



visual

GALLERIES ◊ OPENINGS ◊ PROFILES

BY AMY KEPFERLE

ART HARVEST

On farms and farming

ONE MIGHT think a painting of a boy holding overflowing handfuls of juicy red strawberries was a simple thing. As one of the pieces in "Farms and Farmers," Sarah Ruth Vergin's current exhibit at Edison's Smith & Vallee Gallery, the illustration of the young farmworker is meant to convey much more.

One of the messages Vergin says she's trying to send by showcasing images of the people who make their living farming in Whatcom and Skagit counties is that every person who helps feed us by toiling in the soil has a story.

"The age of the person also has a lot to do with how we view them: what their future is, what their past is, where they've been," Vergin notes. "It's a pretty profound thing to be looking at what seems to be a 12-year-old boy who has labored all day in the hot sun to pick strawberries. It's food and it's important, but how do we feel about that?"

Vergin doesn't claim to have all the answers, but says the extensive research she undertook in preparation for creating the show helped her see that the issues surrounding local farms and farming are numerous: how development is encroaching on area farms, immigration issues and eating local are just the tip of the iceberg.

"At first, I was really captured by the regional landscape, but the more I met farmers and people who were working the land, the more intrigued I got by how hard people work," Vergin says. "I became



interested in considering the relationship between people's bodies and the land, the food itself and how the community is changing."

Vergin says she enjoys connecting art with issues the community is passionate about. In fact, she's putting her pocketbook on the line. She's committed to donating five percent of the profits from the sales of her "Farms and Farmers" show to Sustainable Connection's Food and Farming program. In addition, the wine and food served at the reception for the show will come from local farms—many of which will be depicted on the walls of the expansive Smith & Vallee Gallery.

If you take Chuckanut Drive and meander through the Skagit flats to get to Edison to see the show, be sure to keep your eyes open for Vergin's subject matter. On the beautiful drive, you'll see it all: the farmland, the encroachment, the tourism. Perhaps it'll make you think.

"A lot of farmers locally are very proud of what they pay, but they themselves are not making much money," Vergin points out. "Laborers never get enough and farmers are always on the edge. I go to the Co-op and stretch my budget to the limit to afford local produce. We're all doing what we can. It's a complicated issue." ☺



SEE IT

WHAT: "Farms and Farmers" Reception

WHEN: 6-9pm
Sat., July 28

WHERE: Smith & Vallee Gallery, 5472 Gilkey Ave., Edison

COST: Entry is free

INFO: (360) 305-4892