



## SHEA HEMBREY'S CADENCED CONVERSATION

A Prelude to *The Secret Ingredient*  
by KATE BARNEY

ARTIST SHEA HEMBREY thinks of corn as fish bait. He recalls feeding human blood-kissed corn kernels to black hens to cure pesky skin warts—his grandfather's remedy. Hembrey was reared by a hairdresser mother and a factory worker father on forty acres of sorghum, peanuts, watermelon, corn, and cantaloupe in Hickory Grove, Arkansas (pop. 128 or 129, depending on your source), a country hour from movie-theater popcorn or Star Wars pinball machines on carpeted arcade floors.

Hembrey speaks of his corner of Arkansas with great reverence: "Where I grew up, there was a mysticism and creativity to everything. Everyone made things with their hands." His gratitude for the rural life reminds us how much genius has been cultivated in the fields of the American South.

Hembrey's works span media and



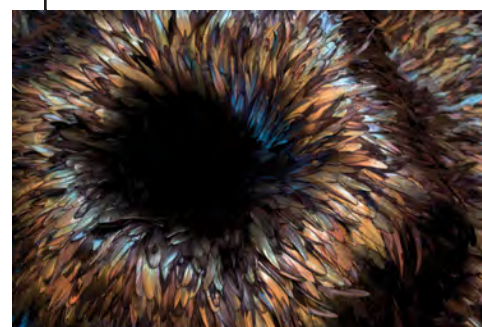
subject matter, their most consistent quality the relentless chase of answers to unanswered questions. He believes that contemporary art should exhibit exquisite craft and pass what he calls the "MeMaw test": the ability to explain the concept of a piece to his grandmother in five minutes or less.

For the SFA Fall Symposium commission, Hembrey revived a period when he used dried corn husks in sculptures and images of corn in

Ana Sousa

trompe-l'œil paintings. He day-dreamed about utilizing the textures and aromas of corn husks for large-format sculptures. This past summer, he visited the Powerhouse in Oxford to explore the possibilities.

The Powerhouse stands tall and sits long. Its grand wall spaces called Hembrey to attention and begged him



Shea Hembrey

to listen. He describes the space as "conversational, requiring a piece with a stronger narrative, both poetic and informational." He turned from more large-format sculptures to a long, conversation-starter of a piece supplemented by several smaller components.

This larger piece, *The Secret Ingredient*, debuts at the Powerhouse in October as part of an exhibit by the same name. Wall-long installations of recipe boxes each display a single,

FROM TOP TO  
BOTTOM:  
Oven; Detail  
from Font;  
OPPOSITE:  
Double Portaal



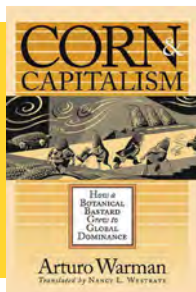
talismanic. The feature Hembrey's writings and drawings with instructions for food and fodder.

Alongside *The Secret Ingredient*, Hembrey will install four sculptures made of humble, often-overlooked materials—from wheat straw to corn-husks to tailfeathers.

Hembrey prods and proselytizes. His art examines the mega and micro that we do not see but should strive to understand. He affirms that "heart and soul transfers directly from the maker into the object, and furthermore, that no idea is so brilliant that it shouldn't be personally backed up with masterful construction." Hembrey's work is a model for curiosity, craft, and clarity in contemporary art.

Driven by a multi-year grant from 21c Museum Hotels, we open the Symposium with a viewing of *The Secret Ingredient*. We invite you to visit the Powerhouse in Oxford, MS, October 4–30 to experience the exhibit.

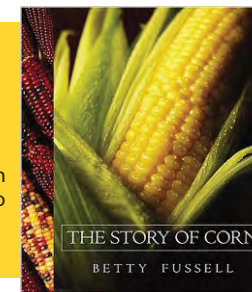
**GRAVY**  
BOOK CLUB  
*Gets Corny*



*Corn and Capitalism* by Arturo Warman is a political, economic, anthropological, and historical analysis of a crop that dominates the world—and the human systems that propagate it.



Marion Nestle's *Soda Politics: Taking On Big Soda (And Winning)* offers a comprehensive survey of soda consumption in America and a dive into the syrupy problem with corn.



*The Story of Corn* by Betty Fussell is the tale of the grain that built the New World and then spread worldwide. Spoiler alert: Humans and corn don't live happily ever after.