normal day-to-day life of the musician on the road, which tends to be an endless vista of identical, dreary non-spaces like motels, vehicles, roadways, and restaurants. They are both looking forward to living and working in a real



Bonnie Prince Billy Performing
(Photo by Ryo Mitamura)

landscape. Says Oldham: “Corporate hotels are, unfortunately, threateningly non-places. Windows that do not open, doors that open only into interior hallways, absent owners. It’s mildly disturbing that modern culture workers ambivalently submit themselves to such environments. I’d like to meet someone who has learned to flesh-out time in these spaces. Culture-workers, musicians who adapt their practice to conform to the norms presented by the behind-the-scenesters are, it seems to me, giving up so much of what can allow their work to continue to flourish as compelling work.”

Oldham is also curious about the effect of an extended experience of these volcanic landscapes on his work. It’s a key part of why he wanted to apply to this particular residency. “One night, insomnia came calling and I put a Herzog volcano doc on repeat to help pass the time. It was an awesome night. The largest attractor of this residency has to do with exploring the resonance of this place for me, for my wife Elsa, and for others before and among us.”

The Couple will perform on Friday, January 26th, 2018 at 6 pm, at the Visitor Center Auditorium at Hawai’i Volcanoes National Park. This event is open and free to the public. The date and location may change so please doublecheck with the Park Media Office (808-985-6018) if you plan on attending.

“As the park enters our fourth year of the Artist-in-Residence Program, we look forward to our second musician and first textile artist,” said Laura Carter Schuster, Chief of Cultural Resources at Hawai’i Volcanoes National Park. “Hawai’i has such a long tradition of both music and quilting, this pair seems like a match for our location. And the park will inspire both the musician and the fabric artist alike,” she said.

The National Parks Arts Foundation is a 501(c)3 non-profit dedicated to the promotion of the National Parks of the U.S. through creating dynamic opportunities for artworks that are based in our natural and historic heritage. This project is supported by the Friends of Hawai’i Volcanoes National Parks, and other generous benefactors. All NPAF programs are made possible through the philanthropic support of donors of all sorts ranging from corporate sponsors, small businesses, and art patrons and citizen-lovers of the parks. NPAF is always seeking new partners and donors for its wide-ranging artist-in-residence programs. If you are interested in supporting these programs, visit www.nationalparksartsfoundation.org

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