

Ruminant (The Grand Masticator)



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KARL UNNASCH



A Tribute to Agriculture, Farming and Food

created by Sculptor and Stained Glass Artist Karl Unnasch
and brought to you by Reedsburg ArtsLink

Harvest Park of downtown Reedsburg, Wisconsin is home to a one-of-a-kind piece of artwork: *Ruminant (The Grand Masticator)*, a harvesting combine clad in 34 agriculturally themed, backlit stained glass panels. *Ruminant* has already earned a juried spot as one of the nation's most compelling public art pieces by *Americans for the Arts* out of Washington, D.C. and continues to gain attention around the country.

A tribute to agriculture, farming and food, *Ruminant* is also an anthropomorphic beacon of contemplation and an intricate play on words and concepts. Its creator, artist Karl Unnasch, explains: "Just as food goes through several chewings and other processes as it is picked and broken down by cattle, so does the harvest as it is gathered and processed by a combine, or art as it is pondered and enjoyed by its viewer. We are ruminants of visual language in the same manner as a cow is of its feed or a combine of its crop."

Originally a temporary installation along the Fermentation Fest's Farm/Art DTour route in 2013, *Ruminant* resonated so strongly that a group of locals formed a new non-profit, Reedsburg ArtsLink, to work toward acquiring the piece for the City. A vacant lot was thus converted into what is now known as Harvest Park, and *Ruminant* was dedicated to the City in October 2014. It became an instant landmark and is expected to attract curious visitors to Reedsburg for decades to come.

Background Photo by Aaron Dysart



Termite

The ultimate chewer



The Crayon Kid

An affectionate reference to oral fixations in childhood



Moustached Corn-Chomper

The "face" of the combine - a close-up of a moustached man chomping with gusto onto a cob of corn



Chew

Comic book character Tony Chu is a police

detective who is also

a "cibopath": he has special empathic powers that are activated by chewing.

(Chewing what? You'll have to read the comic *Chew* to find out!)



PacMan

In the classic video game, the yellow PacMan chomps his way across the screen, attempting to clear it without getting destroyed by one of the four colored ghosts.

This panel pays homage to a creative reimagining of that game by painter Travis Pitts in an ancillary genre of visual art inspired by video games, both past and present.

The corn-head showcases the "teeth" or tools by which rural America came to be: a series of traditional hand-tools used by pioneers to carve out the wilderness of the Midwest, as illustrated by Eric Sloane in *A Museum of Early American Tools*.



Sloane's Tool Set

The central hopper chassis section portrays historic American propaganda central to cultural ideas of the harvest:

"[A] gentle, shocking, hallucinatory creation."

Ralph Helmick,
Public Art Network Year in Review Juror



Homage to Benton

During the Great Depression, a federal program was created to ensure that artists would survive the tough economic climate by providing funding for their work. This "Works Progress Administration" (WPA) program gave rise to more than 200,000 artworks, including some of this country's most significant ones. The harvest-oriented painting to which this panel is an homage was a WPA work by Midwestern artist Thomas Hart Benton, who often portrayed laborers in his imagery.



Corn-Husk Doll

A memorial to the days when toys were simple and lovingly crafted from whatever cast-offs were at hand on the farm, this panel is also a nostalgic tribute to times when imagination still played a greater role in a child's day-to-day life.



Batman and Robin in the Victory Garden

During World Wars I and II, "Victory Gardens" were planted at private residences and public parks. Besides playing a significant role in the war effort in terms of food production, they were also viewed as a morale booster. In honor of this, the cover of *World's Finest No. 11* comic book in 1943 depicted Superman, Batman and Robin as "Victory Gardeners"!



The rear chaff ejection casing

is a billboard for "raw" food humor in simplified form. Agricultural puns and riddles based on lighthearted farm/garden/fermentation silliness here take the form of a set of one-liner cartoons in the mode of puns and wordplay. So look closely! There may be more to some of these than meets the eye.

"[This] monumental piece mashes up the histories of stained glass, comic books and farm machinery to create a funny, expansive re-telling of the harvest narrative. [T]he gleeful mixing of material and cultural references ... adds up to something gloriously unexpected — work that at once respects and stretches its appropriated references and their attendant histories."

Aaron Dysart, Walker Art Center's mnartists.blog



One of these seven panels is a cartoon tribute to America's most famous farm-themed painting — and simultaneously a play on words to honor the name of a local Reedsburg arts organization. Can you figure out which panel it is, and why?