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Monday, September 26, 2011

Off Peak: Reclaiming the Baldwin Hills

An urban hike and roundtable discussion about the future of cultural work and community action at the Inglewood Oil Field

October 16, 2011, Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook Open Air Pavilion

3:00pm to 5:00pm: Screening/site research walking expedition

5:00pm to 7:00pm: Roundtable forum and discussion

Off Peak: Reclaiming the Baldwin Hills is a screening, urban hike, and roundtable discussion among cultural workers, researchers, and artists organized to help develop strategies for future cultural work and community action at the Inglewood Oil Field.

Off Peak has been an ongoing project combining academic research, social media, and public practice art to address the social and environmental problems facing the greater Baldwin Hills community. In January of 2011, the *Off Peak* partners began an initial phase of site research, community engagement, media production, and video documentation of the events and proceedings during the culmination of the three-year legal struggle over expanded drilling at the oil field, which finally reached a settlement in late June of 2011. On Sunday, October 16 the *Off Peak* partners will initiate a second phase of the project, *Reclaiming the Baldwin Hills*, which will present these preliminary findings to help catalyze an open discussion concerning the post-lawsuit future of community action at the Inglewood Oil Field. The event will be structured around the central question: how might creative forms of public engagement and cultural work help provide a context to facilitate sustained community participation to actively shape its local environment in the absence of an immediate (impending) legal crisis? The goal is to present *Off Peak's* preliminary research so that it can be used to facilitate the development of concrete strategies for cultural work moving forward.

The two-part event will begin with a mobile screening of an in-progress collaborative social documentary produced by the Los Angeles/Tijuana based media collective **Bulbo** and a site research walking expedition of the oil field itself lead by artist and urban hike guide **Sara Daleiden**. Following the screening and walk, the second part will consist of a roundtable forum and public discussion among cultural workers, researchers, and artists moderated by curator **Bill Kelley Jr.** and featuring respondents **Suzanne Lacy**, **Matt Coolidge**, **Robert Gottlieb**, **Edgar Arceneaux**, **Therese Kelley**, and **Lark Galloway-Gilliam**. After exploring the complex problems now facing the Baldwin Hills via the embodied and experiential process of walking through the oil field's lived diversity, the roundtable forum held at the Scenic Overlook Open Air Pavilion will ask the

participants to discuss how the problems of access, community, social equity, and environmental justice can be addressed in forms of cultural practice.

On an elevated geological peak located at the geographic center of the city of Los Angeles, the Inglewood Oil Field abuts socio-economically diverse communities; contrasting forms of land use and layers of urban geography; and complex environmental, technological, and social ecologies. Cutting laterally across the Baldwin Hills and actively used for the extraction of oil and natural gas for over 85 years, this large-scale urban drilling operation, dotting the landscape with pump jacks, oil rigs, and pipelines, has unintentionally preserved a massive tract of undeveloped land at the center of Los Angeles, offering the tantalizing promise of a large-scale, centralized urban park at heart of a park-poor city.

However, in 2006 the “Master Park Plan” optimistically proposed by the California Department of Parks and Recreation and the Baldwin Hills Conservancy in 2002 was jeopardized by the discovery of much deeper oil reserves and the rising profitability of the petroleum industry. The subsequent proposed drilling expansion by the Plains Exploration Company (PXP) and the initial permitting of 600 new wells by the County of Los Angeles has led to the establishment of a new community standards district, a 2008—2010 moratorium on the drilling of new wells based on environmental concerns, and a protracted lawsuit pitting local environmental and community organizations against PXP and The County of Los Angeles that began in 2008.

In the era of peak oil, rising petroleum-dependent populations, the growing need for open green space in urban cities to serve those very same populations (proved by the enormous success of the Baldwin Hills Conservancy’s Scenic Overlook, the location of the event), and the environmental and social costs paid by a world literally at war over a dwindling resource, the Inglewood Oil Field is emblematic of global struggles in the arenas of geopolitics, land use, environmental justice, and energy policy from Alberta to Oklahoma, Iraq to The Gulf of Mexico. Yet, alongside these important macro perspectives that can be viewed from afar when standing at crest of the Baldwin Hills, the more fundamental issue of local access and local community can be best viewed off peak, witnessed concretely and materially at ground level. Now that the ink has dried on the legal settlement, it has become a precarious moment for the important community alliances forged at a moment of legal crisis. A critical uncertainty about whether or not the diversity of groups and local residents who became united in oppositional solidarity to the expansion of urban oil drilling in Los Angeles can remain allies to address more nuanced social tensions and insist upon greater access to, and ownership of their immediate local environment.

The Sunday, October 16 event is free and open to the public, but the hike has limited space. Please RSVP to ken.rogers@ucr.edu no later than Monday, October 10, and walk reservations will be honored on a first-come/first-serve basis. You must arrive at the Scenic Overlook Pavilion by 2:30pm or potentially forfeit your reserved slot on the tour. The bus will leave promptly at 3:00pm. Comfortable, sturdy walking shoes suitable for a hike recommended.

Major support for *Off Peak* is provided by UCHRI. Major support for Bulbo’s collaborative social documentary is provided by UCHRI and UCIRA. Additional support is provided by Otis College of Art and Design. Special thanks goes to Baldwin Hills Conservancy. *Off Peak* is organized by Ken Rogers.

For maps, directions, and more information please visit: off-peak.org or email ken.rogers@ucr.edu