CHICKEN BUS COMMISSION

By Jenn Rein / Photographs by Camrin Dengel

While planning her art syllabus for the Jackson Hole Community School, professional artist Shannon Truex found herself contemplating the aesthetic value of a school bus. The bus—used last summer as a chicken coop at Full Circle Farm in Victor—was a fixture in the ongoing curricula of Full Circle Education and was, quite possibly, the perfect medium for teaching the genre of street art.

She consulted with organic farmers Erika Rochkind and Ken Michael. "It turns out they had always wanted the bus painted, and they had very specific ideas about the design," Truex explains. After their meeting, she recognized a further opportunity to educate her
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students about the concept of "commission," including the nuances of client collaboration.

Sixteen art students participated in a question-and-answer session with Ethelbert and Michael, attempting to understand their clients' vision for this bus of food. "The unique feature of a farm is to build by community involvement," Ethelbert says of the session.

"This type of creative contribution is what makes a local farm such an inspiring place to work and visit. The creative process, whether through farming or art, is what we need to bring our community together to face the unique challenges of the twenty-first century."

The initial process was cultivated with the assistance of local muralist Abby Pollack; spray paint would be applied using stencils in an effort to keep within the streets art genre. "We'd like to see some of the students need to overcome the challenge of visualizing negative space as the stencils were meticulously drawn and cut. The stencils used were the back-up of fifteen feet of tracing paper—provided in part by a grant from the Teton County Jackson Hole—so the project started to take shape.

"The chicken bus is a way to inspire the students to create in a design-headway," Tsvetan explains. "The students planned the careful placement of each detail, including the farm's logo onto an octagon placed on the top arm—a subtle feature that reflects the playful aspect of the chicken. All of these elements surface as integral parts of the overall composition."

The bus itself is fully operational, despite the fact that it was long ago modified into a chicken coop. Still, a special permit was needed to drive the steel structure over Teton Pass, to the students in Jackson, and back again. The expiration of the permit established an additional lesson about deadlines for the students.

Now a mobile work of art, the chicken bus will be available for the students to use at local events. Emily Stevick, Full Circle Education program director, addresses its value: "The chicken experience is always a highlight for students that come to visit us, and they find a lot of joy and humor in the fact that it houses chickens and not chickens. It also provides a wonderful opportunity for Full Circle Education to teach about the role of the chickens on their [closed-system] farm."

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