

About the Museum of Contemporary Farming

The Museum of Contemporary Farming is an impossible project.

Museums are generally places where important 'things' invested with knowledge about the past are displayed. The word 'contemporary' is often used about the new or recent, suggesting the cutting-edge and the metropolitan; the contemporary is ever-emerging, always current, never fixed. Such a museum could never be realised because it would become obsolete as soon as it was iterated.

Nevertheless, the Museum of Contemporary Farming is an important project: these words, 'museum' and 'contemporary', combined with 'farming', resist farming as a metaphor for the past. We are asking you to look beyond the historic objects on display at the MERL and to remember that farming is an ongoing occupation, practice and industry.

Since December 2017, artist and farmer Kate Genever and artist Georgina Barney have asked the public via the online social network of Twitter to suggest 'things' – anything – to include in our Museum of Contemporary Farming. These things can be equally impossible: too large, expensive, conceptual or even too simple to include in a *real* museum. We've chosen and edited a selection of these to share with you amongst the physical artefacts in the stores at the MERL. The digital here – ideas collected under the hashtag #MuseumContemporaryFarming – has become a kind of virtual museum itself.

In addition to the Twitter project, Kate has made a series of 'scratch' drawings, installed alongside objects in the MERL collection, that reveal one of the most important tools in farming. A material easily found on the farm, the simple stick, is used – as it has been for millennia – to guide, poke and support. In everyday use, Kate's sticks cannot be displayed at the MERL and, moreover, her drawings highlight that their beauty and meaning is found in their use, rather than in display.

Our Twitter page and Kate's collection of drawings seek to draw the attention of the viewer away from 'things' and into a conversation about use and experience. However, we have also learned that it is the relationship *between* physical things and people that matters. Farmer Chris' £5 note, given to buyers of his sheep, is a symbol of 'trust' in farming; its meaning takes place in its exchange, and the meaning would not be possible without this exchange.

So 'things' do matter: the thing produces the conversation, but the conversation gives the thing its meaning.

Georgina Barney, Curator of the Museum of Contemporary Farming