



PRESS RELEASE

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GROUNDBREAKING “REAL RURAL” PHOTOJOURNALISM EXHIBIT CONNECTING URBAN RESIDENTS WITH RURAL CALIFORNIANS LAUNCHES IN SAN FRANCISCO

Campaign Features Touching Stories of Rural California through Photography and Life Stories

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (January 30, 2012) – Beginning today, riders on Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) will see the faces and stories of farmers, amateur boxers, rodeo riders, and even a young cowboy girl, as part of a new public information campaign and exhibit aimed at connecting urban residents with rural life in California.

“Real Rural: Stories from the Rest of California” is a collaboration between writer and photographer Lisa M. Hamilton and the nonprofit organizations Roots of Change, the Bill Lane Center for the American West, the California Historical Society, and the Creative Work Fund (a project of the Walter and Elise Haas Fund), which supports artists working in the nine Bay Area counties.

Real Rural is a portrait of California’s rural communities—what Hamilton calls with some irony “The rest of California.” Combining photography, writing, and oral histories, the project illustrates that rural California is not simply “the rest” of the state, but in fact a place of surprising depth and diversity. The multimedia portraits she has made bring that rural life to the urban public, in hopes of connecting the two on a basic, human level.

“Real Rural is meant to start a new conversation between two parts of California that are at best disconnected and often at odds,” said Hamilton. “Many people in our cities think they already know the story of rural California: who’s there and how they think, their values and their struggles. I have aimed to demonstrate that in fact this place and its people are far more diverse and dynamic than most of us from outside realize.”

Hamilton spent much of 2011 crisscrossing nearly 10,000 miles of California, capturing amazing portraits of the state’s remarkable scenery and seeking out stories about the diverse residents there. This innovative multimedia project features portraits of people and places, along with compelling, provocative stories about the subjects.

The 20 stories featured in Real Rural highlight compelling struggles and joys of life told from people and families of rural California. What the project tries to capture is the passion of the people featured, each one believing in something deeply enough that they scrap, struggle and sacrifice for it. This includes, among others, the story of Guadalupe Diaz, who as a young immigrant to the San Joaquin Valley, lived under a tree with her husband and infant child; Charley Custer, a pot grower who has gone public in order to help return morality to the marijuana industry; and Sebastian, a tiny, nine-year-old boxer who insists he can be a world champion.

“By putting these stories with faces from rural California on BART trains, Lisa has created an inspiring medium for sharing the lives and dreams of rural Californians with those of us who live in the city,” said Jon Christensen, Executive Director of the Bill Lane Center for the American West at Stanford University. “We’re proud to be part of this unique project that brings the reality of rural California into our urban lives through Lisa’s artistic vision, and the extraordinary people who shared their lives with her and now us.”

While the main medium is photography, the images are supported and enhanced by accompanying text, audio, and other storytelling media. A website – www.realrural.org – helps capture the remarkable photographs and accompanying written and audio stories from places Hamilton traveled to and from that most people have never heard of such as Surprise Valley, Lost Hills and Mecca. “There is no reason why rural California matters more than the rest of the state, but likewise there is no reason why it matters less,” Hamilton added.

“This project illustrates the depth and diversity of these rural communities in order to foster a more productive dialogue and increased cooperation, particularly as it relates to the food system,” said Michael Dimock, President, Roots of Change. “An important part of our mission is to educate people about these important issues and Real Rural helps connect the dots in a creative, inspiring way.”

The BART ad-art campaign will be featured on trains throughout the Bay Area through March 2012. Later this year photographs from Real Rural will comprise a show at the California Historical Society in San Francisco. There will also be a concurrent ad-art campaign on billboards and public transit in Los Angeles and Sacramento.

“The California Historical Society is proud to be a part of this collaboration that explores a unique part of California’s history,” said Anthea Hartig, Ph.D., Executive Director, California Historical Society. “We look forward to helping bring these stories to the general public through an inspiring exhibit that showcases this remarkable collection of work.”

For more information about “*Real Rural: Stories from the Rest of California*” visit www.realrural.org.

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NOTE TO PLANNING EDITORS: Interviews with Lisa Hamilton and the project partners about “Real Rural” and the photojournalism project are available January 30th and 31st. Interviews with a preview of the exhibit and BART portraits and stories can be arranged at the California Historical Society, outside a BART station, in studio or via telephone. Media are invited to attend a special preview reception featuring Lisa Hamilton and exhibit partners on January 31, 2012, between 5:00-7:00 pm at the California Historical Society, 678 Mission Street, San Francisco. Please RSVP to Kevin@hpastrategies.com or by calling 415-963-2601.