

RESILIENCE:

A Living Room





RESILIENCE:

A Living Room



November 16, 2018 - January 13, 2019

Arts and Culture El Dorado • Confidence Lab



Kim Abeles documenting her work
Photo credit: Caitlin Thompson

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Keeping the Trees	1
<i>Resilience: A Living Room</i>	2
A Dialogue Between Art and Forestry	3
A Starting Point for the Residency	5
What Does Resilience Mean To You?	6
Community Based Art: Social Practice	7
Inside	8
What Color Gives You Strength?	9
Outside	10
Collective Energy	11
The Vault	12
Shaky Trees	13
Project Participants	16

Keeping the Trees

Come in. Listen. A swelling silence – oxymoron? – in this living room. No one here. Just walls; ceiling with tubes of curtains hanging to touch bare floor. They look like tree trunks, the ghost of trees in sheets patterned like pine bark, and fir. They move as you pass by, as you stir the air with living breath. Rub your hand down the bark. A flush, as if the tree could feel your fingers. Deeper in the room, a dark vault, its pedestal crowned by a tall pine cone like the burnished statue of a saint. In our changing world, does it keep our hope of seeds, trees?

- Taylor Graham



Installation view of breathing trees
Photo credit: Caitlin Thompson



Detail of 1927 *Pinus Ponderosa*
Photo credit: Michelle Head



View into Confidence Lab
Photo credit: Michelle Head

Resilience: A Living Room

Nestled in Camino at the edge of the El Dorado National Forest, a US Department of Agriculture/US Forest Service research station called the Institute of Forest Genetics (IFG) houses an arboretum, several cabins, and a team of researchers dedicated to the study of our forests. In 2018, IFG hosted something quite different: an ambitious, cross-disciplinary arts and education program centered on the evocative concept of “resilience.”

Organized by Arts and Culture El Dorado, artist-in-residence Kim Abeles stayed in an IFG cabin as a live-work studio, interacting with the researchers and preparing a process-driven curriculum with the students of Independence High School. *Resilience: A Living Room* examines and reflects the idea of “resilience” in all its complexity—in the context of forest ecosystems, as a philosophical concept, and as it relates to our daily lives. The resulting installation is part forest and part living room. It refers to a space in a house where we gather and communicate; and, poetically, it’s a room dedicated to the living. The Western Slope El Dorado poetry group held workshops in the exhibit, and within this book are poems by El Dorado County poet laureate Taylor Graham, who responded to the art.



Detail view of installation showing portraits of foresters and mentors for the students’ understanding of resilience; mural-size print of fireplace, and fabric tree

A Dialogue Between Art and Forestry

The resilience project began to take shape in 2017, when Terry LeMoncheck, Executive Director of Arts and Culture El Dorado, conceived of a project that would fuse the worlds of art and science (especially the science of agriculture and forestry), to produce a fruitful dialogue between disparate fields of study. Upon visiting IFG, Terry was captivated by the idea of resilience as the primary focus of IFG researchers.

She was struck by “the urgency of these issues in our area—water, fire, and tree mortality.” She felt that a collaboration with the arts program at Independence High School, headed by Jen Tomei, would be especially fitting for the project theme, and “it’s a group of young people for whom resilience is particularly important.” Then she sought out Kim Abeles, an internationally renowned artist whose process-oriented “social practice” provides an ideal medium for the open-ended artistic exploration at the heart of the project.

Throughout its development, the project organized itself around three of Arts and Culture El Dorado’s guiding principles: the organization should create a bigger tent for what art can do in a community; it should actively deliver services to the community; and it should allow people to experience the arts in a way that might not have occurred to them before. The resilience project undoubtedly reflects all three principles.



Conifers planted from different regions and elevations as early as 1927



3

One of the nurseries at IFG



Seedlings in the IFG greenhouse



A monitor to measure photosynthesis through the leaves

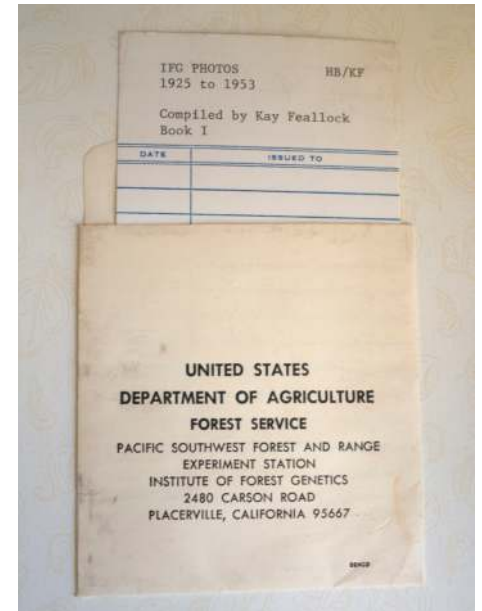


Angela White explains one method of measuring trees to students in the Blue Water Exchange: Connecting ideas and cultures across the Pacific



Tools for measuring trees

Terry's final step was to secure funding for the project. She submitted a proposal to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), imbuing the application with the authentic enthusiasm she felt for the project. Although she was confident the project addressed many of the NEA's target areas, such as emphases on non-traditional approaches, "cross-sector partnerships", and underserved communities, she also knew that a successful proposal is "more than just a great idea—you have to back it up...and, you have to make it come alive on the page." The NEA shared her enthusiasm and in an exceedingly rare endorsement of the proposal, they granted Arts and Culture El Dorado the full amount of funding it had requested. With supplementary financial support from El Dorado Savings Bank, the Teichert Foundation, and the Society of American Foresters, the resilience project became a reality.



Historical documents are available for visitors to see at IFG



Students from Jen Tomei's art class at Independence High School visit IFG



Crushing pine cones to collect seeds



Caples Creek Trail

A Starting Point for the Residency

Kim started the collaborative process for the resilience project in June 2018 by attending a Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative Workshop at IFG entitled Comparative Resilience. Kim learned about the way a focus on “resilience” has supplanted “management” and “control” for forest researchers, reflecting an emerging paradigm that treats humans not as separate from nature, but as intimately involved in it. The researchers spoke of the value and potential of her work. “We don’t know how to tell our stories,” one scientist told Kim. One of the speakers at the workshop, Malcolm North, is a research forest ecologist with UC Davis’ John Muir Institute of the Environment and the USDA Pacific Southwest Research Station. He started his presentation by saying he did a Google search for the term “ecological resilience” and found 20.5 million entries. Here are some of the terms and ideas that came up through the workshop when participants tackled resilience in our forests.

- society’s role
- stewardship
- varying types of forests biodiversity
- energy flow
- interconnectedness including wildlife
- heterogeneity
- flexibility in the idea of success based on specific areas
- public and private collaborations
- science in partnership with management
- dynamism
- process toward intended outcomes
- strategies that are not so specific to be prescriptive or so broad that it doesn’t give foresters direction

What are the desired landscape outcomes, and what is the desired outcome for humans?



Likewise, with societies and as individuals, our resilience is observable in our ability to problem solve, to nurture good health, and to value our differences. Resilience is not coping; rather, it is toughness and positive action.

What does resilience mean to you?

The relationship of people and the surrounding forest is unique to specific locations. Resilience is a process, and requires a long-view approach specific to each region's climate projections, topography, and tree populations. Local strategies for healthy forests and communities will differ, yet the interconnectedness is undeniable. A one-solution-fits-all does not meet the needs for forest communities, and solutions require cooperation between forestry and entrepreneurial innovation. As in our own lives, mistakes are valuable when we use our history to reconsider our future actions.

Ask a person the meaning of resilience and you'll see their energy and thought pulling together as one. Their personal response comes from personal experiences and the interior self. That is where our individual strengths rise to the moment. Listen to some of the responses offered by the students. The first three are in response to the question: What is resilience?

- "To believe you can make it back from something when you feel you've reached rock bottom."
- "Never giving up. Never backing down. Standing your ground. You won't go down without a fight. A sense of hope in there, too."
- "Resilience is the ability to deal with something over yours or other people's expectations."



1953 *Pinus Ponderosa* x Jeffrey Coulter

The remaining responses resulted in a class session several weeks into the residency, and the question was rephrased in this way: What are the qualities a person needs to have resilience?

- "To understand it is okay to have a helping hand...but you can't always depend on other people. To understand that you are your worst enemy and biggest supporter."
- "Energy & Confidence. Fearlessness. Pride. Be straight up with people - be honest."
- "To understand it is okay to have a helping hand...but you can't always depend on other people. To understand that you are your worst enemy and biggest supporter."
- "Everyone is strong and resilient in their own way. Know your value. Deep happiness."

Community-based Art: Social Practice

Kim's prior work has embedded her in a diverse set of communities, and she sees the participants as both her audience and her artistic collaborators, participating in the creation of art that addresses their own lives. Prior to *Resilience*, she completed a project with incarcerated women who are trained as firefighters. "I'm a strong believer that art is a highly effective way to translate complex, difficult, and urgent information," Kim says. "I always strive to give people a way to feel idea rather than just intellectualize them."

Kim's collaborative, community-based work, also called "social practice," balances process with the resulting art elements to create an art installation, transforming a space into the unexpected. Although there is always a finished product at the end, her work is just as much about the process of artmaking, the exchange of information between participants, and the mutual growth they experience. This becomes a challenge because an organic process like this doesn't begin with the easy comfort of showing the outcome first. As a reflection of resilience, projects like this need to stay fluid, allow for the participants' voices, and even to find the value in missteps. Like the experience for studio artists and researchers, bravery in combination with determination is required when entering creative territory.



Paper Person

Paper Person (2010) is made from paper trash that was generated by visitors to California Science Center on Earth Day 2009. At 48-feet in length, Abeles's concept was to scale the figure based on the amount of trash. Collection of the California Science Center.

Photo credit: Ken Marchionno

Run-Off Dolphin Suitcase

Run-Off Dolphin Suitcase (1995) is a sculptural suitcase that Abeles created to teach youth and community about the stormdrain system, littering, and consumption.

Funded in part by the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project Collection of the Lux Art Institute



Fire Line

This is one of ten Valises for *Camp Ground: Arts, Corrections and Fire Management in the Santa Monica Mountains* (2018). Abeles created the functional sculptures in collaboration with the female inmates at Camp 13, who have been trained as firefighters. The women directed the content through their experiences with firefighting and fire abatement methods, and the valises will be used by the National Park Service and County Fire Department to teach about fire prevention, national forests, and our relationship to nature. Funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, Los Angeles County Arts Commission, and administered by the Armory Center for the Arts.

Photo credit: Ken Marchionno



Inside

In the classroom at Independence High School, the learning process was in tandem with Kim's art production at the cabin studio. Above all, she wanted the students to join her "on a journey of self-exploration and discovery." Though a curriculum was created as a starting point, the students' input, fieldtrips, and accumulative art processes quickly re-defined the direction of the project. It became clear early on that each of us has a strong potential for resilience and we naturally call upon our strength, and as one student put it, "when we are pushed to the edge."

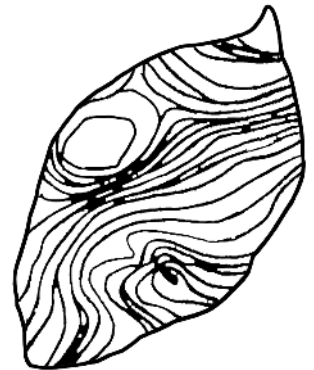
The basic strategy for the project involved experimentation with varied art processes and tools (both digital and traditional). Kim drove to Placerville with her vehicle piled full with art supplies ranging from handmade seed paper to plaster and wood, and tools like drills, a light table, and even a heavy-duty cardstock cutter. The modular wall installation at Confidence Lab is composed of the resulting art elements created by 24 students: cast plaster reliefs, two-dimensional art, scanned objects, color squares, and text. Each element is attributed to the specific student, and collectively the artwork presents a visual narrative about the forest and personal resilience.



Cast plaster relief created by Wendy Justo



Symbol of resilience
drawn by Korben Church



Concept drawing by Mikaila Green
for a plaster casting

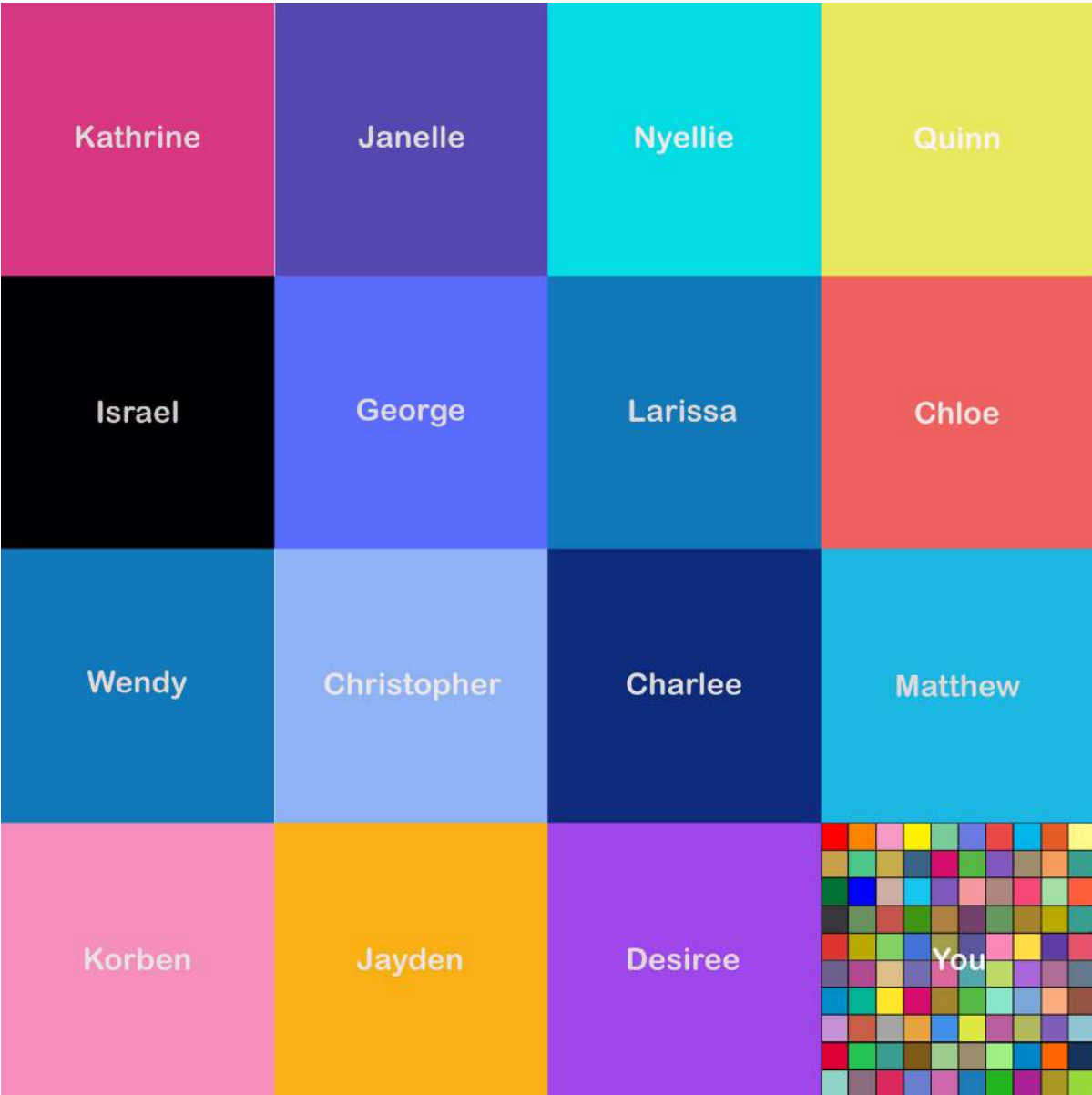


Photographic
scan created by
Israel Montoya



Process elements were created as a way to work toward an idea called resilience: from fortunes in cookies to pastel rubbings of tree bark, scans of details from the forest, colors and symbols of empowerment.

What Color Gives You Strength?



One of the more direct exercises was to have each student select a color on the Adobe Photoshop Color Picker. Color has important and deep symbolic value, as for example, “green” means “life” as an early human understanding of plants seen in the distance. Color can also have differing cultural meanings.

purple refers to royalty or spirituality in many cultures, but in Thailand it depicts mourning. Looking at red actually over-stimulates a person, while pastels used in hospital settings are intended to sooth. The students in the resilience project were asked to select their “power” color, and not just the name of a hue, like blue for instance, but the tone and intensity of the hue. After all, blue can be somber or light or fanciful. Which blue?

Outside

During the first weeks of the project, the students headed outdoors for two fieldtrips. The first visit was to IFG where several researchers generously toured the students around the grounds and facilities. Pat Manley, Program Director, started out the fieldtrip with a slide presentation about resilience in the Sierra Nevada. Conservation geneticist Jessica Wright gave an overview of the institute's history, which begins with James G. Eddy in 1925 and his Eddy Tree Breeding Institute. The Eddy Arboretum is interesting as a point of discussion because it started in the early 20th century as a collection of pine species from around the world. This was a time period when private collectors, museums and other institutions were focused on collecting parts of nature for research and ownership.

Another researcher at IFG, Leif Mortenson, studies issues such as beetle bark blight which has caused so much tree mortality in the region. Researcher Valerie Hipkins explained how DNA is used to identify conifers more likely to have resilience against attacks by bark beetles, for example. Prior to DNA identification, researchers were required to do exhaustive, detailed collection of samples in the forests to determine which trees had strong resilience. With DNA, the researchers can analyze a single pine needle to identify the genome known for resilience.



Students were given cameras for the fieldtrip, and Charlee Fiedman took this photograph, perhaps in collaboration with another student.

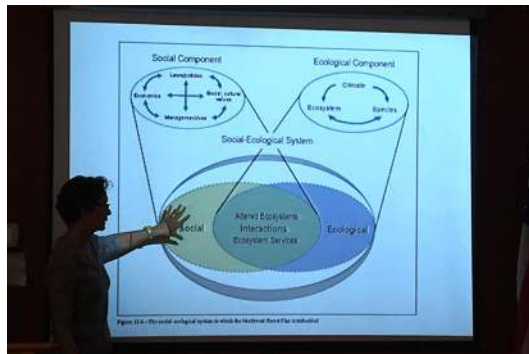


Leif Mortenson, a Biological Science Technician, shows students bark beetle tracks and explains issues related to the blight.

Conservation geneticist Jessica Wright speaks with students about the research that takes place at IFG. Jessica showed the students stands of hybrids, and conifers planted as early as 1925 to compare differing elevations and locations of origin. Her own study focuses on oak trees and resilience especially in terms of water.



Kathrine Gray's photograph points to a parasite in one of the trees.



Pat Manley, a biological scientist and the Program Manager at IFG, gave a presentation for the students and teachers of Independence High School to describe the connection between social and ecological systems.



Collective Energy

Resilience embraces change and prompts us to reevaluate terms like success, stewardship, and interconnectedness. Social practice is reliant on the ability to take a misstep and look for its lesson. Often, the most powerful resource is the participants themselves. Like the trees, we derive energy and resilience from diversity. Our differences are to balance and strengthen the whole.

One of the students, upon visiting the exhibition while it was still being installed, said that her favorite part of the project was working with each other. The project as process presented an unusual construct for the students – the class enrollment was expanded, the class time was doubled, and students were often working on different techniques of the process.

The loose, organic structure when respected for its energy had unexpected benefits for individual students. One student who was normally on the quiet side boldly volunteered to guide a few previously absent students through the process, using the scanner-as-camera and its computer interface. Another student, totally frustrated by one of the art techniques, made her way over a seemingly impossible hump, and accomplished the task. Her joy of success was like a stunning, visible light in the middle of the classroom.

What is a symbol that empowers your spirit?

The process during the weeks included moments of personal growth and leadership, and perhaps like the transformation of a tree, change is observed most easily in hindsight or when we look closely at the details.



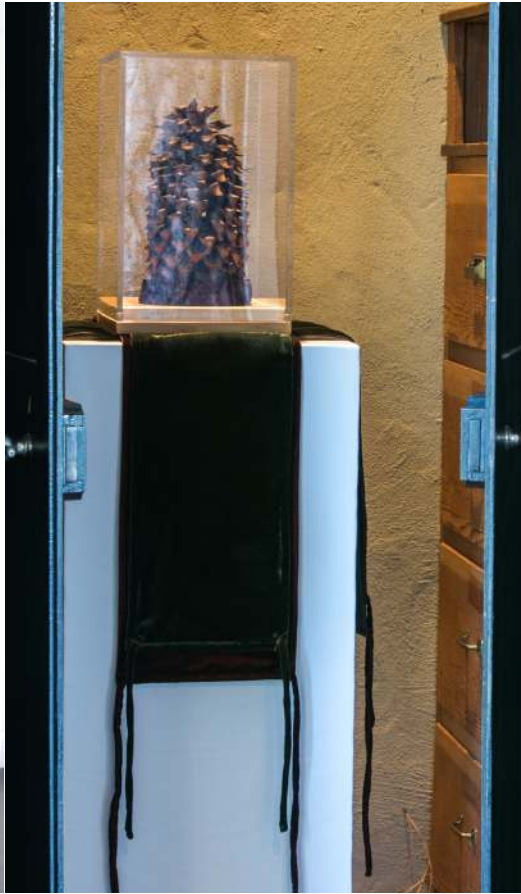
Detail of mixed media grid
Photo credit: Michelle Head



Portraits of each student were placed in frames along
with their artworks
Photo credit: Michelle Head



The artworks created by the students during the workshops were
numbered on the wall grid, and this corresponded to an annotated list of
their names. Photo credit: Caitlin Thompson



Abeles received permission to collect a Coulter pine cone from one of the stands at IFG. These weigh up to 5 pounds and a helmet is required for safety when walking through the Coulters. Her sculptural encasement for the cone is has a velvet and cordura covering and is placed in the vault at the Confidence Lab. Though not on the endangered list, much of the remaining Coulter stand was destroyed by California wildfires. Here, according to Abeles, the pine cone with its seeds is displayed like the Hope Diamond.

Photo credit: Caitlin Thompson

The Vault

A venerable pine cone like a sacred hat,
burnished wood-tones on ebony pedestal.

This is where they keep precious things
dormant but alive. Seeds. Pine and fir,

hope for generations of breathing life
like sunlight secrets, safe in a black box,

lamplight beacon in a dark cabin
in wilderness; like our future.

- Taylor Graham



Looking into one of the greenhouses at IFG

Shaky Trees

This living room replicates the forest, trunks of fabric painted to look like trees. The building has stood 150 years, repairs are needed in the upper floors. Chain across the stairway: "Don't even think about it." Keep out of dark you can't see. We stay in the lower, living room; walk among textile trunks wavering with our steps, our conversation. The floor seems steady but fabric trees take on a living of their own; these ghost trees, breathing. Do they mourn solid trunks that used to grow here for ages before the place was town'd? Town still growing, trees on shaky ground.

- Taylor Graham



The stand of trees made of fabric "breath" when viewers approach. Each tree is created from photographic portraits, taken in-the-round, of specific trees at IFG



This view of the installation includes a mural-size print of the fireplace that is located in the cabin where Abeles lived during her residency

Photo credit: Caitlin Thompson



Self-portrait as Tree is framed above the fireplace mural, and shows Abeles holding up her tree fabric in an effort to transform into her surroundings



Photo credit: Caitlin Thompson

Each tree has its label attached that names the tree and the date when it was planted. The earliest example exhibited here is from 1926



Photo credit: Michelle Head



Photo credit: Caitlin Thompson

The sofa cover is fabric made from photographs of a local forest floor with its pine cones and needles. And, the pillows are created from photographs taken in the greenhouse at IFG. Other imagery includes a puzzle made from Kim's photograph of lichen.



Above shows images Abeles captured during her artist residency at IFG, and how they were displayed in the exhibition.

Below are artworks created by the students during the workshops. The numbers corresponded to an annotated list of their names.



About the Institute of Forest Genetics

The Institute of Forest Genetics (IFG) is a world-renowned facility in forest genetics and disease research. IFG studies both old and new problems facing our nation's forests, such as wood production, disease resistance, and environmental resilience. The IFG in Placerville was established in 1925 by James G. Eddy and was originally named the Eddy Tree Breeding Station to help find ways to restore forests. In 1935, he renamed the facility and donated it to the U.S. Forest Service.

About Confidence Lab

In September 2018, Arts and Culture El Dorado introduced a new attraction to Main Street: The Confidence Lab, a dedicated space for temporary "pop-up" arts projects, including installations, student works, play readings, live music, and other activities. The space occupies the bottom level of Main Street's historic Confidence Hall, and is managed and programmed by Arts and Culture in a public-private partnership with the City of Placerville. Built in 1857, and rebuilt in 1860 following a fire, Confidence Hall, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, is one of Placerville's most recognizable historic buildings.

About Kim Abeles

Kim Abeles is an artist whose community-based projects explore biography, geography and environment. She has created projects with the California Science Center, air pollution control agencies, health clinics and mental health departments, and natural history museums in California, Colorado and Florida. Abeles received the 2013 Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship, and is a recipient of fellowships from J. Paul Getty Trust Fund for the Visual Arts, California Community Foundation and Pollack-Krasner Foundation. In 1987, she innovated a method to create images from the smog in the air, and Smog Collectors brought her work to national and international attention. She recently created sculptural valises for Camp Ground: Arts, Corrections and Fire Management in the Santa Monica Mountains that embeds artists in the Los Angeles County Fire Department to work in collaboration with the paid and inmate workforces. Her work is in public collections including MOCA, LACMA, Berkeley Art Museum, California African American Museum, and National Geospatial Intelligence Agency. Abeles' journals, books, and process documents are archived at the Center for Art + Environment, Nevada Museum of Art.

About Taylor Graham

Taylor Graham served as the inaugural Poet Laureate of El Dorado County from 2016 - 2018. Born Judith Ann Taylor in Pasadena in 1944, Judy was raised by her doctor father and nurse mother in Sierra Madre and later Newhall, California. Writing under the name Taylor Graham, Judy has had thousands of poems printed in poetry magazines, journals, newspapers, and anthologies. She has nine books of poetry in print. She is very proud of her recent inclusion in the anthology *California Poetry: from the Gold Rush to the present*.



Arts and Culture El Dorado's mission to promote, connect, and empower arts and culture throughout the county is achieved by targeted programs and services, a vibrant gallery exhibition series, and a focus on initiatives which support and sustain the cultural life of the region.

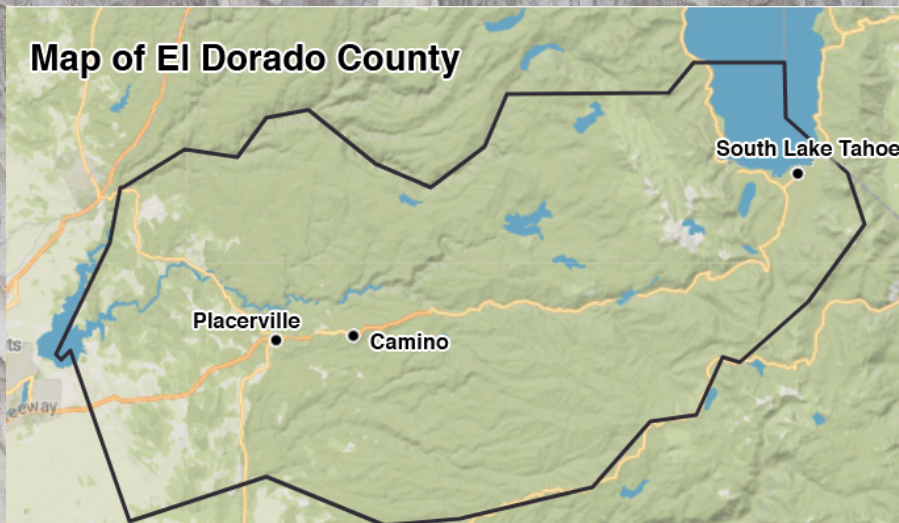
Terry LeMoncheck, Executive Director

SUPPORT THE ARTS IN EL DORADO COUNTY
Visit ArtsAndCultureElDorado.org to make a tax-deductible contribution.

Resilience was funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, El Dorado Savings Bank, the Teichert Foundation, and the Society of American Foresters.







Arts and Culture El Dorado • Confidence Lab
487/489 Main Street, Placerville, CA 95667
(530) 295-3496 • ArtsAndCultureElDorado.org