

Beautiful Possibility Tour: an ingestible travelogue

by Rebecca Ebeling

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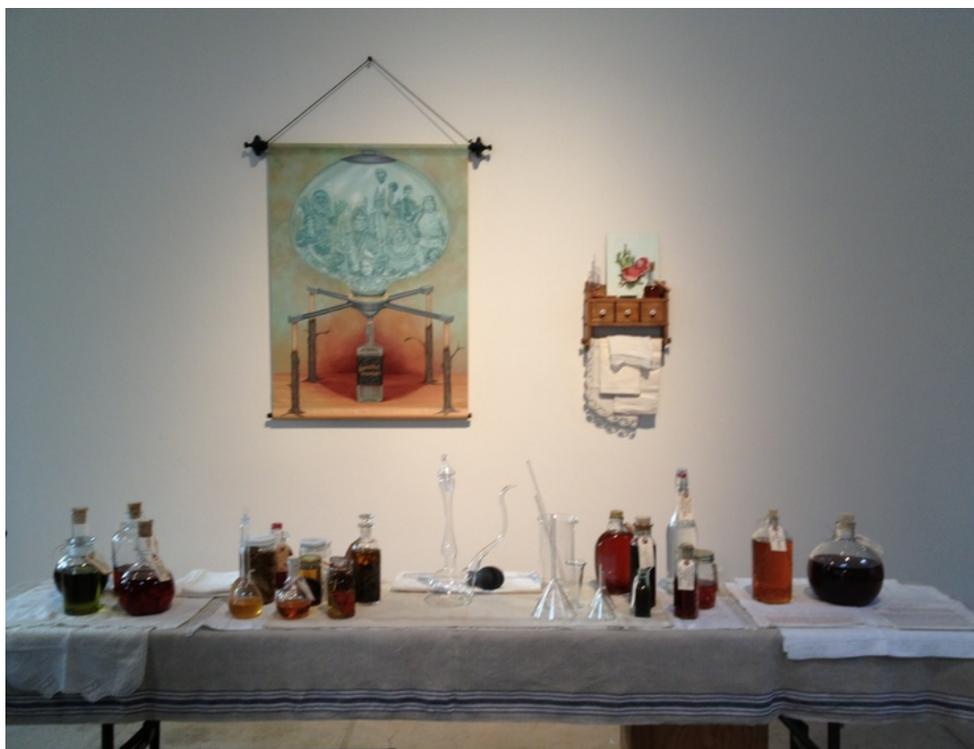
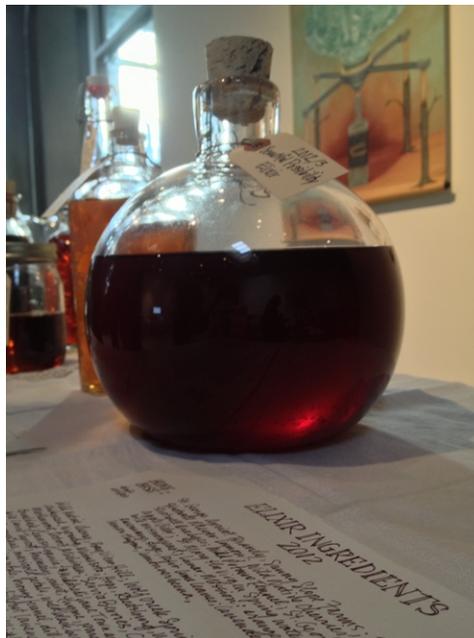
Picture this: driving cross country, windows down, trailer strapped to the back of your car, and a jug full of apples fermenting in your trunk. This may not sound like your typical road trip, but for artist Alison Pebworth, this was her life for 3 years as she traveled around the United States and Canada in search of the histories of post-industrial cities, literally and figuratively distilling the cultures of "Lost America" into an ingestible travelogue. During her tour across the country, Alison collected stories, surveys, and edible ingredients all culminating in what she calls her "Beautiful Possibility Elixir".



Last week I had the opportunity to hear Alison speak about the Beautiful Possibility Tour at Southern Exposure, where the project launched back in 2010. The event began with a slide show where Alison talked about the last twelve months of her tour. Her epic road trip began in the Dakotas, where she spent time on an Indian reservation. Next she drove through the Midwest stopping in Minneapolis, Detroit, and Cleveland, then traveling to the East Coast where she lived with the last living Shaker Community in Maine for a month. Alison then headed down to the very tip of Florida, through parts of the deep South, and then finally back to San Francisco where her journey began.

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Most of the places on the Beautiful Possibility Tour were urban farming communities, or other groups of people that were actively engaged in their local landscape. At each stop along the tour an infused tonic was made on site at the location where the ingredients were gathered. All of the tonics were infused in a clear alcohol base that was either locally produced or distilled by the artist herself. Over the course of 3 years more than 200 ingredients were used to make tonics that were blended into the Beautiful Possibility Elixir.



At the end of the slideshow, Alison did a final and ceremonious blending of the last few tonics to be added to the elixir. She stood behind a long table that was decorated with a collection of glass bottles filled with individual

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tonics, all glimmering under the gallery lights. Each tonic had a different hue and some still had the original infused ingredients in them, acting as a reminder of the place the flavor came from. In the center of the table there was a large glass decanter/serving apparatus that the elixir was poured in to for the tasting. As Alison stood behind the table meticulously mixing and pouring, she transformed from an artist to an apothecary, to a shaman bartender mixing up a cure-all cocktail.



Once the elixir was mixed just right, Alison walked around the room pouring her potion from her decanter into our mouths one at a time, in a ritualistic fashion. The elixir tasting felt almost spiritual, as if we were taking holy communion in a speakeasy, ingesting the artist's travels, filling us each with hopefulness and beautiful possibility.

It was the *ultimate* moonshine, and each flavor was as distinct as the story behind it. Notes of citrus, licorice, dirt, and flowers all flooded my tastebuds at once. The elixir was slightly sweet at first, then bitter with a medicinal aftertaste, but surprisingly smooth. It was the most complex, deliciously-horrible shot of booze I have ever taken in my life. I think I'll stick with bourbon.

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