



Corn Palaces and Butter Queens: A History of Crop Art and Dairy Sculpture

Pamela H. Simpson

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Teddy Roosevelt's head sculpted from butter. The Liberty Bell replicated in oranges. The Sioux City Corn Palace of 1891 encased with corn, grains, and grasses and stretching for two city blocks—with a trolley line running down its center. Between 1870 and 1930, from county and state fairs to the world's fairs, large exhibition buildings were covered with grains, fruits, and vegetables to declare in no uncertain terms the rich agricultural abundance of the United States. At the same fairs—but on a more intimate level—ice-cooled cases enticed fairgoers to marvel at an array of butter sculpture models including cows, buildings, flowers, and politicians, all proclaiming the rich bounty and unending promise held by the region.

Often viewed as mere humorous novelties—fun and folksy, but not worthy of serious consideration—these lively forms of American art are described by Pamela H. Simpson in a fascinating and comprehensive history. From the pioneering cereal architecture of Henry Worrall at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition to the vast corn palaces displayed in Sioux City, Iowa, and elsewhere between 1877 and 1891, Simpson brings to life these dazzling large-scale displays in turn-of-the-century American fairs and festivals. She guides readers through the fascinating forms of crop art and butter sculpture, as they grew from state and regional fairs to a significant place at the major international exhibitions. The Minnesota State Fair's Princess Kay of the Milky Way contest, Lillian Colton's famed pictorial seed art, and the work of Iowa's "butter cow lady," Norma "Duffy" Lyon, are modern versions of this tradition.

Beautifully illustrated with a bounty of never-before-seen archival images, *Corn Palaces and Butter Queens* is an accessible history of one of America's most unique and beguiling Midwestern art forms—an amusing and peculiar phenomenon that profoundly affected the way Americans saw themselves and their country's potential during times of drought and great depression.

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