WHAT DO WE SHARE IN COMMON? WHO IS THE "WE" IN "WE THE PEOPLE"? HOW CAN WE REIMAGINE WEALTH AND COME TOGETHER FOR COMMON GOOD?

Commonwealth explored these questions, and how our common resources are used to influence the wealth and well-being of our communities. Commonwealth was the outgrowth of a multiyear partnership between the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University (ICA at VCU) in Richmond, Virginia; Philadelphia Contemporary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Beta-Local in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The project explored the historical concept of "commonwealth" and its legacy in each of the three locations. It asked whether it is possible to unleash the collective power embedded in that term while recognizing its connection to exploitation and colonialism. The question of how people understand common wealth, and the tension between individual choice and collective wellbeing, became all the more relevant in 2020, a year that began with earthquakes in Puerto Rico and continued with the historic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement.

Starting in 2018, the curatorial team met in their respective cities to formulate a collaborative project. In 2019, through community processes in each city, the team explored the meaning of commonwealth. The project was initially intended to be an exhibition in three cities but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project changed. The two physical manifestations of Commonwealth included a banner project by a local community council and a billboard by Firelei Baez in Philadelphia (October 15, 2020-January 10, 2021), and an exhibition of commissioned works at the ICA (September 12, 2020 – January 10, 2021). In addition, there was a digital publication and online public programs. This physical publication is an archive of this project.

Commonwealth was organized and curated by Pablo Guardiola, Michael Linares, nibia pastrana santiago, Sofía Gallisá Muriente; Stephanie Smith, Noah Simblist, Kerry Bickford, Nicole Pollard, and Nato Thompson.

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ISSUE THREE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors would like to acknowledge the many people who contributed to both the publication and the project overall.

Thanks to Virginia Commonwealth University and the William Penn Foundation for the generous funds necessary to support this project.

Thanks to the team at Tiguere for the development of the graphic identity, the design for the online publication and this book.

Thanks to the translators, Raquel Salas Rivera, Nicole Cecilia Delgado, and Kahlila Chaar-Pérez who worked tirelessly to make sure that we could realize our goal of bi-lingual content.

The ICA would like to thank the following individuals:

Administration and Project Management: Keara Dail and Traci Garland

Graphic Design: Meredith Carrington and Grace Hoffman

Exhibition Design: Andy Clifford

Installation: Payton Baril, Andy Clifford, Nick Crider, Nick Fagan, Warren Jones, Dylan Languell, Margo Lentz-Meyer, Ricardo Vincente Jose Ruiz, and Sandy Williams IV

Program and performance production:
Savannah Grace Goodenow and Becky Hudson

Communications and social media: Jessica McCadden and Stephanie Stanton

Facilities and Visitor Services: Michael Lease, Dan Nemer, Emerson Tedder, and the ICA Visitor Experience Associates

Research assistance: Bernita Randolph and Luis Vasquez La Roche

The Richmond presentation of *Commonwealth* was shaped in part by two research initiatives:

Summer Sessions: Commonwealth, an intensive public programs and dialogue series held in summer 2019, and a VCU undergraduate seminar held in spring 2019. We thank the following participants.

Summer Sessions: Commonwealth, summer 2019
Special thanks to Enjoli Moon and David Riley for their collaboration, especially through introductions to community collaborators and partners who continued to shape the Commonwealth project.

Project Initiators: Noah Simblist, VCUarts, and Stephanie Smith, ICA

Program Development: Erin Hanas, Caroline Legros, Enjoli Moon, David Riley, Noah Simblist, Stephanie Smith, and Dominic Willsdon

Program Facilitators: Duron Chavis and Rebecca Keel

Program Collaborators:
Andrew Alli, Friends of the James River Park
Chaz Antoine
Janine Bell, Elegba Folklore Society
Marshall Brown, Princeton University
Carolina Caycedo
Heather Davis, The New School
DJ Ease
Free Egunfemi, Untold RVA
Pablo Guardiola + Michael Linares, Beta-Local
Chelsea Higgs Wise, WRIR's "Race Capitol"
Patton Hindle, Kickstarter
Ice Cream Social
Kevin LaMarr Jones, CLAVES UNIDOS
Jonathan Knopf, Maggie Walker Community Land Trust
Bill Martin, The Valentine
Katherine McDonald, Historic Richmond
Daniel McGarvey, VCU Center for Environmental Studies
Carlos Medellín, Fundación Horizontal
DJ Nobe
Tawnya Pettiford-Wates, The Conciliation Project and VCUarts
Quilian Riano, DSGN AGNC
Ryan Rinn, Storefront for Community Design
Gregory Sholette, Queens College
Kate Sicchio, VCUarts
Southerners On New Ground (SONG)
Jonas Staal
Brent Tarter, Library of Virginia
Brooke Taylor + Tanesha White, WRIR's "Critiques for the Culture"
Melissa Vaughn, WRIR
Jackie Washington, 6PIC

Whitney Whiting, WRIR's "End of the Line"
WRIR's "Local Voices Live"
...and others

Spatial Design: DSGN AGNC + Fundación Horizontal + El Equipo Mazzanti

Additional design support from Andy Clifford, Michael Lease, and Ed Williams

Graphic Design: Meredith Carrington and Grace Hoffman

Installation: Payton Baril, Andy Clifford, Nick Crider, Nick Fagan, Warren Jones, Dylan Languell, Margo Lentz-Meyer, Ricardo Vincente Jose Ruiz, and Sandy Williams IV

Visitor Services: Payton Baril, Malia Bates, Lillian Cook, Griffin Davis, Alyssa Evangelista, Kyla Garland, Laketch Haile, Madison Hall, Erin Hanas, Madeline Honig, Michelle Koppl, Madeline Maier, Kyle Maurer, Andrea Medina, Jessica Melgar, Dan Nemer, Devonte Robertson, Gus Rasich, Erica Taylor, Emerson Tedder, Luis Vasquez, and Tyler Wiseman

***Commonwealth* undergraduate seminar, spring 2019**
ICA + VCUarts Department of Painting and Printmaking
Teaching Assistant: Luis Vasquez
Students: Anthony D'Angelo, Malia Bates, D'Anna Johnson, Berkley Cutlip, Eli Trees, Erica Taylor, Wansu Kang, Meighan Cahoon, Cora Georg, Alex Haller, Erika Hastings, Brittany Horner, LaRissa Rogers, Julea Seliavski, Clayton Turner, and Scarly Zhao.

Philadelphia Contemporary would like to thank all of the Philadelphia Contemporary Staff who supported *Commonwealth*, including Swabreen Bakr, Director of Storytelling and Digital Strategy; Rob Blackson, Co-Director of Curatorial Programs and Curator of City-wide Initiatives; Annie Chiu-McCabe, Director of Learning and Community Partnerships; Mia Culbertson, Graphic Designer; V. Shayne Frederick, Social Media Coordinator; Sunanda Ghosh, Director of External Relations; Natalie Harris, Graphic and Interactive Designer; Harry Philbrick, Founding Director and CEO; Natalia Rodríguez, Development Assistant; Judith Thomas, Chief of Staff; and Yolanda Wisher, Co-Director of Curatorial Programs and Curator of Spoken Word.

Special thanks to Sedakial Gebremedhin, Philadelphia Contemporary's Community Engagement Coordinator and the co-facilitator of the *Commonwealth* Community Council. Our thanks also go to De'Wayne Drummond, Philadelphia Contemporary's Community Outreach Strategist.

We could not have mounted *Commonwealth* without the work and wisdom of the *Commonwealth* Community Council. Our special thanks go to all the members of the council: Cynthia Blocker, Chuck Bode, Nora Elmarzouky, Lucia Esther, Rikeyah Lindsay, Derrick Pratt, and Ellen Tiberino.

Thank you to Mary Virtue for her evaluation of the process behind assembling and convening the Community Council.

Thank you to all of our local regranting partners, who uphold and demonstrate the values of *Commonwealth* in all that they do: Al-Bustan Seeds of Culture, Ellen Powell Tiberino Memorial Museum, Neighborhood Bike Works, Scribe Video Center, Spiral Q, and Tiny WPA

Thank you to the Community Education Center (CEC), particularly Theresa Shockley and Ellen Tiberino, for hosting the installation of The Source of Self Regard *(movements reimagined)* by Firelei Báez.

Thank you to James Wright and Yolanda Braxton of the People's Emergency Center (PEC) for providing a meeting space for the Community Council, and a home for Philadelphia Contemporary for the past 2 years.

Thank you to Noa Denmon for her illustration work on the *Commonwealth* community banners. The banners were conceived by the *Commonwealth* Community Council, which identified community leaders in the West Philadelphia Promise Zone neighborhoods to be recognized on a series of light pole banners spanning a portion of Lower Lancaster Avenue. Two banners were also dedicated to The Black Bottom and University City High School.

Thank you to all of our speakers and collaborators on the *Commonwealth* virtual programs: Carolina Caycedo, Duron Chavis, Dr. Mary Ebeling, Ashley Gripper, Quilian Riano, and Huerto Semilla: Semilla Crystal Cruz and Semilla Julian Garcia.

Last but not least, we would like to express our gratitude to the neighborhoods of Belmont, Mantua, Mill Creek, Powelton Village, and West Powelton.

Beta Local would like to thank Yarimar Bonilla y Ángel “Chuco” Quintero Rivera for all their intellectual support around the history of our Commonwealth.
All Beta-Local staff was involved in the development of the project: Yarima González, Anahí Lazarte, Sofía Gallisá Muriente y nibia pastrana santiago.
The first exercise dissecting this project was done with La Práctica 2018-2019: Amara Abdal Figueroa, Juan Antonio Arroyo, Guillermo Boehler, Félix Canales, Tania Gabriela Díaz Camacho, Amanda Hernández y Anna Karina Lawson.

OUR BRIEF HISTORY OF COMMONWEALTH

By The Editors
Kerry Bickford, Pablo Guardiola, Michael Linares, Nicole Pollard, Noah Simblist, and Stephanie Smith

This volume tells a set of interrelated stories connected to *Commonwealth*. Our curatorial project developed over three years, across three cities and three different arts institutions, with an evolving cast of collaborators—and it unfolded against a backdrop that dramatically mingled contested histories and historic recent events. These events had a huge impact on our work. So much so that it went through multiple changes, with reality seeming stranger than fiction and often taking a melodramatic form. The following introduces this publication by way of a look back at the larger project.

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Our project started as a simple line of questioning. Curators and artists from three institutions, each based in a US political territory designated as a “commonwealth,” chose to think together about what that term actually means. In this partnership among Beta-Local (San Juan, PR), the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University (Richmond, VA), and Philadelphia Contemporary (Philadelphia, PA), we set out to investigate its history, its utopian potential, and its limitations. The United States of America began as a

colony whose revolutionary texts espoused the idea of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Yet it was founded on land taken from indigenous peoples, slavery, and a host of other injustices. In the nineteenth century the US became an empire itself, and it remains so through its ongoing colonization of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Mariana Islands and Puerto Rico. How is one to swallow such massive contradictions?

In 2018, the curatorial team began meeting in our respective cities, considering these questions and formulating a collaborative project—one that would reflect shared values and commitments while respecting the differences in our institutions, our contexts, and our perspectives. Through our collaborative work as well as community processes in each city, we explored the meaning of commonwealth. We explored our connection to the land, our unity or division as a common people, and the voices of resistance that come together to fight injustice within our communities. Together, our curatorial team also selected a group of artists from whom to commission works that would respond to ideas of "common wealth" and "common debt." We initially planned to present them through exhibitions in all three cities, along with a more traditional print publication and localized public programming, but the onset of COVID-19 forced us to pivot—one of a series of dramatic events that occurred as we researched the project and developed its themes and structure.

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Throughout this process, external events unfolded that resonated deeply with our thinking and added urgency to our

work together. When we first gathered in San Juan in early 2019, we talked a lot about how the island was still coping with natural, social, and political disasters made visible by Hurricane María in 2017. Then and through later meetings and community-centered research in Philadelphia and Richmond, we began to connect deeper histories and current realities in those two cities with longer arcs of Puerto Rico's colonial relationship with the mainland United States. That was amplified in the summer of 2019, when hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans took to the streets for creative and effective protests against governor Ricardo Rosselló and his cabinet after a series of inflammatory Whatsapp messages sent between them came to light. In early 2020, the team met again in San Juan, converging on the same day that a powerful earthquake hit the island.

Not long after this, which turned out to be our final in-person meeting, the COVID-19 pandemic radically changed the ways in which we could come together and pushed us to sharpen our thinking about questions of common wealth and common debt during a time of social upheaval. It also forced us to rethink the final phase of the project, which was initially meant to include in-person exhibitions and programs at all three cities in fall 2020. We agreed instead that each organization would oversee one re-formulated component of the project. Beta-Local would lead on this re-envisioned publication—which we thought at the time would be digital only—and through it, direct resources to Puerto Rican graphic designers, translators, and other contributors. This also freed energy and time for the small team at Beta-Local to provide other forms of support to their community outside its work on *Commonwealth*. The ICA would focus on a reconceived exhibition, add a commission that highlighted

principles of mutual aid and provided direct support to local food justice activism, and work with all the artists to adapt their commissioned projects into a spatially distanced indoor-outdoor exhibition (held in and around the ICA September 12, 2020 to January 31, 2021). Philadelphia Contemporary would emphasize locally-facing support of its neighbors and collaborators through its community council and a regranting initiative. It also organized a neighborhood banner initiative and the public display of one commissioned project, a billboard by Firelei Báez (shown in Philadelphia October 15, 2020 to January 10, 2021). The newly-obvious benefits of digital programming also opened paths to collaborative online programs that linked our communities and connected us to others.

As we were making those changes, the pandemic intersected with another external upheaval. In the summer of 2020, the streets of Philadelphia and Richmond, like many other cities in the US and around the world, were filled with protests for racial justice after the murder of George Floyd, building on decades of prior organizing in response to the incessant murders of Black people by police officers. The context of these uprisings, combined with the ongoing stressors of the pandemic, shaped the commissioned projects and their presentation. Because many of these new works were still in formation during this tumultuous time, some artists had to change their projects for practical reasons such as inability to travel or gather in person, which they found creative ways to weave into their works. Artists also chose to respond to the times in direct or indirect ways within the content of their commissions. Some of the works didn't change form or content but still resonated in unanticipated ways.

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And now we reach the heart of this particular part of the *Commonwealth* story—the publication itself. This volume—available in both Spanish and English and in print or PDF form—shares texts that we initially distributed through an online publication released in three issues over late 2020 and early 2021. Given the rapidly shifting contexts described above, we chose a digital format because its flexibility allowed quick responses to changing events. While keeping the commissioned artists and their projects as one core of the content, we also commissioned texts that folded in a variety of other perspectives from within and beyond art worlds. We hoped they could plumb deep histories and offer real-time snapshots as things kept changing, and twists continued to tighten and unfurl. The resulting three volumes, released sequentially online and assembled here, include networks of content that reflect our contexts, ideas, and feelings (many of these contradictory) in various ways and from multiple latitudes that are at times almost impossible to reconcile.

This publication also shares a set of conceptual tools that we developed together to think through key issues and ideas. These were translated into icons by illustrator Lorraine Rodríguez; the full set is included. We combined some of these tools and their icons to generate three conceptual categories:

Collectivity

Spatial Economies

Historical Agency

We found these categories useful to think through aspects of the artist commissions, public programs, and the publication texts. As a result, Tembol's design for the online version of the publication was structured around these principles, creating conceptual and visual "tracks" for the content to follow. While the three-track design couldn't translate to this print/PDF iteration, the related icons now accompany texts, suggesting thematic links within and across the three issues. One other key difference is that the online version included video and photographs, which are not included here.

The project also spawned one spin-off. *Artist in Residence* is a printed collection of 50 submissions from artists around the world who were all asked to respond to a simple prompt: what is an artwork or performance we can all do at home while sheltering in place? The responses range from craft to cooking and from conversation to meditation, providing a snapshot of the varied forms creation can take in a time of quarantine. The project was conceived in March 2020 during one of the first periods of lockdowns and social distancing measures implemented in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Available for purchase as a limited-edition printed workbook and as a downloadable pdf, proceeds raised from the sale of this book were donated to support artists in need via emergency grants offered by the Foundation for Contemporary Arts.

In all aspects of the project, including this publication, the only possible way to work has been to unravel the semantic content of the "common good," "commonwealth," "common debt," and other permutations from their mix of meanings. Instead of thinking about the utopia of putting something together, we work from the reality that things break and that

it is not bad to operate from the cracks. The broken and the interrupted as a positive value. Thus the materials gathered in the following pages do not seek to explain the project in a totalizing way; they are an array of multiple approaches to and from *Commonwealth*.

This project is an invitation to work together, to keep up the dialogue despite our unstable contexts, and to allow art and the thoughts it provokes to sustain themselves as necessary tools from the present.

WHAT IS "COMMONWEALTH"?

By The Editors

The United States of America can be described as many things but "a place where people hold wealth in common" would not be one of them. If not wealth, then what do we hold in common? Who is the "we" that defines our nation, our states, our cities, and our communities?

Maybe we shouldn't let go of holding wealth in common. Can we redefine "wealth" and redistribute it in ways that foster greater well-being for all? Essentially, can we draw on the collective power embedded in the term "commonwealth" while at the same time recognizing its connection to exploitation and colonialism? In the Puerto Rican context, Commonwealth has a very particular meaning, associated with American colonialism. This fact has been a recurring touchstone for this project to consider.

In the spring and summer of 2020, the pandemic has challenged our public health infrastructure on both a local and global level. It has prompted big and urgent questions: Do we rely on government or private corporations to keep us healthy and safe? Are these our only two options? And when we say "government," do we mean local or federal or both? Who knows what's best for us and who has the ability to follow through on a promise of care? In addition to the public health crisis, we saw a collective pushback against racism and police violence on both a national and global scale. The offense that called forth this rage was a betrayal of the commonwealth.

In response to these crises we have seen people come together for the common good in a myriad of ways. Mutual aid groups have gathered food, rent support, and other supplies so that neighbors can help one another survive. In some cities, people sheltering in place would come outside to applaud first responders. A remarkably diverse coalition came together, often in the streets, to commit to anti-racism. In the US a discourse of abolition has risen to the surface as we realize that there is little justice in the justice system. Protesters cried "I can't breathe," invoking the image of society as a body that has been choked off from the resources it needs to live by the very system that was established to protect it. Despite the fact that we have lost faith in some systems, we have built new ones and treated "commonwealth" as an idea that is an organic thing, something that must constantly adapt to maintain a commitment to the common good.

ISSUE 1

ISSUE ONE EDITORIAL NOTE

By The Editors
Publication Date: 12/03/2020

This first issue, includes contributions by three participating artists: Mónica Rodríguez, Sharon Hayes and Duron Chavis (with Quilian Riano). These texts provide context for their respective Commonwealth projects, rather than explanations of the works.

This issue also includes a journalistic note by Brian Palmer that considers the impact of Richmond's Confederate monuments. Originally, in the online version this piece also included Palmer's photographs. We commissioned journalistic content for all three issues of the publication as a way to respond to conditions on the ground in all three cities as they unfolded. In this case, Palmer's contribution was one way for us to respond to the racial justice uprising that occurred in Summer 2020.

The first issue also introduces the local contexts for each of the three collaborators. This was a chance for each of the institutional partners to talk about how the term commonwealth, in all of its various meanings, resonated in relation to each of our institutions. It also was an opportunity for each of us to talk about the local contexts in which these institutions functioned. That way we could be self-reflexive and transparent about the ways in which this project functioned under the particularities of concrete conditions.

DURON CHAVIS

By Duron Chavis and Quilian Riano

Food justice activist Duron Chavis believes that fresh, healthy food should be available to all: a form of common wealth. He conceived his "resiliency garden" at the Institute for Contemporary Art, one of the commissioned projects for *Commonwealth*, as a space both to grow fresh produce and to teach about the links between food insecurity, access to green space, and systemic racism. For example, the modular design, developed in partnership with architect Qulian Riano, includes not only raised beds in which to grow vegetables, but also trees and other elements that shade what is usually a bare blacktop lot. This demonstrates how to reduce the "urban heat island" effect that makes some neighborhoods hotter than others. Initiated in response to COVID-19 in the spirit of mutual aid, the project also came to reflect the ICA's location near an epicenter of the first wave of racial justice protests in summer 2020, traces of which remain on the facade. Black empowerment drives Chavis's practice, and he and Riano chose to echo the "Black Lives Matter" street murals painted around the country in summer 2020 by integrating the phrase "Black Space Matters" into the design. The harvest will be distributed to VCU students facing food insecurity, and the plants, soil, and other materials will be redistributed to urban garden sites around Richmond.

– The Editors

Why Does Black Space Matter?

Two years ago I had the pleasure of taking a garden tour with several amazing colleagues. The tour was unique in that we went to Reveille Church in the West End of Richmond, Virginia.

Reveille Church is one of the oldest churches in the city, and it is also one of the wealthiest. The tour guide narrated the history of the church, walked us through its gardens, and told us the story of the oldest house on the church's campus, which is also one of the oldest houses in the city.

The house is as old as the enslavement of my ancestors in the country. The other tour participants were predominantly white, older women, all of whom I am sure weren't experiencing the tour in the same way I experienced it. As the tour guide told the history of this space, all I could think of was how my African ancestors experienced this place. What stories they would tell. What terrors they faced. What their lives were like as they were forced to work the landscape, the kitchens, and the farms of one of Richmond's oldest religious institutions. I distinctly remember the separate door for the help.

Alongside my own ancestral evocations, one of the most poignant aspects of the tour was the story of how the land came to be held by these early Virginia colonists. As we walked up the steps of the house, the tour guide explained that King George had granted an astounding 50,000 acres to them. I thought, 50,000 acres? The guide said this from the top of the steps, explaining that the land stretched from these steps, only blocks from Willow Lawn, to the James River; the entirety of that expanse was given to these white people in complete disregard of the indigenous people who lived there.

I tell this story to help you understand the root of why Black Spaces Matters. The story of people of European ancestry and western imperialism, specifically the story of the Americas, is the story of space: white people having it and the power of it to do what they want and create the life they desire upon it.

The genocide, forced removal, and marginalization on reservations of indigenous people; the enslavement, discrimination, and marginalization of African people; the marginalization of Asian communities; the exploitation of so-called Latino people (because before a Spanish person colonized this hemisphere, the people we say are Latino or Hispanic didn't call themselves that) are all wrapped up in the people of European ancestry doing wrong to every other ethnicity on the planet using the false construct of race as a justification and a hierarchy of human value that places themselves at the top and everyone else beneath them.

Food, Climate, and Racial Justice require Land Justice. As an urban farmer, one of the most tenacious issues I have faced has been that of land tenure. Finding places to grow has been hard work, often harder than the growth itself. After years of

growing on land, I have seen landowners decide to change terms, sell their property, or develop urban farms we have grown on into something else. In order to fully practice self-determination, people of African ancestry have to have land that they control, without worry that it will be taken away.

The phenomenon we experience today is that predominately white-led urban agriculture profiteers colonize our rapidly gentrifying Black and brown communities in Richmond and across the country. Instead of investing in the preexisting community, these organizations access their circles of wealth and resources to fund salaries, programs, and organizations that hardly ever put our communities in leadership positions. We aren't ever given the title to the land nor the title of leadership. These organizations rarely if ever use their power and privilege to disrupt patterns of systemic racism.

When we do work explaining why communities do not have access to healthy food, we tell the story of how communities of color were redlined—denied mortgages and financing based on race—in the 1950s by the Federal Housing Administration. We tell the tale of how African American neighborhoods were destroyed by the creation of the interstate highway system. We tell the story of how Black farmers were discriminated against and denied loans and other services by the USDA, plus how their land was stolen by members of the white community operating on local and state levels across the country. We tell the story of how black farmers have had twelve million acres of land stolen in the last century. That 98% of agricultural land is owned by white people. We always explain that lack of food access is always about power and how systems were established to deny people of color of theirs.

Black Space Matters because it is the one thing we have lacked. Agency over space has been denied to people of color by people of European ancestry since the first piece of land was granted to a colonist, whether it be in the Americas, Africa, the so-called Middle East, Australia, or Asia. The navigation of space, or land; its equitable redistribution; its potential for use and what happens on it are the final frontier for all those who aspire to social justice.

The Resiliency Garden is a reimagining of space and an example of what can happen when Black people take control of space and regenerate it as a catalyst for freedom, healing, and liberation. The space lives at the intersection of food, climate, and racial justice and is an homage to a future that serves us all, not just a select few.

– DURON CHAVIS

A FLEXIBLE SPACE THAT GROWS: ON THE DESIGN OF 'RESILIENCY GARDENS'

The design of 'Resiliency Gardens' takes as its inspiration the very process of farming and community organizing as an ongoing process, one that shifts slightly each season and over time. Thus, the design is a framework, or organizational logic, for growth that evolves as the programming and other needs change and shift.

It begins with the dimension of the width of a growing bed, 4 feet, which begins to take over the ground as a grid that demarcates the area of the garden. On top of the linear 4 foot grid, a secondary grid is superimposed in the more public areas to demarcate a 6 foot distance to comply with Covid19 protocols. On top of that the team on the ground will create a tertiary grid that breaks down some of the areas most used by them over the course of farming, classes, and producing other programs. Together, all the grids create a tapestry made by the farmers in which they both claim land and create a new set of relationships and communities for growth.

Within the grid, items grow towards the center, with larger items, trees, on the edges, followed by grow beds, followed by either table top or hay bale growing showcases. The center is not one dedicated zone but rather a negotiated zone of growth, circulation and programming.

Framing the entire active area are three murals that together say BLACK SPACE MATTERS, placed in different places and surfaces to encompass the entire project -- both to be seen as a whole from outside and to be experienced in different ways inside the active area of the project. on boards placed throughout the space, the artist Duron Chavis and his team will lead programming to explore just how Black Space Matters in the Black communities of Richmond and beyond.

– QUILIAN RIANO, DSGN AGNC

SHARON HAYES

By Sharon Hayes and Ross Gay

For Commonwealth, Sharon Hayes created a new work that extends her long interest in how intimate speech can also be political speech and in the interplay between one's individual subjectivity and sense of belonging to a group. *Ricerche: two* is the third in a series in which she uses the format of the group interview to interrogate questions of identity, affinity, and difference among individuals who are bound together by choice and circumstance. In each *Ricerche* installment, Hayes interviews groups of people, soliciting multiple answers for each question and drawing out distinct and sometimes conflicting perspectives.

In *Ricerche: two* Hayes interviews players from two women's tackle football teams: the Arlington Impact and the Dallas Elite Mustangs. Hayes prompts individual players to discuss their relationship with the sport, how they perceive playing football in relation to their own womanhood, and the sport's impact on how they see themselves as mothers, daughters, workers, citizens, and sexual and romantic partners. The camera tracks the ripples of communal response: laughter, attentive listening, raised eyebrows, sideways glances, clapping, nodding, and hums of communal agreement or dissent. The teams of women are shown to be built from constant negotiations of trust, empathy, difference, and common purpose. Filmed at close range, the women form a collective body, casually touching—a uniquely charged dynamic in an era of social distancing. For the work's in-person premiere at the ICA, Hayes designed a wide, gently curving screen to evoke the embrace of a huddle.

– The Editors

Accommodating Contact: Sharon Hayes and Ross Gay in Conversation

HAYES: The piece I showed you is called *Ricerche: two* (*ricerche* means "research" in Italian). It's one of a series of works I did stepping off of the beautiful and also vexing *Comizi d'amore*, a film by Pier Paolo Pasolini. Pasolini goes across Italy in 1963 interviewing people about sex and sexuality as a way to get to questions of politics and economics. In the film, he interviews people almost exclusively in groups rather than by themselves. There's a short scene in the film in which he interviews a football club—which in Italy at that time meant a men's soccer team. For me, Pasolini's film acts as a ghost sometimes directing my choices, and here I decided to follow him literally. Football to football: European football to US football, which, of course, is not soccer. In the piece, I'm interested in questions around gender and gender expression and the way in which sex and sexuality act symptomatically at this political moment. I wanted to gather women's tackle football players. From a wide call, I got interest from a team called the Arlington Impact, and then quickly realized there

are three women's tackle football teams in the Dallas area. So I zoomed in on Dallas, Texas, as a place to talk to people.

Maybe we can begin with this kind of fuzzy intersection between activities. You are and have been an athlete, which is super important to you, and you are and have been an artist of many mediums. I'm curious how you find those spheres living in you. (Laughs)

GAY: I played football in college and that's how I got to college. I started getting serious about making art and it was painting, it was writing. I got very interested in being around some people, and some ideas, and writing, and making art—in part because my life as a football player was not making me very happy. (Laughs)

But there are so many things about sport that overlap with poems or different kinds of art making. One of them is touch. I'm really, really, really interested in touch. If there's anything that I miss from playing football it's that there were moments, there were intimacies, there were touches that were just really moving and important to me. When I think of the writing that I do, more than anything what I'm trying to do is be in contact with people, and with ideas, and with other books, and things. And in some way probably trying to represent the way that I'm constantly in contact, and constantly being held, and constantly being filled up by other ideas or movements. So to me at the very least it's about these touches. Of course, then there are other things about life disciplines or practice that I feel are connected too.

HAYES: One of the things I learned in talking to these 23 players is that for these elite athletes, many of whom played various sports as a kid and some of whom went to college and had scholarships to play a sport at college, there is a distinct wall they hit as adults trying to carry on and play high-level sports. I do think that the activity of being an elite athlete is an enveloped living. You're enveloped in your sport, and that's enveloped in the team but also in the routines you need to make that life and the choice to play possible.

One of the things that was the most surprising for me was the players' relationship to what they call "the hit" and how much "the hit" was a part of football. Now it seems totally obvious, like you really can't play tackle football without embracing the hit. (Laughs)

GAY: I know. I spent so much time thinking of the hit as it related to my own experience playing football. The violence that is inside of a locker room—the locker rooms I was in—that makes it possible for us to accommodate the hit. And by that, I mean the incredibly sexist and misogynistic and homophobic apparatus of terrible shit that allows for the violence, the hit. And so to hear "the hit" in the context of these players, the sort of reverie, was a really interesting deepening of my thinking.

It made me think how does touch get accommodated, and how do different kinds of touch get accommodated? Even as I think of the apparatus that accommodated certain kinds of violence when I played football, what does that mean when it's a women's team?

HAYES: I grew up playing sports. I stopped in college so my experience is limited, but still I felt that there was something

on the field for women's tackle football players that's different than sports I had played—soccer, basketball, softball. And there's something that happens on the field that's different than what happens in ordinary life. There's a way of being, a way of moving, of touching, of feeling. There's a really interesting comment that one player makes about aggression and the complexity of being aggressive. And so I think you're right in terms of accommodation. One of the things I felt really strongly from these players is the infectiousness of playing football. Just talking to them made me want to play. I wanted to feel what it felt like on the field. Because it seemed unlike anything I had access to. That there is something happening on the field that allows them to be different than they can be anywhere else in their life.

GAY: Certain kinds of contact are deeply fulfilling, and life making, and life meaning. The ways that I resist my own experience with that aggression or the hit is that it was not a prohibition to do what I was doing. It was a mandate. So that's part of what I was aware of: there are all of these normativities inside of it. And it felt like for the folks who you were interviewing, there were different mandates that they were reacting to. Maybe mandate's the wrong word. There were different things though, that they were doing, you know?

And that's a sport where there's different kinds of getting hurt. That's one of those sports where probably someone's going to get hurt in the game. It's unlikely that it doesn't happen. And that can foster a kind of closeness. In terms of touch, what to me feels beautiful about teams and team sports is the way that ultimately we're studying our own . . . precarity is not quite the word. But the fact that we're going to die, and you get to be close with folks in the midst of that. And you know, in a game

where probably someone's gonna get hurt, it feels like there's a kind of tenderness that holds. The ways that we're constantly checking in with each other about playing. Like, are you ok? Is your knee okay? Should we stop? And there's a kind of intimacy that is so much about care. I'm thinking about how sport can actually provide moments of profound tenderness and care. Often my experience has been that it's in the seams of the sports. My curiosity is then about how those seams become the thing. It's in the team or it's in the play that this tenderness gets expressed. And it often gets expressed in the gesture that you do not even see. It might be that someone stumbles a little bit and you just easily grab their forearm and keep them from falling and no one saw it but it goes into the registry of actually how we lived. And fuck, I love that. I love that.

HAYES: How do you think of those points of contact in relation to something called the political or something called politics?

GAY: I was thinking of course that everything is political. I wasn't thinking about it in terms of electoral politics necessarily. But when I think of these practices of care, I've been thinking of witness as a practice of making. To witness is a kind of politics. Saidiya Hartman teaches me that there are all of these things that the archive itself, for all of its reasons, does not accommodate. So it requires that we are able to engage the archive, or imagine an archive, in these other ways, which is to me a kind of different kind of witness. Part of what's interesting to me with sport is that when we witness those instances of care, then we can see them as a kind of making. There is all of this political shit. When I say political shit, there's all of this, again, apparatus that makes us alien from one another. And I feel witnessing instances of

care indicates to us that in fact we have the great capacity to be enacting instances of care constantly. And that's why I'm more interested in sport as points of contact than I am in one person winning, or one team winning and the other team losing. I mean, it's so obvious, but it is still important to say that it's a kind of story about capitalism. But this other thing of these gatherings of care and people working things out is a story of how do we share our shit? How do we practice working things out? How do we come together to think this through?

HAYES: Right, right. There is care and then also resources or lack of resources. I think what I also learned from these players is that it's a grind to get to the field. As adults, it is exponentially harder to carve out time and space and resources to play football. And that they and their sport move against the grain, as one of them described it, also means that they're constantly battling, for sponsorship, resources, access to good fields—all of the things that would make it easier to do what they're doing. And so, I don't want to call it care because it's something else, but the impact of resources on any given player or given team's ability to inhabit this space or the sport or this activity is huge. The resources are totally critical and yet the care occurs in spite of the absence of resources.

GAY: Yeah, resources do one thing, but they don't make care possible. I mean, resources can be put to care of course, but the care is the resource.

HAYES: For women tackle football players, there is no opportunity to play at an elite level outside a pay-to-play system. They pay players' fees, buy or borrow their own gear, have to participate in team fundraising and, of course, have to have health insurance! They can't play without health insurance.

And you would think, well of course, but health insurance is unfortunately difficult and expensive to secure in our country. So there's something about capitalism and the pressure it puts on sports at all of these levels that is a huge and looming factor. I felt it really strongly. But also what you're talking about is that this sort of massive force keeps trying to squeeze out room and squeeze out care. I don't want to make it so oppositional. But for these women trying to do what they love doing and trying to excel and be powerful, these obstacles matter.

GAY: I think it is a good way of putting it: to squeeze out the care, to squeeze out capacity for care. And despite that, it's going to happen. In all the intricacies that I'm not even thinking of, just the way the capital itself is impeding the possibility to get on a fucking field. Capitalism mixed with, you know, sexism mixed with racism mixed with . . .

HAYES: Homophobia.

GAY: Homophobia, right.

HAYES: As you were talking I was thinking about capacities to see the seams or to hear from the seams. And I was thinking about how in your work you sometimes unfold or go into those seams. And language and poetry have a certain capacity to stretch out time or to see something up close that otherwise isn't recognizable from the outside. Forms of representation can contain or carry super violent operations, but they also have the capacities to resist that violence and to allow for something else.

GAY: Yeah, I love in your piece the moments of quiet and looking. They are so beautiful to me and are actually a point

of contact. That's one of the things I think too about teams. The best thing for the team or the play is that they can hold a quiet, they're the kind of quiet that could be held. And certain kinds of representation don't want to hold a quiet, because inside the quiet is all of this shit that we can't predict. But you can feel it. (Laughs)

MÓNICA RODRÍGUEZ

By Mónica Rodríguez and Pablo Guardiola

Monica Rodríguez's project for Commonwealth is an extension of a larger project, Antilles for the Antilleans in which she revisits the work of the Puerto Rican independence advocate Ramón Emeterio Betances (1827–1898), who fought colonial rule, opposed slavery, and remains a key figure for those contesting US power over Puerto Rico. Betances called for an Antillean Federation to support and connect people across the Caribbean, and Rodríguez asks whether such a federation might be possible now.

Antilles for the Antilleans links 19th-century independence movements in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Puerto Rico to our present moment. The ICA installation also brought this larger project into dialogue with Confederate monuments that have recently been removed in Richmond and elsewhere—but unlike those statues, the monuments Rodríguez depicts in the digitally-printed mural that runs along the ICA's façade were meant to uplift the people and fight oppression. Under these images runs a text in English and Spanish: "Today the revolution proceeds, like a volcanic eruption, from the social strata that forms the very core of the people." This quote—in both the original Spanish and an English

translation—comes from a letter Betances wrote in 1892. It is relevant not only to the Caribbean but also to Richmond and Philadelphia, not only to his time but to ours

– The Editors

Volcanic Eruptions

By Mónica Rodríguez and Pablo Guardiola

Unique and Eventful: The History of the People of Haiti!

It is not surprising that Ramón Emeterio Betances was extremely enthusiastic about the Haitian Revolution. It is actually the great modern revolution, but we know very well why it has been overshadowed by the French and "American" revolutions.

A dark-skinned doctor, abolitionist, Freemason, and revolutionary, Betances held an ideal of emancipation that was independent and federative. In Puerto Rico he already feels like an anachronistic figure, but in different ways he is always present. He tried to start a revolution against Spanish rule in Puerto Rico. He died in France and was buried in Père Lachaise. His remains were transferred to Puerto Rico in 1920.

For Betances, annexationism, the movement that seeks to complete annexation to the US, was out of the question.

As José Martí stated, **"Cuba must be free: from Spain and from the United States."**

For Betances, Cuba and Puerto Rico needed to be free: from Spain and from the United States.

In fall 2020, Mitch McConnell, leader of the Republican majority in the US Senate, also ruled that annexationism is out of the question in the case of Puerto Rico.

The annexationists in Puerto Rico held a Yes or No referendum on statehood on November 3, 2020. Jenniffer González (Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico in Washington, who is pro-statehood, a Republican, and a supporter of Donald Trump) does not know how to manipulate the snub caused by McConnell's rejection.

McConnell Valdés is a firm of lawyers with very close ties to annexationist politicians. It has nothing to do with Mitch McConnell.

TODAY THE REVOLUTION PROCEEDS LIKE A VOLCANIC ERUPTION, FROM THE SOCIAL STRATA THAT FORMS THE VERY CORE OF THE PEOPLE. CUBA AND PUERTO RICO WILL BE INDEPENDENT, GREAT, AND HAPPY.

In the summer of 2019, the Puerto Rican people forced, through massive protests, the resignation of Governor Ricardo Rosselló Nevares (an annexationist). The catalyst was the publication of 889 pages of a Telegram chat. The chat explicitly states how the governor and his closest collaborators really thought and acted, putting their personal and partisan

interests above the problems and afflictions of a country immersed in a sequence of crises. There is no concrete evidence of corruption in the chat, but in it we can see how the corrupt think and operate. The chat was the spark for the demonstrations—equal in size only to the demonstrations twenty years ago against the US Navy's presence in Vieques—that were actually rooted in accumulated bad governance practices. Hurricanes Irma and María exposed, in an absurdly explicit way, how ineptitude and corruption were the course of action of the Rosselló Nevares administration. In the summer of 2019, it was very clear. The "volcanic eruption" was irreverent because any respect for the government was lost. In the long run, it is going to be a good thing. Another characteristic of that eruption was that, just like Vieques, a catalyst suddenly causes the people to rise from their colonial marasmus. This has not been studied yet, but it is a very special phenomenon. However, it must also be made clear that the protesters **had many qualities, but they were not really revolutionaries.**

The torrent passes by; and all their sorrows turn to untamed courage and impetuous hopes; and they are thrown into the tumultuous waves; and the furious tide shakes them and drags them, prostrates them and encourages them, brings them together or disperses them, sometimes submerging them and sometimes raising them, until they are placed forever in the immortal gallery, on the eternal pedestal of the liberators of Humanity.

Alejo Carpentier, in the introduction to his novel *The Kingdom of This World*, describes the context of Haiti as one immersed in what has been named a marvelous reality.

Commonly, it is argued that the real and the imaginary in Haiti have the same weight. This assertion recurs in multiple chronicles and newspaper articles about our Caribbean neighbor.

"The Antilles for the Antilleans" is a quote by Ramón Emeterio Betances, which Mónica Rodríguez appropriates both as a title and as a theoretical and ideological framework for a long-term artistic project. In this specific case, it refers to a series of large-scale digital images of emancipatory monuments from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Cuba. These monuments celebrate the independence, greatness, and happiness that freedom brings, or, in the case of Puerto Rico, the possibility of it. Like any monument with canonic 19th-century aesthetics and aspirations, they are full of contradictions, but as Betances states when referring to the Haitian revolution, it should be considered that these **are the eternal pedestal of the liberators of Humanity.** Yet this project is still unfinished. Formally, its digital construction gives us the sensation of a plan or a blueprint, the guide for our emancipation.

In Haiti, something very interesting happens: their Revolution is present in everyday life. It is not a historical celebration; it is something alive and current. There, time becomes flexible, it will collapse if necessary. I think that, in part, this is what Carpentier refers to when he uses the term *marvelous reality*. For Haitians, their revolution is not over; it is a difficult and complex process; it is still developing. The revolution as a reconfiguration, as a beginning that must be continually calibrated as it unfolds.

There is a monument in Haiti, or rather, part of it, that catches people's attention. One of its components is at the Bureau d'Ethnologie in Port-au-Prince . It is a sculpture of Christopher

Columbus. The sculpture spent years on a boardwalk near what is today Cité Soleil. During the protests against Baby Doc (Jean-Claude Duvalier), the protesters threw the sculpture of Columbus into the bay. On the empty pedestal there was a piece of cardboard with the phrases "Foreigners out of Haiti" and "Viva Charlemagne Peralte," a revolutionary leader assassinated in 1919 by the Marines during the US military occupation. At the Bureau d'Ethnologie the custodians tell visitors the reason why this particular Columbus had historical value was because it had been mutilated and because of the time it spent underwater. In 1986, after being thrown into the bay, the sculpture of Columbus was rescued and placed back on its pedestal several days later, only to be thrown in again by protesters. The mayor at the time decided that it was better for it to stay underwater.

THIS TEXT IS THE RESULT OF AN EXCHANGE BETWEEN MÓNICA RODRÍGUEZ AND PABLO GUARDIOLA. SHE SENT SOME QUOTES FROM RAMÓN EMETERIO BETANCES (WHICH ARE BOLD) AND ASKED TO RESPOND FROM THE CARIBBEAN PRESENT. THIS IS A TEXT IN PROCESS.

RICHMOND REPORT

By Brian Palmer

Before the George Floyd uprisings, Richmond's Confederate monuments had seemed inviolable. On the rare occasions that someone burst their sacred bubble with a jagged, spray-painted tag, city or state officials would deploy cleaners to powerwash the grafitti away.

That protesters targeted those sites after Floyd's murder in Minneapolis wasn't surprising. But the magnitude of the assault was. With paint, hands, and—at the national headquarters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy—fire, people made their rage known.

Mob violence or citizen uprising? Defacement or refacement? Your answer may depend on what you know or don't know about who erected the statues, why they put them there, and how they did it.

More likely, your view depends on how you identify yourself and what you believe.

Confederate sites and structures are not history in themselves, so removing them does not "erase history." They do, however, tell us a lot about our past, if we care to look at them in context.

They help us understand how white citizens used intimidation, graft, and violence to claw back rights that Black citizens had

won for themselves in a gruesome civil war and during the brief period of possibility that followed. The monuments and their truth-bending inscriptions tell us a lot about how a monopoly on political power created white entitlement to public resources, some of which funded monument construction and most of which did not go to the needs of the Black community. The monuments tell us something about how a white majority maintained absolute authority through discriminatory law and either the threat or the actuality of violence. And Confederate sites and structures also help us understand the legacy of Jim Crow, that system of engineered advantage (for whites) and disadvantage (for Blacks and other POC) that's still embedded in our culture, law, and landscape.

Context. It's in the archives. It's in the newspapers of the time—the Black papers, such as the *Richmond Planet*—and in plenty of recent research, art, and oratory. It's in the persistence of residential segregation, the underfunding of Black communities, the wealth gap, the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black and brown folk, the brutality of police.

We also see it in the neglect of historic Black cemeteries like East End and Evergreen here in Richmond and the political machinations that put such sacred places in unqualified yet favored hands.

Editors of our largest local newspaper, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, tell us that once the monuments are gone, we should "put the past behind us and focus on the present and the future."[1] This is a stunningly retrograde statement in 2020, but it is perhaps not surprising for a paper that has consistently been on the trailing edge of history when it comes to Black folk. It is a call for a retreat from reality, an invitation to ignore honest African American testimony about these toxic objects—from *Planet* editor John Mitchell Jr., a man born into slavery, who in 1890 opposed the first monument on the Avenue, to Black Lives Matter. It gives a green light to citizens, particularly whites, to retreat into denial because the message or the messenger—or both—offends their sensibilities. This is where the *Richmond Times Dispatch's* guidance becomes especially dangerous to those of us who can't hide behind whiteness or wealth: as a segment of the citizenry returns to its delusion, that segment will try to use its power to drag the rest of us back into that delusion. Removing statues is only the beginning of a necessary reckoning with our past.

[1] Pamela Stallsmith and Robin Beres, "Goodbye Confederate Statues," The Richmond Times Dispatch, July 21, 2020

COMMON STAKES — LOCAL PERSPECTIVES: BETA-LOCAL

By Pablo Guardiola and Michael Linares

When Beta-Local was invited to participate in the collaborative Commonwealth project, our initial response was one of alarm. We went from being alarmed to considering the offer and then deciding to actively participate in it.

To begin with, the concept of "commonwealth" means something different within the immediate geopolitical context of Beta-Local, which is Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. Its local meaning is not the same as in Pennsylvania and Virginia. In plain English, "commonwealth" refers to the legal definition of Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States. The term is only used in the USA. This concept, or legal statute, in Puerto Rican Spanish is called *Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico* (ELA), roughly translated as the Free Associated State of Puerto Rico. Since 1952, our "commonwealth" has been a kind of smoke screen designed during the Cold War to evade a concrete reality: Puerto Rico is a colony of the United States. Today it is an anachronistic status that still applies out of sheer inertia. Even the claims of its injustices and failures are anachronistic. Is there someone who still believes today, in the 21st century, in emancipation struggles within the hyper neo-liberal global paradigm? When it comes to decolonial practices, in Puerto Rico we're still dealing with the basics. To sum up, in English Puerto Rico is considered an "Unincorporated Organized Territory with Commonwealth Status," in Spanish it is the *Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico*. In the Caribbean West Indies, it also means something else. But this should be discussed elsewhere.

The ELA was presented at the time as a promise of modernity. For many, it was and continues to be (consciously or unconsciously) the only possible modernity for the island. Like many other political projects from the middle of the last century, it ended up being a failure. It was a fallacy, developed in part by exclusion. It was argued from the beginning that human rights were equal to acquisition rights, not common goods. The social mobility of some was possible thanks to the disappearance of others. A clear example of this has been the massive (and in some cases, forced) migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States (first to Hawaii and New York, and in present times to states like Florida and Texas, among others) and to other territories (for example, St. Croix). Puerto Rican migration has been a cyclical phenomenon, and it continues exponentially today. It becomes impossible to articulate an autonomous voice from Puerto Rico; it will always be conditioned by our unilateral relationship with the United States.

For Beta-Local, participating in this project presents the possibility of operating within a system of non-unilateral relations with the United States. The organization's relationship with the USA is a zig zag. Within that situation, it is necessary to find opportunities to interact from other

latitudes, generating autonomous and horizontal pockets of action, in direct relationships (sometimes difficult and complex) with collaborators, both here and there, locally and abroad, expanding the possibilities of that zig zag.

COMMON STAKES — LOCAL PERSPECTIVES: INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART AT VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

By Noah Simblist and Stephanie Smith

For the ICA, *Commonwealth* brings up a number of important issues. First, the notion of "the commons" is one that the ICA is centered on. It has promised to be a common space for multiple communities within Virginia Commonwealth University and the city of Richmond. Second, the notion of "wealth" is something that neither the museum nor the university define exclusively in monetary terms, instead advocating for value in terms of culturally or educationally enriching experiences. At the same time, the ICA and VCU acknowledge that actual capital has real material effects on our institutions despite their lofty goals.

The university is a particular context for the ICA. It promises to be a space for discourse and knowledge but is also a major force of development. As a result VCU is an active agent in the complexity of class and race in the city of Richmond. To develop this project we taught an undergraduate seminar on the topic of Commonwealth in spring 2019. This course was a space for the curators to collaborate with students in an early phase of research for the project and to hone in on the key concepts of the project. We read historical and theoretical texts ranging from the 1776 *Virginia Declaration of Rights* to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's 2009 book *Commonwealth*. Other texts included Silvia Federici's "Feminism and the Politics of the Commons" and Taylor Keeanga-Yamahtta's book *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective.*

But the context of this class, and the university itself, is the city in which it was held. Histories of class- and race-based divisions are inscribed in the city of Richmond itself, as are histories of resistance, resilience, and coalition. Richmond was the capital of the Confederacy, as evidenced by Monument Avenue and other traces of its racist past. But it also was a foundational site of the American Revolution and the beginnings of American democracy. As a way to extend study to the public, the ICA presented *Summer Sessions: Commonwealth*, an extensive public research and discussion series that considered the ideas of Commonwealth in relation to Richmond. It was developed in partnership with local activists and artists, several of whom we went on to commission (Duron Chavis as well as Quilian Riano of DSGN AGNC,, Alicia Díaz, and The Conciliation Project, and program partner Rebecca Keel of Southerners on New Ground). *Summer Sessions: Commonwealth* was organized into thematic segments that included Natural Resources, Built Environment, Dependence + Independence, Assembly, and Public Domain. These sessions included lectures, workshops, performances, and field trips. The project was designed by DSGN AGNC + Fundacíon Horizontal + El Equipo Mazzanti, as a flexible discursive space that allowed for multiple forms of education and engagement. Significantly, it was sited in the first floor gallery of the ICA, the same site where the exhibition of the commissioned works were found in fall 2020.

COMMON STAKES — LOCAL PERSPECTIVES: PHILADELPHIA CONTEMPORARY

By Kerry Bickford and Nicole Pollard

Philadelphia Contemporary was founded in 2016 on the principle that partnerships across the city of Philadelphia and beyond it would strengthen and enrich its curatorial program. Since that time, we have continued to explore the potential of partnerships to disrupt the power dynamics of cultural institutions, using our programs as opportunities to cede and share power with cultural producers across the city and around the world. *Commonwealth* has been an important opportunity for us to enact these values, particularly in how we build trust with local communities and hold ourselves accountable to their input. Philadelphia Contemporary is currently in the early stages of conceiving and designing a permanent museum building centered around these principles of partnership. The lessons we learn from our work on *Commonwealth* will guide the shape of our institution as we transition into a more permanent home.

In early 2019, Philadelphia Contemporary moved into The Bank at the intersection of Lancaster and Powelton Avenues in West Philadelphia, a former branch of the United Bank of Philadelphia that was transformed into a local arts and community center in 2017. The renovation of The Bank was part of a larger push by institutional and residential stakeholders to create spaces to address how decades of gentrification and urban renewal had displaced families and communities and drastically altered the character of the neighborhoods that had once made up Philadelphia's Black Bottom. The stakes and inadequacies of our "commonwealth," and the role of community organizing and local historians in creating new possibilities for sharing local wealth more equitably, could not have been clearer. Philadelphia Contemporary's manifestation of the *Commonwealth* project was developed out of our dialogues with these histories, communities, and geographies.

For us, the term "commonwealth" is meant to identify both a set of values and a set of processes by which we can gather and mobilize the input of community stakeholders. Throughout the process of developing *Commonwealth*, we have worked to foster relationships between our cultural institution and the residents and stakeholders of the West Philadelphia neighborhoods of Mantua, Powelton Village, West Powelton, Mill Creek and Belmont, not only for the short term, but for many years to come. Philadelphia Contemporary formed a Community Council to inform various aspects of the local manifestation of the project, and also to set a precedent for a more collaborative, civically engaged program in the future. The council members have met monthly from August 2019 to October 2020 and have served as ambassadors to their communities in gathering and providing important insights on the neighborhood's history and current needs and interests. They have helped to develop light-pole banners along lower

Lancaster Avenue and direct a substantial regranting initiative in which funds from the William Penn Foundation were distributed to support a number of local organizations in West Philadelphia: Al Bustan Seeds of Culture, Neighborhood Bike Works, Scribe Video Center, Spiral Q, the Tiberino Museum, and Tiny WPA.

Our hope is that we can continue to learn from our work on *Commonwealth*, using this community guidance to inform how we can continue to invite civic participation from the multitude of neighborhoods and communities within the city of Philadelphia in ways that help to plan, direct and shape our future programs. The processes of "common wealth" have also guided our efforts to share resources with cultural organizations in these neighborhoods, and to seek to learn from forms of mutual aid that these communities have developed and maintained.

ISSUE 2

ISSUE TWO EDITORIAL NOTE

By The Editors
Publication Date: 12/18/2020

This issue of the *Commonwealth* digital publication raises and continues many of the core questions that have animated our conversations about the project from its beginning: how do we begin to define "commonwealth"? How do we acknowledge the historic inequities of our commonwealths without being bound by them as we pursue more equitable futures? When do we reform our systems, and when do we create new, alternate models for pursuing the common good?

To add to the range of lenses on and approaches to these questions, we solicited—in addition to *Commonwealth's* artistic commissions—journalistic reports, historical case studies, and scholarly essays and dialogues from writers in all three of our commonwealths. Like the artworks, these writings approach the central themes of common wealth, common debt, and the productive tensions that arise in the pursuit of common good from a wide spectrum of methodologies and social contexts. The writings in this issue also speak to the range of methods used to create space for common good and collectively held wealth, encompassing activism, mutual aid, and community organizing. Sometimes these collectives pursued goals of developing separate, self-determined spaces and models outside of those of their predominant capitalist and political systems, and sometimes they demanded reforms from within them.

Our hope is to share these narratives as pieces of a larger methodology of questioning, soliciting new perspectives, and respecting differences in positions and context.

This second issue of the publication features three contextualizing contributions from artists who participated in *Commonwealth*: Firelei Báez, Alicia Díaz (with poems by Patricia Herrera), and Nelson Rivera (written by nibia pastrana santiago). This issue also includes two historical case studies: one by Kalela Williams on the founding of the Black-owned United Bank of Philadelphia and one from Mabel Rodríguez Centeno on writer and singer-songwriter Rita Indiana's new album, *Mandinga Times*; its accompanying video, *After School*; and their many resonant intersections with Puerto Rico's queer, decolonial histories. This issue's journalist report by Sojourner Ahebee centers on the mutual aid networks that have developed across the West Philadelphia Promise Zone neighborhoods during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. An essay by anthropologist Yarimar Bonilla reflects on the social and political ramifications of Puerto Rico's recent history of compounding crises. A new comic strip by Jimena Lloreda is also included.

Finally, the conceptual tools first presented in Issue #1 have been transformed into an online game, allowing visitors to group and recombine them. Our hope is that these tools will serve as prompts for further dialogue and new perspectives on the central questions of this project.

FIRELEI BÁEZ

By Firelei Báez, Kerry Bickford and Stephanie Smith

Firelei Báez often takes historical documents as a starting point to imagine future interpretations and possibilities for the sites they depict. For *Commonwealth*, Báez created two new works that overlay historical maps from Philadelphia and Richmond with powerful new imagery, the works presented at billboard scale outside the Community Education Center on Lancaster Avenue in Philadelphia and on the exterior wall of the Institute for Contemporary Art's building in Richmond. The Philadelphia commission, *The Source of Self Regard (movements reimagined)*, draws inspiration from Philadelphia's history of Black liberation movements as well as from the histories of resistance and anti-gentrification activism in the city's Black Bottom neighborhood. Báez superimposes a West Philadelphia atlas plate with symbolic images of protest and protection drawn from across the Global South, including the figure of a "stone-thrower" and a *figa*, a charm carved from jet stone into the form of a fist that is worn to ward off evil. The Richmond work, *Moon minded the sun goes farther (to the Daughters of Revolution, who could fly between the Artibonite and the James River*, centers women as agents of revolutionary change, as diasporic travelers, as healers. Yemoja, an African and Brazilian ocean deity, looks over images of protest that in turn rest on a map of Richmond. Báez's title links the city's location on the James River to the Artibonite River in the Dominican Republic, invoking waters that connected Richmond, the Caribbean, and Africa during periods of colonization and enslavement. For both cities, Báez drew from symbolism connected to the past t o assert a vibrant, change-making presence, an animating energy that emanates outward from the underlying place.

– The Editors

Kerry Bickford and Stephanie Smith in conversation with Firelei Báez

For Commonwealth, you created two site-specific billboard projects, one for Richmond and one for Philadelphia. In each case, you built up imagery on a foundation of historical maps of these cities. Why did you select these maps?

I'm interested in looking at the past as a part of the present—how certain cycles repeat. We are all tethered to unresolved histories that still determine current actions within particular spaces. Like time capsules, these maps reveal cultural mindsets and values. The map used for the Richmond billboard is from 1873, and the map of Philadelphia is from 1872. They reflect individual and collective modes of organizing space during the same historical moment, which laid the groundwork for how those spaces are experienced today. In my research for this

project I was interested in the ways that conceptions of place and community have reflected and reinforced social relations conditioned by gender, race, and class—and most specifically, how those social relations are linked to violence on one hand, or, on the other hand, acts of revolution or cultivating spaces for healing.

What were you looking for as you reviewed images of each city? How did you respond to that historical content within these new works?

I was looking for maps that conveyed histories of corrosive culture or actions within each space so that I could engage with collective counterefforts to those things. My goal for this project was to acknowledge both the violent erasure and proactive recalibration that happens in each of these sites. For example, I was interested in peoples' responses to the displacement in the Black Bottom neighborhood of Philadelphia and histories of state violence within West Philadelphia in a broader sense. In Richmond, as another example, the site of Lumpkin's Slave Jail Site Devil's Half Acre is being made into a museum. In response to these narratives, recalibration is required again and again. In these works I wanted to explore how efforts for self-determination and healing in these spaces were either met with further violence or erasure—and to reaffirm, to reify, gestures of recuperation and self-definition.

What elements of the history of the Lancaster Ave corridor, and West Philadelphia more broadly, did you focus on in particular as you developed this work?

I was interested in looking at the individual histories of these neighborhoods—incidents such the bombing of the MOVE house or displacement in Black Bottom, for example—as intrinsically linked and interconnected with broader concerns related to race and climate. The disregard for Black life, freedom, and independence ties these historic events together. Still today, the actions of the MOVE house towards anti-capitalist and environmentally equitable and sustainable practices are seen with a much gentler lens when enacted by white practitioners, much like the war on drugs and vilification of marijuana.

The location of the billboard in Philadelphia, and the broader area encompassed by the map, are sites of cross-cultural Black liberation, and also healing. Philadelphia is such a critical site for Black interconnection, especially with the broader Black diaspora.

Could you expand on your insertion of a cityscape from the Global South into the Philadelphia work?

The cityscape is meant as a signifier for all the provisional housing forced upon people living on the edges of capitalist states. The imagery being thrown by the figure is a mashup of *favelas* and shantytowns from different sites in the Global South that often bear the weight of environmental and economic disasters caused elsewhere—the things you make out of what's left, stemming out of the capitalist turnover. The figure's gesture is an unequivocal rejection of these terms.

Why did you select Yemoja, an Afro-diasporic Yoruba water deity, as the central image in the Richmond work?

In both of these works, and Richmond in particular, I am thinking of water—the ocean, or possibly the river—as a space of cleansing and also of despair. How do you find hope within those parameters? I immediately thought of Yemoja, who is the ocean, the beginning of life. She creates a restorative space for healing given the violent relationship the Atlantic Ocean connotes for many of us descendants of the Middle Passage, who continually find life and refuge within inhospitable places.

Caribbean poets and theorists like Edouard Glissant have conceptualized the sea as a connective, generative space. A space to exist in relation rather than isolation. The ocean is a connector and a repository of physical memory. Afro-diasporic vernacular cultures in the American South and Caribbean have rich stories of ancestors who were able to gain agency, to escape, to traverse vast spaces towards freedom through their special relationship to water. The spirituals, the myths of flying Africans (who mutinously chose to walk into the wild ocean upon reaching the new world) are gifts of strength from our ancestors to new generations. Young writers like Ta-Nehisi Coates and Quincy Flowers remind us through their fresh retellings: We are linked to revolution and a history of protests. Linked by waters that heal and activate something new in us.

You laid the water imagery over a collage of images sourced from various moments of protest (which in turn overlay a historical map of Richmond). Can you talk us through some of those historical and contemporary protests?

This piece is an homage: a celebration of the lineage of pivotal revolutionary women whose role has been silenced by

normative history but who are vital to our every step towards freedom. At the right of the painting is a detail of a recent gathering of congresswomen celebrating the anniversary of the right to vote for women in the United States, paired with archival images of the Black and white suffragists who valiantly fought for that right. For 50 years, this suffrage was exclusively for white women. Only after the civil rights movement did Black women finally gain access to the vote. Black women are always in the frontlines for civic freedom despite histories of exclusion. In the lines of the poet Gwendolyn Brooks I would like this work to be a celebration, a gentle reminder that "we are each other's magnitude and bond."

I also want to acknowledge the support of Bernita Randolph, an ICA intern from VCU's history department who identified the map image for me. Bernita is so inspiring. Her enthusiasm and love of research and of her city were a joy. Her deep understanding of the culture and history of Richmond allowed me to address the site with far more complexity than I could have from the outside.

Why did you decide to incorporate images of protest in this work, at this site, in our current moment?

Richmond has been activated and proactive to current protest movements, re-evaluating legacies—in a sense creating, in John Lewis's terms, "good trouble." In particular, the city has been having a lot of youth protests and, unlike Detroit, this has been well received by city politicians. The city of Richmond has been relatively more receptive to having institutional change because of the protest or as an extension of it—to the effect of the city itself recently shifting blue due to youth involvement.

The images I incorporated into this work are of this current youth protest spliced with historic voting protests in the region, from past to present: the Freedom Riders walking for the vote, suffragettes walking for the vote, the 100-year anniversary of the women's vote and women in Congress celebrating that moment.

How are these two works linked? Do you see them as connected, as a dispersed pair? Could you expand on your use of water as a shared motif in both of these works?

Both sites are near water and I wanted to bring this element to both compositions. It is a signifier for both horrific loss and painful histories but also for healing, of life, of potential, syncretized. The baptismal waters in Christianity and the Yoruba force of Yemoja. The two works are related in the sense that they are coming from this same movement toward self-definition and healing, and that's why there is a link to the water—that they reflect this making of something good out of something awful.

What does "common wealth" and/or "common debt" mean to you?

To quote Gwendolyn Brooks again, "we are each other's magnitude and bond." That's the goal of a commonwealth. To not just share physical goods but also each other's goodwill. The success of the commonwealth is predicated by how much we are willing to give.

ALICIA DÍAZ

By Alicia Díaz and Patricia Herrera

Dancer and choreographer Alicia Díaz evokes both history and ritual in her work for *Commonwealth*, which centers on a performance filmed in Richmond at the former site of The American Tobacco Company (ATC) factory. Díaz was interested in the relationship between the tobacco industry in Virginia and Puerto Rico and the ways that both were tied to power and resistance. For centuries, Virginia's economy was rooted in both tobacco and the labor of enslaved people that supported it. In the late 19th century, even though slavery had been abolished, Jim Crow laws were in effect and as a result the ATC factory segregated Black and White women workers. In 1898, as a result of the Spanish American War, the US occupied Puerto Rico, making it possible for the ATC to take over its tobacco industry. Thus narratives of the African Diaspora, capitalism, and colonialism become intertwined. The characters portrayed in the film are inspired by labor organizers: the Puerto Rican feminist Luisa Capetillo (1879–1922) and the Afro-Puerto Rican nationalist leader Dominga de la Cruz (1909–1981). At the ICA, the video was presented within an installation that interwove these histories of resistance with contemporary activism. Both the

installation and the film's mise en scène reference Puerto Rico's strong tradition of ritual, which can be found throughout the Caribbean.

– The Editors

ENTRE PUERTO RICO Y RICHMOND: BRIDGING STORIES OF RESISTANCE

Alicia Díaz and Patricia Herrera, with Bio Poems by Patricia Herrera

In the aftermath of the Spanish American War of 1898, Puerto Rico became a "possession of the United States." Established in 1952, the current name—the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico—is an attempt to conceal the United States as a colonial power over Puerto Rico. Although geographically distant, Puerto Rico and Richmond, Virginia, share interrelated histories of racism and exploitation, especially through the tobacco industry.

The American Tobacco Company (ATC) was founded in 1890 by J. B. Duke (for whom Duke University was named) in a merger with several other cigarette manufacturers, including the company belonging to Lewis Ginter (for whom the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden was named). ATC operated a factory in Richmond where both Black and white women worked in segregated facilities. When the US occupied Puerto Rico in 1898, the ATC took over the tobacco industry and leaf market on the island, pushing the transition from artisanal shops to capitalist factory production. This transition led to a rising working-class consciousness, mass migrations to the US, and recurrent confrontations between organized labor and factory owners.

The dance film on view in this online publication, *Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond: Women in Resistance Shall Not Be Moved*, brings forward these deeply connected stories. Evoking history and ritual, the film honors a lineage of resistance against US colonial capitalism through the activism of Afro-Puerto Rican radical nationalist leader Dominga de la Cruz Becerril (1909–1981) and white Puerto Rican anarchist, labor organizer, and feminist writer Luisa Capetillo (1879–1922). Both were hired as *lectoras*, readers in tobacco factories where they read classic literature and union newspapers out loud to the workers. This tradition of tobacco factory readers in the Caribbean and parts of the United States played a role in raising political consciousness amongst workers and informed protests demanding better working conditions. Luisa became an important labor organizer in Puerto Rico, New York, and Tampa, FL.. Dominga joined Puerto Rico's Nationalist Party and played a significant role in the struggle for Puerto Rico's independence.

DOMINGA DE LA CRUZ BECERRIL (1909–1981)

Soy Dominga
Dominga de la Cruz Becerril
An Afro-Puerto Rican woman
Nacionalista, activista
Lectora de tabaquería
Rebelde, atrevida, luchadora
Daughter of manual workers Domingo Clarillo de la Cruz y Catalina Becerril

Amo mi patria
I love poetry
La batalla de resistencia vive en mi

My body is tired
Pero me gusta moverme con fuerza y alegría, como en los bailes de bomba en Mayagüez

Trabajaba hasta la medianoche a la luz de una lámpara de aceite y aún así no ganaba lo suficiente para cubrir nuestras necesidades básicas.
My daughters starved to death.

En la tabaquería
I learned about el Asalto al Capitolio
The US legislation was co-opting our Puerto Rican flag for the official colonial symbol
Entonces el pueblo se metió en el Capitolio
And 18-year old nationalist Manuel Rafael Suárez Díaz was killed defending the dignity of our flag.

Al aprender ésto yo tenía que hacer lo mismo
I became líder del Partido Nacionalista junto a Pedro Albizu Campos
I protect the freedom of my people
Lucho por la igualdad de la mujer en el Partido

La Masacre de Ponce
Los vi
Tendidos a mis pies a todos mis compañeros
Con sus vientres abiertos
March 21, 1937
I dodged bullets to rescue the Puerto Rican flag splattered in blood

Era terrible, luchar contra un imperio que tenía toda la fuerza en su favor.
Thank you to the twelve-year-old boy who gave me flowers many years later.
"¡Toma estas flores, Dominga, porque a tus hijos te los mataron en Ponce!"
And I was reawakened!

Dominga reimagined the role of women in the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party. She survived the 1937 Ponce Massacre, in which a peaceful march commemorating the end of slavery in Puerto Rico and protesting the imprisonment of Nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos by the US government was attacked by the police. After being politically persecuted, Dominga relocated first to Mexico and later to Cuba, where she continued to fight for the independence of Puerto Rico.

LUISA CAPETILLO (1879–1922)

Luisa Capetillo was arrested for wearing pants in public.

Soy Luisa
Luisa Capetillo
Feminista, escritora
Labor union activist
Fearless leader
Lectora de tabaquería
Creyente del anarco-comunismo
Daughter of labor workers Luisa Margarita Perone, a Corsican domestic worker, and Luis Capetillo Echevarría, from the Basque country of Spain.

Amo la madre tierra y la naturaleza eterna
Defiendo la autonomía e igualdad de las mujeres
Creo en el amor libre

The US invades Puerto Rico
July 25th, 1898
I was twenty years old
A witness of colonial power

Tengo en mi corazón a mis hijos y lo que significa ser madre

Lucho por la emancipación de las mujeres
Lucho por los derechos de los trabajadores
Lucho por la educación for all people regardless of sex.

Vivo mi visión

Desafío las tradiciones sociales
Me arrestaron por usar pantalones en público
Eso fue 1912 y otra vez en 1915
No temo nada

He logrado mucho
I was amongst the leaders who organized the Sugar Strike of 1916, one of the largest strikes in Puerto Rico's history.
More than 40,000 sugar industrial workers protested for five months.
I opened a vegetarian restaurant, a place for anarchists and socialists to convene and dialogue
Viajo a New York, Ybor City, Tampa, La Habana, and the Dominican Republic donde participé en political rallies and strikes.

"This planet belongs to all of us and is not the privilege of only a few. Why are there so many injustices?"
I organized workers until my death from tuberculosis on October 10, 1922.

Luisa was a prolific writer and a playwright. She denounced the exploitation of workers and women in the capitalist system and envisioned a more just and equitable world. She is recognized as the author of one of the earliest feminist treatises in Puerto Rico, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

BLACK FEMALE TOBACCO STEMMERS AT THE AMERICAN TOBACCO COMPANY

Underlining interrelated histories of Puerto Rico and Richmond, the film *Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond* was shot on location at the American Tobacco Company in the Southside of Richmond in one of the company's last remaining warehouses before it was torn down to build a mixed-income housing complex. As the physical space disappears, we honor the spirit of resistance and liberation of Black women who worked in tobacco factories in Richmond and who organized to denounce the injustices they faced.

We are Black female tobacco stemmers
Posing in front of the American Tobacco Company
Richmond Stemmery

Sat right there at that table
De-stemming tobacco leaves by hand

Sort
We grabbed and untied a handful of tobacco leaves
Clean
Spread them flat

Stem
Pull the stem away

White female workers had cleaner jobs
They inspected and packed the tobacco
While we sorted, cleaned, and stemmed

That pungent smell of tobacco leaves
Clouds of tobacco dust coated the air
And our lungs

Made us cough
Choke
Difficult to breathe
We wore kerchiefs over our mouths and noses
And placed orange in our mouth to keep us from throwing up

Our bosses ruled with an iron fist
"If you don't catch up, you will be fired"
Without any increase in our meager pay of 15–25 cents an hour

August 1938
Over at Richmond's I.N. Vaughan Export
*Louise Harris**
A stemmer herself
Organizes sixty Black female fellow workers
Over the noise of the factory she defiantly shouts

"Strike!"
White women also walked the picket lines in support of striking tobacco workers
After 17 days on strike
factory owner conceded
They won a wage increase, an eight-hour workday and the right to unionize

Like her
We don't back down
We fight back!

*Louise "Mamma" Harris was born in 1891 in Richmond, Virginia. She was a fierce labor organizer and tobacco worker who joined the Congress of Industrial Organization and led strikes against the terrible working conditions of tobacco factories in the late 1930s.

Entre P*uerto Rico y Richmond: Women in Resistance Shall Not Be Moved* is part of a larger mixed-media installation at the Institute for Contemporary Art. This installation, *Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond: Bridging Histories of Resistance*, includes *Altares of Resistance*, honoring this lineage of activism in both Puerto Rico and Richmond, and ~~*commonwealth*~~ *colony*, an image board that offers a broad historical context of the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. Remembering and interweaving these local and global histories through these acts of commemoration, we aim to problematize the term "commonwealth" in the context of massive protests in 2020 in Richmond as well as in Puerto Rico and its diaspora.

NELSON RIVERA

By nibia pastrana santiago

For *Commonwealth*, Nelson Rivera wrote a score for a performance that occurred periodically throughout the run of the exhibition at the ICA. The script is based on speeches by Pedro Albizu Campos (1891–1965), a Puerto Rican attorney and political leader who was the main figure in the movement for Puerto Rican independence from the United States. These speeches, delivered from 1948 to 1950, were made during the US military occupation of Puerto Rico, when it had partial sovereignty and before it was designated as a commonwealth, an unincorporated territory of the United States. In 1948, the Puerto Rican Senate passed Law 53, which made it illegal to display the Puerto Rican flag and limited speech against the United States government. The speeches in Rivera's scripts violated this law by criticizing the US government and advocating for independence. Rivera has required that only nonSpanish speakers perform the score. This gesture also asks that we pay attention to the form and the musicality of political speech.

– The Editors

Another version of *Álbum de familia*: no order, no photos, just a few years

2015:
The *exhibition Sucio Díficil / Nelson Rivera: teatro, música y performance* opens at Museo de Caguas. "El sucio difícil, sácalo con Lestoil" ("For difficult dirt, use Lestoil") was the slogan of a T.V. commercial in Puerto Rico. In Nelson Rivera's words: "This title is my version of the plantain stain, that dirt never comes out, it is invincible. It was originally a pseudonym, I signed my first theater and performance pieces as "Sucio Difícil", difícil with a capital 'D', like a last name."

1970:
Antonia Martínez Lagares, a 20-year-old student from the town of Arecibo, is shot and killed by a police officer during a student strike at the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras. The students were protesting against the presence of the ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) on campus.

2008:
I was in my final year at the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras. I went to see Nelson Rivera's *El maestro* at the Arcelay Theater in Caguas. Not once, a set, lighting design, actor (Teófilo Torres), or text would move me as much. Theatre itself is political. Pedro Albizu Campos's words are current and sharp.

2012:
"...I insist on 'Puerto Rico' and not on the so-called 'Commonwealth', which is a sordid rant that not even us can recognize. For me, what defines Puerto Rican art as a national art is its absolute awareness of its greatness, the assurance of being on equal standing with all of humanity, along with a critical consciousness of our colonial status, which prevents from full recognition of that greatness. My definition is very

personal, without any pretensions." - Nelson Rivera

1953:
Nelson Rivera was born in Fajardo.

1954:
On March 1st, armed Puerto Rican nationalists Lolita Lebrón, Rafael Cancel Miranda, Irving Flores, and Andrés Figueroa entered the United States House of Representatives on Capitol Hill in Washington DC. They fired thirty shots, wounding five congressmen.

2015:
Nelson Rivera curates my first work in a museum, "taller de nada." This live workshop, at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico, lasts two weeks.

1971:
"Nothing could better justify the colonizer's privileged position than his industry, and nothing could better justify the colonized destitution than his indolence. The mythical portrait of the colonized therefore includes an unbelievable laziness, and that of the colonizer, a virtuous taste for action."
- Albert Memmi

2000:
The United States Navy, the FBI, the Puerto Rico Police Task Force, and federal marshals forcibly remove people doing civil disobedience in Vieques, destroying the camps, schools, and chapels built inside the firing range. They brutally arrest 200 civilians, releasing them ten hours later.

2010:
Nelson Rivera's "Sin título: piezas de teatro experimental para un grupo de actores" (Untitled: Experimental Plays for a Group of Actors) premieres at the Victoria Espinosa Theater in Santurce. From one of the scores: "The entire cast dances a merengue choreography. In complete silence."

1993:
Visual artist Elizam Escobar completes 13 years in prison, out of a 68-year sentence imposed on him as a penalty for his alleged participation in the Frente Armado de Liberación Nacional (FALN/Armed Front for National Liberation).

1933:
Pedro Albizu Campus successfully led a strike against Puerto Rico Railway and Light and Power Company, the companies that held the island's electricity monopoly.

1980:
On February 6th, Adolfina Villanueva Osorio, 34-years old and mother of six children, was murdered by a Puerto Rican police officer. State forces wanted to evict her family from their house and land in Medianía Alta in Loíza.

1991:
Nelson Rivera creates *Álbum de Familia* for a single performer: "A desk, a performer with his back to the audience. A microphone. A slide projector. The performer reads a text (per year) about the history of political repression in his country while projecting a photo corresponding to that year. Slides: in chronological order, his family photos. The performer must add a personal commentary at the end of the sequence of photos and text."

1891:
Pedro Albizu Campos was born in Ponce.

2016:
Nelson Rivera and I performed together for the first time. The piece was titled "Danza Actual." The improvisation score had a choreographic sequence of simultaneous gestures, which we did sitting on a bench. The choreography, which lasted exactly one minute, took us about 4 hours of rehearsal. We presented it at the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras.

1987:
"Art is not a deception of reality, it is not a lack of courage, given the weight of lurking circumstances. Also, we must be ready to support with facts what we so beautifully say; there is no worse misery than continually talking about the value of spirit if we do not feel at the same time the militancy of the common good. Hypocrisy is exhausting already."
- Francisco Matos Paoli

2006:
30 years have passed since the murder of Santiago Mari Pesquera, son of Juan Mari Bras. The FBI has not yet provided documentation to clarify the murder and its cover-up.

2012:
"I firmly believe that all Puerto Rican art is a forceful demonstration of the injustice of our colonial relationship and, as such, the metropolis has to deny it. José Campeche was already painting in San Juan when the United States of America did not yet exist and, however, when in 1997 there was an exhibition in Washington D.C., the Yankees had the insolence of presenting him as 'one of our own.'" - Nelson Rivera

2002:
Professor José Solís Jordán was transferred to the Guaynabo federal prison from the United States, convicted for placing a bomb in front of an Army recruitment center in Chicago. Agent Rafael Marrero testified at his trial, admitting to having placed the bomb and receiving $119,000 from the FBI in exchange for immunity for his testimony.

2015:
I started teaching classes at the university. My students in the choreographic composition class read Nelson Rivera's text "¿Y qué es eso de arte experimental?" ("But what's that thing called experimental art?"/1997). I quote: "Myth 11: We cannot compare Puerto Rican experimentalists with true artists like Eva Hesse and Joseph Beuys" Bendito...! If Eva Hesse had been born in Puerto Rico, no one would know about her. Imagine what people would say if an artist exhibited lard spread on the corners of a gallery and blood sausages in glass urns, huh? In Puerto Rico, we don't even have access to the art of the masters (we haven't seen Oller's "French Landscapes" for centuries)."

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"THE PANDEMIC IS MAKING IT HARDER BUT IT'S ABOUT LIVING": MUTUAL AID IN WEST PHILADELPHIA'S PROMISE ZONE

By Sojourner Ahebee

On a brisk October morning Shante McLaughlin stood outside the former United Bank building at 37th and Lancaster in Philadelphia. Wearing a rainbow-colored face mask, she waited under the shelter of her large umbrella as the rain crashed down on the street, turning the long expanse of avenue to a dark grey. With the COVID-19 pandemic in full swing, she's one of the many home health aides who risk their lives each day to care for some of the most vulnerable communities. And on Thursdays she and her elderly client make the trip to lower Lancaster Avenue to pick up fresh produce from the local emergency food hub.

They come with a mission.

"My client is a reverend," said McLaughlin. "She finds out all the places where they're giving out food and she'll come

get food and . . . we give it away to people that's on our block that can't get out, that can't get nowhere, and we give it to them."

Residents of West Philadelphia's Belmont neighborhood, McLaughlin and her client are a small yet mighty piece of the expansive mutual aid network keeping West Philadelphia afloat. As the pandemic moved through the city in late March, many lost their jobs, their ability to work. And the simple task of going to the supermarket quickly became a health hazard for those with already compromised immune systems.

James Wright, 39, is the director of Community and Economic Development at the People's Emergency Center (PEC), a West Philadelphia–based corporation working to respond to the needs of locals through affordable housing, food relief, homeless prevention, and a host of dynamic, year-round services aimed at protecting and nurturing a transforming community.

PEC is headquartered in the West Philadelphia Promise Zone, an Obama-administration designation meant to describe neighborhoods that have significant needs but also incredible assets like active civic groups, access to a plethora of public transport, and close proximity to thriving businesses and employers.

Wright says prior to the pandemic, his organization ran the emergency food cupboard from within one of PEC's transitional housing complexes. "But we didn't want outsiders coming in because we had residents living there," said Wright. "So we turned the bank building into our emergency food hub."

"The summertime was a time of plenty"

Food banks have had to shift how they serve their communities

while adhering to social distancing mandates. Since March, food has been stored within the bank building, but all food dissemination happens outside in the adjoining lot where wooden picnic tables and brightly-colored concrete tiles adorn the pavement.

Food distribution is scheduled for 10 in the morning but residents begin lining up as early as 8:30. Open only once a week, there is a real incentive to be ahead of schedule because once the food runs out, residents won't be able to take advantage of the food cupboard until the following week.

Wright says the beginning of the pandemic brought a lot of bounty to food relief programs and organizations in the city. But several months into the global health crisis, a different story has unfolded.

"The summertime was a time of plenty and now it's getting a lot more restrictive," said Wright. "In March there was just a ton of food that came to the table. . . . We were receiving calls from all kinds of businesses that wanted to redistribute or donate food."

As the economy has opened up, food donations have dropped off dramatically. In March, PEC was moving upwards of 2,500 boxes of food each week to residents and families in need. Now that number is closer to 1,200 per week.

But the lines outside their food banks are still growing. And it's unclear how the need is going to be met.

Food-insecure seniors working together to feed the community

PEC's emergency food hub is just one of the numerous food relief networks reaching residents in West Philly. During a typical year, the organization provided free food to three

local independent living facilities for seniors, a *masjid*, and a local elementary school. Now the masjid is closed and PEC staff are no longer allowed to enter the senior homes in an effort to prevent contact with elderly, immunocompromised residents. But seniors within these facilities are taking it upon themselves to get the job done.

"The senior buildings have just become a drop-off," said Wright. "We just do bulk deliveries and there are a couple of seniors in the building who facilitate their own dissemination."

Prior to the pandemic, these seniors were relatively independent and came in and out of the facility as they pleased. "But with the [super]markets and all the different vulnerabilities that come with [them], [seniors] ended up being kind of locked down in those facilities," Wright explained.

Local churches have been a key player in responding to some of the pandemic-related needs. Eastern Outreach is composed of a network of 80 churches in Philadelphia that distribute 10,000 pre-cooked meals on Easter. In an effort to respond to a growing number of food-insecure seniors, they shifted away from the Easter model this year to pick up the slack.

"From March to July we had this church network that was helping us to disseminate 400 boxes, door to door, to seniors," said Wright. "We worked with civic leaders to get a list of 50 to 100 people in the [local] neighborhoods who might have a really hard time getting to the supermarkets and we would deliver weekly boxes of food to them on their doorstep."

Mantua, a changing neighborhood with multi-generational family roots

Gwendolyn Morris, 70, has lived in West Philadelphia's Mantua

neighborhood for over 42 years. She came to the city to attend college and settled in the area shortly after graduating. Though she's not a native, she has deep roots here and says that's not an uncommon quality of the many people who call Mantua home. "There are multiple generations of family connections here. . . . The grandmother may have lived here but the grandchildren live here now," she says with a smile ripening across her face. "And so you see vestiges of multiple generations of families that have lived in this community for 70, 80 years."

Morris, affectionately known in the neighborhood as Ms. Gwen, serves as the secretary of the Mantua Civic Association (MCA). Established in 2014 out of a desire in the community to preserve Mantua's rich history in the advent of rapid university-induced gentrification, residents formed the group as a way to actively participate in the transformative developments and changes that continue to sweep the area.

"It's a community that, by virtue of its location, I think is up and coming," said Morris. "Who wouldn't want to live in between the art museum and the Philadelphia zoo? Who wouldn't want to be able to walk to the Amtrak [train] station and be close to Center City? . . . [It's] the history and culture of this community our longtime residents are concerned about preserving while embracing the changing diversity."

While access to food has been one of the greatest concerns to arise out of the pandemic, access to information is a close rival. The dissemination of resources in the Promise Zone is highly dependent on the relationships that neighbors, civic organization leaders, block captains, and local residents have built with one another. There's a trust and a knowing that runs so deep here among residents. It's an energy like no other.

Morris and her small team of volunteers at MCA have been critical to food relief efforts in Mantua during the

pandemic. When the School District of Philadelphia closed schools in early April, the District organized meal sites at rec centers and public schools throughout the city for students who wouldn't be able to take advantage of free and reduced-price lunch programs while attending classes remotely from home. But MCA outreach coordinator Sam Samuel was presented with an obstacle: the closest food site was located at the Alain Locke School on Haverford Avenue, a few miles too far. "A lot of people down here, kids, couldn't go all the way up to 44th and Haverford to get it," said Samuel. "So I decided to go up there, introduce myself to the school lunch people and explain. So they allowed me to come pick up like 50 [meals]."

As the weeks progressed and word got out in the neighborhood that Samuel was running her own unofficial Mantua food delivery service, families began to depend on her to get their children fed each day.

"The more that people realized that their kids were gonna get these lunches because I was gonna deliver it to 'em, the volume went up and up as the weeks progressed," explained Samuel. "I was able to get guys from the community to go out early in the morning with me. I got a U-haul [and] we would go up and down the street, knock on doors and drop it off."

By the end of this effort, Samuel and her team were delivering upwards of 200 boxed meals to students and families in her neighborhood.

Samuel says people know her in the community as the unofficial fairy godmother of Mantua. "Me being here all my life, I know everybody," Samuel said, proudly. Samuel attributes her knack for community organizing to her grandmother, who helped to run a mutual aid organization called Mantua Planners back in the 1960s."They

helped people with utility bills, housing, clothes . . . so my grandmother inspired me to always want to help people."

"Our community assets, all right here"

But Mantua residents will not ask just anyone for help. Samuel believes her ability to do the work she does depends on long-standing relationships and trust. "We have a senior building that's up on 34th and Haverford," said Samuel. "Usually if the seniors need something they'll call me. I made sure they all signed up to vote and drove some of them to get COVID tested."

But according to Morris, many of the Promise Zone elders live alone or in a single home, making it difficult to reach them and provide services. "Those are the people we rely on—neighbors or block captains and other organizations like our [Neighborhood Advisory Committee] who are there to really help folks connect with city services."

When there are issues that arise that MCA doesn't have the capacity to handle, they reach out to the local Neighborhood Advisory Committee (NAC) and pass on the task. NAC is a city-wide program that runs under Philadelphia's division of Housing and Community Development. The city gives each NAC organization funding to do community organizing via an elected board. The People's Emergency Center facilitated an election of the local neighborhoods in which NAC members were nominated and voted in by their peers to serve as advisory members to PEC.

Kevin Brown has served as the local NAC manager for five years. While he says food relief is the most dire need among Mantua residents amid the pandemic right now, he believes having intimate knowledge of the service area has been invaluable to the work of disseminating food itself.

"Doing this work you create partnerships, right?" asked Brown. "And so one of my colleagues, Curtis Stewart, he created this interactive map . . . on [PEC's] webshare site [where] we internally can see this map of all of our allies basically. Our community assets, all right here: this church, this store, this block captain, and within this many blocks they're gonna help us get the word out."

While this work was already happening prior to COVID-19 in other forms, Brown said the pandemic required another level of engagement, another level of knowing and naming community. "You can really figure out how to cover your area that way and the interactive map was a really great way of formalizing something we were already doing."

Standing outside the old bank building as rainwater collected in a puddle on the pavement beside her, Shante McLaughlin explained that without word from her block captain, she wouldn't have known about the food hub at 37th and Lancaster. Distressed by the recent police shooting of Walter Wallace Jr. in West Philadelphia's Cobbs Creek neighborhood, McLaughlin said that despite the unrest in the city, she's determined to care for her loved ones through it all.

"[The pandemic] is making it harder but it's about living. It's about living."

A PANDEMIC RECKONING

By Yarimar Bonilla

In Puerto Rico, 2020 began with a jolt. The month of January brought the onset of an earthquake "swarm" that rattled the southern coast, bringing buildings, schools, and emotional nerves to the ground. In just one month over 2,500 seismic events were registered by the local seismic network, with over 272 "felt events" of magnitudes between 2.0 and 6.4. Most of the quakes came in the wee hours of the night. As a result, thousands found themselves sleeping in their cars, in tents, or on park benches, afraid to reenter their homes. That is, if their homes were still standing.

As with Hurricane Maria, the tremors were followed by scandals of political corruption, the mismanagement of emergency aid, and the failure of state agencies. Once again, locals were left to their own devices, forced to take recovery and community care into their own hands. While the Department of Education dithered in inspecting quake-damaged schools, parent groups and community organizations began setting up home schooling and donating tents for makeshift outdoor classrooms. While the government stalled in delivering aid, caravans of citizens created traffic jams bringing emergency supplies to earthquake-impacted neighborhoods.

Unpredictably but unsurprisingly, the earth kept shaking, and citizens eventually became accustomed to the unstable ground. Hurricane Maria taught many to live without electricity or running water. Now the earthquakes forced us to

sleep in our running shoes, with our survival kits by the door. After all, Puerto Ricans are experts in resilience. We've learned how to live with state failure. We've become accustomed to crisis. Because of this, when the COVID-19 outbreak began in March, it was quickly treated as yet another chapter in our compounding disaster.

This feeling of layered crises is perhaps best seen in the popular memes that began to circulate on social media in the wake of the pandemic. One example is that of a book cover for an imagined illustrated guide to recent Puerto Rican history. It features three emblematic objects: a gas canister like the ones used to fill generators during power outages after Hurricane Maria; a backpack representing the survival kits that residents were exhorted to prepare during the onset of the quakes; and a surgical mask, the latest emergency object that residents are now obliged to acquire in order to mitigate the latest threat to the body politic.

Like other forms of crisis and emergency, the pandemic is a socially produced event, driven not by biological forces or natural hazards but by the deeply rooted social inequalities that shape our experiences of those hazards to begin with. The pandemic is thus also a disaster in the manner often described by anthropologists and other social scientists: a totalizing and disruptive event that reveals long-standing fragilities and creates new possibilities—both economic and political. Disasters do not only destroy or damage, they also reveal. They peel away the blinders of habit and routine, and they cast new light on what might otherwise remained obscured.

In the wake of Hurricane Maria, many began to see Puerto Rico's colonial relationship in a new light. Across the United States many "discovered" that their nation was actually an empire. As historian Daniel Immerwahr argues, one of the particularities of the United States is the way in which it has

successfully "hidden" its empire.[1] The very name of the country suggests a federation of sovereign states, when in actuality as a polity it is a collection of states, territories, tribal nations, and other ambiguously defined jurisdictions. This messiness is obscured by its contradictory name (or its lack of a name, as many Latin American writers have suggested) and by what Immerwahr describes as the "logo map" of the United States that veils its far-flung territories.

However, before empire could be hidden, it first had to be assembled. In its early era of colonial expansion, the United States was concerned less with hiding its colonial possessions than with reconciling its contradictions. While claiming to be "The Land of the Free" where British colonial rule was successfully challenged, the United States simultaneously asserted its "manifest destiny" as the site of territorial expansion. However, the affective tensions of asserting freedom, empire, progress, liberty, and expansion atop coerced labor, colonial warfare, and native genocide were not easily reconciled.

US political leaders were thus caught in a white supremacist liberal double bind: on the one hand, manifest destiny empowered them with a mission, nay a duty, to expand and join the ranks of imperial Europe. But the nation's stated principles of equality and anti-imperialism made it difficult to justify the incorporation of new territories without offering them entrance into the union of states. As a result, expansion into places like Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines brought up thorny questions about the character and purity of the nation. Incorporating societies of "alien races" ran counter to the racist thinking of the time, which was focused on eugenics and ideas of racial purity. At the same time, acquiring these territories *without* incorporating them politically ran contrary

to the liberal democratic principles of their new nation.

Double binds are typically thought of as moments of impasse, but that is not always the case. Aporetic moments can also be generative. In this instance, a new legal category was invented: that of the "unincorporated territories." This would distinguish settlements like Arizona, New Mexico, and Oklahoma, which were *incorporated* but not yet admitted as states because they were still in the process of settlement, from sites that were *un-incorporated* and thus not intended for annexation. The latter were said to "*belong to but not be a part of*" the United States. They were described as "*foreign*, in the domestic sense" and placed in a legal category of their own—unfit for either citizenship or sovereignty.

In Puerto Rico in 1952, the status locally referred to as the "ELA" (an acronym for *Estado Libre Asociado*) was developed as a way of meeting the rising calls for self-determination around the globe. This status was glossed in English as "commonwealth": an empty phrase that simultaneously evoked formulas of statehood, independence, and dominion. The English translation of *Estado Libre Asociado* similarly evoked a multiplicity of forms by suggesting that Puerto Rico would now be Free, a State, and Associated—when in fact it was none of the above. The slippery semantics of the ELA were a purposeful attempt at appeasing the various claims from local residents for independence, supported by a large constituency at the time, while also appealing to those who favored statehood, a formula which was locally growing in support even as Congress remained firmly opposed t o the prospect.

At the moment of its founding, the ELA was described as an agreement "in the nature of a compact"—a legal euphemism that sought to mask the fact that it was *not* an agreement between two equal parties, or even a binding piece

of legislation. The language of the Public Law 600 was so vague that political scientist Peter Fliess wrote at the time: "Even if it were binding, one still would not know *what* was binding."[2]

Luis Muñoz Marín, the main proponent of the commonwealth and Puerto Rico's first locally elected governor, assured Puerto Ricans that this new status would put a definitive end to "all traces of colonialism" and grant freedom, dignity, equality, and a permanent union with the United States. Nevertheless, within Washington the bill's sponsors assured Congress that the law would leave the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States intact; Muñoz Marín himself testified in a Senate committee hearing that "if the people of Puerto Rico should go crazy, Congress can always legislate again."[3]

The main outcome of the slippery and ambiguous ELA was thus a symbolic one, though it did allow the United States to successfully petition the United Nations to remove Puerto Rico from the list of non-self-governing societies—thus freeing the US from submitting routine reports on its political conditions. The symbolism of the date chosen for the ELA's signing, July 25—the same day as the US Navy's landing on Puerto Rico's southern coast in 1898—further served to cloak Puerto Rico's colonial status while inadvertently creating a palimpsest.

Although often viewed as a unique relationship, the formation of the ELA was part of a larger process of political experimentation following the end of the Second World War. Around the same time of the establishment of the ELA, both the Dutch and French Antilles were engaging in similar forms of non-sovereign incorporation to their metropoles, while in the British Caribbean the West Indies Federation and later the Commonwealth of Nations were taking shape. Meanwhile, in what became independent nations, forms of decolonization

were being forged that allowed for "flag independence" while severely limiting economic and other forms of sovereignty.

During the mid-twentieth century, residents of *both* independent nations and of the many commonwealths, departments, and other postcolonial experiments in the Caribbean were offered the promise of a bright postcolonial future by both local political elites and former imperial powers. Throughout the region, modernism, development, and economic growth appeared to beckon on the postcolonial horizon. In the first decades following the formation of the ELA, Puerto Rico did experience rapid industrialization and economic progress, due in great part to the postwar New Deal policies and tax incentives that lured American manufacturing to the island. These results were celebrated as exemplars of US-led capitalist development, and Puerto Rico was showcased as an alternative to the left-wing politics in other parts of the region. A 1970s promotional film for Puerto Rico went so far as to describe the territory as "Progress Island" and represent it as a site of rapid development and unstoppable growth.[4] However, the main beneficiaries of these policies were not Puerto Rican residents but rather American companies that reaped profits, tax breaks, and a captive market for their products.

As in other parts of the Caribbean, the promises of decolonization in Puerto Rico soon began to fade. As early as the 1970s—as the global economy experienced significant shocks due to rising oil prices—it was already becoming clear that development via foreign investment was not leading to sustainable growth. By the 1990s, when the Clinton administration removed the tax incentives that had once lured manufacturing industries to the island, Puerto Rico's economy began a historic downturn. As a result, local administrations turned to heavy borrowing—with direct assistance from Wall Street—to compensate for and mask a

deflated economic base.

By 2015, Puerto Rico's governor had declared that the territory was at risk of descending into what economists describe as a "financial death spiral." For many, this was just a confirmation of the looming sense of doom that had already presided over the society for decades. Following the governor's declaration that Puerto Rico's debt was "unpayable," the federal government denied the island the right to declare bankruptcy. Instead, the government passed what is known as the PROMESA law (Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act), which allowed for the imposition of a undemocratically appointed fiscal control board to manage the island's finances in what for many represented a return to a previous era of overt colonial rule.

Our colonial status, long adorned by euphemisms and legal sleights of hand, was suddenly and violently asserted by the federal government as it became clear that we had no ability to negotiate the terms of our foreclosure. Caught in a political limbo with neither the protections of a state nor the fiscal sovereignty of a nation, we found ourselves unable to define the nature of our debts, the severity of our austerity, or the limits of our endurance.

When President Trump arrived in Puerto Rico hurling paper towels in lieu of emergency assistance, many in the United States were scandalized. But in Puerto Rico, Trump's spectacle was simply an unvarnished version of the state violence that has long tied us to the nation. His tweets and stunts are but an extension of how Congress has long treated federal programs as colonial benevolence rather than a national responsibility.

In Puerto Rico some have speculated that COVID-19 might become the United States' "Maria moment": the point at which residents discover that they live in a "failed state" with

gutted infrastructure, inefficient state agencies, and a populace that emerged from the 2008 economic crisis with stark divisions between those who can live through a hurricane, an earthquake, or a pandemic, and those who cannot.[5]

This might also be the moment in which Americans discover that the future is a cancelled promise. Puerto Ricans, and many others across the globe, long realized that climate change, neoliberal austerity politics, the dismantling of social safety nets, and unsustainable global capitalism were heralding a troubling future. Long before Maria, young people in Puerto Rico were grappling with bleak prospects of even finding employment, much less achieving a better standard of living than their parents. It is thus with great irony that we view a headline from the *Wall Street Journal* lamenting the state of millennial graduates from top universities in the United States who, due to the COVID crisis, are now said to be "walking into a hurricane."[6]

This feeling of déjà vu is not exclusive to Puerto Rico. Within the United States itself, what is for some a sudden crisis is for others simply the extension of an already existing state of insecurity. While some only begin to discover a negligent government capable of putting their lives at risk, residents of Flint, Michigan, enter the pandemic on the sixth anniversary of their still-unresolved water crisis. As controversy swirls around the nature of a newly revalued "state sovereignty," indigenous communities wrestle with their decimated ability to manage their own affairs and care for their own communities. And while some discover the limits of federalism, others have long known that the US is a federated empire structured precisely to ensure an unequal distribution of rights.

The truth is that the pandemic is also a disaster in the broad sense: a sudden catastrophic event but also a revelation of failures, an episode that exasperates already

existing inequalities, and a moment of reckoning. Many across the globe are currently struggling with feelings of collective mourning, grief for the loss of loved ones, for the sacrifice of strangers, for vanished personal goals, projects, and plans for the future. For some this is experienced as a sudden crisis, but for others it is yet another chapter in a larger narrative arc of shock, trauma, and forced endurance.

However, we must be careful to not romanticize this knowing déjà vu through well-worn tropes of resilience that reduce the harm of repetitive trauma, the slow wear and tear produced by structural violence, and the risks that come with being deemed both "essential" and expendable. Indeed, it is partly their overrepresentation as essential workers in industries such as healthcare, sanitation, and the food service industry that has placed African Americans,Latinos, and other minority groups at greater risk of exposure to COVID-19. But it is their already constituted vulnerability that makes this exposure much more deadly.

In the context of Puerto Rico, the COVID crisis has been depicted in memes and other popular representations as simply the latest "season" of a long-running drama that has featured hurricanes, earthquakes, mass uprisings against government corruption, and years of austerity measures and colonial governance. Yet the way the pandemic is experienced in this space of catastrophic sedimentation might offer some lessons to a world that now collectively faces a post-disaster future.

It is telling that in the United States there have been two kinds of protest movements in the wake of COVID-19. On the one hand there are protestors who long for a return to "normal" and resent how the lockdown has restricted their individual "freedoms." On the other hand there have been those supporting rent strikes, demanding greater social assistance, and requesting more protective gear for essential

workers, signaling how both the risks of the virus and the burdens of the lockdown are unfairly distributed.

The very same day that armed protestors stormed the Michigan capital with loaded weapons, activists in Puerto Rico carried out a "caravan for life" demanding increased testing, more government accountability, and greater social assistance for those struggling with food insecurity, domestic violence, and police brutality during the lockdown. Much of this work has been carried out by feminist and LGBTQ activists who have also been using the lockdown as a time in which to educate residents about the rise of gender and transphobic violence, to denounce predators, and to seek justice for the victims of hate crimes.

While some seek to narrowly circumscribe lockdown politics into a false debate between social and financial health or the limits of individual versus collective rights, Puerto Rican activists are questioning the very terms of these debates. Across communities for which COVID-19 has arrived with déjà vu, demonstrators emphasize how gender violence, poverty, food scarcity, colonialism, racism, and austerity were already threatening community health, long before the arrival of the novel virus.

These communities are also forging new ways of thinking about state obligation by pushing back on the scripts of coerced resilience that have for so long placed an uneven burden of care on individuals. Rather than simply accepting that citizens must work to "flatten the curve," these communities are also calling upon the government to "raise the bar" and provide an infrastructure and social safety net that can protect us from future pandemics, disasters, and the ordinary crisis of pervasive health and wealth disparity.

At present Puerto Ricans, like many others, are being precipitously ushered out of lockdown even as rates of COVID-19 continue to climb. This is not because the state has

taken the necessary public health measures; in fact Puerto Rico remains dead last in terms of testing rates across the United States and its territories. Contact tracing has yet to be properly implemented and even basic statistical modeling and information sharing have failed. However, as in other parts of the world, business owners are exerting pressure to get back to business, suggesting that employers are the best equipped to ensure the health and safety of their workers—all while Washington debates immunity legislation to protect employers from litigation if they fail to do so.

The debates over how to reopen the economy unfold as earthquakes continue to shake the island, and hurricane season threatens once again. Indeed, the greatest concern for many here is not simply how to overcome COVID-19 in order to return to a comforting normality but rather how the COVID crisis will worsen preexisting disasters and further hinder our ability to respond to those yet to come.

[1] Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2019).

[2] Peter J. Fliess, "Puerto Rico's Political Status under Its New Constitution," *Western Political Quarterly 5*, no. 4 (December 1952): 635–656.

[3] Juan R. Torruella, "Why Puerto Rico Does Not Need Further Experimentation with Its Future: A Reply to the Notion of 'Territorial Federalism,'" *Harvard Law Review Forum 131*, no. 3 (January 2018): 79.

[4] "1970s Puerto Rico USA Promotional Film 'Progress Island USA' San Juan 83994," uploaded by Periscope Film, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdTQGNZMYPI.

[5] George Packer, "We Are Living in a Failed State," *Atlantic*, June 2020.

[6] "Class of 2020 Job Seekers May Be 'Walking Into a Hurricane,'" *Wall Street Journal*, April 29, 2020, https://www.wsj.com/video/class-of-2020-job-seekers-may-be-walking-into-a-hurricane/D54FC13E-FE9A-4C00-860C-E359C7541085.html.

QUEERING HISTORY IN AFTER SCHOOL AND MANDINGA TIMES

By Mabel Rodríguez Centeno

Rita Indiana's new musical project presents an updated version of our narratives about history. The *After School* video emerges from the pandemic as a cover letter for her new album, *Mandinga Times*. Thirteen minutes are enough to unleash the narrative demons of otherness.

The failure of the Puerto Rican Commonwealth is old news. The economic recession/depression coincided with the unpayable indebtedness and bankruptcy of the country's finances. The precariousness and deterioration of living conditions on the island explain, among other things, its increasing depopulation. In the summer of 2016, a series of judicial, legislative, and executive determinations revealed to us that territorial self-government was an illusion. Just then, we learned that the narratives about the history of Puerto Rico had already been exhausted. Still, the hurricanes of 2017, the earthquakes of 2019 and 2020, and the ravages of the global pandemic were yet to come. After losing so much, even history was stripped from us.

The rewrites become urgent; Rita Indiana's *After School* is one of them. The launch of *Mandinga Times* was filmed in one of

the more than 673 schools closed in pursuit of debt repayment. From an empty classroom, we remember the revolution's fire and strategies—discursive contours determined by reparations and demands for love and justice.

In this empty classroom, a bolero-son cries for the 43 disappeared students from Ayotzinapa. Under the musical production of Eduardo Cabra and featuring the guitar of Café Tacvba's Rubén Albarrán, Caribbean rhythms reach Mexico. It is necessary to cross land and sea to light a candle. Inside an empty classroom, we miss the *normalista* students who are gone. "Who executes an order like that?" sings Rita Indiana.

Love is the geographical space of *After School* —the voice of conviction, a claim for the writings of a new world, promising different cartographies.

The song "The Heist" evokes a long tradition of piracy and smuggling. The story of the Wells Fargo robbery of 1983 echoes our pirate centuries (from the 16th to the 18th). The mockery of capital's transports—robbing them without shooting fire and using the money to gift toys to the children—proposes another kind of resistance, a different-other course of history. The march that combines the voices of Rita and Mima creates pan-Caribbean, queer-amorous polyphonies as narratives of a new and defiant history, a queer history. In the meanwhile, we recover the figure of Pedro Albizu Campos, and political determination takes refuge in Havana.

After School closes with a call for revolution. *Mandinga Times* means to abandon fear, not to give in, to learn how to live and survive. With terror at night and revolutions by day, "*llegó*

Mandinga" sings Kiko el Crazy, at full speed (180 bpm). "*Los tiempos de Mandinga*" are the times to inhabit a new world. This is a radical story, a discursive bet on the abject, the queer, and the decolonial. Let's write together . . . there's a future.

THE PROMISE OF COMMON WEALTH

By Kalela Williams

How does a Black-owned bank fulfill the true promise of a commonwealth? To explore this question, Philadelphia Contemporary, with the help of local writer Kalela Williams, sought to discover the history of the United Bank of Philadelphia.

The rise and fall of water—that is the name, in a long-gone language, of a river that flows through the childhood memories of Emma Chappell. The Rappahannock, an Algonquin word, was spoken in the rhythmic language of the Powatans, a people who lived and thrived along the Virginia tidewater. The land through which this body of water coursed was called, correspondingly, Tappahannock, meaning "on the rise and fall of water." The Powatans may have named this river not for the properties of liquid but for the land it interrupts. If you've ever traveled along the length of the Rappahannock River, you know that at its mouth it is a wide swath of blue-grey water drawn from the Chesapeake Bay. A neck of land separates it from the Potomac River to the north. Other fringes of land, thick and soft with expanses of swamp and forest, divide this body of water from the York and the James rivers to the south. As the Rappahannock reaches further inland, and as the flat tidewater landscape lifts into piedmont, the path of water narrows and

climbs. You could say Virginia's rivers are the landscape's gesture to a lost promise of a commonwealth. And you could say the Rappahannock in particular was the backdrop of a childhood, that of a young girl who one day sparked a change-making institution.

Emma Chappell, who was born Emma Carolyn Bayton, lived in Philadelphia. But she spent her summers in the small, everybody-knows-everybody town of Tappahannock. With her father's family homestead on a seventy-acre farm near the river's banks, many hot-weather days saw Emma and her two siblings racing across the road to play and splash in the river. Sometimes they cavorted with cousins after church or tucked dimes into linty pockets to redeem for movie tickets at the Daw Theater. The children would have scrambled up the stairs to reach the balcony, the Colored section.

In Philadelphia, Emma's father was a chef at Horn & Hardart, a landmark restaurant. He and his wife's patience may have been tried by Emma, a mischievous girl who disrupted class by chewing gum and giggling with girlfriends. But school was a sanctuary for her, as she had a capacious and endlessly curious mind. So was Zion Baptist Church, where she spent Sundays leaning into the words of Reverend Leon Sullivan, a beloved Philadelphia pastor and civil rights activist.

Her mother, who suffered from heart disease and diabetes, had been bedridden for years. She knew she couldn't shepherd her eldest daughter past girlhood. When Emma was fourteen, her mother died as she lay in bed beside her. "She used to tell me . . . how she wanted me to grow up, and the things she wanted me to do, and how she believed in me," Emma recalled decades later. These were words she tucked into a safe place, like the dimes she once slipped into her pockets

Like the waters of the Rappahannock climbing the higher and higher altitudes of Virginia's landscape, Emma

found a way to rise. Her father, supporting the children on his own, was strict, a "tough taskmaster." But aside from the loss of her mother, Emma's young life "was like out of a storybook," she said. "Things were just kind of placed in my path." A West Philadelphia High School yearbook shows an oval-faced girl with tightly curled bangs and smooth black hair neatly tucked behind the collar of a striped blouse. Her smile is magnetic, and indeed the caption of her photograph reads "smiling, cute, 'Em' plans to center her career in Medical Research. Emma is fond of Latin, music, and dancing. In her spare time she finds pleasure in making clothes."

With her mother's illness indelible in her memory, Emma did imagine becoming a doctor. But her pastor insisted she take an aptitude test, and it suggested math was her calling. Reverend Sullivan encouraged her to go into banking, as there weren't enough Black bankers. She decided to walk this road set before her.

As a young woman, Emma learned to draw all that she needed from the community around her. She learned to follow some, though not all, of the guidance given generations before by activist Booker T. Washington. A trade was not enough for her. But she realized that to make water rise, she must cast down her bucket where she was.

* * *

Emma's young life was framed by two commonwealths, as named by their constitutions: the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, where she shaped a vital institution, and the Commonwealth of Virginia, her ancestral home. The word "commonwealth" is meant to define an idea of public wealth, of general good, and a state in which power is vested in the people.

We like to think of the United States as the people's republic. But this country was never built upon the people; rather, it was built on the bones and backs of peoples. We can look to the Rappahannock and her sister rivers, the Potomac, the York, and the James, along which the English sought to stake a territory. Their Virginia Company was the 17th-century version of a corporation: wealthy English gentlemen bought shares in hopes that a colony would return their investment. But the land withheld its generosity. White settlers were felled by disease, resorting to eating rats during what they called "the starving times." Later, any trust forged by the marriage of the Powatan chief's daughter Pocahontas—we'll call her Matoaka, which may have been her preferred name—to Englishman John Rolfe dissolved. Perhaps it was because their relationship was built on distrust, with Matoaka meeting Rolfe after she'd been kidnapped by the English as a political pawn. Perhaps it was because she did not live long. Either way, the Powatan confederacy attacked the English settlement in 1622, killing hundreds. They, like Native communities up and down the continent's coast, had been decimated by European disease over the century, with thousands upon untold thousands dying.

It was around this time that John Rolfe began planting in earnest a new strain of tobacco that "smoked pleasant, sweete and strong," holding promise for export. But raising it was arduous work, and the English eventually turned to the transatlantic slave trade that had been made lucrative by the Dutch and the Portuguese. Over the centuries, nearly 400,000 people, brutally abducted from their African homelands, would arrive on the shores of the United States, with millions more in Europe's other New World colonies.

Virginia's rivers frame colonization's landmarks. The banks of the York on which Matoaka once played are adjacent to the colonial capital of Williamsburg, built from the profits

of tobacco and the sweat of black backs. The James River winds through Richmond, capital of the Confederacy, a city once made fat-rich by the sale of human flesh. The Rappahannock passes by Ferry Farm, boyhood home of George Washington and the land of a mythic cherry tree. The Potomac stretches inland, its waters reflecting pools to the marble, slave-built skyline of Washington, DC, perhaps the most fraught US city in the ongoing story of oppression. These are not places of common wealth.

* * *

The young woman handled dollar bills with the speed of a poker dealer. She was the only Black teller standing behind the tall, polished wood counter. She finished counting the twenty-dollar bills, shaping them into a neat stack that she pushed into a narrow envelope. Smiling, she passed the envelope to a customer, thanking him by name. She took this time, even though her line was the longest. Customers, Black and white, chose her as their teller when they walked into the chandeliered lobby. They knew her as being quick and efficient but warm and personable, just as she'd once been with her classmates. This meant that in the breakroom, colleagues would sniff and say things like, "fine, let her work herself to death, then." But they did not feel threatened. They saw Emma as a young woman working a minor job, although she'd already been moving up when she became a teller; her career at Continental Bank had begun in 1959, when she earned $45 a week photostatting checks—that is, photographing them for deposit. With Emma being newly married, her colleagues reasoned she'd eventually quit her job. But many didn't know she was enrolled in night school at Temple University. To get ahead, she knew she'd need a college degree, and Emma had dreams of being a CEO.

Emma Chappell made long strides. After receiving her degree, she secured a place in an executive training program, which allowed her to work in every department at Continental Bank. In 1971, she was promoted to assistant treasurer. As she moved higher and higher, she met with resentment. How dare a woman, and a Black woman at that, be in control of loans especially? some asked. They understood the power of loans in shaping the promise and distribution of wealth. So did Emma. She became the company's first female and first Black vice president in 1977, heading a division she founded, the Community Business Loan and Development Department, which dispersed commercial loans to minority and women-owned businesses. During this time, she granted more than $30 million in loans to Black enterprises. Recalling the hostility she faced, Emma cited the adage, "The higher you get up the ladder, the tighter it gets at the top." Corporate ladders for Black women then were like the rivers of lost promises. But other people recognized Emma's talent and reached out an oar. Later, she remembered, "Somebody was always marshalling me along."

In the early 1980s, Emma's respect among city leaders won her the attention of activist Jesse Jackson. She was floored when he asked her to join his presidential campaign as national treasurer. Taking a leave of absence from Continental Bank, Emma traveled with Jesse Jackson across much of the country. And as she visited one city after another, she came to intimately know the value of Black-owned banks: how they uplifted communities, how they extended loans and credit to areas marked untouchable with boundaries drawn in red ink.

In 1987, Black leaders in Philadelphia mounted their own campaign: they wanted Emma to open a bank. Though she'd always dreamed of being a CEO, she never imagined actually founding an institution. But she rose to the challenge. She, along with business and community leaders, turned out

their own pockets to raise $600,000 in start-up money to cover a business plan and feasibility study. And then Emma Chappell set out to raise millions more.

She started with big banks, which had historically helped other small banks boost capital. She acquired a million dollars from institutions like PNC, Mellon Bank, and of course Continental. She thought she was on a roll, that perhaps her entire six-million-dollar venture could be funded by a fistful of national banks. But the 1987 stock market crash sent that vision falling to the floor. Emma realized that to raise the needed five million dollars, she would have to cast down her bucket where she was.

And so she walked. She went from church to church, talking with pastors and congregations. At one point, she held a Black Bank Sunday. Three hundred pastors around the city announced from their pulpits that her bank needed funding, and almost half a million was raised in just a day. Emma pounded more pavement, wore out more shoes. She went from business to business, speaking with owners. Eventually fourteen institutions gave a total of $2.7 million. Emma soaked her feet in bath salts. She trekked from door to door, talking with friends and family, the natural charm that won her friends in high school radiating as she shared her dream. Three thousand individuals raised $3.3 million in a true grassroots feat. This was a commonwealth.

On March 23, 1992, United Bank of Philadelphia welcomed the community. An article in the Black-owned *Philadelphia Tribune* highlighted the presence of Jesse Jackson and the state governor, its headline announcing "United Bank's Opening Draws Jackson, Casey, and the People." The piece went on to say, "Eloquent words were used to describe Philadelphia's only Black-owned bank, hailed as 'the people's bank,' but perhaps the most important word used to describe United Bank Monday morning was 'open.'"

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United Bank's beginning is a story of the power of community, gathered into the dreams of a woman who returned what she'd been given with generous and unending interest. It is the story of power vested in the people, a power that must and will grow. The US Black-white wealth divide is as wide as it was in 1968, the year the world lost Martin Luther King Jr. The COVID-19 crisis has attacked Black communities with a ferocity fed by centuries of oppression. The United Bank of Philadelphia, or "the Bank" as it is known, with its B-shaped logo that is also the image of a raised fist, is more vital than it ever was in the evolving future of Black Americans. It is a Black-owned bank that can fulfill the true promise and premise of a commonwealth: to cast down buckets and draw up talent from the community, to tilt those buckets earthwards in libations of wisdom, in offerings of collective wealth.

ISSUE 3

ISSUE THREE EDITORIAL NOTE

By The Editors
Publication Date: 02/15/2021

Uncertainty is in vogue. Suddenly necropolitics is felt by more people, but it continues to be an abstract experience. The sad thing is that the antidote will be more necropolitics. The crisis caused by the Coronavirus is similar to those generated by mega storms, earthquakes and systemic racism. The crisis is not a total event, it is a sequence from which it is very difficult to escape, to which we are forced to get used to it. If we look closely, we will see that it bears a human stamp, it is the product of the inequality generated by capitalism.

For some people the solution is to go back to pasts that never existed. And if they existed, they are in part to blame for our present. This is why it is important not to lose historical perspectives, without fear of the daze they may cause. “Colossal task of inventing the real”, this quote from Franz Fanon can be very useful. Think also in relation to groups that have been labeled through multiple ways. Please don’t assume, we are not what you think we are. In order to invent the real we need many counter narratives, and accept differences, which is not the same as operating in opposition. Our narratives may be fragmented, but we should not be. The we we refer to is both a contracted as well as an expanding one. It can be both, think of it as an invitation. The opposition must be against the conditions that wear us out, but this is not so easy. Who are the culprits of collective wear and tear? This takes time and

conscience, meanwhile we work against extinction by omission. That is another front. It is also possible to advance from the rear, and go through uncertainty without diluting ourselves. Commonwealth has been an interesting experiment. How to harmonize such different conceptions and contexts? This situation at times was also projected for instance among the relationship between pieces that were presented in the exhibition in Richmond, as well as the interventions in Philadelphia and the contents of this publication. However, an assemblage has been achieved that has made sense, contributing from multiple angles with interesting counter narratives. This is the third and last volume of the publication. It includes contributions that expand on many of the ideas in this note, as well as the project in general.

CAROLINA CAYCEDO

By Andrea Paasch

Caycedo's hanging fabric panels are a synthesis of historical documents from Virginia, Puerto Rico, and Pennsylvania. Public utility bonds for water, sewage, electricity, and infrastructure projects, the primary subject for Caycedo's project, are a mechanism to commodify natural resources in the name of civic infrastructure development. Starting in the late 19th century, governments, municipalities, and private companies started raising money with bonds for projects which were traded on bond markets. According to Caycedo, "the word bond as we know it in financial terms today, comes from bondage as in slavery, and those first bonds were generated to 'rent' out, or mortgage enslaved people to other individuals or companies." In the case of public bonds, governments often aren't able to repay their capital or interest.

For instance, Puerto Rico has fifteen times the bond debt of states in the mainland US, and in 2014 entered into a debt crisis when three major credit agencies downgraded several bond issues to junk status. Caycedo noticed that the earliest bonds were issued as physical currency with elaborate designs and imagined that their physicality was distressed, much like it would be by water and time, evoking the financial and political distress that Puerto Rico

faces today. As a result, each panel is a collage of images and language from these bonds. But Caycedo has also looked at the bonds of Virginia and Pennsylvania, opening up larger questions among these commonwealths about the sustainability of governments that capitalize on natural resources.

-The Editors

Aesthetics of Debt

In the history of finance, debt and credit are inevitably bound to the human body. They are bound literally, as the artist Carolina Caycedo suggests when she tells us that the financial bond and the slavery term bondage share the same root, and that the first bonds issued in the U.S Southern States would often "mortgage enslaved people to other individuals or companies."[1] With regard to the creditor or debtor, defaults invariably cause strain in an individual's or a group's livelihoods, and their access to even basic necessities. If we are so obsessed with credit and debt, it is thus, precisely, because it always, in one-way or another, they register and leave their marks on the human body.

In this regard it is not a coincidence that the world of economics, finance and debt, overwhelmingly refers us to death, corpses, carrion and decomposing bodies. This is the point made by, for example, S. B. Benerjee, when he speaks of necro-capitalism as be the economic order of the world (we should remind ourselves here of the etymology of the prefix *necro* [nekros], which in Greek means death or corpse). Necro-capitalism is defined as contemporary forms of organizational accumulation that involve dispossession and the subjugation

of life to the power of death. Some contemporary necro-capitalist practices include the impact of the resources industry in developing countries and the privatization of war and the military.[2] In this economic model, the power of corporations and modern states comes from extorting money, resources and loyalty from communities in return for protection from internal and external threats, which are often artificially created or exacerbated.

Historically, bonds operate at this level. Governments and corporations commonly use bonds in order to borrow money. Governments do so in order to fund infrastructure. Corporations will often borrow against the purchase of property and equipment or to capitalize themselves in order to undertake profitable projects. The problem that large organizations run into is that they typically need far more money than the average bank can provide. Bonds provide a solution by allowing multiple different investors to assume the role of the lender.[3] What is the problem then? Public debt markets let thousands of investors lend a portion of the capital needed. Moreover, markets allow lenders to sell their bonds to other investors or to buy bonds from other individuals long after the original issuing organization raised capital. All good, but an example that showcases all that can go wrong with government issued bonds is Puerto Rico's Debt Crisis, where the U.S territory saw itself in need of filing for bankruptcy. In 2019 the country owed $129 billion in bond and pension debt to its creditors, an issue that not only has not been resolved, but that has been aggravated by the lack of governmental aid throughout its recent history of natural disasters. And if we want to find a point of origin for how this recent crisis started, we need not look further than an

ad from the Government Development Bank of Puerto Rico (fiscal agent for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and its Public Authorities) in a 1970's magazine that shows a happy couple walking along a street in Old San Juan, but if we don't read what they are advertising we may think it's a marketing campaign promoting tourism, yet the slogan reads: "If you think the charm of Puerto Rico is unique, let us tell you about the bonds of Puerto Rico". What happened then to the remarkable and rewarding future the bonds of Puerto Rico offer to investors?[4]

This also exemplifies what artist Carolina Caycedo rightly calls "the aesthetics of debt," and what she researches and presents in her series *Distressed Debt*, an installation of collages printed on silk and cotton fabric, overlapping historical slave bonds with contemporary infrastructure, public utilities and private company bonds from Puerto Rico, Virginia and Pennsylvania. Through this series, Caycedo traces the aesthetics of societal pathologies such as debt and the origins of our current financial slavery and oppression. Bonds and shares certificates have a particular visual aspect and vocabulary. Though most bonds today are issued electronically, historical bonds, notes and bills, took shape as physical certificates, with an official aesthetic that favored letterheads, city shields, insignias, ornate borders, imprints, signatures, and vignettes that range from animals, to architecture, to personalities. In each printed collage of Caycedo's series, visuals, words and phrases are extrapolated from the original documents, and are used to create a palimpsest that provides a layered account of how debt has been historically created, and how water, and other common goods, are privatized using financial schemes, often selling

futures of resources that we have no sure way of knowing will be available. In fact, we are almost certain that they won't be available at the rate that industry demands, which is why, of course, primary resource futures are sold at all. All of this, ultimately, bears down on bodies.

There is a phenomenon called slow or structural violence,[5] this kind of violence happens when a society causes harm to its citizens, often invisibly through social inequalities or another systemic means. It could be experience over many years, possibly even generations. To me, debt and its mechanisms historically insert in this kind of violence provoking that its victims suffer physically and psychologically. Perhaps I can borrow a concept from another field to elucidate this in closing, namely the term John Henryism, coined in the 70's by the epidemiologist Sherman James, which refers to the effects of being exposed to prolonged adversity. As he describes it, John Henryism is "the stressful, damaging health impact of thriving despite inequality, financial hardship and racial discrimination."

THE CONCILIATION PROJECT

By Tawnya Pettiford-Wates and Ram Bhagat

As a commissioned project for Commonwealth, The Conciliation Project (TCP) created a new performance titled COMMON/wealth & COMMON/debt. TCP is a non-profit social justice theatre company with a mission "to promote through active and challenging dramatic work open and honest dialogue about racism and systems of oppression in America in order to repair its damaging legacy." Their performances begin with research: they interview diverse groups of citizens and collaboratively develop a script based on the voices and ideas they encounter. They used this methodology to construct COMMON/wealth & COMMON/debt, building from TCP's facilitation of part of Summer Sessions: Commonwealth in 2019. Based on conversations with Richmond citizens, their new production responds both to deep histories and the upheavals of 2020, including the coronavirus pandemic and racial justice protests. Originally planned as a live performance, due to COVID-19 the project shifted into a work for broadcast. The resulting work combines footage filmed on location at key sites around Richmond with a live performance in ICA's auditorium—first screened on November 15, 2020 in tandem with a live talk-back and Q + A featuring two of The Conciliation Project's leaders—founder Tawnya Pettiford-Wates and collaborator Dr. Ram Bhagat. They extend that conversation in the written text that follows.

–The Editors

The COMMON/wealth & COMMON/debt Project: An Overview
Tawnya Pettiford-Wates, PhD, and Ram Bhagat, EdD

The collaboration with the Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU and Richmond based The Conciliation Project is designed to be a multimedia journey and interrogation into how we, as a community, acknowledge, define, and contextualize living in the Commonwealth of Virginia and how the specific identifier of "being a commonwealth" impacts our communities, our lives, and our psyche. This collaboration began as a conversation with various artists, community organizers, educators, and participants as we asked the question of what "the commonwealth" means to them, which took place over a period of months in the spring and summer of 2019. These community conversations and artistic introspections inspired more questions and an abundance of "call outs" from activists, organizers, and community members all over the Richmond, Virginia (RVA) area. In bringing the process of interrogation and community comment to a close, we decided that we needed to address the community's concerns and the issues raised with an artistic response. That response evolved into a performance piece that was devised through direct interviews, improvisation, historic research, and engaged community outreach.

COMMON/wealth & COMMON/debt is a live performance on film. It includes several vignettes with video documentation from underrepresented historic sites, as well as highly controversial sites, monuments, and RVA landmarks that we used as our backdrop for the artistic rendering of our performance piece in final production. We collected hundreds of stories, anecdotes, memories, and experiences from the people of RVA specifically interrogating the meaning and context of "the commonwealth" from their perspectives. Using that material, we created a representative account of the historic legacy of RVA residents using verbatim theatre, ritual poetic drama, fable, song, and music to look at who we are in RVA and what we can do to embrace our problematic history while simultaneously addressing our "collective" well-being as a community. Can we reconcile our past with our present in order to build a future together? Can we embrace our identity as a "commonwealth" and find demonstrable ways in which to walk that out with shared resources and equitable access?

Due to the multiple pandemics of COVID-19 and America's racial reckoning, we had to radically adjust our process and the timeline for creating the work. There were numerous delays due to lockdowns and health concerns, and many of the activities, workshops, and events we had planned with various communities and community groups had to be cancelled. This was exacerbated by the civil disobedience and unrest that erupted in RVA and throughout the world after the heinous murder of George Floyd, filmed live and released on television. In considering that event combined with the murders, just weeks before, of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, we reshaped our initial proposal and planned project to be responsive to what was happening on the ground and in the ethos of our current times. We had to stop and reexamine the

ways in which the violent past of Richmond, the former capital of the Confederacy, has not only impacted our past but rests firmly on the ground where we stand today. Additionally, we were compelled to interrogate with greater scrutiny the formative role that the Commonwealth of Virginia played in the chattel slavery enterprise and the slaveocracy state, given the racial unrest and new awakening that the entire nation was experiencing, with specific focus on Richmond and our infamous Monument Avenue.

Ultimately, we engaged the Applied Theatre class from VCU's theatre department in the project to do a lot of the community interviews and make proposals as to how to theatricalize these interviews and stories into a performance for the public. Although the student proposals were for a class assignment, their research was invaluable to us as our timeline for production was severely affected by all of the unforeseen delays and new production conditions. We employed a group of professional artists to begin putting this performance piece together, and collectively we devised *COMMON/wealth & COMMON/debt.* In the process, we used improvisational techniques and character work to create original songs from poetic writing and revised traditional folk and spiritual songs from the civil rights movement to create a dramatic interpretation of the "lived experiences" and perspectives of the people of RVA. Our focal points for the work explored themes surrounding a) The Commonwealth, b) The Ground on which we stand, and c) Stories in the soil. This collaborative piece includes the stunning videography of David Riley, the grounded beats of Drums No Guns, and a wonderfully rendered landscape of characters and authentic voices from the Greater Richmond community by our incredible ensemble of actors.

The gathering of these stories and their adaptation into the script of *COMMON/wealth & COMMON/debt* was inspired by a methodology called Ritual Poetic Drama within the African Continuum (RPD).

Ritual Poetic Drama is grounded in story as practice, and uses, as one of its foundational tenets, this quote from James Baldwin: "A story is impelled by the necessity to reveal itself and therefore a story can have nothing to hide; at least not intentionally. There is no resolution to a story. The aim of the story is revelation in what we make of the questions with which the story leaves us." The RPD process challenges the eurocentric scriptwriting model of exposition, plot development, rising conflict, climax and resolution. The process engages the community as collaborative partners instead of the singular script writer or playwright. In the RPD process, the story is the centerpiece, and the rite of passage journey is the modality to reveal the story. The revelation serves to enlighten and transform both the artist and the community surrounding the artist. All of the testimonials and lived experiences gathered and shared in the script and in the live performance of *COMMON/wealth & COMMON/debt* were examples of rites of passage moments and the lived experiences of the community participants in RVA.

This synthesis of artistic expression through multidimensional forms of media combined the power of historic images, rhythmic vibrations, drumming, creative movement, social dance, call & response, and spoken word to acknowledge the unhealed history here in the *COMMON/wealth*. The potent mixture of transformative and participatory art utilized for this collaborative piece also incorporated the healing elements of

culturally responsive circle process—with social distancing and mask wearing—to provide an intentional space for self-care of the participants, who immersed themselves in the traumagenic waters of collective, historic, and generational harm.

The power of this synthesis of art and social justice arises from acknowledging how the impact of our common past affects the possibilities for our common destiny. By examining, exploring, unpacking, and interrogating the truth and lies surrounding the past/future continuum of unhealed racial and social injustice, acceptance and agreement can emerge. Hopefully, this interrogation empowers advocates, activists, allies, and abolitionists to fully engage in a generative process of open and honest dialogue about racism and oppression throughout the *COMMON/wealth*.

Although the city of Richmond was an epicenter of the slavocracy system in this *COMMON/wealth* and the Americas, it can evolve into a city for truth, racial healing, and transformation. Yet it is imperative for the community to hear and listen to the young people who continue to demonstrate and protest for equity, justice, and liberation. It was their collective cry for freedom that compelled us to research this notion of the commonwealth, remember the ground on which we stand, and respond to the stories in the soil.

TANYA LUKIN LINKLATER AND TIFFANY SHAW-COLLINGE

By Tanya Lukin Linklater and Tiffany Shaw-Collinge with Noah Simblist and Stephanie Smith

Commonwealth includes only one pre-existing work—the sculpture Indigenous geometries (2019) by Tanya Lukin Linklater (Alutiiq) and Tiffany Shaw-Collinge (Métis)—which was originally developed for ....and other such stories, the 2019 Chicago Architecture Biennial. The sculpture resembles Alutiiq (Alaska Native) domestic architecture, with hand-bent wooden "spines" that are simultaneously integral parts of the sculpture, tools to be activated in research and performance, and reminders of the ongoing work of reassembling Indigenous cultures in the face of settler colonialism. At the artists' direction, Indigenous geometries was shown at the ICA with its opening facing east toward the sunrise, and seven spines were removed from the structure and placed on the gallery floor.

Two spines were also shipped to Canada for Lukin Linklater to use as she produced her Commonwealth commission. Her new performance for camera, This moment an endurance to the end forever (2020),

is part of an ongoing series related to Indigenous geometries. Lukin Linklater had initially planned to research and develop this performance through a week-long period of open rehearsal and live performance at the ICA but had to find new spatially-distant methods in response to COVID-19. The final film interweaves scenes of Lukin Linklater working with the spines in her home, dancers on-site at the Salmon River in Ontario, and Lukin Linklater's poetry. She focuses on qualities of atmosphere—both its density and its dissipation—as well as breath, song, and language. During a time in which breath can carry danger, when movement is restricted, when speech can be so charged, what does it mean to breathe alongside one another, to move alongside one another, to speak alongside one another?

The following conversation was convened in February 2020 by architect and theorist Beth Weinstein, following her research regarding the relationship between architecture and dance, to unpack the layers of meaning in Indigenous geometries. Interjections from Noah Simblist and Stephanie Smith from November 2020 introduce connections that emerged from the context of Commonwealth and through ongoing conversations with Lukin Linklater and Shaw-Collinge. This section closes with Lukin Linklater's written meditation on This moment an endurance to the end forever (2020).

—The Editors

A Conversation with Tanya Lukin Linklater and Tiffany Shaw-Collinge (with interjections by Noah Simblist and Stephanie Smith)

Tanya: In our early conversations with Sepake Angiama, cocurator of the 2019 Chicago Architecture Biennial, I introduced her to work by Indigenous poets Joy Harjo and Susie Silook. Included in the biennial's catalogue is "Adventures in Chinatown 1958" by Susie Silook, which tells the story of her family's relocation from a remote Alaskan village to Chinatown in Chicago. The US government moved Indigenous peoples from their homelands to cities across the US, promising education and employment, but mostly the Indigenous people found poverty. The government tried to disperse the people to discourage community-building, but many maintained relationships, including with their homelands. There are now generations of indigenous people who live in cities. They also organized politically in the 1960s.

At a talk in the fall of 2018, I spoke about structures that constrain and limit Indigenous people. A group of Indigenous architects asked me a question afterwards about how I might imagine a space for Indigenous performance. I had never been asked a question about imagining a space outside of domination. Sepake asked me to spend time with this question. I was also reading a series of short texts written by faculty and students at the Institute of American Indian Arts in 1969—their theorization of American Indian theatre's structure, space, etc. It was a significant time politically, in dance, and in art. All of this was aligning.

I asked Tiffany to join the project. Her experience listening to Indigenous peoples and communities and our shared concerns allowed for abundant conversations. I considered Alutiiq material culture, knowledges, and processes, from aesthetic forms to scale. I wanted to build citations for us from my homelands including the *ciqlluaq,* our homes in the old days. I chose to paint the inside of the spines of the sculpture because this is where life happens when we are in relation to one another. These painted lines also reference the designs rendered on Alutiiq and Unangan baskets and bags from Alaska. I've always had a kind of sensibility that materials should have relation to the scale of the body, and these markings reinforce that along with the spines of the sculpture that can move independently.

Tiffany: When we arrived at the answer, it came quite quickly, which was really beautiful because we had lengthy conversations to set up the dialogue. Among the many goals we sought to achieve, it was also important to root the work in Chicago. Tanya and I talked about how Indigenous people were forcibly removed from their homelands and relocated to Chicago, among other cities, and through the use of local materials we sought to honor that history.

AllKinds Studio, the fabrication team, listened thoughtfully. This was a new concept for me. With male fabricators, they typically bring in their own ideas and reconfigure the design but AllKinds is an all- women fabrication team, and they tried to complement our process and move the idea forward so it could be fabricated exactly as it was drawn out.

Tanya: With Tiffany, there's an openness, a way of being with each other that allows sharing towards making something that

is situated in Alutiiq art histories but also in relation to the policies of relocation in the 1950s.

In the first section of the performance, A song, a felt structure: *We are putting ourselves back together again,* the dancers embodied the idea that our objects have their own energetic qualities and that they listen, so that there is care required in our handling of them. While the sculpture is not a spiritual object, I applied some of these concepts or principles in the process.

Noah: While Chicago was the city in which the work was first introduced, it was also possible for it to be in relation to *Commonwealth,* a project that is centered around three cities: Richmond, Philadelphia, and San Juan. Furthermore, these cities are really stand-ins for any urban US Indigenous population. The history of urban Indigeneity is one chapter in the history of settler colonialism in the United States, from 1950s relocation to the political organizing of Native peoples in cities in the 1960s. So, one way to read the actions implied in *Indigenous geometries*—the gestures of pulling apart and putting back together again—is in relation to the histories of Indigeneity found in American cities in the second half of the twentieth century.

Stephanie: Yes. There were also local connections to deeper pasts and our present moment that bookend those wider, late twentieth-century histories. Before it was a commonwealth, Virginia was one of the first sites of settler colonialism in the US—a site of foundational violence and disruption. That's part of what made it so moving to experience *Indigenous geometries* this fall with several members of the Richmond Indigenous Society. The group includes people from many

places, representing a range of tribes as well as hybrid backgrounds. They shared some of their experiences navigating that complexity—moving across contexts, assembling and reassembling culture and community, and trying to build solidarity with others working toward social justice. They also sang to *Indigenous geometries.* It was a way to honor the sculpture, and Tanya and Tiffany. Building on Tanya's thinking about how objects listen, perhaps that sound and energy are now infused into the material: one way that Richmond's varied Indigenous histories/presents will now be part of the sculpture's ongoing life.

Tiffany: Tanya's original question about creating space for Indigenous performance is a significant question because we are always attempting to create space for movement, as Indigenous people continue to do, but the build of the bodies and vessels (architecture) are often static whereas the potential is not to be.

Also the connection between indoor and outdoor environments for Indigenous groups is important. Like the threshold, essentially. We talked about that critical difference between the inside and the outside of the tipi. What we were searching for in that expression is not a typical concept. The quality of environment we sought to create was surrounding the threshold between these two spaces and how performance can extend beyond this concept.

Noah: Another topic that came up in conversation with the artists in the context of *Commonwealth* is the question around the abstraction of architecture and movement. While rooted in real histories and real politics, the work's abstract forms can be perceived as inaccessible to the uninitiated.

But perhaps the use of abstraction has a politics behind it precisely because it resists easy accessibility. We often understand things that we recognize and we recognize things that are firmly established within hegemonic norms. To be confronted with new forms, new abstract configurations, is to be challenged to learn a new language. Abstraction is a language that is accessible but contingent on the unlearning of habits that are formed by the colonial tongue. In this sense abstraction is a form of resistance.

Tanya: Hierarchies of value and power exist in performance and museum systems, but I attempt to work against that. In performance, a kind of community is made with the people you're working alongside. The institution is not built for people; it is built for objects. All of the conversations I have in advance, in the proposal (paying dancers a living wage), the ways in which we orient ourselves to the space and inhabit it for a short duration, our way of being with one another—these are ways I work against the ongoing violence of systems.

In powwow and Alaska Native dance, babies, elders, we dance alongside one another. The viewer is also active within this context. There is an energy moving between the dancers, the sound moving amongst bodies, including those who have gathered, not just the "performers." That's how I imagine these spaces.

Tiffany: Yes, like Tanya said, the museum is not typically built for people. It's built for objects. We are talking about repatriation in a way. In prior work I've seen Tanya create what appears to be interventions. She creates a container or plinth for the artwork she considers and also creates care in the space that opens up the conversation in the name of community.

Stephanie: Creating care in the space is critical and can be challenging—but your approach to collaborative processes grounded in Indigenous ethics opens paths. Along those lines, it was important to meet in Chicago last year, not only to experience the piece and that performance, but also to visit together with all of your collaborators and Andy Clifford, the ICA's exhibition designer and chief preparator. Looking back almost a year later, in November 2020, that slow and physical experience of being together, breathing together, feels especially precious. In the end we weren't able to host all of you in Richmond for the planned period of open rehearsal, performance, and community connection, but that shared experience still helped lay the foundation to pivot to Tanya's development of *This moment an endurance to the end forever* as a performance for camera.

Tanya and Tiffany, thank you for opening space for Noah and me to insert these notes. It nods to our spacious conversations about the project, but we recognize that it also disrupts the flow you had established in your original text, which echoes in a small way the larger disruption of Indigenous conversation and culture that you are working to remedy. We appreciate your openness to this experiment. It makes me think of something Tanya shared in a recent online discussion with Catherine Wood (senior curator at Tate Modern)—you spoke of cultivating a mobile practice that is grounded but unbound, not containable within imposed structures or given forms or institutional expectations. A resounding yes to all of that.

Tanya: Our peoples, families, and ways of being have been pulled apart by policies and systems that have actively attempted to dismantle our relationship to ourselves, to our ancestors, to one another, to the land. When we put the

sculpture together it gestures towards the ongoing activities in our communities of putting our languages, our songs, our dances, our governances, our education, our healthcare, all of this back together so that it's intact.

* * *

This moment an endurance to the end forever by Tanya Lukin Linklater

We inhale swell heave billow fall. We exhale shiver pulse weep echo. This breath, this life all around us. We yearn for moments that are only ever now with no memory and no end, no density of time in the body. We sense feel discern an endurance an insistence a continuance a history that is ever present and always now. We inhale song, breathe language. We exhale sigh pant gust gasp, sounding. We recall a sigh shared amongst strangers. We reach for a breath repaired. This moment an endurance to the end forever.

During the early moments and days of my limited mobility due to the worldwide pandemic of the novel coronavirus, I began to consider breath, atmospheres, and clouds. The live news coverage of George Floyd's murder and the response in Black Lives Matter protests as well as ongoing indigenous resistance to state violence became more concentrated for me during this time. I began to consider Indigenous knowledges that teach us about breath and air.

I shot the first part of this work for camera using Super 8 in my living room near two sculptural spines from *Indigenous geometries*. I considered this a potential counter to the US and Canadian federal policies that have worked to dismantle our homes and families as Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island.

This action in my living room cites the sculpture and the performance that accompanied it in 2019.

In the second part of the work, I began to concentrate on a more-than-human structure, the density of the atmospheres that surround the earth and are held close to the planet by gravity, then dissipate in all directions forever outward toward and through the cosmos. With dancers Ivanie Aubin-Malo and Ceinwen Gobert, I investigated textures, tones, and other qualities of breath and atmospheres through embodiment. This was balanced with structuring the video through the duration of one day from sunrise to sunset. I also cite ritual time as expressed in a text by a group of faculty and students as they proposed a structure for Indigenous performance at the Institute of American Indian Arts in 1969. I suppose there are many citations that I hope are coalescing or present in some way in the work.

I am left with and continue to wonder, to reach towards repair, to consider what might be possible or potential at this time.

THE WORLD WE WANT IS US

By Noah Simblist and Stephanie Smith

Over one weekend in November 2020, words and images of protest and collective care were projected onto the ICA's facade. For The World We Want Is Us, artists and Southerners On New Ground (SONG) members Shazza Berhan and Laura Chow Reeve cocreated a series of images that were projected onto the ICA by Dustin Klein, known for his now-iconic interventions on the Lee Monument in Marcus-David Peters Circle in Richmond. The project built on prior collaboration with SONG VA Statewide Organizer Rebecca Keel as a facilitator for Summer Sessions: Commonwealth in 2019, a public research and discussion series that considered the larger ideas of Commonwealth in relation to Richmond.

Berhan's and Reeve's visuals combine text and imagery to envision a new future after community demands for social justice are met. For instance, one depicts protest as a form of collective care; another presents a future in which investments in the public good through health care, housing, education, and the arts lead to safer, happier communities. The artists hope for a time "in which conditions have changed and we no longer have to fight for dignity and basic safety, building on the work of local organizers, activists, and advocates who have been working for justice, reformation, and liberation." Their title references a poem of the same name by Alice Walker. Conceived as part of Commonwealth's Richmond presentation, it was shown November 12–15, 2020, in conjunction with 1708 Gallery's InLight, an annual citywide festival of outdoor light-based work. In the following conversation, curators Noah Simblist and Stephanie Smith reflect on the project.

–The Editors

Stephanie: It felt great to see Laura's and Shazza's images shining out from the ICA a few weeks ago—especially since we had to walk a tightrope to get to that point. Big public universities like VCU can be exciting contexts but also pose specific challenges, and at times we weren't sure we'd be able to proceed without compromising the project's spirit. We decided to write this together to explore the push-pull among activist intentions, aesthetic approaches, and institutional norms—both in this project and in relation to larger frames.

The seeds of the project were planted in summer 2019, when activist and organizer Rebecca Keel facilitated sessions on the themes of "Assembly" and "Public Domain" for *Summer Sessions: Commonwealth.* The 2020 uprisings gave new urgency and visibility to the work that Rebecca and others had been doing for years, including honing six community demands that mixed calls from national movements with Virginia-specific demands, ranging from "defund the police" to the creation of a "Marcus Alert" system to respond to mental

health crises. In early summer 2020, we decided to extend our initial collaboration in the spirit of mutual aid and as part of Commonwealth. Rebecca had recognized that demands like "defund the police" can feel abstract or alienating to some people and wanted to address that through art. Fellow SONG members Shazza Berhan and Laura Chow Reeve began to visualize concrete and poetic ways that people's lives could be better if those demands were met, and after considering more traditional approaches like a static mural, the team decided to bring Dustin in to project onto the ICA's facade. We didn't initially anticipate many challenges beyond technical ones, given that because of COVID-19 we'd already pivoted to an indoor-outdoor project and were installing other large, politically engaged works around the ICA's exterior.

Noah: One of the things that arts institutions often wrestle with when addressing social or political subject matter is community engagement. That way, the politics that are represented by an artwork can account for the community context in which it is presented. This would take a long time to go deeply into, but this attitude rejects the autonomy of an artwork and instead allows for the fact that its very being is dynamic and informed by the living communities that encounter it. On the one hand, we could have thought that SONG, an activist group, was the social context for the artwork that was presented. But that doesn't account for other points of view, which is precisely the definition of politics—the negotiation of competing points of view through shared governance. So, I think that you started this process from the standpoint of institutional stewardship and the ethic of a broad form of community engagement by reaching out to some folks at VCU, specifically the office of government relations, and that quickly spread to VCU's counsel's office and the office of public affairs, right?

Stephanie: Yes. As with any cultural institution nested inside a university, reaching out to university colleagues isn't "community engagement" in the way you'd think about it at a freestanding nonprofit. It's blurry. In this case, those colleagues were external to the ICA but all of us were still internal to the larger organization, working under a shared, overarching structure that, as a public university, extends all the way out to the Commonwealth of Virginia itself. In this case, several of us had reached out to VCU colleagues earlier, and then yes, the crucial conversations began after I called a colleague in government relations for input. While supportive overall, he raised very reasonable concerns about timing. The projections were initially planned to go up in late October, and since the ICA was a polling place for the November elections, he wondered whether the timing might impact prospective voters. That triggered questions from others as well as a key meeting with you and me, colleagues from the ICA, and leaders from VCU's legal, university relations, and government relations teams. That's when we really began to surface and address the larger issues. Could you start with the concern that the project might constitute "political speech" that could activate the ICA's facade as a "public forum"?

Noah: That issue was interesting to me because, as I understood the legal concerns, if "political speech" were allowed on the outside of the ICA it could transform it into a "public forum" that would have to be open to a wide array of points of view, including ones that might contravene the values of equity and inclusion that VCU strives to uphold, because as a public institution we couldn't restrict any political speech. One example was that if we allowed SONG's projection then we might need to also allow projections from white supremacist groups because of freedom of speech.

As you note, the institutional structure that we were negotiating with was both VCU and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Many don't know just how much VCU is an institution of the state, so much so that the legal team for VCU technically reports to the Attorney General of Virginia. So when we were negotiating the terms of this program, we were negotiating with the state about the conditions of political speech and artistic practice in the public sphere, not just within the context of a university.

In our conversations with VCU legal and public affairs departments, there were two issues at stake. One was that art and politics were assumed to be separate. The other was that putting something outdoors was assumed to be public while something inside the architecture of the ICA was not. This goes against most ways that art institutions like to think of themselves in relation to "the public." In fact the use of the ICA as a public polling place was great precisely because it reinforced the notion of the museum as a civic space. Furthermore, because there was a political message it was assumed that this was not art but politics. So we had to go to great lengths to prove that it was art and that art could be political and politics (or activism) could be art.

Stephanie: Yes, it was fascinating to listen to the ways different participants understood the labels "art," "activism," and "politics" and applied them here. It was also interesting that no concerns were raised about other public works in *Commonwealth* that are arguably more publicly visible and at least as political in intention. That's especially true for Duron Chavis's *Resiliency Garden* commission—which, like *The World We Want Is Us*, began with an activist's facilitation of part of

Summer Sessions. It was strategically useful to reinforce the "art" side of *The World We Want Is Us* in these conversations, but in other contexts we've described both projects as "art adjacent" to keep things fluid and to avoid over-defining them.

That categorical slippage ended up being a key part of the behind-the-scenes process—practically, conceptually, and ethically. As curators, we were simultaneously seeking paths for the university to support the project; trying to hold space for the creative team to realize their intentions; and also thinking about how all of this sits within larger arcs of contemporary practice. At one point you worried about whether we were in danger of pushing the creative team to water down the activist part of the project, taking away the edge that made it interesting in the first place. Could you say more about that?

Noah: Yes, in my mind, the most interesting aspect of the project was giving an activist group, with values connected to our exhibition, a platform to amplify their work. Much of the art in *Commonwealth* dealt with politics and even activism but this project would ground representation in praxis, something that both Chavis and SONG offered. I worried that by working so hard to make this "art" we might dull down the politics, which was the aesthetic gesture.

This might be a little academic but the French philosopher Jacques Rancière talks about the reciprocal relationship between art and politics through his notion of "aesthetic regimes," reminding us that the hierarchies that we impose on aesthetics introduce politics. In this sense all art is political to some degree. But on the flip side, we could also think about

politics as having an aesthetic form, based on the specific configuration of the regime.

I remember seeing that beautiful projection of SONG's images on the ICA and thinking that this was just one piece of a much larger artwork that contained every email and Google doc and meeting that constituted our negotiations with the VCU administration that got us to this point. It reminded me of a famous project called *Picasso in Palestine* that the Van Abbemuseum did with the International Academy of Art in Palestine. The project included not only the loan of a Picasso painting to the occupied West Bank but also the paperwork that documented the convolutions of bureaucracy to get it there.

The irony of the worries that VCU legal had about the project being too political is that by the standards that Tania Bruguera has laid out for art that doesn't just represent politics but also enacts politics, a practice that she calls Arte Útil, we didn't quite get there. We were just debating what level of politics could be represented and if an activist can call themselves an artist.

While we didn't note these examples, we had to educate the VCU administration with a PowerPoint that ICA Director Dominic Willsdon showed our colleagues for final approval. It included ACT UP, Krzysztof Wodiczko, For Freedoms, and others. This level of education is so important and rarely talked about. In standalone museums it's often a part of board stewardship, but in our case it included the stewardship of the state.

Stephanie: Yes. And that builds on prior behind-the-scenes work done by other ICA colleagues. That kind of ongoing diplomatic work is always partial and imperfect, but so necessary.

Overall, things aligned, and the project wasn't crushed or neutered. That could have easily happened, given the inherently conservative, self-protecting nature of most big institutions, and the ways that people (us included) learn to conform to institutional codes and expectations that sometimes lead people to close in/shut down. I appreciate the good will of everyone around the table (or rather, the Zooms); we were able to explore complex issues in fairly nuanced, spacious ways. Similarly, things could have gone wrong with the creative team if we didn't have a pretty clear sense of each other's values going into the project, backed by practical support and resources from the ICA. It could also have soured if the creative team of artists and activists hadn't been open to the process, or if they felt that we weren't being transparent partners. So much could have gone wrong. So to go back to earlier points: the project involved community engagement in a broad sense, and was also, as you said, politics in action—we shared perspectives, negotiated outcomes, and built support for specific ideas and actions. And all of that really comes down to individual people making space to listen to each other's perspectives. Which is very much in the spirit of *Commonwealth* overall.

So it was especially moving to hear the impromptu speech Rebecca made as our little cluster of chilly, socially-distanced collaborators sipped hot chocolate and cheered the lighting of the projections, to feel their joy in the moment and what it meant in Richmond in 2020, just over a week past the election. To quote the Alice Walker poem that the piece is named after, we're far from there but for a moment it felt like maybe "the world we want is on the way."

SAN JUAN AND PHILADELPHIA: IN COMMON, THERE IS NO WEALTH

CHRONICLE OF THE SECOND HALF OF 2020

By Joel Cintrón Arbasetti

1
To Flee from Gas and Fly Mid-Pandemic
June 1, 2020

The crowd clambers up a slope on the side of the highway. They are fleeing from tear gas thrown by the police. A cloud of asphyxiating, stinging smoke envelops them. They flee, but the cops, with their protective gear and gas masks, keeps throwing hot cartridges. Some people are carrying their bikes, on their shoulders, up this hill toward a cement wall full of creepers and a steel fence they will also have to scale. A helicopter hovers. An officer arrests a woman with a red shirt as if she were a rag doll, dragging her down toward the highway to make the arrest. Those who struggle up the incline are wearing their facemasks. There is audible crying. Amidst the collective, unintelligible murmur, the only phrase that rings out loud and clear is, "I can't breathe." It can be heard over and over. But in this

particular instant, in contrast to the march, the phrase is no longer a chant. Those who are climbing, can't breathe.

Signs, bicycles, umbrellas, sneakers, gloves, water bottles, and backpacks are strewn across the weeds.

Thus, ended the third consecutive day of protests in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, following the May 25 assassination of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, at the hands of a white police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Today, a sunny June 1, more than a thousand protesters were marching on Philadelphia's streets. A little before 5:00 pm, a section of the march walked onto Interstate Highway 676, close to Center City. They stopped traffic. After a while, the police arrived and began shooting tear gas canisters. Protesters tried fleeing by climbing up this rugged incline. But it seems the police strategy was to teach them a lesson for protesting, hoping this would dissuade them from prolonging the marches. The preceding days were intense. Patrol cars were set on fire in the center of the same city where the U.S. Constitution was signed.

I observe the slope scene on my laptop; it's already nighttime, almost 10, and I'm lying on my bed, on the second floor of a reinforced concrete house I rent in the municipality of San Juan, Puerto Rico's capital city, which is populated by more than three hundred thousand people. Drifting through the aluminum sheet window, I can hear the neighborhood's soundscape to my left: Santurce, sub-neighborhood Hipódromo, Aibonito Street, bordering on the Barriada Figueroa, La Colectora. The soundscape: the explosive motors of ramshackle trucks. Some carry imported goods down the highway. These goods come out of San Juan's port. Standing on

my balcony, from afar, I see the port's giant crane arms lifting boxcars to a flank of the "John F. Kennedy Expressway," a pestilent route that connects San Juan to the Cataño, Bayamón, and Guaynabo: part of San Juan's Metropolitan Area ("Área Metropolitana de San Juan"), home to more than two million of the island's three million inhabitants. This port defines an essential part of what makes up the "Commonwealth" in Puerto Rico: the "common" comes down to a corporate conglomerate that controls the entry and exit of goods. According to the Cabotage Law, the cargo ships that arrive at the island's ports have to be crewed, flagged, owned, and built "primarily" by the United States. The same regulation applies to states, but Puerto Rico is not a state. Nor is it an independent country, but rather a "Commonwealth." The "Commonwealth of Puerto Rico," unlike Virginia or Pennsylvania, does not translate into Spanish as "Commonwealth of Nations, but "Estado Libre Asociado" or "Free Associated State," which, to make a long story short, can be translated as "Colony." Under the capitalist economic regime that dominates us, the literal translation, "Common-wealth," would also be inadequate.

The most distant but persistent sound belongs to the planes that descend into Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport. When I am in the air, and we are commencing our descent onto the island, from my window seat, I always find my street. My reference points include a grey square that is a giant Walmart near the Parada 18 in Santurce and a white circle that is an old (probably empty) water reserve. Despite the noise, and given that it is the most violent neighborhood in the second most violent capital in Latin America and the Caribbean (after Caracas), with 53.5 homicides for every 100,000 inhabitants (in 2019 there were 172 violent deaths in San Juan, 606 in the

whole island), in this sector, the sub-neighborhood Hipódromo, one breathes a homey air; a bucolic environment that at night is bathed in neon lights pulsing from billboards almost a mile away. The sound of the truck motors that speed down the highway sometimes gets tangled with gunshots or the gunshots get tangled with the motors, until it becomes clear what we are hearing is an automatic weapon. The noise of police sirens or ambulances or firetrucks is not as constant as that of weapons or shaky motors.

As I watch the police brutality video on that June day, from my room in Santurce, I recall the bitter taste of tear gas from the strikes at the University of Puerto Rico against the 2010 and 2011 tuition hikes and the May 1 protests against the Financial Oversight and Management Board imposed by the U.S. Congress. I remember the Summer of 2019, when massive protests and violent confrontations with the police made then-governor Ricardo Rosselló resign; the desperation of a giant mouthful that seeks breath but only succeeds in swallowing more gas that continues penetrating deeper still into one's lungs. The drowning.

I saw the beginning of the Summer 2019 protests from the opposition direction, staring at my laptop on the second floor of a house in Kensington, North Philly. I've spent a year coming and going between the two cities, in order to see my partner, Heather. Today, June 1, at 9:42 am, I bought another ticket to that city, Philadelphia.

In a big U.S. city (Philadelphia is the sixth largest city and the and the poorest of these six), one easily forgets the rest of the state. I've always gone to Philadelphia, never Pennsylvania,

much less the "Commonwealth of Pennsylvania." Nor do I live in the "Commonwealth of Puerto Rico," which is impossible to visit because it doesn't exist. What does exist is the nonincorporated territory, administered by the same two parties belonging to the technocratic elites since 1948 and subject to the mandate of the United States Congress.

My flight to Philadelphia is Delta 357. It leaves on June 4, at 3:40 pm. It makes a stop in Atlanta at 7:20. I arrive in Philadelphia at 10:30 on Delta 2116. I'm supposed to return, but I never bought a return ticket.

I'm going to take a plane mid-pandemic.

I will quarantine myself in a West Philadelphia church.

2
Churches for Gentrification
June 4

I arrived in Philadelphia on a rainy night. We crossed the street running up to the red church door that opened with a four-digit security code. The church exterior is built with grey brick, in a Victorian style, designed by the architect Frank Furness and built in 1900 on 4700 Kingsessing Avenue. In 2017, it was converted into a complex that houses 21 apartments. The lent studio where we quarantined has a spiral staircase shaped like a conch that leads up to a mezzanine containing a bathroom and a bed. The window frames are concave with a stained-glass tip. The brick columns are adorned with chapiter. Is this another example of gentrification or a display of historical preservation? The church was set to be demolished in 2014, but

it was saved with the aim of converting it a housing complex. Each studio rents for $1200 monthly. Does preservation necessarily lead to gentrification? Is there another alternative? In Spring Garden, an area much closer to downtown Philadelphia, the neighborhood where Edgar Allan Poe lived and that later began Philly's first Boricua barrio in the '50s, there was a church. It was called La Milagrosa, and it was a meeting place for the Latinx community. Now it is an expensive condo building. After riots and massive arrests, the Boricuas were expelled from Spring Garden towards the Northeast, to zones such as Hunting Park, Kensignton, and Fairhill—the current Boricua barrio with a growing Dominican population (as the saying goes, "Puerto Rico and the Dominica Republic, two wings of the same bird.") Philadelphia is the second city with the largest Puerto Rican population outside New York. From the '50s to today, the Boricua community—along with the other non-rich, non-white communities—still faces the threat of displacement posed by gentrification.

3
Earthquakes: Welcoming a Poet

In 2018, the city of Philadelphia named the Puerto Rican poet Raquel Salas Rivera as its Poet Laureate, in other words, the city's poetry ambassador. Raquel lived out their childhood years in the U.S. and, at the age of 14, moved to Puerto Rico. At 26, he headed to Philadelphia to complete a PhD in Comparative Literature and Literary Theory at the University of Pennsylvania. He published five poetry books in Spanish, some with self-translations into English. He is an editor and a translator.

On December 8, 2019, after eight years in Philadelphia, at the age of 34, Salas Rivera returned to San Juan, Puerto Rico. He

received the 2020 New Year with the island in his heart. And the New Year and his island received him with shaking arms: earthquakes in the Southern and poorest half of the island, a seismic sequence that reached a climax on January 7, the day after Three Kings Day. That morning, a little before sunrise, the earthquake reached a scale of 6.4 and was felt throughout all of Puerto Rico. There was an island-wide blackout. The aftershocks continued for months and still continue to this day. Hundreds of people in the south lost their homes. Thousands returned to refugee camps and darkness, reminiscent of hurricanes Irma and María that hit Puerto Rico in September 2017. Irma only grazed us, but María entered the island as a category 5 hurricane. There were thousands of deaths and the government tried to hide them.

The hurricane and the earthquakes crowned more than a decade of economic depression caused by a global capitalist crisis; the neoliberal politics adopted by the two parties that share power in Puerto Rico; the colonial politics of the U.S. Congress; and the economic interests that mutated from military and agrarian interests; and mono-cultivation of the land. This went hand in hand with cheap industrial works and their tax exemptions; mass migration to the U.S.; the pharmaceutical plantation; experimental transgenic companies; multinationals for mass consumption; government bonds emitted with great gains for banks and financial entities; and, later on, the debt.

In 2014, Puerto Rico declared bankruptcy with more than $70 thousand million in debt. In 2016, the government entered a debt restructuring process that would take place via the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA). This law, signed during the Barack Obama

administration, imposed a Fiscal Control Board that was placed in charge of government finances. It is an organism similar to the Pennsylvania Intergovernmental Cooperation Authority (PICA), which supervises finances of the city of Philadelphia, but with the much greater power to rule over a whole country, one that can't vote for the legislative body that selected the seven members who make up "la Junta" (FCB). While the country goes through what has been described as the largest crash in the history of the U.S. municipal bonds market, dozens of investment firms, insurance companies, and venture capitalists battle it out in court to collect an odious debt that, if properly audited, would most probably be declared illegal. In this recent interval of successive crises, emergencies, and states of exception that define the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the government's only economic plan has been to market the island as a fiscal paradise of tax exemptions for the rich, millionaires, administrators of investment firms—many of them fraudulent—, and cryptocurrency speculators. Thus, along with mass migration, many millionaires or aspiring millionaires arrive on the island, in what could be called tax-exemption tourism.

But, sometimes, there is the arrival (or return) of poets.

[let's say you go to philadelphia
to look for the coats much needed
by the abuelas, the angelías, the río maunabo, etc.
you work hard, look for a license with a renewed address,
buy three four five hundred coats,
go to the local branch and say
here they are.
i would like to pay that debt.
but without looking up they answer

here in philly we don't accept coats.]

*Fragment of "'coats are not exchanged for coats'" from lo *terciario/the tertiary* by Raquel Salas Rivera.

4
The Monster That Eats Flags
June 6

On June 6, protesters marched from the Philadelphia Museum of Art (PMA) to City Hall, paralyzing Philadelphia's Center City. According to Billy Penn, it was the largest march for social justice the city had seen. That day, it was 88 degrees out and a helicopter flew through the gray sky above our heads as we parked on Fraternity Street, Mantua Hood, and then proceeded on foot toward the Museum steps. These steps, which Silvester Stallone raced up as Rocky Balboa, are visited by dozens of tourists daily, even in the midst of a pandemic. That day, they were packed with hundreds of people protesting against police brutality. We reached City Hall, built in the Second Empire architectural style, whose giant tower is crowned by William Penn, Philadelphia's founder. In the wake of the toppling of colonial statues throughout the U.S., this would be the highest aspiration, to topple William Penn, the Quaker slave-owning colonizer. Although it may still seem impossible, those days I overheard evening conversations, amidst the flies of summer, in front of working-class Kingston homes, about the best method of accomplishing such a mission. Someone suggested a giant crane and I suggested the services of Puerto Rican Tito Kayak, who among his many accomplishments, once climbed and planted a Puerto Rican flag on the Statue of Liberty in order to denounce the island's colonial status.

At an intersection near the Museum, there waited a military vehicle whose carrier was packed with soldiers, protected from the sun by a sand-colored canvas cloth, wearing sunglasses and surrounded by boxes full of water bottles. Other soldiers walked down the street carrying M4 carbines, an automatic assault rifle, crossing in front of citizens that marched to protest social injustice and the police state, demanding the defunding of the police under the Black Lives Matter slogan. Some soldiers blocked a street while others ate Fudge Pops, protected by fusil, helmet, camouflaged bullet-proof vest, and good-natured smiles that seemed to say they didn't want to be there. But there they were. And the whole world knows all it takes is an order for them to drop the ice-cream and grab the riffle.

Using the Spring Garden bridge, we crossed the Schuylkill River until we reached the Museum. On our way, scattered across the grass, we saw pieces of cardboard, paintbrushes, tempera, and small plastic cups: materials for sign-making. I wanted to make one that read, "Looting is protest." I decided to take a lighter route in order to avoid any possible discussions and instead wrote, "Corporations are looters." Heather wrote the phrase, "Austerity is state violence." When we almost finished painting, a boy of three or four came up to us and showed us his sign. His father stood behind him wearing a surgical mask, and his mother stood much further back wearing a surgical mask and carrying a baby in her arms. Both let the boy move freely, as if he were alone. Showing us the sign with great pride—his piece of painted cardboard that was a tumult of red brushstrokes, an abstract protest, or a premonition—he explained its meaning in English and in detail. The red tumult was the ending of a story he and only he understood, and thus, we stood before a revelation. All that

red was explicable: a monster, we have no idea what kind, started eating flags (we also don't know what kind, but let's assume they are American), and the monster ate so many, I mean so many flags, that he ended up vomiting them all. And that was the red: the vomit of a flag-eating monster. His small index finger pointed at the strokes, as he explained that the sign was product of his current state of human development: "I don't know how to form letters, but I feel like I know the numbers."

The father came closer, read Heather's sign and said that now he'd have to find a way to explain to his son the meaning of "austerity." When it is an everyday occurrence, austerity is something so vulgar that it almost doesn't need an explanation. But, undoubtedly, it's a difficult concept for someone who doesn't have to live it. Still, I was surprised that, at such a young age, the boy understood that flags, along with statues, borders, and police stations, were something to be abolished, gobbled up, and vomited. There goes someone with an upside-down U.S. flag, but that isn't really a flag, it's an anti-flag. Another flag that's worth it, is a flag on fire. In the city's center, in front of City Hall, when the protest felt truly massive, I saw another flag (or anti-flag) I'm meant to identify with: the Puerto Rican flag dressed in black.

4
Trump Visits Philadelphia
September 15

On Tuesday, September 15, at 5:00 pm, I turned off on 6abc Action News and left the apartment after watching Air Force One land in Philadelphia International Airport. I began walking

toward the intersection of 46th and Walnut Street, West Philly, heading toward the same destination as Trump, who sped there in his vehicle and security contingent: the National Constitution Center, on the other side of the Schuylkill River. It was an hour-and-17-minute walk towards downtown Philly. In a car, it would take Trump less than 15 minutes. His visit was part of the 2020 presidential campaign and the electoral battle for Pennsylvania, a decisive state in the upcoming elections. Trump would take part in a "Town Hall Event," a presentation targeting undecided voters. There had been a call for a protest right in front of the building.

The street numbers in West Philadelphia count down toward the east. From 46th to 10th, nothing seems to indicate that Trump would be in the city today, his first visit after a summer packed with street protests and confrontations with the police. On the Walnut Street's sidewalks, in front of the Chinese Christian Church—next to the Association Islamic Charitable Projects—they pass, as they do every afternoon: joggers, dog walkers, the stuttering woman who asks passerby for change, the UPS worker with his brown uniform. Further down, the students with their UPENN (University of Pennsylvania) shirts, the motorcycle crews that are running red lights and doing wheelies, the cars playing trap at full-volume, the high-rises that can be seen in the skyline behind the Schuylkill, September's good weather, the afternoon drifting in on a few clouds, and people and cars forming Center City traffic.

Starting at 9th and Arch, I started to see a noticeable increase in police presence and blocked streets. The National Constitution Center was on Arch between 6th and 5th. The protestors took up the middle of the street in front of the Independence National Historical Park Visitor Center. Behind

a table, a group of activists gave out stickers that read Trump/ Pence OUT NOW RefuseFacism.org #OutNow! A paper mâché Trump marionette with devil horns and a Bible made its way down Arch. One sign said: Fuck Off Trump. Large speakers played music in the space between speeches: Janelle Monae, "I Like That"; Marvin Gaye, "What's Going On"; dancers improvising; Bob Marley, "O'Clock Roadblock"; Frank Ocean, "Sweet Life"; Curtis Mayfield, "Back to Living Again"; Shop Boyz, "Party Like a Rockstar." A pantless woman with a Trump mask and a blazer performed mid-crowd. A man carried a piece of cardboard and a megaphone, offering JESUS OR HELLFIRE to the protestors, fully protected by a line of cops.

5
Proud Boys in West Philly
September 19

In September, a flyer started appearing all over West Philadelphia light posts and walls that read:

PROUD BOY FASCISTS ARE COMING
DEFEND
WEST PHILADELPHIA

Proud boys are a fraternal order of neo-fascists who glorify white supremacy, patriarchy, and authoritarian leaders like Trump. They are a violent far right organization and they are targeting our neighborhood for a Saturday rally in "the belly of the beast." Stand together with your neighbors to drown them out, shut them down and kick them out!

THIS SATURDAY: SEPTEMBER 19 CLARK PARK
12:00 PM
bring noisemakers, shields, signs
and all of your friends & comrades

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) identifies the Proud Boys as a "general hate group." The SPLC is a non-profit organization that monitors hate and extremist groups throughout the U.S. and exposes their activities. In 2019, this organization identified 940 hate groups throughout the country. Its Hate Map shows 36 in Pennsylvania. Philadelphia has the Be Active Front USA, described as Skinheads, various groups classified as Black separatists, and the Proud Boys. The group was founded during the 2016 elections by VICE Media cofounder, Gavin McInnes. It is a self-described "fraternal group" of "western chauvinists" with an agenda to fight against political correctness and "white guilt."

Clark Park is an important gathering place in West Philadelphia. It's a green area populated by trees, benches and tables. People picnic on the grass and play sports or instruments. There is usually a farmer's market on Saturdays. West Philly is known to be a diverse neighborhood that includes the following racial, ethic, and political groupings: white, Black, Indian, Bangladeshi, Mexican, Vietnamese, Ethiopian, a large queer community, anarchists and anti-fascists. On Saturday, September 19, around noon (the day the Proud Boys were supposed to march), there was already a great deal of movement at the park. It was more packed than usual. Someone sold pizza under a tent, a girl gave out an anti-fascist newsletter. An older gentleman gave out flyers with a touch of nostalgia that filtered through his small, round glasses and came off as a spark of joy. What makes this man so content,

this white activist over seventy that hands out a sheet of paper with the Socialist Resurgence logo?

I take one and read the first paragraph: *Fascists thugs like Proud Boys, militias, and Nazis are mobilizing, emboldened by Trump's racist rhetoric and often helped by police. From Charlottesville to Portland they are on the march.*

I don't know if the man was remembering the older days of activism when clearly-formed enemy groups gave a more concrete sense of a political struggle that mostly happened on the battlefield of abstract language; but, if this was the case, shouldn't he instead be upset or sad that he still has to fight these fascist groups? Or can we attribute his smile and happiness to the number of people who have shown up to reject fascism? The park is full. According to *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* there are more than 500 people here. A notable group dressed all in black, with black umbrellas, backpacks and shields, has gathered in one of the park's two main sections. It is a black bloc, the self-proclaimed vanguard of the riots. Its members stand at the frontlines, confronting the police during protests. The umbrellas are useful in hiding its members from the camera's lens. Yet, no matter much they've covered, it is evident that they are mostly young, white, and 20-something.

The atmosphere in the park, more than that of a protest or counter-protest, feels like that of a family outing. People are walking their dogs, babies in carriages take sunbaths, and someone is dressed as Gritty, the official mascot of the Philadelphia Flyers, wearing a black shirt with an anti-fascist symbol: a circle and three arrows. There is a sound system, people give speeches, and only one skirmish takes place.

Suddenly, a faction of black bloc starts running toward a provocateur that apparently has a weapon. This open field stampede across the green grass bowl in the middle of the park, amidst slides and jungle gyms, of a group dressed in all black, with covered faces, gloves, and backpacks, is a scene at once infantile and medieval. The group chases the fascist to his car and breaks in the windows. On a nearby street, leans a bicycle police contingent. Amongst those gathered, it's easy to identify the detectives with their jackets, their badges, and their pistol handles poking out of their belts.

One of the black bloc members becomes upset that I'm taking photos. That's how I find out what the umbrellas are for. They explain how they can be identified even when covered. They have a particular voice; I wonder if they are disguising it for protection. I comment that their group needs some more color. They say that isn't true, that not everyone in the group is white, and that those are just lies the liberal press perpetuates to discredit them. They tell me they have been to Puerto Rico, went to Naguabo, and mention a supposed Taíno god I've never heard of. Before taking leave, they ask me my name. After answering, I ask theirs and they say: "Not this time, but I'll find you again."

The Proud Boys never show up. Later, on the social media, they claim the march was a staged event created to expose Left radicals. One week later, sixty self-proclaimed Proud Boys march through Center City.

6
The Assassination of Walter Wallace Jr.
October 27

The ceaseless drone of police helicopters has been filling West Philly homes all morning, as they restlessly circle the area.

Yesterday afternoon, a white cop murdered Walter Wallace Jr. on the 6100 block of Locust Street, a half-hour walk from where I live. As evening fell, dozens of people congregated between 54 and 55 on Pine St., in front of the 18th precinct. Wallace was a Black, 27-year-old mentally ill resident. He had a knife in his hand when the police arrived and was shot more than ten times, in front of his home, his mother and their neighbors. The scene was caught on a cellphone video and later posted on social media.

That night, I left the apartment at 10:21 and headed by bicycle towards the protest. There were light showers and some fog. When I arrived, I tried to penetrate the crowd, but in that very moment, a group of protesters came running toward me, zigzagging between parked cars. I couldn't see what was happening up ahead, but I could tell that there was a multitude and, from what I could gather on Instagram, it faced a row of cops.

After a while, a group of teenagers (between 16 and 19 years old), from the surrounding West Philly community, arrived carrying a box full of big empty bottles, which they immediately began launching. More cops, on foot and on bike, started appearing from lateral streets. The teens easily dispersed the police by walking toward them, screaming, "Get the fuck out of here!" This was eventually followed by the arrival of a riot squad that formed an immovable line, once again blocking the street. I tuned onto a website that allows one to listen in on police radios. I searched for the Southwest

police zone and heard there had been disturbances on the corner of 52nd and Market St. I grabbed my bike and headed over. There was a giant dumpster on fire in the middle of the street, police cars with shattered windows, broken storefronts, open warehouses, people carrying boxes full of new sneakers. The most powerful image delivered that night, showed a vandalized cop car parked in front of a McDonalds. As the night progressed, the car eventually caught fire and finally exploded. This was a celebration, a release that will not stop police brutality. The next night, two cops stood right there, in front of that same McDonalds that, like other area businesses, met the day with boarded up windows, as if this expecting a hurricane. This time, the protests were quickly contained, dispersed by the toxic mist of the new election cycle.

7
Expecting Chaos
November 2

One day before the election, the sun began setting at 5:25, with a temperature of 45 degrees and a mostly clear sky. The boarded-up businesses kept reminding me of hurricane season storm shutters in Puerto Rico. It doesn't help that people, in their homes, are discussing the possibility of preventative shopping, food storage, stockpiling. But no hurricane is on its way, just the elections; just Trump giving indications that he's getting ready for a "coup"; just the deployment of the Pennsylvania National Guard to City Hall, spurred by a fear of riots.

8
A Bitter Victory
November 7

It's 11:50 am. Through my window, I can hear screams, car alarms, and the beating of kitchen pots. Today people celebrate the virtual victory of U.S. presidential candidate Joseph Biden. I prefer to think that the celebration is a response to Donald Trump's defeat, in a city where the vote has been decisive. Meanwhile, in Puerto Rico, parallel elections are taking place. Pedro Pierluisi is the projected winner, a candidate belonging to the same political party as Ricardo Rosselló, the ex-governor dethroned by massive protests in summer of 2019. In San Juan, there is a tight mayoral race between the right-wing candidate belonging to Ricardo's party, and a "liberal" or left-leaning candidate that is part of the new party, Victoria Ciudadana. Vote counting in San Juan has been delayed by a series of irregularities: lost suitcases containing votes, which have slowly been reappearing, and accusations that there have been duplicate votes, phantom votes, or even intimidation from the right-wing candidate's supporters, whose party remains in power.

9
"safety briefing"
January 20, 2021

Another tense day. More than 20 thousand National Guard members from all states and other territories of the United States of America were deployed to attend President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration in Washington D.C. Today is Trump's last day at the White House. Certainly it will not be the last day of Trumpist fascism. On January 6, for many Latin people the Three Kings Day, a white supremacists mob of various denominations violently stormed into the United

States Capitol Building protesting the alleged fraudulent presidential election.

There is fear that the violence will continue today in the inauguration of the Democrat president. Not only in D.C., but in every part of the country. The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico will be contributing to this new chapter of USA paranoia with 127 soldiers of the 92nd Military Police Brigade of the National Guard. They departed last Saturday from the Muñiz Air National Guard Base in Carolina. For Barack Obama's oath of office in 2012, 8 thousand soldiers were deployed, for Trump's in 2016, 10 thousand soldiers, and today there are 22 thousand troops deployed.

General José Reyes, of the Puerto Rico National Guard, warned the boricua soldiers that extremist groups, like the Proud Boys, could be present in the inauguration, according to a report by Sofía Rico for the Puerto Rican news media Noticel.

"The Proud Boys group leader is Enrique Tarrio. He lives in Miami and is of Cuban descent. This group was created around 2016. Many members speak Spanish and could try to take advantage and infiltrate our troops of Puerto Rican soldiers because they speak Spanish too. They have announced that they will not be wearing the colors that usually distinguish them (black and yellow) and that they will be infiltrated among people. So, (the message) is like a 'a safety briefing' to our soldiers, this is the moment where you can't trust anyone. There are different groups, but I mentioned the Proud Boys since some of their members speak Spanish", Reyes declared.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Capitol Building, in Harrisburg, the capital of this state with a population of more

than 12 million, is totally surrounded by barricades. Extreme security measures have been taken and the FBI is on a state of alert, here and in the whole nation. In Philadelphia the police commissioner said there were no specific threats but the officers are prepared.

Today in Walnut Hill, West Philadelphia, Philadelphia, the most populated city of the Pennsylvania Commonwealth, part of the Delaware Valley and the Northeast Megalopolis, the morning was slightly cloudy. At 11 a gust of wind came in with snow. In Knockbox cafe, in the Spruce Hill area, customers are listening to the presidential inauguration on MSNBC. From a car and from the windows of a house in Locust St, near 47 Street, you can listen to the voice of Lady Gaga singing the United States anthem while the snowy gusts of wind increase in power turning Southeast. The temperature is 37 degrees and it is expected to lower to 23 degrees at night. The weather forecast never detects the presidential changes. In the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Caribbean tropical archipelago north of South America, slightly cloudy, 81 degrees of temperature, 127 National Guard soldiers less, and 14 new COVID-19 related deaths.

"SURVIVING BETWEEN FAILURE AND QUEER/CUIR MAROON WRITINGS"

By Mabel Rodríguez Centeno

An hour less. How strange is the time change from latitudes so hot, so Caribbean, so wild? Of course, that time is not ours. Shall we elope?

In Puerto Rico "we learned to read the times of nature when the human time was suspended," says the voice of Sofía Gallisá Muriente in *Celaje*[1] (2020). "Some times are only visible if they stay in your memory" because "here nothing is forever." "The tropics devour the ruins of progress." Celaje is "an elegy to the death of ELA," "a piece of experimental film oscillating between an intimate chronicle, a dream, and the historical document." Just like the archipelago, "disasters, deaths, and absences" accumulate.

By challenging conventional perceptions of time, the piece proposes an other-ours and Cuir/queer temporality that involves historical rewritings, like the slow and constant change of a stone. It is a way of being with/in nature, the recognition of the tiny timescale of our species. It is the possibility of looking at us from "the oldest corner of the island." It is "dreaming that

the ocean swallowed the cement" and that we rescued "ruins with our hands" to create our own story from premonitions, leftovers, mistakes, and ghosts. It is a narrative of survival out of love —a history from the loving memories of those who are gone and of those who are still here.

Sofía Gallisá provoked me — and I came to understand maroonage in the Caribbean as a historical opening to the affirmation of *celajes,* or bodies escaping from the dominant order. As such, the maroon bodies found the other-ours temporality, different from the regimentation of time that was established by the plantation, as Sidney Mintz reminds us. For many Caribbean thinkers and artists, coloniality is the same as slavery. In these conditions, our only option is to flee. Pedro Lebrón proposes that we should inhabit the archipelago as a *world* of our own, an "exteriority of the Eurocentric world." In Édouard Glissant's "right to opacity," this is described as a maroonage of opacity. I mean, as bodies that travel like unapproachable shadows, leaving the trail of their mystery, far from power's reach.

The history of Puerto Rico has many erasures. The narratives about the archipelago —from the gold depletion of the 16th century to the Royal Decree of Graces of 1815— insist on material and moral failure. This is the version of the captain-generals, envoys of the crown, and the bishops. But I like to tell them as cracks, a chance to live our own dispersed lives, *vidas-celajes,* full of freedom.

I think of the Cuir/queer, feminist, and anti-capitalist opacity that surrounds me. Every time I go to the Loverbar or Taller Libertá I thrive in our beautiful monstrosity. And I recognize myself and my own as *celajes*. I see us in those free and

maroon dwellers of the 16th-18th centuries, who have never disappeared. That other-*world* is here. Watching *Celaje* and listening to "Bairópolis" by Ana Macho, along with the Cuir/queer songbook by Alegría Rampante, Rita Indiana, Mima, Macha Colón, Lizbeth Román, and many others, I am sure that there is a future in our opacity and the opacity of stones.

THE COMMON WEALTH OF RICHMOND'S SHOCKOE BOTTOM

By Ana Edwards

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines "commonwealth" as "a nation, state, or other political unit: as one founded on law and united by compact or tacit agreement of the people for the common good; one in which supreme authority is vested in the people." A commonwealth is the antithesis of a monarchy, which is rooted in the belief that its right to govern is divinely bestowed and not to be challenged. For a brief eleven-year moment from 1649 to 1660, England was without a king and declared itself to be a commonwealth—an English state governed by the will of the people. The short-lived experiment came to a bloody end, but the notion took hold in the imaginations of many on the outskirts of the realm, including the planter-politicians of the British colonies.

By 1776, Virginia had determined to separate from England and form her own commonwealth as part of a new United States of America. Our nation, Virginians declared, shall have a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. But which people? In 1776, Virginians George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, and their ilk never meant to include ALL the people. Rather, they defined the "we" of the people to be propertied white males like themselves. In addition, the term "commonwealth" conjures up idealistic notions of wealth held in common, which sounds to the modern ear suspiciously like socialism. We are certain the founders did not mean that. Most were oligarchs, arch-capitalists bent on wealth accumulation for their narrow sector of society and their large vision of a manifest destiny. Those who were not of the same mind found themselves fighting to make sense of the fading commitment to liberty for all "men," the enlightened rhetoric of their recently completed revolution.

"We the people"

Richmond's African Burial Ground, Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park, and Monument Avenue each represent places that are in the process of being changed. These changes represent shifts in the balance of power and are expressions of the expansion of the people's participation and therefore of the concept of "we the people." The struggle to reclaim the African Burial Ground was a demonstration of the right of an oppressed people to self-determination in the face of their oppressor—the right to assert control over what they could not control before—in a place where a suppressed story of oppression, exploitation, and resistance central to their history finally could be told. Between 2001 and 2011, Black Richmonders determined that the 3.1-acre site in Shockoe Bottom was their common ground—a historical and cultural resource to benefit the public good, not the private

investor. But the people, who we also call "the community," asserted the right to know, value, and interpret in that space.

The establishment in 1799 of Richmond's first "Burial Ground for Negroes" represented a remaking of the landscape that, in turn, redefined the conditions of Black life and death. Although the cemetery was established by the municipal government, Black people used it to affirm their humanity through traditional burial practices. The city's second municipal cemetery for Blacks opened in 1816 on land overlooking Shockoe Valley. This "Grave Yard for Free People of Colour and for Slaves" grew from two to more than thirty acres and, by the time of its closure in 1879, had received more than 22,000 burials. A series of intentionally destructive acts between the end of the Civil War and the early twentieth century reduced the site to a parcel of 1.5 acres that today is in the process of being acquired by the city for preservation because of the research and advocacy efforts of descendants of some of the people interred there.

A network of small, privately run, cemeteries for free Black folks grew as the city expanded north and south of the James River, especially after emancipation in 1865 when Black settlements became communities with homes, churches, cemeteries, and eventually schools. In spite of slavery and racism, Black people were Richmonders, claiming Richmond for themselves and their children. The battles they had to fight were to protect themselves from the terrors of racial violence, to thrive economically and spiritually as households and communities, and to educate themselves and their children to make their futures. Enslaved and free, skilled and unskilled Black women, men, and children had as much to do with the making of Richmond as their free white counterparts. Plainly

these resourceful ancestors won many of these battles, or Richmond would not be the 49 percent Black city it is today. The dangers, however, persist.

The ongoing struggle to properly memorialize Richmond's first municipal burial ground for Black people represents an act of reclamation for the common good. The violence of American history can be felt there, and it needed to be confronted. Richmonders are confronting history in Shockoe Bottom, the epicenter of the US domestic slave trade from 1830 to 1865. They are confronting the memory of the brutality of slavery in the way the story is unpacked, presented, performed.

Shockoe Bottom is the "original" Richmond, a village of thirty-two square blocks arranged in a grid adjacent to the river and bordered on the north by ten-acre estate lots. This small trading village sat on a perfect topographical situation for its industrial and transportation future. The Bottom embodied, on the one hand, the capital generated by the trade in enslaved labor and, on the other hand and far more recently, racial progress. The community-generated proposal for a nine-acre Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park envisions a gathering place for reflection and learning that also preserves for future research and equitable economic development the last remaining parcels of land that can represent the enormity of the events that took place in Richmond and Virginia over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries. Developed through an open, public engagement process, the Memorial Park concept was designed to acknowledge the history, the systemic mechanisms, and the individual prejudices that bar the way to a society supposedly built for the common good. The footprint of the proposed park presents and protects the opportunity to combine creative and

practical methodologies for preservation, redevelopment, and some measure of justice.

The wealth held in common by Black Richmonders has been the creativity and resourcefulness that allowed them to weather the determination by white-supremacist policy actors to squelch their progress toward equity and full participation in American society. Literacy and voting were considered critical representations of freedom attained. The building of neighborhoods led to demands for appropriate infrastructure--public utilities like potable water, electricity, paved streets, trash pick-up. The first public monument to a Black person in Richmond came directly from such a demand, unfulfilled.

The first public statue to honor a Black person in the capital city of the Commonwealth of Virginia was commissioned and erected in 1973 by the Astoria Beneficial Club. The nine-foot cast aluminum statue of Bill "Bojangles" Robinson (by Richmond sculptor Jack Witt) stands at the intersection of Leigh and Adams streets, the site of the first traffic light north of Broad Street. According to the account on the Club's website, in 1933, Mr. Robinson donated $1400 to install this light "for the safety of the students of Armstrong High School." I was fortunate to chat with Dr. Francis Foster, renowned local Jackson Ward dentist, VCU educator, community historian, and son of a founding member of the Astoria Beneficial Club, before his death in 2008. He recalled being able to attend the afternoon unveiling as a sixteen-year-old Armstrong High student because, as an upperclassman, his classes were in the morning. He said hundreds witnessed the ceremony, and everyone present knew that Robinson had paid for the traffic light because the white authorities of city hall had refused to do so.

Another example of the expansion of the "we" in "we the people" has been the transformation of Richmond's iconic Monument Avenue during the recent uprising against police killings. The Jim Crow–era Confederate statues on the avenue had been controversial since their installations, but the first public battle to disrupt the white-supremacist sanctity of these statues did not erupt until *seventy* years after the last one was put up. In 1996, the proposal to erect a monument to Arthur Ashe Jr., Richmond's native humanitarian-scholar-athlete, was initially intended for sites in African American neighborhoods related to his tennis playing and coaching of the city's Black children. But once the "Avenue of Lost Cause Memory-Making" was raised as a location, the city's various factions leapt to heatedly debate the propriety of such a move. Even proposing putting a Black man's monument on that avenue drove the covert racists right out into the open. "Sacrilege!" they cried. Well, then it was sacrilege of the best kind and also all too true. Ashe was an anti-apartheid activist, and planting the metaphorical Ashe flagpole in Confederate/Jim Crow territory was seen as a victory for social justice even as it overrode the Ashe's family hopes for a monument erected in the heart of the community of people he sought to elevate and celebrate—an unintended consequence perhaps, but one that foretold of greater changes to come.

Over the summer of 2020, against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the young Black people of Richmond and youths of other races transformed the pedestal, statue, and green circle of the monument to Confederate General Robert E. Lee into Marcus-David Peters Circle, renamed to honor the young Black high school teacher who, while experiencing a mental health crisis, was killed in May 2018 by a Richmond police officer. This renaming of a public space was another

example of the people demonstrating their ability to affect the public discourse. They changed a place they had for so long experienced as one of hatred and ever-present white supremacist values into a space for expressing grief and rage, and for finding love and unity of purpose.

In Richmond, the killings of George Floyd and Marcus-David Peters stand in for all injustices perpetrated against Black people because the whole of our civil rights are yet to be fully realized. Equality under the law has not yet been attained. Not for people of color, not for people of poverty. The Jim Crow–era statues on Monument Avenue stood defiant in the face of Black progress, but this summer, the sanctity of those white-supremacist idols was broken and the civil discourse of tolerance for injustice in our society was challenged head-on. The acts of rebellion of 2020 have transformed Richmond and cities across the country for the common good. Systemic changes are being demanded, and those demands are working their way up the legislative and judicial chains of command. These acts are a reminder that spontaneous demonstrations of the people's power are rarely without cause or context and will yield a wealth of consequences.

REPRODUCING THE COMMONS

By Silvia Federici, Noah Simblist and Stephanie Smith

As part of the ICA's early research for this project, Noah Simblist and Stephanie Smith cotaught a seminar on the topic of "commonwealth" for which students read Silvia Federici's texts on "the commons" and its relationship to feminism. As an extension of this research, Federici was invited to comment more directly on the application of her ideas to this project. In this interview, Federici elaborates on her conception of the commons and how it might contribute to an understanding of "commonwealth" in light of both historical and contemporary challenges. Simblist and Smith interviewed Federici early in the pandemic, and as a result this conversation touches on a number of issues then emerging as part of the public debate related to COVID-19.

SIMBLIST: The commonwealths of the United States were founded simultaneously on utopian aims and on exclusions. The idea of people coming together to govern themselves for the common good, to repel the forces of imperial Britain, sounds great, but the "we" that constituted this commons was limited in terms of gender, race, and class. In our conversations with our colleagues at Beta-Local, they highlighted the ways in which colonialism remains present in Puerto Rico.

SMITH: Virginia was the site of first contact between the English and Native Americans, and then Richmond was the second largest market of enslaved people in the United States as well as being the capital of the Confederacy. These foundational moments of systemic racism are very deeply felt within this context.

FEDERICI: Today this is one of the lines of battle that most people are fighting. It's all about enclosure, expropriation, and the question of "the commons." Over time, I've come to see the politics of the commons both in terms of an objective to be reached—a kind of image, a configuration of a society that we want to build—and at the same time as a condition of struggle.

Something that has to be continuously woven into the struggle are the forms of organization, which require a certain infrastructure. They require daily creation for the struggle itself. You need to recreate the commons, you need to recreate the commonwealth—and not just the commons as an abstract ideal of solidarity, but the commonwealth in terms of shared wealth and shared expansion of possibility, where the coming together does in fact expand the material wealth available.

So to me the question of the commons and the commonwealth is in fact where the struggle is. I've been spending more time with women in Latin America, and I know also of struggling indigenous communities. This is now sinking very deeply into peoples' consciousness—that you cannot have purely oppositional struggle. You cannot have a struggle in which you're only saying no. The moment of construction, which is the moment of the commoning, is the moment of the commonwealth.

SMITH: Could you elaborate on how you might articulate a newly signified definition of commonwealth?

FEDERICI: To me the question of the material condition is very important, because we can have a notion of the commons as a notion of solidarity, recognizing the equality of life, but without a material foundation. And in that sense, it becomes only a changing consciousness. And I think there also has to be a change in relationship to the wealth that people have produced that is continuously taken away from us.

A small example: there is a group of very young women in New York. They call themselves witches, or brujas. They began as skateboarders, wanting to show that girls can skateboard, that it is not just a boys' practice. Then they began to realize that they were really reappropriating space. They had the presence of space; they were saying "this space is our space." They gained new confidence about being in the street. And so now there's been a whole political development in their conception of what it is that they're doing. Less and less they're doing it as a sport that girls too should practice, and they're seeing it more as a political statement about space.

I know that similar struggles have taken place in Asia and in Africa, which has to do now with issues of cropland, access to forests, and recognition. You cannot really begin to change the situation unless you recuperate the land, access to water, to forests, etc. So this question of the commonwealth is about wealth, because wealth is nature—it's land, it's soil, it's accumulated knowledge.

For example, medicinal plants are important to Zapatistas and to many feminist groups. There's a whole ecological concern that is also very practical. It's not only a question of going back to the past but also not ignoring what others have learned and having respect for the fact that capitalist science has not been the beginning of knowledge as we often are incentivized to believe. For example, in Nicaragua women are circulating seeds, which was a practice that women were traditionally in charge of in indigenous communities. So this is the material expertise, this is the commonwealth. It's really foundational because otherwise the forms of solidarity might be short lived if they don't also have a material base.

SIMBLIST: I wonder if you could speak about some of the examples that you gave in your book *Re-enchanting the World*[1] about the specific feminist connection to the commons and commoning. What is specific to groups of women and their relationship to these terms?

FEDERICI: Now we have at least 20 to 30 years of examples of the fact that women are particularly interested in the question of the commons. I think there is agreement that this is visible particularly throughout the history of capitalist society, since women have had a much more precarious relationship to wages or to any form of property. They have been far more dependent on access to the commonwealth, what we call "nature."

On the other hand, to a great extent women have been, and continue to be, those reproducing the community—those who have to make the food, fetch the water, take care of people who are ill, and do the ecological work. Any change in the environment has a direct consequence on the process

of reproduction. So they understand much more deeply the consequences of the destruction of the commons in terms of the soil, the earth, the forest, and the relationships that are attached to them. Communal relationships and the communal cultivation of land created a whole culture, a whole set of expectations, of mutualities, responsibilities, and reciprocities. More and more, women have been propelled to the forefront of the struggle. Women are on the front line against fracking, against oil drilling, against deforestation.

I'm also very upset now because of the coronavirus. There's a lot to say about the coronavirus and the destruction of the commons. But on the other hand it's important to note how many people are dying from other causes. In Paraguay alone over the last five years, more than 3,000 people have died of cancer related to fumigation, herbicides, and pesticides. Paraguay is now being called the republic of soy. They have planted soy everywhere. Half of the cropland that was in the hands of the people is gone. In the north, in Chaco, where they have the forests, they are now burning them systematically for cattle; they are destroying the forests because they want to plant more soy and they want more land, too.

To make it short, the woman's body is the one who is more directly affected. Not only women's work but also women's bodies are most directly affected by the destruction of the commons.

SMITH: To pivot from thinking about the bodies of women to the body politic, we've been thinking about colonial American principles of the commonwealth that were about shared governance, but only for landowning white men. Do you see any connection between those early limitations on

participation and the structure of American democracy, past and present?

FEDERICI: I think that American democracy, the demos, the people, have never been understood as those who were propertyless. It was always a population of people with property. It was for them that the principles of the French Revolution were upheld. Not surprisingly, the legislation and the Constitution that were forged according to these principles have always been built, in one form or another, on exclusion. It is enough to think, for example, that women have not been citizens. And in Europe, all through the 18th and even into the 19th century, the principle of the "covered woman" prevailed. In France, the "covered woman" is the woman who has no legal agency. So in the democratic societies that have come out of the 16th, 17th, and even 18th centuries, women were non-citizens, and they actually lost rights that they had had in the previous period, like the 14th and 15th centuries when, for example, in different places, women could go to court on their own, directly, to announce an abuse that was perpetrated against them. But by the 18th century, they could no longer do so in Europe—they had to do so through a man. So they became legally non-existent.

I think that we have to open up a very different conception of what democracy is and what the commonwealth is, and we have to conceive it in a way that is not built either on preexisting privileges or any principle that is in fact a principle of exclusion; we have to see instead that belonging is something that is second nature with responsibility for the reproduction of the commons.

Often people ask me: who is a commoner? And always what comes to mind is an indigenous woman, a feminist, activist, and writer, Gladys Tzul Tzul, a woman from Guatemala. She comes from the highland of Totonicapán, from an indigenous community that has been able to maintain its land for 500 years. She says that unless you do the work, you cannot really be part of the assembly. In other words, you belong because you can show that you have contributed to the maintenance of the well-being of everybody. This is a principle that is not exclusionary but instead brings about reciprocity and mutuality. This has to be the essence of social relations, the basis on which we have equal access.

SMITH: It's a beautiful idea that one becomes a part of the assembly based on what one contributes to the well-being of all. Some early uses of the term "commonwealth" were defined in relation to the health and well-being of the larger community—a holistic conception of wealth..

FEDERICI: And that has to be demonstrated with concrete action, participation, and reciprocity. Are we contributing to the principle of the Native Americans to maintain the commons for the next seven generations, to make sure the other people after you can use it? It is given to you temporarily, and you have to be able to pass it on in a way that it is not diminished. This is what makes you part of the commons—not some a priori religion or ethnicity, but where you are in relation to the life of the commons.

SIMBLIST: Yes, it's interesting because these questions point to radically different perspectives on how we exist in the world and with one another.

The next question has a lot to do with debt, which is another thing that one might hold together. You've written a lot about your experiences in Africa just as global organizations were leveraging debt to transform economies and agencies within these countries. This is something that Puerto Rico is very much concerned with now. In many ways, the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States has become defined by debt. It might be speculation for you, without knowing so much about the Puerto Rican condition, but there's a certain bondage that occurs with this notion of debt. How do you see those relations playing out?

FEDERICI: In Maria Mies's writing on the commons, she argued that we should also take responsibility for the negative commons, for example for trash, and not only wait on the government. That is important. They will of course take care of the trash eventually, but we have to think of the trash now because this is our commons, it is a negative commons. This is a useful instrument for restructuring community.

It's important to distinguish national debt and personal debt because often we forget that the same communities are vulnerable to both. Your job, the prices you pay, the cuts in services, cuts in benefits, are justified in the name of the national debt. We have seen it in Africa. With structural adjustment everything changed: the end of free education, the end of free healthcare, everything. And then you have personal debt, and this too is being pushed the same way as standby loans were forced on governments by the IMF. For example, governments that have debt that went to the monetary market were forced to go through the IMF. They couldn't go bankrupt, they couldn't go to a monetary market. And personal debt too often is being forced through microcredit. That's created a

whole population of women who are now basically drowning because they cannot pay whatever they have taken, and they are being subjected to all kinds of reification.

We are living in a phase in which movements against the debt are swelling. Now it is generally more recognized that microcredit is fraudulent. You know this is a Trojan horse. For instance, in what they call *la convocatoria*—the document that was put out by women in Argentina and Chile on the 8th of March, International Women's Day—the issue of the debt is central. I think that women are the ones most deeply affected by debt. Take, for example, payday loans. The whole system of payday loans, that's women. As soon as women began to obtain wage jobs, you have the payday company coming into existence because the pay is so low that you cannot really survive on what you earn through your wages. So you use the wage as a collateral, not as a form of subsistence. If you have no money, you will never have debt, they will never give you credit. So you have women now who may have two jobs, and, at the same time, are accumulating debt. So it's really now an epidemic. Doctors are beginning to talk about the "money symptom"—women are getting sick because they are constantly worrying about money. The debt issue is extremely important; it carries the fear of unemployment, the sense of the precarity of existence, not knowing what will happen tomorrow. That's why the commons are so important. Because if you are on your own now, never has life felt so precarious.

SMITH: To expand on that and to pull together a couple of threads, are there examples that you could share of anti-capitalist, feminist, and/or indigenous approaches to commoning that you think might be useful in pushing against debt?

FEDERICI: In Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Mexico, there has been a growth of the anti-debt movement. But also debt is now being picked up as a central feminist issue through much of Latin America. I'm very interested in Latin America because I see a feminism there that is closer to the feminism that I identify with, which is a feminism that is very rooted in the material conditions in the commonwealth. It's rooted in ecological issues, the issue of land, the issue of land as territory, the land as a source of self-government in which we are together as a collectivity. And in terms of commoning, women are understanding that unless you come together and begin to organize your daily life in forms that are more cooperative with one another, you're not able to survive or to create the kind of social fabric that is capable of confronting the state from a position of power.

The Landless Workers Movement of Brazil has been fantastic. They have been at the forefront of the struggle with tactical protests based around the occupation of unproductive land. During these occupations, they realized that if they did the housework and cared for the children together, they were much stronger and more able to confront the landowner or the death squad. And from that experience, they began to realize that cooperating in the process of reproduction—not only during the occupation but after—is what is really going to change our lives. And in doing that, they also began to confront all kinds of very classic feminist issues: relationships with men, hierarchies, both in daily life and also within the struggle.

Another very broad example can be drawn from the peripheral areas of Latin American cities: the *favelas*. These are areas where the state doesn't come in except through the military. You go in and all you see are young men with rifles; you see

police, you see the military, you do not see social services. Nobody collects the garbage. So more and more you have women who are organizing, and as part of organizing they are also doing that kind of work. But their perspective is not simply to replace the state. Their perspective is also to guarantee a better survival for their community and to begin to create another community. They are creating an alternative that also has a political dimension.

Gladys Tzul Tzul, whom I referenced earlier, has written a book looking at how her community in Guatemala was able to maintain the land for 500 years. She's also fighting for more rights for women within the community because the land is transmitted through the male line. She identifies a number of mechanisms that they have used, but mostly she describes a kind of economy where the politics is totally organic. You do not have a state: these are self-governed communities where everybody has access to the land from the time you're nine years old. Everything is done through the assembly. And all structures of government are functional regarding the question of water, the question of the production of food, the relationship with the surrounding environment, so everybody has a place.

And then they have the fiesta. The fiesta is very, very important. People work on it all year because the fiesta is the moment in which everybody makes a commitment to the community. It's the moment of collective resignification of what it means to be in the community. The fiesta is about music and food, but mostly it's a moment to say, okay we are here, and we want to be here, and we are committed to be here again, to be here tomorrow.

SIMBLIST: Could you say more about your interest in questions of memory and the collective body?

FEDERICI: One part of the commonwealth is the land, the memory, the knowledge, the social relations of ghosts everywhere. Memory is something that connects people. It allows the recuperation of knowledges and the creation of a communal subject that is able to transcend the limits of individualization. It places what you do in a broader tapestry. If you see what you're doing in terms of a long history of human liberation, and also feel this connection with the dead, then dying is not the disaster that it is if you see your life purely in a self-enclosed way, where you are the beginning and the end of everything. If you're part of a collective body, then you don't really die because you're always there. As this woman from Guatemala said, the dead are always here. We never really kill them. This gives you a lot of courage. She was dealing with the question of why people still fight after they witness atrocities. Where do they get their ability to continue? Her answer was that there's a different relationship with the dead, and I began to think of a different relation in terms of commoning, of solidarity with the dead. That's a commonwealth too.

SMITH: We've covered a lot of the territory, but as one final thought: how might we move through this crisis to open up and enact new forms of commoning?

FEDERICI: There's a whole project, there's a whole process. The first step I think is knowledge building. The commons of knowledge has to reinterpret what is happening because we are getting a picture that is very distorted and very disempowering.

Also, it's very important to recognize that this moment can be used as a moment of delegitimation. One of the first steps is delegitimation of the system. Remember that in the 19th century, they claimed that they had defeated epidemics with the discovery of penicillin, and then antibiotics, and then hygienic measures, with the state cleaning up the streets. People used to die like flies, and then they say, "Oh no not now! Science. Hygiene." So what is happening? AIDS, Ebola, swine flu. And now they're telling us there's one virus after another. Okay, why? This morning I was listening to a virologist and she was saying that the cutting of forests is one major factor. Animals, for example, are now entering the cities because they don't know where to go. Global warming. We're having a whole restructuring of who goes where, which insects, which animals? Massive impoverishment. The last 40 years, IMF, World Bank, privatization, millions and millions of people forced out of their land. Chemicals everywhere, fumigation, pesticides.

I think that one of the first things that can be done is to say to the system, "You have no legitimacy." This system is unsustainable, this system is killing us. We're talking about global warming, deforestation, constant cycles of epidemics that are continuously doing away with the most vulnerable.

The second step, I think, is the question of organizing so that in addition to the infection, we do not also pay twice in terms of an economic catastrophe. Because they're sending everybody or most people a check for $1,200? You know the first thing that I thought when I heard that? I'm cynical, but I thought it's like the last meal before they execute you. First they give you a meal and then they kill you. I feel that this is what it is because okay, $1,200 sounds good, but then you haven't had a job, you have to pay three months of rent, your student loan is coming up,

your medical bills are due, so I think people have to be prepared for the fact that unlike 2008, we should not be made to pay for this. I think that is very, very important. There's a number of demands that are circulating, but I think there has to be an organizational structure because this is going to be as serious as the epidemic.

So to the question of the alternative, which is countering the effort to break down social relations: there's quite a bit now. Many, many groups in New York are now organizing for mutual aid. Obviously it's limited, it's temporary, but it's the principle: we are responsible. We are responsible not just for our lives but for our collectivity. This is the real commonwealth. To always make life choices at all levels, not thinking about individual life but thinking about the collectivity. And I think this is a very important moment for that and realizing that we need to do this because they're telling us there's going to be another one around the corner in four or five years. We are going from crisis to crisis —2001, 2008, 2020. It's not just saying to the system, "you're not sustainable," but also organizing to deal with who's going to pay the bill.

MUTUAL AID AND MUTUAL CONFIDENCE IN RICHMOND

By Jahd Khalil

Near the interchange of Interstates 64 and 95, and separated by railroad tracks and razor wire from Richmond's juvenile detention center, there's a small complex that resembles a kind of industrial equivalent of a strip mall. After expanding into one of the suites here last September, the volunteers of Mutual Aid and Disaster Relief Richmond (MAD RVA) were able to ratchet up capacity. But the decision to move wasn't without debate.

Their previous space was in a coffee roaster. The public-facing café's aesthetic lies between wrought iron and reclaimed wood. When the pandemic closed the café's doors to the public, the owners offered the group a space to store and package goods before they're distributed. But there was not enough room to socially distance or rest, and relief was in high demand. When the current, larger space in the industrial complex became available, some volunteers were concerned about right-wing people there menacing the group, which is not short on queer or BIPOC volunteers.

The manner in which Tamanna Kaur Sohal told me about the disagreement among the volunteers underlined the fact that

the organization was unlike any NGO, if you could consider it one at all (at least in the conventional sense). For starters, she is not speaking on behalf of MAD RVA in an official capacity. She might have this role without a title: the group purports to be a horizontal organization in which members take on responsibilities. Even if Sohal's an unofficial spokesperson, the transparency with which she talks about disagreements is not one you'd find in more institutional aid organizations.

"We ended up moving there because the other fact is like, Nazis are everywhere," she said. She also noted that the group's old space was in a neighborhood that's been criticized as a gentrified area and that their presence could be contributing to the problem. White volunteers, she said, might have to defend the space if it materialized as a bigger issue. "You can punch the Nazis. I know you have that patch on your jean jacket."

Sohal says many of the group's 100-odd volunteers are reading Dean Spade's book *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During this Crisis (and the Next)*[3]. The term itself is attributed to another book, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, which the 19th-century Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin wrote "as a scientific rebuttal to Charles Darwin." In the 118 years since that book's publication, there have been plenty of examples of mutual aid, Spade says. He even goes far enough to say that "we see examples of mutual aid in every single social movement." More contemporary organized large-scale examples of mutual aid include disaster relief after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. The current manifestation of Richmond's mutual aid group came out of a bus that has provided relief during cold weather since 2018. The links and coordination were already in place when thousands came out to protest racism in the wake of George Floyd's killing by police. Like other places around

the country, Richmond's organized mutual aid efforts were especially energized by volunteers, donations, and dozens of people who were out of work, volunteers said.

On the Saturday morning before Thanksgiving, a few volunteers wearing gloves and masks unloaded groceries from volunteers' cars, wiped them down with MadaCide, and added them to shelves. They use a web-based app that a volunteer developed to track the movement of the kinds of items people request from these shelves to a spread of several dozen paper bags on tables. Each order serves about three people and costs about $50. In addition to the groceries there's fresh produce from a walk-in cooler the volunteers built themselves as well as household cleaners. There's also a pile of donated space heaters and plastic bins of toys.

Traditional Thanksgiving dinner ingredients are missing, except for green beans. Volunteers attributed that to a lack of capacity, not any political disagreement with the celebration of the holiday. It is doubtful that the DIY walk-in could hold as many turkeys as there are paper bags.

On a table near the shift coordinator's workstation is a wire letter tray with envelopes used for the organization's mini-grants. They've given out $144,000 to 1,100 people but haven't taken or applied for grants of their own. "Mainly because they're annoying," Sohal said. "But it is really important to us that we're not falling into the grant pool. We want to really stay true to ourselves. We don't want to lie to these grant givers about the work that we're doing."

But MAD RVA also doesn't fit neatly into the trope of the leftist collective splintering over ideological purity in practice. The

group buys from Walmart and utilizes Amazon. Compromises happen, but not without self-awareness.

"It's a balance, I guess," Sohal said. "I don't know anybody locally who's milling their own toilet paper. It was just a matter of what is practical right now. We're still trying to be really intentional with every relationship we're building and everything we're doing on a small scale because there's only so many things that we can write off as convenience."

How much and in what ways Richmond's mutual aid participants interact with what they describe as the problem—businesses and the state—will probably change. The national organization, Mutual Aid Disaster Relief, has 501(c)(3) status to enable tax-exempt donations. Maybe that's necessary for the scale of the problem. In April unemployment figures in Richmond were four times as large as the year before. Those numbers have improved, but even a larger MAD RVA hasn't been able to meet demand. But for now, the Richmond branch doesn't think leveraging official nonprofit status is worth it. Even then grocers have their own bureaucracies, said Larissa Goalder, another volunteer who looked into getting donations from Trader Joe's. And Sohal says nonprofit status is its own trap.

"A big part of nonprofits operating as nonprofits is that they never envisioned that their work ends. . . . Well, we want those things to end and we want everybody to have enough."

A NOTE ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATED SYMBOLS, "TOOLS FOR UNCERTAINTY"

By Lorraine Rodríguez

The exercise of illustrating something is directly related to the interpretation of the illustrator. Everything that can be seen and touched, what can be felt, when brought to a paper, will reflect the unique touch of the illustrator. Naturally, translating into symbols a list of words or tools, phrases typical of the reflection of the term "common good", or *Commonwealth*, is a personal interpretation that has to do entirely with the fact that I was born, grew up and worked as an artist in a colony: *What is the meaning to me of each of these words, beyond their given definition? How do I think about them? What feelings do they provoke in me? With what I can relate them? How I see myself in them? What relationship do they have with each other, in addition to being terms thought within the "common good"?*

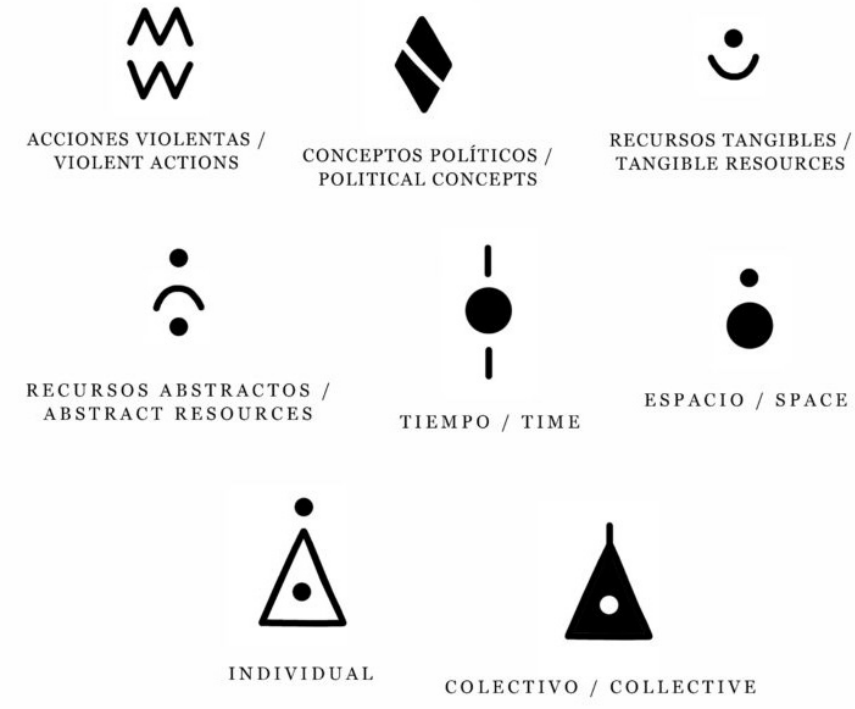
Spoken, written and gestured language have their graphic interpretation. For example: "love" can be a heart.

#37 GENTRIFICACIÓN / GENTRIFICATION

Taking this as a starting point I chose to divide the list into categories using color, then created symbols that collect the words that correspond to those categories, or their derivatives, and thus be able to put together compositions. This in order to be able to create a symbol language that would translate 56 words and phrases, that was coherent and related to each other, and taking into account my personal reflection on each one of them. One word is itself. A concept exists as such, but it has a range of interpretations depending on who does the exercise of thinking them, in this case, of illustrating them and translating them into symbols:

* The categories **I don't know** and **Composite** have no initial symbol:

CATEGORÍAS INICIALES / INITIAL CATEGORIES



Violent Actions / Political Concepts (blue) – (1) Colonize (4) Payback (15) Resistance (24) Debt (37) Gentrification (47) Promise (48) Sovereignty

Tangible Resources (red) – (2) Resources (5) Water (8) Energy (18) Wealth (21) Currency (27) Fissure – Crack (28) Trace (30) Sweat (32) Weapons (36) Food (38) Infrastructure (53) Shadow (Shadow)

Abstract resources (mustard) – (3) Power (7) Responsibility (13) Interdependence (16) Reconciliation (26) Education (29) Empathy (31) Access (33) Boundaries (40) Knowledge (41) Love

(43) Security (44) Memory (45) Experience (46) Values (53) Imagination

Time / Space (orange) – (6) Space (9) Past(10) Present (11) Future(49) Permanent(50) Temporary

Individual / Collective (green) – (12) Public (14) Generation (17) Collectivity (19) Neighbors (23) Band or Group (25) Individual (34) Community (35) Family (39) Institutions (42) People (56) Collective

I don't know (black) – (20) Currents (22) Common (51) Sustainable

Composite (magenta) – (54) Spatial Economies (55) Historical Agency

After creating the categories, I put together unique codes for each one. This classification made it easier for me to think of the words from what they are, from their given definition, and in contrast to my reflection on them.

Each word, having its given meaning, now has a new reading. An illustrated reading from this language of tools; from this system of codes or symbols.

The entire process of searching for references to arrange the tools was fun, instructive, and eye-opening. I started looking for the meaning of each word in Spanish, then going to their synonyms and antonyms, reading examples of those words in sentences and in different contexts. I did the same process as well in English. I looked up the words in other languages, rather to see how they looked graphically. For example, the

word "family" in Persian: "هداوناخ". The word "resistance" in Greek: "αντίσταση". The word "empathy" in Japanese: "共 感", among many others. I looked for references of graphic signs in writing systems such as pictograms, logograms, petroglyphs. Eventually, I started thinking the words from other places. What do they mean to me? What do they make me feel? What experience do I have of them? And soon I was locating shapes, the initial categories, and then separating others to make the compositions of the symbols.

Once I assigned a symbol to each category, then I worked the distinctions of each word relating them to each other.

So I thought that if each of those terms could already live within that new reading, perhaps it was possible to think of others. Think of other concepts that could have life under that same language. To think of other compositions. Other formulas. For example:

LORRAINE RODRÍGUEZ

Individual. Person. Art. Lorraine. The possibilities are endless. Through this illustrated language, which occupies those 56 words that have to do directly with "common good", or Commonwealth, we can work on many other concepts, and consequently, many combinations of symbols to think about ourselves from the initial reflection. We could include more values that we have in common and thus expand our toolbox.

#14 GENERACIÓN / GENERATION

Contemplating the infinity of possibilities, the universe of combinations, we created a generator of tools: an invitation to generate unique arrangements. Clicking builds a formula of symbols, and thus others based on the 56 words. The generator works like an oracle, a random exercise whose result is random. So each person who uses the generator will get their own set of tools. Possibility is everything.

The exercise of creating a system of symbols that responds to values that we have in common is also an exercise of creating language. And language is a tool, and a tool is also a weapon. This exercise is not final. Everyone who was born and lived in the commonwealth can build their own symbols on these same words, and having the same reflection. Build other toolboxes. Add others and so on.

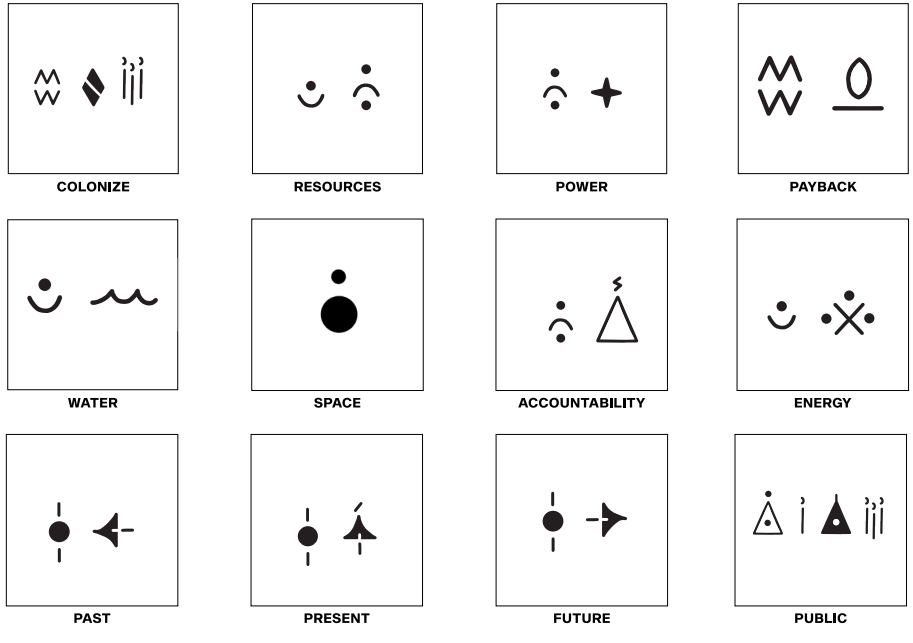
This is just a reflection of a creative process. It is sharing a method, an exploration, an approach.

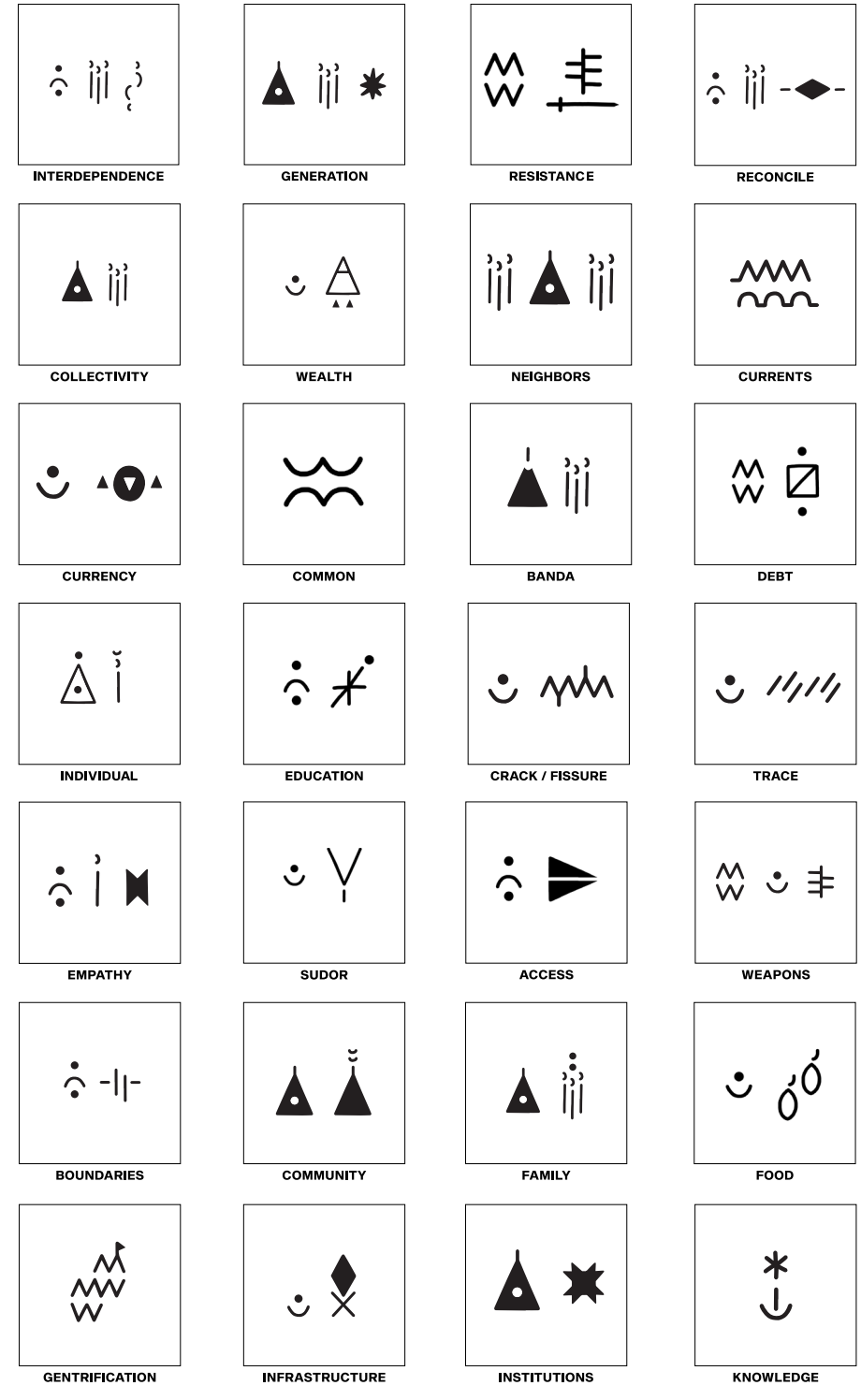
TOOLS FOR UNCERTAINTY

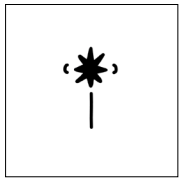
TOOLS FOR UNCERTAINTY

By Lorraine Rodríguez

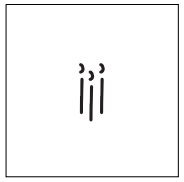
Words have power – they can define, they can hurt, and they can compel action. Words can also have meaning and function beyond their intended use - like using a lighter to open a bottle. In these ways, words are tools. Inspired by Beta-Local's exploration of the concepts of "common wealth" and "common debt," we developed a set of "tools" central to the ideas of a commonwealth -- common words that unlock, intrigue, and challenge our thinking. By exploring the depth and power of these words, we deepen our understanding about what we all have in common.



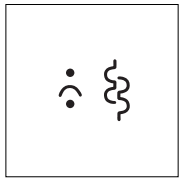




LOVE

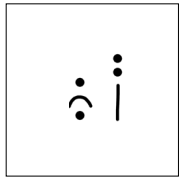


PEOPLE



SAFETY

MEMORY

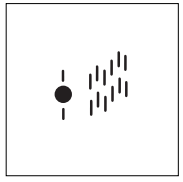


EXPERIENCE

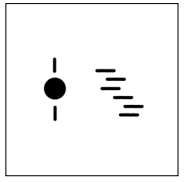
VALUES

PROMISE

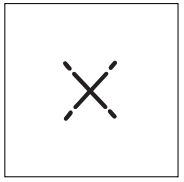
SOVEREIGNTY



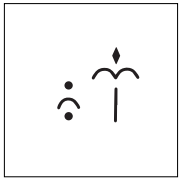
PERMANENT



TEMPORARY



SUSTAINABLE



IMAGINATION

SHADOW

COMIC

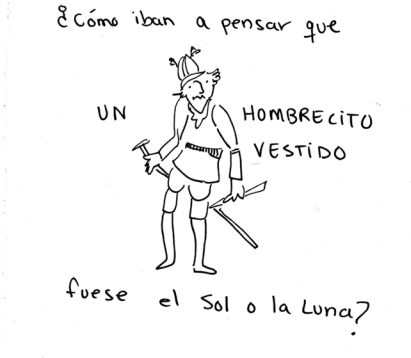
COMIC

By Jimena Lloreda

People in Puerto Rico say that the tainos drowned Diego Salcedo...

The say they did it to be sure that he was no "God"...

The tainos believed in many gods: the mountain, the river, the rain...

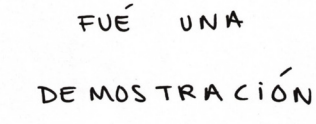


How could they possibly thought that that little dressed man was the sun or moon?

Bet they thought they owned life and death...

That who come to others land and steal it is an impostor!

Diego Salcedo's killing was not an experiment...



It was a demostration...

You have to jump over the puddle.
Things are not good here...
"They say"

Buy a house, get a car,
air conditioner

Those who travel know what cold is.
Dark and uncomfortable.

Look back like if they doesn't mind...

To paradise

River, beach, mountain, all of that
in a split second. Where people
wear shorts

Where the mulatto's dance prevails.
Party and protest.

Fertile black amber soil

El barrio of hugs and kisses,
warmness.

Gold for the foreigner.

This looks like another country. Puerto Rico haves many wonderful places.

Beaches to surf, cliffs, rivers, pools

Dry forest

Caves full of bats

They've been taking all from us little by little

Although our feets have walked here, our grandparents have sowed

When we see something that calls our attention

We tend to think that it belongs to us

This looks like another country

ARTIST BIOS

• **Firelei Báez** (b. 1981, Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic; Lives in New York, NY) created two new works that overlay historical maps from Philadelphia and Richmond with powerful new imagery. These are reproduced at billboard scale, one in a public site in Philadelphia and the other on the ICA's exterior. **Issue 2**

• **Carolina Caycedo** (b. 1978, London, UK; Lives in Los Angeles, CA) created an installation titled *Distressed Debt*, in which she printed hanging fabric panels with imagery drawn from historical public utility bonds for water, sewage, electricity, and infrastructure projects in Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Puerto Rico. These bonds have often been a mechanism to commodify natural resources in the name of civic development. Puerto Rico has a bond debt 15 times that of the other states in the U.S., a situation called "distressed debt," the source for the title. **Issue 3**

• **Duron Chavis** (b. 1980, Richmond, VA; Lives in Richmond, VA), a food justice activist, created a *Resiliency Garden*, outside the ICA: a space both to grow fresh produce and to teach about the links between food insecurity, access to green space, and systemic racism. Initiated in response to COVID-19 in the spirit of mutual aid, the project now also responds to the ICA's location near an epicenter of the first wave of the Black Lives Matter protest in Richmond. Chavis and collaborating designer Quilian Riano of DSGN AGNC chose to echo the "Black Lives Matter" street murals painted around the country in summer 2020 by integrating the phrase "Black Space Matters" into the garden. **Issue 1**

• **Alicia Díaz** (b. 1985, San Juan, PR; Lives in Richmond, VA), a dancer and choreographer, partnered with a large group of collaborators to create *Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond: Women in Resistance shall not be Moved*, a performance for camera. Filmed in a former American Tobacco Company warehouse, the work links the colonizing economies of Virginia and Puerto Rico and invokes the pioneering labor activist Luisa Capetilla and Afro-Puerto Rican nationalist leader Dominga de la Cruz as inspiration for the present. At the ICA, the film is presented within a related installation titled *Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond: Bridging Stories of Resistance*, which evokes the factory's atmosphere and connects these historical figures to contemporary activism. **Issue 2**

• **Sharon Hayes** (b. 1970, Baltimore, MD; Lives in Philadelphia, PA) extends her ongoing series *Ricerche* (Italian for "research") with *Ricerche: two*, which balances individual and collective voices. In early 2020, Hayes interviewed members of two women's tackle football teams, who discuss the pleasure they find in strength, skill, camaraderie, and the power of being part of a chosen family of teammates. At the ICA, it is shown on a gently curving screen to evoke the embrace of a huddle and link the viewer's body, the bodies on-screen, and the space. **Issue 1**

• **Tanya Lukin Linklater** (Alutiiq, b. 1976, Kodiak, AK; Lives in North Bay, Ontario, Canada), an artist who often works with dance and choreography, has designed space for Indigenous performance in collaboration with architect **Tiffany Shaw-Collinge** (Métis, b. 1982, Calgary, Alberta, Canada; lives in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada) The ICA's exhibition pairs their 2019 sculpture Indigenous geometries with Linklater's

newly commissioned performance for camera This moment an endurance to the end forever. This work is filmed in two locations: Lukin Linklater performs with two of the "spines" from the sculpture within the intimate space of her own living room, while two dancers perform in a natural setting—a COVID-era adaptation to her original plan for public open rehearsal and live performance. This new work is part of an ongoing series of performances related to Indigenous geometries. This iteration focuses on qualities of atmosphere, as well as breath, song, and language. During a time in which breath can carry danger, when movement is restricted, when speech can be so charged, what does it mean to breathe alongside one another, to move alongside one another, to speak alongside one another? **Issue 3**

• **Nelson Rivera** (Lives in San Juan, PR), an artist, art historian, and activist, created *El Maestro 4*, in which a performance score calls for performers, born and raised in the U.S. with no knowledge of Spanish, to read texts by the late Pedro Albizu Campo (1891-1965) an attorney and leader in the movement for Puerto Rican independence from the United States. These speeches, delivered from 1948 to 1950, were made during the US military occupation of Puerto Rico, when it had partial sovereignty and before it was designated as a commonwealth, an unincorporated territory of the United States. This performance will occur periodically in and around the ICA during open hours, with select performances shared on social media. **Issue 2**

• **Mónica Rodríguez** (b. 1980, San Juan, PR; Lives in Los Angeles, CA), inspired by a 19th-century call to create an Antillean Federation to combat colonialism in the Caribbean

created a new site-specific digital mural that pairs drawings of monuments to independence struggles in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Puerto Rico with a revolutionary statement from Puerto Rican independence advocate Ramón Emeterio Betances (1827–1898). Unlike many monuments torn down across the U.S. by protestors in summer 2020, these monuments were meant to uplift the people and oppose colonial oppression. **Issue 1**

• **The Conciliation Project** (TCP) (Founded 2001, Richmond, VA) is an anti-racist group whose performances begin with research: they interview diverse groups of citizens and collaboratively develop a script based on the voices and ideas they encounter. This flexible approach has allowed them to pivot to address the current racial justice protests; the program shifted from a planned live performance to a filmed broadcast on November 15, 2020. TCP is led by VCUarts Theater professor Dr. Tawnya Pettiford Wates and educator, activist, and drummer Dr. Ram Bahgat. **Issue 3**

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• Tiffany Shaw-Collinge is a Métis artist, curator and architect based in Alberta.
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• The Conciliation Project (TCP) is a social justice theatre company that promotes dialogue about racism and oppression in America in order to repair its damaging legacy.
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• Raquel Salas Rivera (Mayagüez, 1985) is a Puerto Rican poet, translator, and editor. His honors include being named the 2018-19 Poet Laureate of Philadelphia and receiving the New Voices Award from Puerto Rico's Festival de la Palabra. He is the author of five full-length poetry books.

• Nicole Cecilia Delgado is a Puerto Rican poet, translator, and book artist. In 2016, she founded La Impresora, an editorial studio specialized in small-scale independent publishing. Her latest books include: Apenas un cántaro: Poemas 2007-2017 (Ediciones Aguadulce, 2017), and Periodo Especial (Aguadulce/ La Impresora, 2019), which explores the socioeconomic mirror images between the Greater Antilles in light of Puerto Rico's ongoing financial crisis. Delgado is widely regarded as one of the leading Puerto Rican poets of her generation, and as a cultural worker bringing together artists, activists, and writers from across the Americas.
• Erin Hogan is an independent consultant who works with art and history museums on content, interpretation, and communications.
• Kahlila Chaar-Pérez is a Postdoctoral Associate at the University of Pittsburgh's Program of Information and Data Stewardship and also works as a Reference Associate at the JKM Library at Chatham University. She's interested in Latinx, Afro-Latinx, and Caribbean cultures and politics as well as queer and transgender studies. Her writings have appeared in Small Axe, Global South, Uncle Tom's Cabins: the Transnational History of America's Host Mutable Book, and the U.S. Intellectual History blog. She also edits and translates scholarly texts and is committed to cultivating transformative justice, antiracism, and a world without capitalism.

ASSOCIATED PUBLIC PROGRAMS

MONUMENTS AND POLITICAL SPEECH

September 23, 2020

What are the circumstances that allow for speech to become political? How is political speech encouraged or restrained? In recent months monuments have become sites for civic discourse, where we debate the ways in which we want to reform or revolutionize our social structures. This event invited some of the artists for *Commonwealth* whose work addresses these issues, to be in dialogue with invited panelists. Panelists included Artistic Director and Co-founder of Monument Lab Paul Farber; photographer and visual journalist Brian Palmer; and three of the artists commissioned as part of *Commonwealth*: Sharon Hayes, Nelson Rivera, and Mónica Rodríguez. Moderated by *Commonwealth* co-curator and Chair of Painting + Printmaking at Virginia Commonwealth University Noah Simblist.

WATER AND WEALTH

October 15, 2020

How can we reimagine the relationships between water and wealth? This event explored the issues raised when life-giving natural resources are commodified and waterways are privatized. How do we re-envision water as something that we hold in common? Carolina Caycedo, one of the artists commissioned as part of *Commonwealth*, and Mary Ebeling, Director of Women's and Gender Studies and Associate

Professor of Sociology at Drexel University, considered these questions and the overlap between their practices. Moderated by *Commonwealth* co-curator and Philadelphia Contemporary Director of Programs Kerry Bickford.

WOMEN IN RESISTANCE

October 21, 2020

How can revolutionary women of other times and places inspire art and action in the present? This program considered intersectional approaches to creative work and collective organizing—centering Puerto Rican artists and activists within wider networks. Panelists included *Commonwealth* artist Alicia Díaz and collaborator Patricia Herrera, Shariana Ferrer-Núñez of the Puerto Rican anti-colonial feminist activist group La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción, and feminist theorist Silvia Federici, who is also a contributor to the *Commonwealth* publication. Díaz's project *Entre Puerto Rico y Richmond: Women in Resistance Shall Not Be Moved* inspired this program. Moderated by Anahí Morales Lazarte of Beta-Local and introduced by *Commonwealth* co-curator Stephanie Smith.

INDIGENOUS MOVEMENT: A DISCUSSION

January 13, 2021

Writer and curator Candice Hopkins moderated this virtual conversation, which brings together *Commonwealth* artists Tanya Lukin Linklater and Tiffany Shaw-Collinge with Vanessa Bolin, an activist, singer, and leader of the Richmond Indigenous Society; it was introduced by *Commonwealth* co-curator Stephanie Smith.

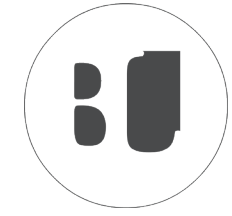
This panel was inspired by two works presented in *Commonwealth*. Lukin Linklater, an artist who often works with dance and choreography, has designed space for Indigenous performance in collaboration with architect Shaw-Collinge. The ICA's exhibition paired their 2019 sculpture Indigenous geometries with Linklater's newly commissioned performance for camera *This moment an endurance to the end forever*.

URBAN FARMING / COMMON GROUND

January 28, 2021

Can urban farming elicit decolonization, self-determination and healing through access to food? How do factors such as environmental racism, food deserts, and the history of land ownership impact these goals? What kinds of spaces can be developed in tandem with urban farms to fully achieve food sovereignty for Black and Brown communities?

Urban Farming / Common Ground explores these questions with brief presentations and dialogue between Duron Chavis, urban farmer, educator and changemaker, Quilian Riano, founder and lead designer of DSGN AGNC, Ashley Gripper, founder of Land Based Jawns, and Semilla Julian Garcia and Semilla Crystal Cruz from Huerto Semilla at the University of Puerto Rico. Nicole Pollard, Program Coordinator at Philadelphia Contemporary moderates the discussion. This program was inspired by the Resiliency Garden, an outdoor installation at the Institute of Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, that was commissioned as a part of *Commonwealth* and co-designed by Chavis and Riano.



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INSTITUTE FOR
CONTEMPORARY ART
VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH
UNIVERSITY

WILLIAM PENN
FOUNDATION

Commonwealth

Published by:
Beta Local, Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU,
and Philadelphia Contemporary

Designed by:
TEMBOL

Printed and distributed by:
Publication Studio: Hudson

Edited by:
Kerry Bickford, Pablo Guardiola, Michael Linares,
Nicole Pollard, Noah Simblist, and Stephanie Smith

Translation by:
Raquel Salas Rivera, Nicole Cecilia Delgado,
and Kahlila Chaar-Pérez

Copyediting and Proofreading by:
Erin Hogan

Printed in the USA by Publication Studio Hudson

ISBN: 978-1-62462-187-1