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Where do we belong?

Our sense of belonging comes from many sources: warm food dropped off by a neighbor, our personal experiences and shared histories in a place, the rituals we practice in community or familial traditions, dancing to your favorite song, being welcomed warmly by loved ones.

This thesis explores the tie between design of public spaces and our sense of belonging. It demonstrates how place-based public art projects can create a sense of belonging for groups that have been historically and currently excluded.

The relationship between belonging and public space provides an opportunity for the collective creation of more just futures. When artists (in the broadest sense of the word) create opportunities for belonging through participation and design, they encourage residents to radically imagine new structures and interactions that uphold values of equity and spatial justice. The work in this thesis employs methods of community participation and the design of shared public environments to enhance feelings of belonging and allow for collective imagining from all community members.

intro duction

In my experience as a queer, first generation, mixed race, Taiwanese American, I have often felt between worlds and cultures. Art has always been a way for me to build a sense of community and belonging where I didn't always find it at home or find myself reflected in mainstream media. My personal lens and identity led me to the realm of socially-engaged public art. This journey grew into a community-based art practice, first sprouting from my role as a Boston Public School art teacher, then growing into public art projects aligned with creative placekeeping strategies in Boston's Chinatown, and later into a multimedia approach to participatory public art.

The artworks that I will present in this thesis operate at the intersection of belonging, public space, and collective imagination. Often we may feel excluded or unable to show up as our full selves in public spaces. For QTBIPOC folk, this feeling of exclusion is by design. It is part of intricate systems of separation and oppression. Within this reality, this thesis poses the question: How do we design spaces that cultivate a sense of belonging? What stories can we share that promote a sense of belonging to a specific place? To one another? And as a designer, what shape can those stories take?

Our sense of belonging is tied to the shape of the structures and systems within our environment – the stories we are told and the stories we tell each other. By manifesting new stories, can we create new systems and structures that help us imagine and experience alternative futures?

In this book, I will share contextual research around key themes in my work - participation, design of space, and collective imagination - as they relate to the larger theme of belonging. After contextual research is a contextual history of New Genre Public Art, which illustrates the canon of art in public space that informs my own work. Then, there are four case studies: A House Shaped Dream, Plaza of Dreams, inPublic Voicemail Project, and Shape of Belonging. These projects demonstrate that public art and design can manifest invisible elements from our social lives - memories, care, imagination - into the physical space to be touched, listened to, learned from, and shared. In doing so, these projects help us to collectively imagine new ways of being together in public space and interrogate how our spaces encourage or discourage belonging.

contextual research


TOW ZONE
NO STOPPING
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YU AN
CHINESE

Contextual Research for Belonging

In this thesis, I argue three things about belonging. One is that our sense of belonging is an action. A sense of belonging demands our active participation; that we say hello to our neighbors; we chat daily with our teammates in the online game; we "rep" the colors of our favorite sports team; we recount stories about our ancestors; we share food with members of our community. Active participation in our communities increases our sense of belonging to those communities. Our participation also invites and affirms other members in our community that they belong as well.

Two is that belonging is affected by the design of the spaces we inhabit. For example, redlining in American cities enforced segregation with clearly drawn borders; neighborhoods with strong social infrastructure and public spaces (libraries, public parks, etc.) have stronger social bonds which increases their resident's overall survival rate (Klenenberg). The design of our spaces is a physical reflection of our priorities and who we believe belong and do not belong in those spaces. Due to this fact, we as citizens, designers, artists, or activists have the opportunity to redesign spaces and structures based on more just ideas to produce more inclusive and welcoming spaces.

Three is that because our systems and public spaces are inherently welcoming to some and exclusionary and oppressive to others, redesigning systems and spaces that increase a sense of belonging for all is an imagination exercise into a world that is more just. With the strong relationship between belonging, participation, design of spaces, and collective imagination, it is no surprise that participation in democratically imagining the future of our shared spaces also encourages belonging (a recurring theme in the later case study projects).

In this section, I will examine contextual research around the main themes of my projects - participation, design of spaces, and collective imagination - and how they relate to the overarching theme of belonging.

The Relationship of Belonging + Participation

In our complex world, we belong to a number of groups, communities, or spaces. We may be a citizen or feel allegiance to a nation, state, city, neighborhood, or city block. We may feel like we belong to a community based on our race/ethnicity, our gender, our sexual orientation, our culture, the culture of our immigrant parents, what we like to do, the online games or chat rooms we frequent, where we live, the activities we do, the sports teams we support, the ways we express ourselves, and more. Belonging is a sense of comfort or support that comes from a community with which you identify. When you feel a sense of belonging, a part of your identity is nourished and feels like it can be fully present in a space.

Belonging is an action that demands our active participation. In each of my projects, I design an interaction for visitors to engage in the work, create participation, and thus increase a sense of belonging. If visitors are sharing stories in a space, hearing the stories of others, imagining the future, or describing what they are caring for, they are increasing their sense of belonging to a space and to one another. Participation is necessary in the work because the goal is to affect social life. Suzanne Lacy wrote these words in her book Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art "…what exists in the space between the words public and art is an unknown relationship between artist and audience, a relationship that may itself become the artwork" (20). Especially in artwork that is concerned with creating alternative futures that include more voices and identities, this work must be done collaboratively and encourage participation. If we, as artists, wish for others to imagine or experience a new world where more people feel a sense of belonging, we must invite folks to participate in that world.

The Relationship of Belonging + Design of Space

Design in this thesis refers to the reimagining, redrawing, and recreating of the layout, orientation, and structures within physical space. This thesis also refers to the design of interactions between people, which is also impacted by the design of space. Dimensions of Citizenship illustrates the relationship between design of physical space and belonging in this quote:

"From the simple demarcation of a bathroom by gender, to the complex ways in which the design of housing limits diverse family structures, to how the layout of an office plan affects hierarchy in a corporation. From the legacies of red-lining to the impacts of present day gerrymandering, measuring lines on a map and cutting access and inclusion determines the distribution of resources, limits the influence of voices and defines belonging across our society" (17).

This quote describes how belonging is by design. One's sense of belonging is inextricably linked to the design of our built environments. This concept is further explained in the book *Ideas, Arrangements, and Effects* by Design Studio for Social Intervention which states "ideas are embedded within social arrangements which in turn produce effects " (18). *Ideas, Arrangements, and Effects* offers the example of a classroom to illustrate this theory. In a traditional classroom, the chairs face towards the head of the room where the teacher speaks. This arrangement uncovers the underlying idea that knowledge flows in one direction from the teacher to the students. This arrangement also produces effects in the classroom. Within this arrangement students must listen to the teacher and sit still and quietly in order to learn. Furthermore, in this arrangement, students miss out on more collaborative methods of learning and do not hear the ideas and

thoughts of their fellow classmates. How could the space of this classroom be rearranged to produce new effects? What if the chairs were arranged in a circle or in small clusters? What if there weren't chairs at all? What if the learning happened outside of the classroom? The book posits that these new arrangements would be supported by new ideas - for example, that all students are experts in their own experience and can learn from one another - and would produce different and more equitable effects.

A Short Story

I was sitting in Copley, meeting with my thesis advisor, Sofie Hodara, when I heard my name called. It was one of my old students, Ish, from my first year teaching at The English High School. We embraced and chatted for a bit. Ish was sitting with a group with his back to an iron fence, watching other folks - mostly young folks of color - skateboard in a concave area next to the historic Trinity Church. Ish has been a part of the skateboarding community since I knew him. His Instagram is filled with videos of him landing tricks on his skateboard in areas around Boston and New York City. I always loved reading the supportive comments from Ish's fellow skaters celebrating the videos. One comment I always remember is "that's my favorite skater in the city!". I excused myself to finish my meeting with Sofie and told Ish I'd come back over after my meeting. When I returned, I sat with Ish next to the skate area. Ish and I caught up about life, how college was going (he had gotten a full ride to Northeastern University and had just returned to Boston from an internship in New York City), how his fashion line was going, who we kept in touch with at English, art we wanted to make, art we were making. He introduced me to his friend saying, "this is my old art teacher!". Other folks would come by and dap him up. He'd have conversations with them. In one of those conversations,

they talked about the planters that were put in by a group called Friends of Copley. Ish and his friend lamented that this group hated skaters and they put the planters there so they couldn't skate in that area. They expressed frustration with rich, white people who had put money into the space, felt like they owned it, and could set the rules of a space that was for public use. Further, the conversation had a strong note of defiance; they would keep skating there, Friends of Copley couldn't stop them, they felt ownership over the space too. This conversation with Ish illuminated the insidious ways that design of public space can delineate who belongs and doesn't belong. Even planters, which I had assumed were merely for the beautification of the space, were a clear message to the skateboard community that the space wasn't for them and they weren't welcome. Whether it is in our symbols as a nation, our monuments, our architecture, our social or economic systems, the design of our cities or the design of our educational spaces - these structures, symbols, systems, and arrangements unveil the underlying ideas that are possessed by society and affect who is included and who feels belonging. And if belonging is by design, then the opposite is true; exclusion is also by design.

The unbreakable relationship between belonging and design can be a source of power and agency for disruptive designers who recognize the insidious and oppressive nature of public space design. Dimensions of Citizenship further contends that because belonging "is indissociable from the built environment [that is] exactly why that relationship can be the source for generating or supporting new forms of belonging" (29). Indeed, as will be explored in the next section, this relationship between belonging and the designed environment is exactly where artists and designers seek to intervene.

“The future itself might be conceived

as a design problem.”

Ramia Mazé

The Relationship of Belonging + Collective Imagination

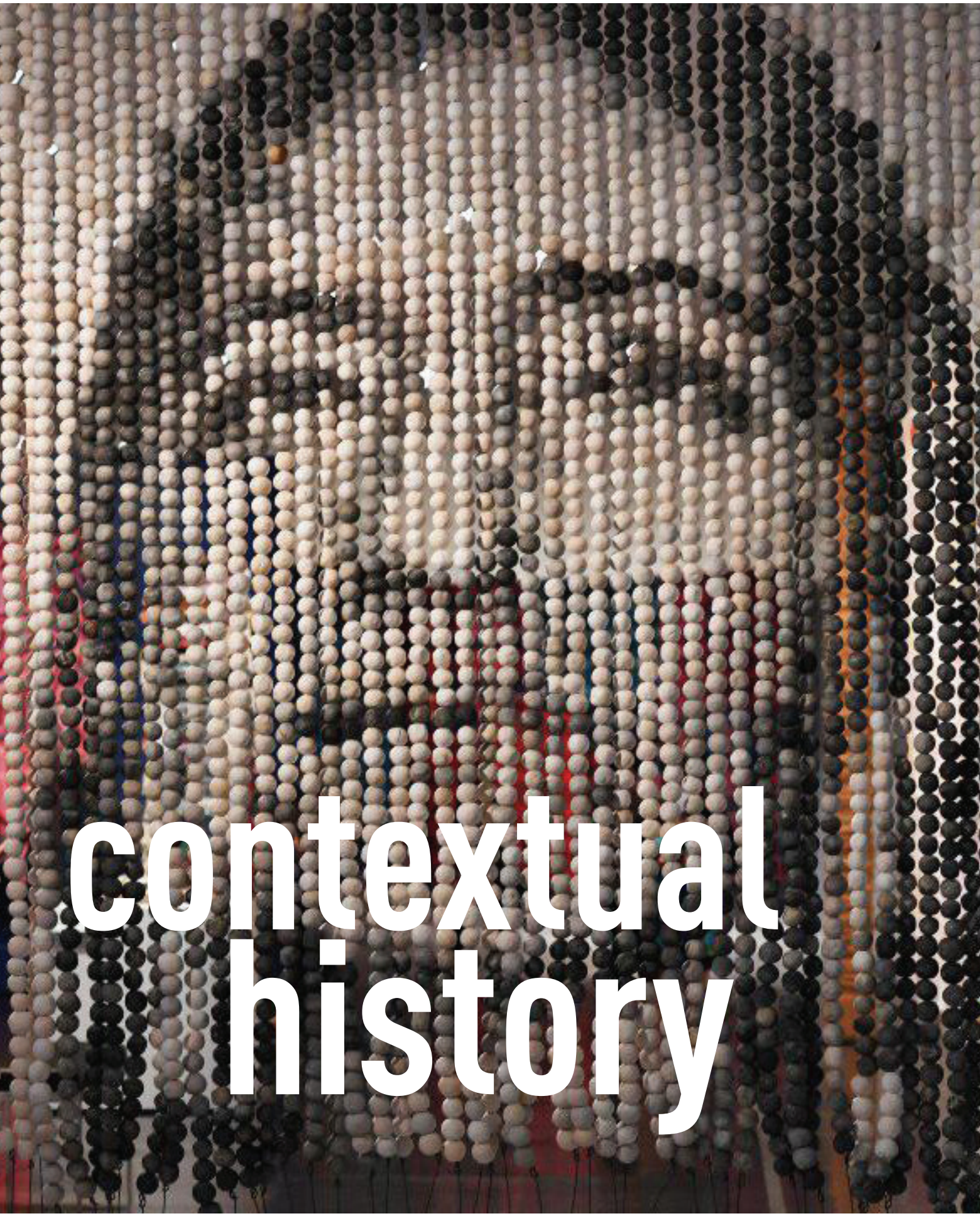
The relationship between belonging, our designed environment, and collective imagination is beautifully described in Dimensions of Citizenship as the "intimate yet complex relation between ourselves and the actual and virtual spaces we inhabit – and the future worlds of which we dream" (27). For QTBIPOC folk who have been historically and presently left-out, a way to feel belonging is to imagine new arrangements in our society which include folk of many different cultural, racial, ethnic, and sexual orientations. Because our built environments and our public spaces have been designed to exclude, we need to imagine new designs, experiences, and structures that encourage inclusion and shared understanding.

Lori Lobenstine, the co-founder of Design Studio for Social Intervention, states, "For BIPOC artists, the interconnectedness of spatial justice and their role as visionaries and imagination warriors is critical. (www.nefa.org)" Artists of color are responding to designed inequities by imagining and creating their own alternative designs and inviting us to participate in these new worlds.

Around the country, artists and activists are engaging in conversations about (or actively participating in) tearing down old monuments that glorify racist historical figures and building new monuments that are in line with values of racial equity. A call to artists in Chicago asked folks to imagine and create a drawing of how communities could use the yearly budget from the Chicago police to fund social infrastructure projects and improve quality

> Photo from a Public Kitchen by Design Studio for Social Intervention.

of life. Design Studio for Social Intervention imagines new social infrastructure for public life and invites folks to embody these experiences. One question that DS4SI asked was, what if there were public kitchens in neighborhoods like libraries? Kenneth Bailey, a cofounder of the studio explained, "We're asking people to imagine if they had a shared kitchen, a public kitchen, if they were cooking together, learning about food together, sharing recipes together, how having something like that in your neighborhood might change your life" (www.ds4si.org). It is these imagination projects that help others experience alternatives to the status quo and begin to advocate for structural change.



contextual history

Contextual History of New Genre Public Art

In the book Mapping the Terrain, Suzanne Lacy coined the term "new genre public art" to describe a wave of artists in the 80s and 90s that gained recognition for their socially-engaged artworks in public spaces. While the bulk of Lacy's book focuses on artists working in the 80s and 90s, Lacy and others scholars in the anthology acknowledge that this type of socially-engaged, process-centered artwork was in existence well before the 80s and was categorized under different terms for politically-focused artwork, such as feminist performance art or the Mexican muralist tradition in southern California.

In this section I provide contextual history about new genre public art and their artists to examine themes that relate to my own work and position my work within a long legacy of socially-engaged artists. The values and key characteristics of new genre public art have greatly informed the role of belonging, collective imagination, design, and participation in my own work. In this chapter, I will describe the characteristics of new genre public art and acknowledge the long lineage of artists that have made participatory, political artworks that have come before me.

Previous page: Each/Other Exhibit at Peabody Essex Museum by Cannupa Hanska Luger and Marie Watts displays participatory public artworks

What New Genre Public Art is

It is helpful to define what new genre public art *is not* to understand what *it is*. For example, new genre public art is not any artwork that exists in public space. It is not a commissioned sculpture that sits outside of a bank. It is not a monument that is erected in a community without consultation and engagement from said community. It is not a mural that is painted without consideration to the specific audience or social-political context of a location. It is not an outdoor exhibition.

These examples of what new genre public art isn't, helps us uncover some of the defining characteristics of what new genre public art is. In this essay we will look at three components that make new genre public art what it is: location, audience, and process.

Location

The first defining tenant of new genre public art is the location. New genre public art positions itself outside of traditional art spaces, galleries, and museums to uphold it's value of accessibility. However, the location can also function as part of the poetics, metaphor, or political meaning of the artwork. As an example, new genre public artists have a rich history of activating and creating artworks at sites along the US-Mexico border. In 1986 the Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo (BAW/TAF), a performance art collective that focuses on issues at the US-Mexico border, activated the space where the border fence meets the Pacific Ocean to perform the piece "End of the Line". In the piece, Mexicans, Chicano, and Anglo Americans sat, held hands, and exchanged food across a large table that was bisected by the border line. During the performance, they illegally crossed the border to switch seats across the table. In the words of Guillermo Gómez-Peña, a founding member of the collective, "The Mexican media reported the event as news, and we became aware of the political power of site-specific performance. A cultural act emerging from such a politically charged site…carries much more weight and many more implications than similar gestures in the interior of either country" (Lacy 206).

^ End of the Line performance piece by Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo (BAW/TAF), 1986

Audience

The second characteristic of new genre public art is the careful consideration of the audience. New genre public art is distinct from traditional art in public spaces in that it considers the complex historical and social structures of a space and the people within it. In her essay "Looking Around: Where We Are, Where We Could Be" Lucy Lippard describes this type of art "as accessible work of any kind that cares about, challenges, involves, and consults the audience for or with whom it is made,

respecting community and the environment" (Lippard 121). This respect for the audience uncovers an essential underlying value of new genre public art. It is inherently anti-elitist (one of reasons it often operates outside of traditional gallery spaces). It functions to communicate with and engage those that are not necessarily a part of the art world.

Moreover, a common theme in the work of new genre public artists is to consider audiences that are often left out from economic or political systems in society. A function of new genre public art is to create more inclusive spaces for folks on the margins and within spaces on the margins. As Guillermo Gómez-Peña states, "we want to be part of a "multi"-participatory society that truly embraces us all, including the multiracial and multisexual communities, the hybrids, the recent immigrants from the South and the East, the children and elderly people - our most vulnerable and beloved ones - the people with AIDS, the homeless, whose only mistake is not being able to afford housing. This is not radical politics but elemental humanism" (Gómez-Peña 99).

One example of this core value of new genre public art is the AIDS Memorial Quilt, a quilt that brings together 55,000 panels to honor 110,000 individuals and was first presented on the National Mall at Washington D.C. This quilt influenced public opinion around the AIDS epidemic and also involved active participation from the community to contribute quilted panels. This project helped increase public care and empathy for individuals that were impacted by the AIDS epidemic and reimagined social interactions the relationship to folks with AIDS. In this way, new genre public art is an exercise in world building and imagination. What would our world look like if we truly cared about each other, not just people that looked or spoke the same as us? What would our commu-

AIDS Memorial Quilt at National Mall in D.C. 1987 >

Process

In addition to respect for and inclusion of audiences at the margins, this type of artwork often aims to turn the viewer into "a participant, even a collaborator"(Lacy 28). Changing the role of the viewer fundamentally alters how the artwork is created.

A defining characteristic of new genre public art is that it is not solely about the final product, it is about the process. As said by Jeff Kelley, "Processes are also metaphors. They are powerful containers of meaning" (Lacy 45). This is to say, the art is the work, the engagement, the relationships, the bonds formed, and more. It is relational and ephemeral. In the eyes of the new public genre artist, the process is as valuable -if not more- than the final artistic product. Lacy argues that it is this tenant of new genre public art, the process, which "challenge[s] the nature of art as we know it, art not primarily as a product but as a process of value finding, a set of philosophies, an ethical action, and an aspect of a large sociocultural agenda" (46).

<Guns collected for "Palas por Pistolas" artwork by Pedro Reyes, 2008.

^ Shovels created from the guns and used to plant trees. "Palas por Pistolas" artwork by Pedro Reyes, 2008.

An example of the poetics of process in new genre public art is the piece "Palas por Pistolas" by Pedro Reyes. This artwork began in 2008 in Culiacán, Mexico, a city which has a high rate of gun violence. The artist organized a campaign for Culiacán residents to donate weapons in exchange for coupons to buy appliances and electronics. Reyes got the word out via television ads on local stations and eventually collected 1527 weapons through the campaign. The weapons were publicly crushed by a steamroller and taken to a foundry to be melted. The metal was then sent to a factory and turned into 1527 shovels. These shovels have been distributed to art institutions, botanical gardens, and public schools with the goal to plant 1527 trees(Pedro Reyes). In this piece by Reyes we can understand that the artwork is not just the trees grown or the shovels created, but instead the process of transformation and the political message that is communicated through the artwork's action.

New role of art and the artist

New genre public art challenges the traditional understanding of the form and process of art and the role of the artist; for this reason the field can be hard for art critics to understand. The curator and writer Mary Jane Jacob takes on the voice of these critics when she states, "Art should be primarily visual, and since this work uses and mixes any media, takes forms associated with traditional popular arts, or involves community organizing, where's the art? Isn't this social work after all? The artist's role is being co-opted or compromised; it's not the work of the artist but of the community, thus, it's not art" (Jacob 55).

As Jacob illustrates, critics can be uncomfortable with the new role of artists as activists and artists. Furthermore, they worry that the participatory nature of new genre public art will cause the aesthetic quality of the work to suffer. Poet and performance artist Estella Conwill Májozo in her article "To Search for the Good and Make it Matter" responds to this concern by critics and posits that "perhaps the greater fear is that elitism will be destroyed, that the function of art will once again be recognized, that freedom of expression will carry the impulse and stark beauty of our first breath, and that our own relevance as human beings will come to be seen in the meaning of our acts" (Májozo 90). Májozo beautifully reminds us that the main goal of this type of work is in service of a larger value system that prioritizes collaborative co-creation as a way to search for meaning and express a more just way to be together in society.

In examining critics' discomfort with the new role of public artists, we can understand some of the various hats that new genre public artists wear. One being that of the educator. If this "new public art" is for the masses and aims to change social consciousness, then it is argued by some in the field that a main function of this type of work is to educate viewers about the form, function, and message of the art. For example, Bolton states, "if art is to ever play a role in the construction of shared social experience, it must reexamine its pedagogical assumptions, reframing strategy and aesthetics in terms of teaching" (Bolton 39). In this way, some artists take on the role of the teacher. For example, since 1974, Judith F. Baca has worked with youth in LA from opposing street gangs and taught them mural painting while simultaneously building the situation for them to work collaboratively. The mural extends 2,754 ft, took 5 summers to complete, and employed over 400 youth.

Other artists in this field believe that this work is about restructuring our understanding of art itself and using art as a tool for creating a more equitable society. Lynn Sowder, an independent curator, affirms "We need to find ways not to educate audiences for art but to build structures that share the power inherent in making culture with as many people as possible. How can we change the disposition of exclusiveness that lies at the heart of cultural life in the United States?" (Lacy 31). In this quote, Sowder argues that the role of "new public artists" is to challenge the current systems of exclusion and design new systems that allow more people to drive social and cultural change.

^ The Great Wall of Los Angeles,
Judith F. Baca

A related role of the "new public artist" is to engage themselves and others in dream work - the work of imagining new structures that would create a more just or equitable society. As Alf Lohr, a German critic and artist affirms, "part of what we're doing is to dream. [An artist] is not changing the homeless problem. How many million homeless are there in the world? How many people is that one artist working with? No, this is an issue about identity and history" (Lacy 46). In this way, Lohr asserts that new genre public art is distinct from social work because its role is to reimagine; reimagine our relationship to homeless folks, our ideas about homeless folks, the structures in our society that lead to homelessness, and new social arrangements that could lead to more empathy and housed neighbors.

Challenges + Impact

This type of art poses challenges to those that wish to evaluate it. With no shared artistic medium or final form, how is the quality of this art meant to be considered? By formal or aesthetic qualities? By skills or craft? It seems that one natural way to evaluate New Genre Public Art would be by it's reception or impact on the audiences it hopes to reach. However, the success or failure of this type of impact is often difficult to gauge. How do you measure a greater feeling of belonging among community members? How do you quantify a change in heart of a population?

Artists in this field would instead argue that the state of our world—plagued by disconnectedness from ourselves, our communities, and our natural environment—necessitates work which stands in opposition to forces that diminish our humanity. Estella Conwill Májozo responds to criticism of new genre public art as akin to criticism of any art; "That art is a luxury is as false a theory as the notion that the outer terrain can undergo transformation without affecting the soul. Notions of separation and otherness are ingrained in Western thought, and it is this very way of thinking that has wreaked havoc on the cultures of the world" (90). Májozo reminds us that we can look to our ancestors as guides to deeper connection with earth, community, and self. The magic of new genre public art is in exposing our current systems of disconnection and employing new strategies for connection, empathy, and humanity. New genre public art is fundamentally at odds with the systems that divide

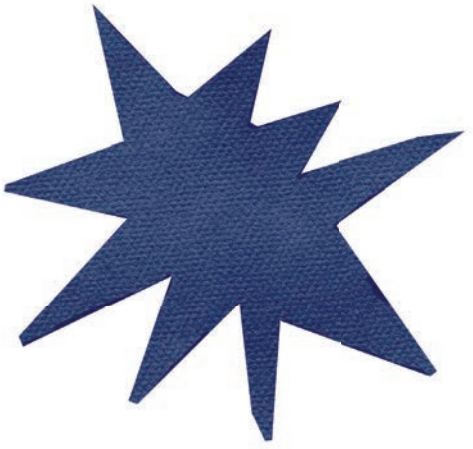
us and thus must take another form than traditional art (a table across the border of two nations, guns melted into the shovels to plant trees, or a giant collaboratively-made quilt) - which often work within systems of elitism, capitalism, etc. - in order to oppose those systems. This work is shared, democratic culture-building. It is imagination and world-building. It is artists who "… recognize the illusion of duality, the miracle of collaboration, and the beauty of making truth matter" (Májozo 90). The careful consideration given to location, audience, and process in New Genre Public Art, interrogates systems of exclusion and marginalization that exist in our world and imagines new ways of being with one another and structures in physical space. These new interactions and physical structures, created by artists, remind us of our connection to one another and imagine worlds that promote belonging over separation.

case studies

a house shaped dream

plaza of dreams

The following projects, Plaza of Dreams, A House Shaped Dream, Chinatown Story Kits, Internal Resonance, inPublic, Boston Nature Center, work at the intersection of belonging, public space, and collective imagination. They examine how to cultivate a sense of belonging and the stories we tell one another to create belonging. They create new structures, invitations, and interactions to encourage belonging in public space and - in doing so - help folks collectively imagine new ways of being together that encourage connection and joy.



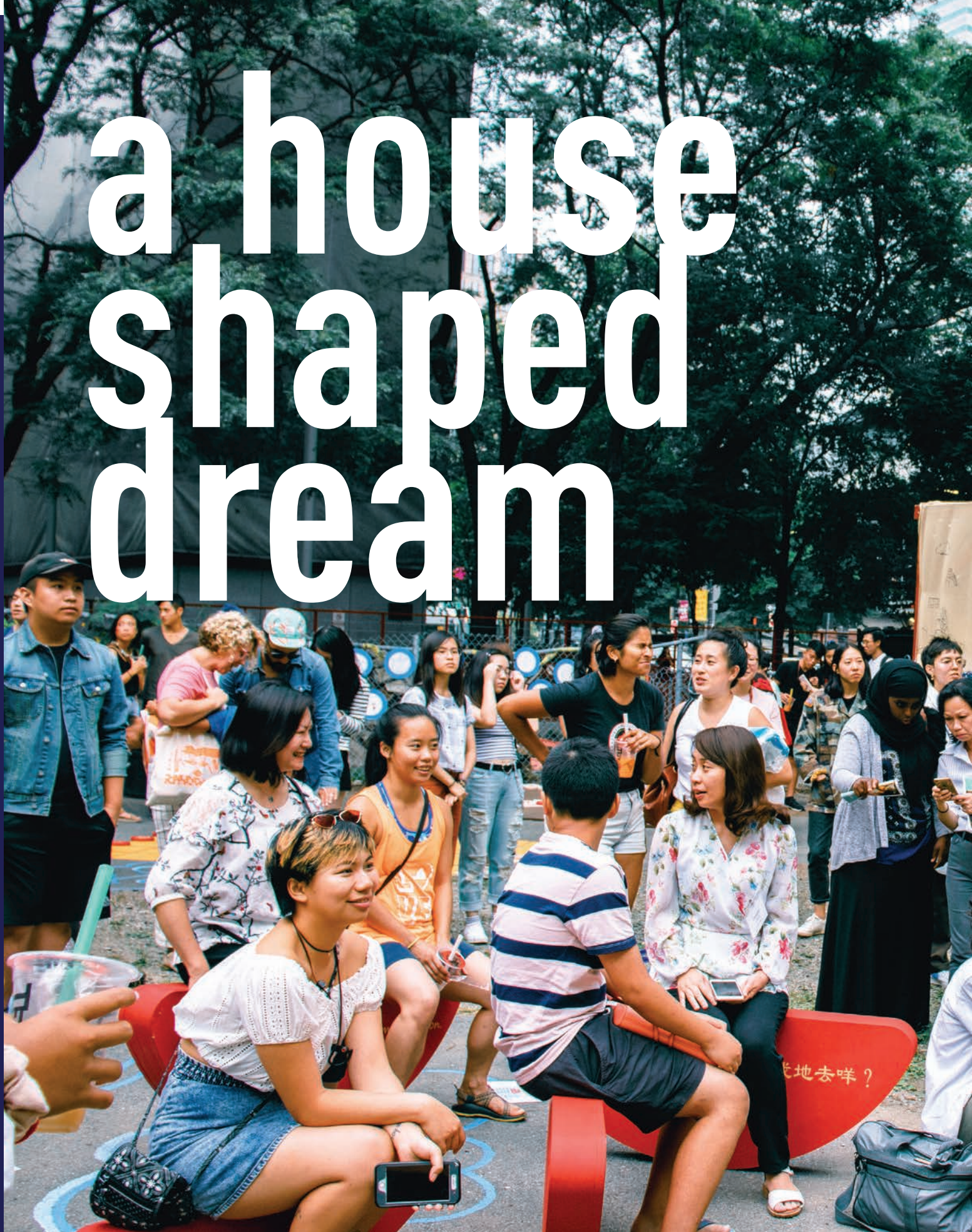
inPUBLIC Voicemail Project

shape of belonging

Key for Shapes:

height = level of collective imagination
width = level of design of space
number of sides/curves = # of participants / ten

a house shaped dream



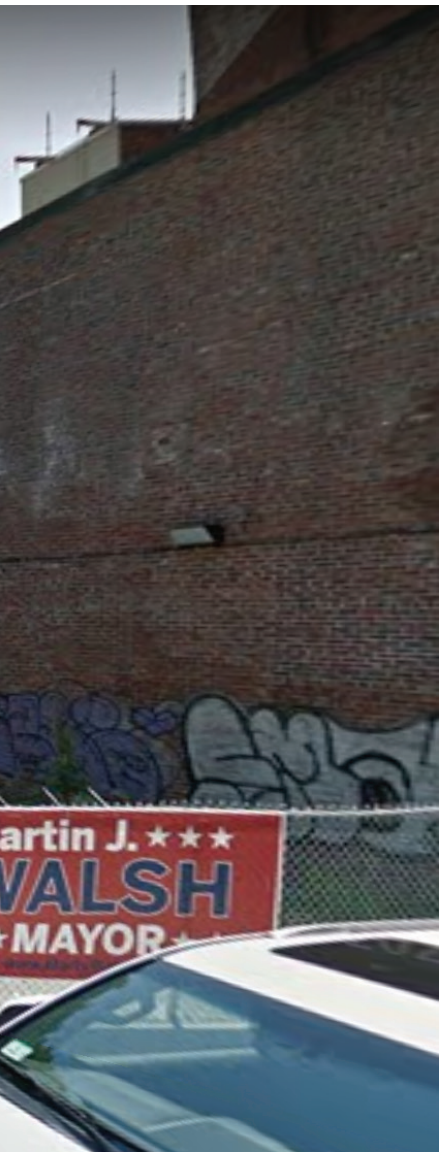
Introduction

A House Shaped Dream was an installation artwork that was created as a collaboration between artists Lily Xie and myself and Chinatown residents Pihua Lin and Yuyi Li. The project was a part of Residence Lab, a placekeeping artist residency organized by Asian Community Development Corporation and Pao Arts Center to activate an empty lot in Boston Chinatown's Hudson Street. Residence Lab and the resulting project, A House Shaped Dream were exercises in collective imagination. The installation doubled as a space that helped to reimagine an empty lot as a community space and one that invited community members to leave their dream for the future of Chinatown. These exercises increased resident participation in the future of this public space and feelings of connection to the empty lot.

As part of Residence Lab, we attended weekly workshops and worked with residents to understand their desires for a community space in the heart of Chinatown. The empty lot on Hudson street was known by locals as the "piss lot" due to the smell and regular use of the space in a neighborhood without public restrooms. It was hard to imagine this space transformed into a space for the community. However, the residency sought to do just that. Starting in June of 2019, Lily and I and two other artists - Katytarika Bartel and Ponnapa Prakkamakul - were grouped with Chinatown residents to create projects that would activate the empty lot and reimagine it as a community space. Everyone in the residency, including artists and residents, attended workshops on placekeeping and Chinatown history in order to feel grounded in our task ahead.

Previous Page: Photo of Residence Lab Opening Event. Photo credit - Tarik Bartel.

^ The empty lot on Hudson Street in Chinatown before it was turned into a community site. Screenshot taken from Google maps.



Collective Imagination

Collective imagination can take many forms – from the visual to the auditory. In A House Shaped Dream, Lily Xie and myself used exercises in collective imagination to engage with residents of Chinatown and learned about what they wanted to see in the empty Hudson Lot.

Lily and I met with residents Pihua Lin and Yuyi Li to co-design an intervention to activate the empty Hudson Street lot. In our first conversations with Pihua and Yuyi, they expressed a desire for permanent infrastructure in the neighborhood; in particular, public bathrooms for the homeless population. Although we had no skills in plumbing, we heard that Pihua and Yuyi had a desire for more permanent structures to make the space more welcoming to residents. Also the nature of the project was to collectively imagine with community members the future of the lot as a community space. This led us outside of our comfort zones to design a physical structure made of wood that would provide shade and a place to sit, gather, and connect with others. Additionally, the nature of the project was to collectively imagine the future of the lot as a community space. With this goal in mind, we drew up an idea to create a structure where residents could sit, talk, connect, and share their ideas, hopes, and desires for a future community space and their neighborhood as a whole.

Participation with Red Oak Youth

In the future of Chinatown, what do you see, smell, hear, feel, and taste?

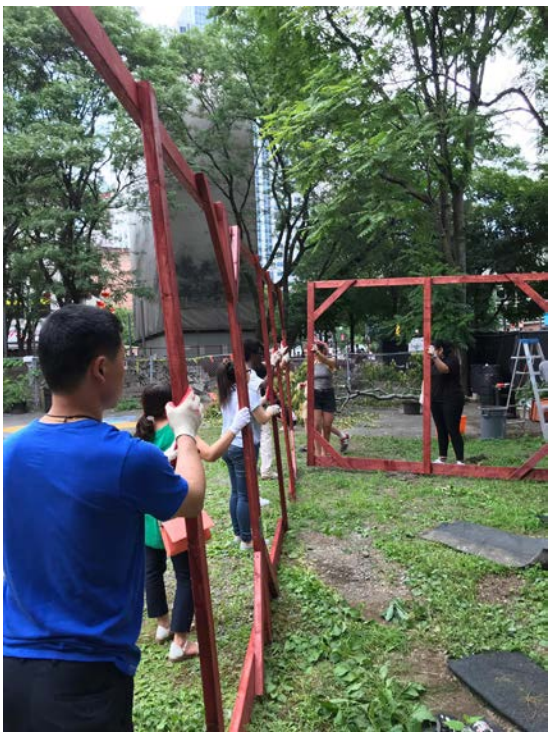
As part of the project, I led a series of workshops with Red Oak Youth in Chinatown around collective imagination. I started by brainstorming with the students around the question: In Chinatown's future, what do you see, smell, hear, feel, taste? I gave the students maps of the Chinatown neighborhood and they drew their dream version of the Chinatown neighborhood in the future. I ran the workshop with 5 Red Oak Youth groups with students ages 5 through 12. These drawings are examples of collective imagining. The students used their imaginations to transform the public infrastructure of Chinatown. Their future versions of Chinatown centered on fun and play. They featured ferris wheels, free boba tea stands, free toys, and chocolate fountains (an unexpected theme across all age groups!). The students also imagined infrastructure that showed an understanding of the issues in their neighborhood: care packages for the homeless, apartment buildings where you didn't have to pay rent, and a new permanent Chinatown library to replace the one that was destroyed during an urban development project 60 years prior.

Red Oak Youth: In the future, Chinatown sounds like…

I also led a workshop with Red Oak youth in middle school and high school. This workshop focused on the question "In the future, I hope Chinatown sounds like…". We gathered field recordings and made our own instruments to put into the installation.

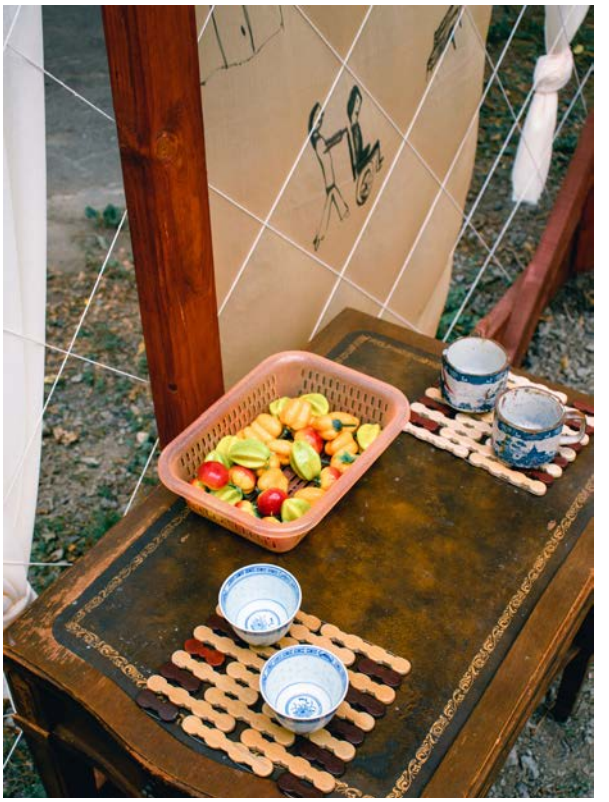
A House: A Shape of Belonging in Chinatown

In the construction of the installation, we consulted a woodworker, Derek Schwartz. He helped us to build a structure that was both functional and easy to construct.



The woodworker cut the wood to the correct size and the community members, Lily, and I stained the wood and assembled the final structure.. We created wooden frames that were attached with hinges and fit together in the shape of a pentagon (as a birds-eye view).

We decorated the inside of the house and put up fabric sides which displayed photos of the construction process with community members and the Red Oak student's dream drawings, sound objects, and soundscape. We made ginkgo leaves on water proof paper with prompts for visitors to respond to about their hopes, dreams, and desires for the future of Chinatown.



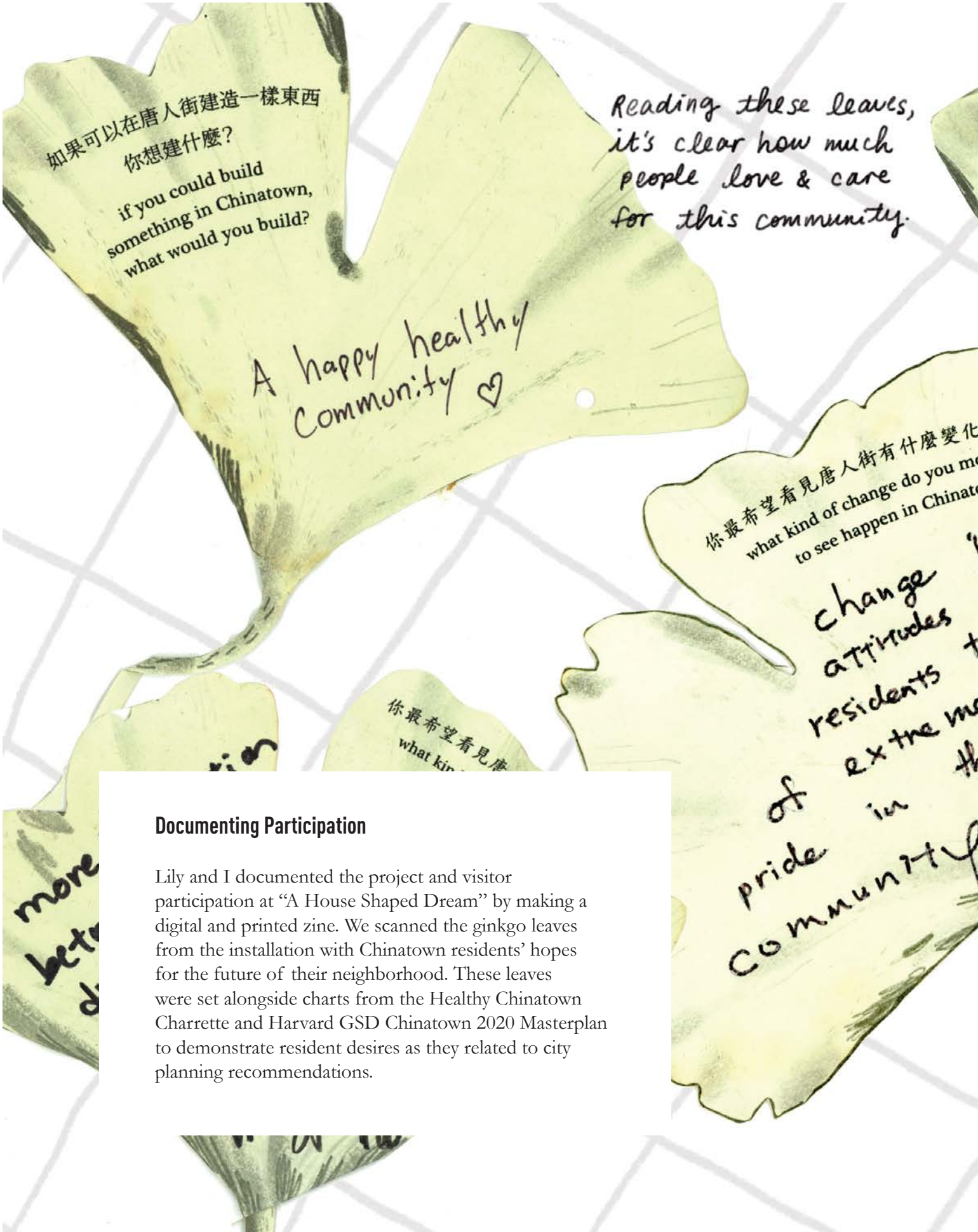
^ Photo credit Tarik Bartel

^ Photo credit Tarik Bartel

During the opening event, the Hudson street lot was transformed into a community space with vegetable garden beds made by Chinatown youth groups, moveable boxes that formed into a stage with resident portraits and stories, unique benches with resident quotes, a giant painted Chinese checker game, and the installation A House Shaped Dream; a space for residents to connect, relax, converse, and imagine the future of Chinatown.

Inside, visitors were asked to imagine with us. We invited them to write on ginkgo leaves and tie them to the structure of the house. The ginkgo leaves had prompts in Chinese and English that asked residents what they hoped for the future of Chinatown and what they wanted to preserve about Chinatown. Layered atop the children's drawings, the ginkgo leaves adorned the walls inside the house, a physical manifestation of the imaginations of the community.

At the closing event, I invited visitors to sit, sip tea, and join a conversation. There were prompts on the tea cups for participants to reflect on their memories in Chinatown and their hopes for the future of the neighborhood. Participants dipped their tea cup into an ink well and marked the paper tablecloth to document their conversation. In the end, we had a beautiful, visual documentation of the conversations that took place in A House Shaped Dream.



Documenting Participation

Lily and I documented the project and visitor participation at "A House Shaped Dream" by making a digital and printed zine. We scanned the ginkgo leaves from the installation with Chinatown residents' hopes for the future of their neighborhood. These leaves were set alongside charts from the Healthy Chinatown Charrette and Harvard GSD Chinatown 2020 Masterplan to demonstrate resident desires as they related to city planning recommendations.

如果可以在唐人街建造一樣東西
你想建什麼?

if you could build
something in Chinatown,
what would you build?

a culture of visible love and acceptance for LGBTQ and disabled community in Chinatown.

places of healing. where we can resolve and carefully confront the trauma of migration, of separation. where one generation can understand each other more art. where we feel safe to express ourselves.

I hope Chinatown stays beautiful and changes only to be more radiant.

we know there exists a future where China Town is thriving and vibrant, and its residents are healthy, happy, and safe.

如果可以在唐人街建造一樣東西
你想建什麼?

if you could build
something in Chinatown,
what would you build?

More events like these in public spaces to bring members of the community together. Less cars + angry drivers. More affordable housing. [redacted]

Conclusions

Residence Lab and the resulting project, A House Shaped Dream were exercises in collective imagination. A group of residents and artists reimagined an unwelcoming, empty lot (once called the "piss lot" by locals) as a community space. By creating temporary infrastructure and activating the space with community programming, the residency helped other residents reimagine the space too. Residents started to see and embody a new future of the Hudson lot.
Moreover, community members began to feel a sense of ownership over the lot as a space where they could grow vegetables, converse with friends, dream of possible futures, and sing karaoke, because they had experienced it. With collective imagination taking hold, Asian Community Development Corporation had the community support to maintain use of the space for 2 more years. They later applied and received a loan from the City of Boston to purchase the empty lot on Hudson Street from its current owners. The negotiations for ownership of the Hudson Street lot is still ongoing. However, whether or not the purchase is successful, this project is an example of the power of collective dreaming when employed by community members in collaboration with the arts. Inviting residents to engage their imaginations is not a superfluous exercise. Instead, it is an essential and only first step to shape public space to be more welcoming, joyful, inclusive, and just.

plaza of dreams

Introduction

I've always loved voice messages. On my birthday, my closest friends will call to leave me a voicemail. They know I'll keep the message and treasure it. I'm the type of person who's mailbox regularly get's full. The type of person that has a hard time deleting even the most mundane messages from my loved ones. I think about moments I might not be able to hear their voices and so I keep them. In voicemail I can hear so much music - the timbre and rhythm of my loved one's voice.

Plaza of Dreams emerged when I mixed my love of voicemail and interest in participatory art with a simple piece of technology that I had been using for years: Google Voice. Google Voice is a telephone service that provides a U.S. phone number to anyone with a Google account that can be accessed through an online platform or phone app. After a winter of isolation and disconnection during the pandemic, I saw the potential of the app's capability for connection in the spring.

Previous Page: Still from a video filmed by Rene Dongo and edited by Crystal Bi.

Background Research

It was important for me to look into the cultural understanding of a call-in center while diving into this project. How had call-centers operated in the past? What were people's most common interactions with call-in centers today? In my research, I found that call-in centers -such as 1-900 numbers- were a rich, pre-internet space for connection, information, interest, love, therapy and more. Call-in centers were spaces you could go to find more information, be a part of a fan club, receive a psychic reading, or explore a sexual fantasy. My own understanding of a call-in center was as a space for community and peer support models of therapy such as suicide prevention.

This particular cultural understanding of a call-in line fit within the themes I sought to explore such as community care through peer support models of care.

I researched artists that also used the platform and technology of call-in lines or telephones in their work. The artist MPA did a piece called "The Interview". The artist had a red phone next to a couch with images of the planet Mars on the walls. Visitors were invited to pick up the phone and talk about the colonization of Mars with the artist.

^ MPA's piece "The Interview" at the Whitney Museum.

Other projects that I found included a call-in line from the 70's where you could hear famous poets read their poetry. Another project was Call'n Oates, a call-in line to hear the songs by Hall and Oates. The number invited callers to "dial 1 to hear rich girl" and so on.

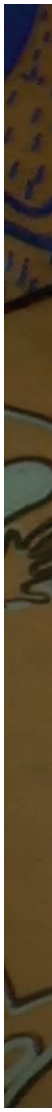
These three projects were particularly influential in their use of the phone as a platform for interaction and connection between the viewer and the artist.

Collective Imagination

Plaza of Dreams is a participatory voicemail, gift-giving project and interactive installation. The project was developed as part of a Performance Art class at MIT and Elements of Media class at MassArt. Through Plaza of Dreams, participants are invited to call the Google Voice number 857.220.7819 and leave a dream as a voicemail message for themselves, someone else, or their community.

This project emerged out of themes that I have continued to explore in my work; collective imagination and community care. Collective imagination describes the work associated with imagining the world differently than it is now. Creating a means for more democratic imagination work - allowing folks to have more access to imagination work in society - shaped the project's prompt: "leave a dream for yourself, someone else, or your community as a voicemail".

My goal as the artist was to create a virtual space for collective and democratic dreaming - a community of people that were imagining a world different than this one - through voicemail. For users, I hoped to create a sense of connection and collective care during the pandemic through the intimacy of voicemail and receiving art prints as gifts. I wanted users to be able to activate their imaginations for the future and to engage with other's responses as a way to share dreams through the platform.



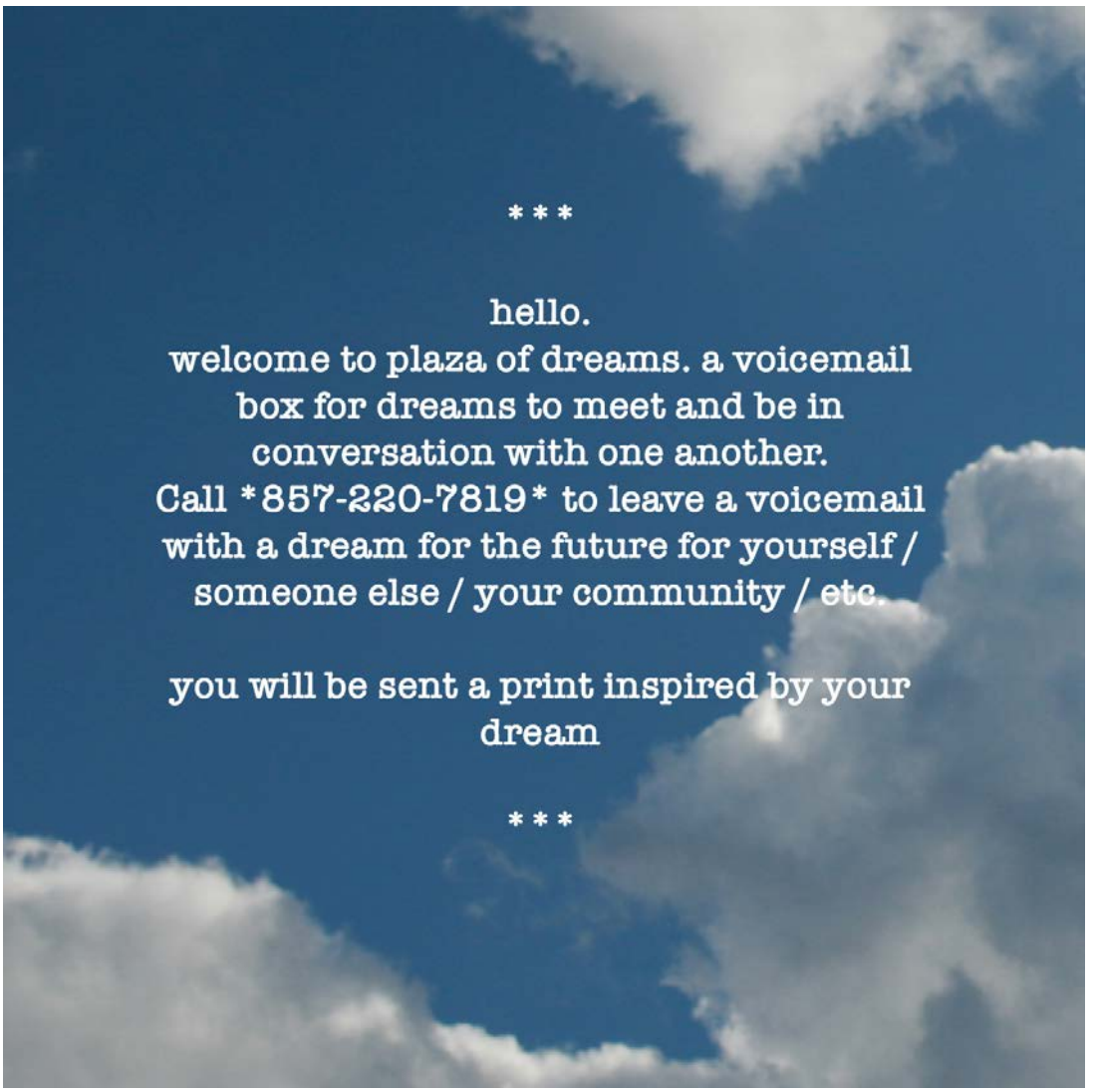
Gift-giving

When I first started this project, I wrote that I had "an interest in gift-giving." Upon further reflection, I realized that this was a core value that I held in my personal relationships, work, and artwork. I wanted to make sure that inviting people to participate would mean that they would receive something in return and ensure that their participation is valued and reciprocal. These interactions can sometimes be merely transactional, however I wanted the interaction through Plaza of Dreams to convey care through the time spent to make the gift.

In order to create the gifts, I interpreted the voicemail messages through drawings on transparencies and developed as a cyanotype print on fabric. Two cyanotype prints were made. One cyanotype print was embroidered and mailed as a gift to participants. Another cyanotype print joins an interactive installation of cyanotype prints. The installation prints are embroidered with conductive thread and attached to a microcontroller. The microcontroller is connected to a laptop which runs Arduino to play the individual voice messages. When someone touches the conductive thread in the fabric cyanotype, the message will play.

Listening to the dreams, interpreting them through drawings on glass, printing them with the sun, washing them out in a tub of water, hanging them to dry, writing a note, and putting them in the mail. The process took time, was physical, and emotional. The process created intimacy between myself and the person that left the voicemail.

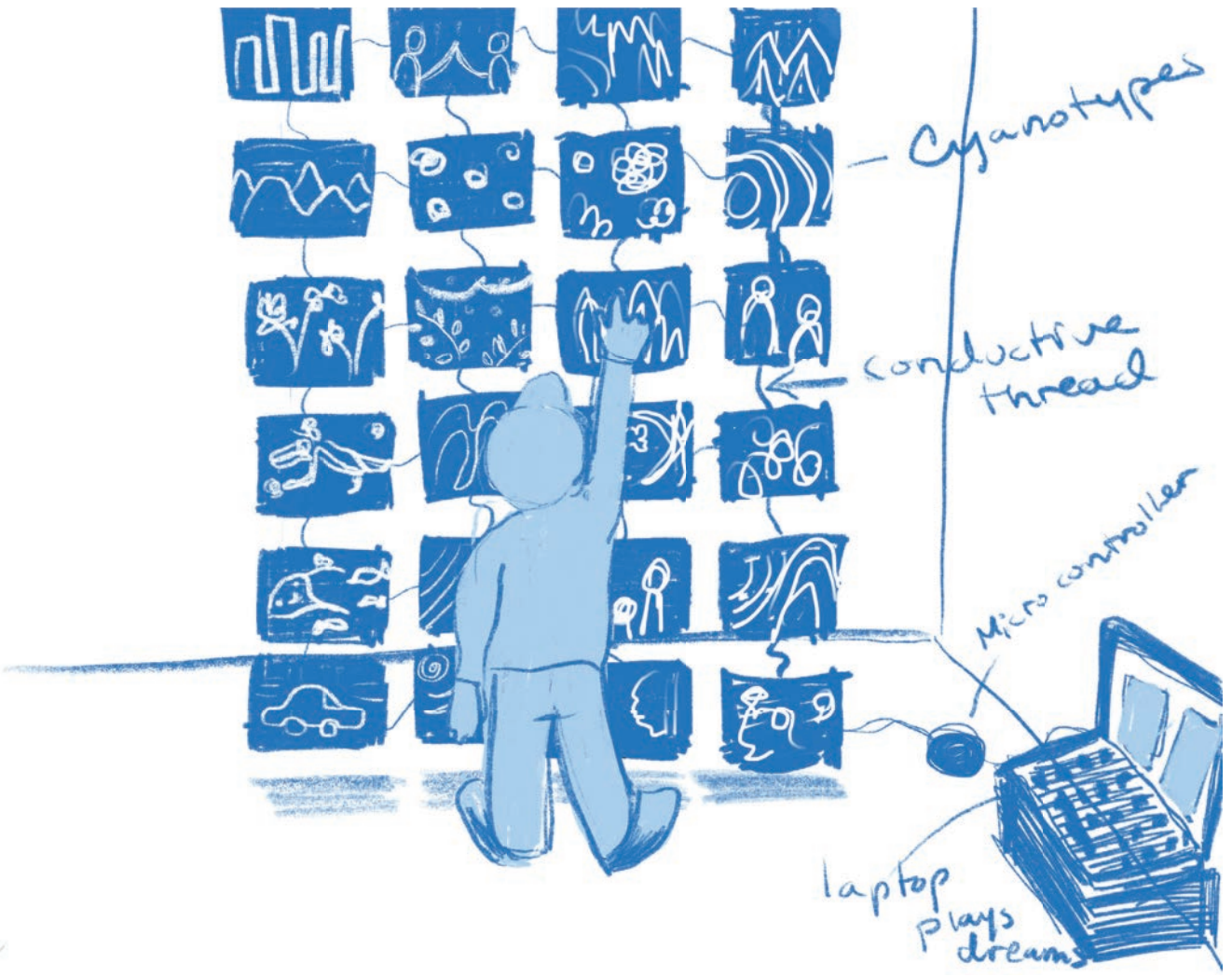
When a viewer at the gallery saw the cyanotypes, they could close the switch with their touch to feel, hear, and see a bit of this process of care and time.


* * *
hello.
welcome to plaza of dreams. a voicemail box for dreams to meet and be in conversation with one another.
Call *857-220-7819* to leave a voicemail with a dream for the future for yourself / someone else / your community / etc.
you will be sent a print inspired by your dream
* * *

Designing Participation

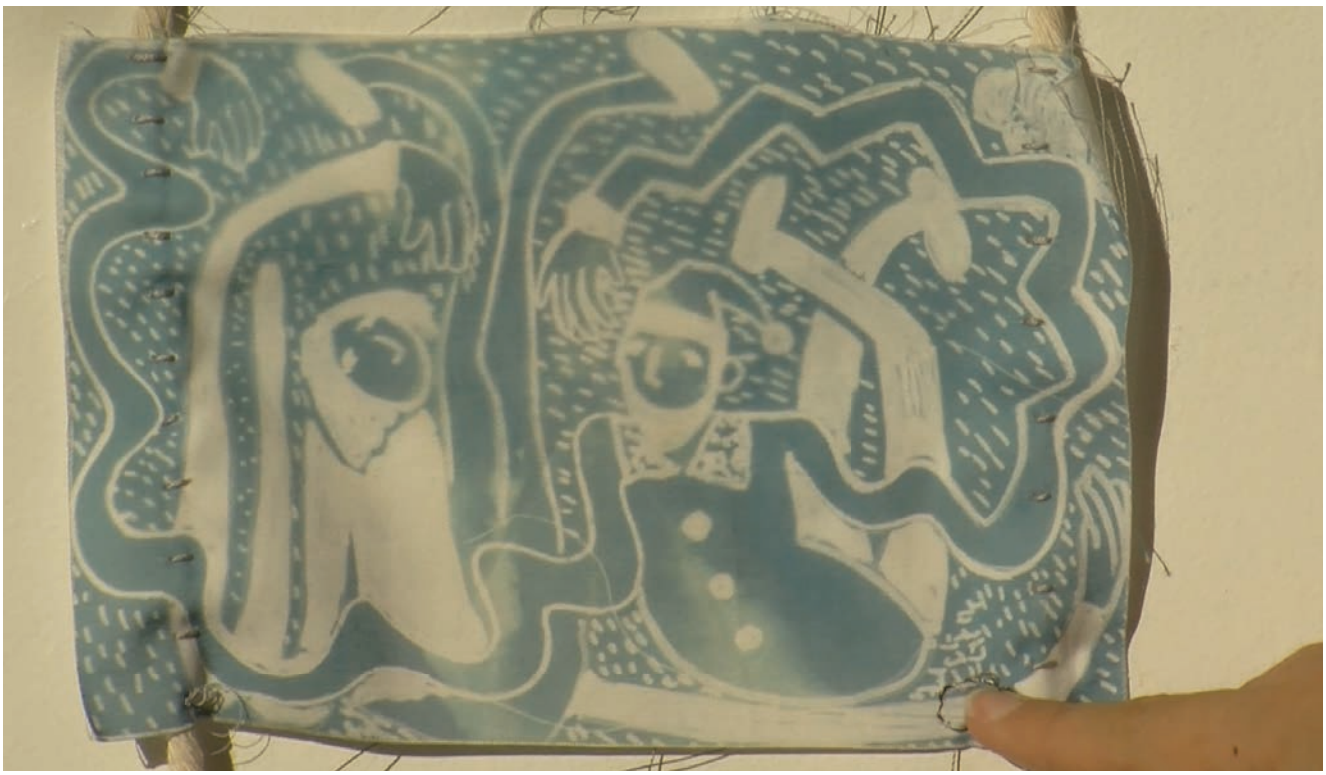
I developed a graphic with the prompt about dreaming and tested it with friends and classmates. The prompt was "Call to leave a voicemail with a dream for yourself/someone else/your community/etc." Over the course of a few weeks, I received 10 voice messages. I realized that the prompt could be interpreted in different ways. Some voicemails described people's subconscious dreams while others described their imagined dreams for the future.

I tried changing the prompt to use the word "wish" instead of "dream" and tested the change with classmates and friends. I found that wishes were interpreted to be more shallow and simple. For example someone could respond "I wish for a million dollars". By comparison, the dreams that I received as voicemails were vivid, tangible, and poetic. From these iterations of the project, I learned how much a single word in the prompt could change the audience's interpretation of the project. Although there were multiple meanings for the word dream, it was ultimately more important for me that the responses were rich and colorful.



Installation: The Shape of Belonging

For the installation, I wanted to design a way for visitors to interact with the dreams that people left. The designed physical space would document the voicemails that were received, the art prints that were created, and place the messages in conversation with one another by sharing physical space. It was important to me for people to be



able to engage with the dreams as a collection. This would activate their own imaginations, allow viewers to draw connections between dreams, and collage the collection into their own experience of what a collectively built future could look like. I was not able to test these theories to their full potential with a number of users due to the pandemic and working on this project in my home.

Testing

I prototyped the installation by writing the code to play the voicemail when the cyanotype print was touched through Processing. I chose touch interaction for its intimacy. To close the circuit with their touch, the viewer would be able to feel, hear, and see the interaction between the caller and myself. There is an intimacy in the relationship between myself and the caller due to the process of listening, reinterpretation through drawing, and gift giving.

The technical parts of the prototype were accomplished with the help of Fred Wolflink in our Elements of Media class. Through prototyping and creating a small installation in my living room, I found that it was hard to produce a response from the microcontroller by touching the conductive thread. In future iterations of this project, I can use wire or a switch to reliably play the voicemails when visitors touch the prints.

Conclusions

Plaza of Dreams designed an interaction between myself and my classmates during the pandemic. The participants were excited to receive the cyanotype prints and the voice messages that they left were unique, colorful, and intimate. I was touched by the experience of this project and continue to use Google Voice as a platform for participatory art projects.

In the future, I would like to take this project further to incorporate an interactive performance piece. In the piece, I would be a dream researcher and would create a dream office. People could leave a voicemail on a phone or leave a written dream. I would collect these dreams and work to reinterpret them and create them into cyanotype prints. I would give them to people on the spot to take home as gifts. The pandemic caused me to seek new forms of connection from within quarantine, as mail-art and interaction through a voicemail platform. Recreating this project where people can gather, view, leave a dream in a space, see their dream be reinterpreted through a cyanotype print, and receive a gift in real-time, would promote participation and deeper in-person connections.

Watch the video abstract for plaza of dreams:
www.crystal-bi.com/plaza-of-dreams

^ Sketch of a future in-person iteration of Plaza of Dreams

inPUBLIC voicemail project


E HEAL TOGETHER
Hand
SANITIZER

Introduction

inPUBLIC Festival was a 3 day event in the Fall of 2021 in Boston that was produced by Design Studio for Social Intervention and funded by New England Foundation for the Arts and Boston BID. I was honored to join the team as the audio curator for the event and be a part of the organizing team with Letta Neely, Sheila Novak, Lori Lobenstine, and Dzidzor Azaglo. inPUBLIC Festival 2021 invited 60 audio, video, 2D, and 3D artists to respond to the prompt "what are you tending to?" and transform the steps at Downtown Crossing as a space for folks to be, express, connect, and thrive. This theme of tending was dreamed into existence by the organizers of the event to explore community care after nearly two years of pandemic.

Previous Page: Photo of inPUBLIC Festival 2021. Featured in the image - sculptural weavings by Crystal Bi, poetry performance by Letta Neely vinyl decals on the stairs by Furen Dai, fabric water installation by UnBound Bodies Collective, 3D structure with umbrella by Brine Space Studio, and black and white photo by Tyahra S.A from Afro Centered Media. Photo Credit - Afro Centered Media.

^ The steps at Downtown Crossing surrounded by luxury condos.

The Space

This project was an exercise in spatial justice and collective imagination between the organizing team and the 60 participating artists. The steps at Downtown Crossing are surrounded by large luxury condos which impose strict noise ordinances for performers and treat the steps at Downtown Crossing as a space for condo residents. For this reason, the programming at the steps caters to white residents in the condos or tourists from the suburbs rather than to the diversity of visitors in Downtown Boston.

^ Space Bingo sheet with post-its

A few months before the event, artists were invited to meet at the Downtown Crossing steps and play Space Bingo, a game developed by Design Studio for Social Intervention. Space Bingo featured large bingo sheets with squares labeled with phrases such as "sacred space", "queer space" "sanitized space", "commercial space", "confused space", and "private space as public space". In groups, we ran around Downtown Crossing and found locations that matched the description in the squares on the bingo board. For example, a "commercial space" could be all of Downtown Crossing or a "public space as private space" could be the steps, or a "confused space" could be the street with cement pavers (is it for pedestrians or cars?). As a team, we reflected on the experience of the Space Bingo activity which revealed the lack of sacred or queer spaces and the abundance of comercial spaces. As a team we asked ourselves, "how can we turn the steps into a sacred space?" and "what if the space focused on collective care rather than buying things?" and "what if the space was welcoming to and reflective of QTBIPOC residents in Boston?". By revealing the spaces that were needed in Downtown Crossing, we had a starting point for the kind of experience we wanted to curate at Downtown Crossing's steps.

< Flyer for the voicemail project, developed for inPUBLIC Festival 2021.

Designing Participation

It was important to me that folks - at any level of involvement - felt invited to participate and lend their voice to the prompt of tending and community care. Leading up to the festival, I set up a Google Voice number and designed a voicemail project to encourage participation around the theme of tending. Participants were invited to leave a voicemail with their response to the prompt: What will you tend to? and What are you tending to presently? Their responses were collected and joined a

collaborative soundscape that was played at inPUBLIC. I created an illustration and made postcards to send to each of the Festival's artists and organizers. I also hung up flyers with rip off tabs in East Boston, Downtown, Dorchester, and Jamaica Plain. By the time of the event, I had received 40 voicemail messages responding to the prompt. I was touched by the voicemails left by participants. The voicemails showed a large measure of intimacy and vulnerability. Some people vented about difficult conversations, used the platform as a confessional, or described the more difficult emotional and physical impacts of the past years in the pandemic. Others recounted self-care techniques, where they were centering their care and focus, and the aspects of their lives that they hoped would flourish in the future.

< listen to the soundscape and voicemails at the link **bit.ly/iwilltend**

Sound + Weaving: A Shape of Belonging in Downtown Crossing

Soundscape

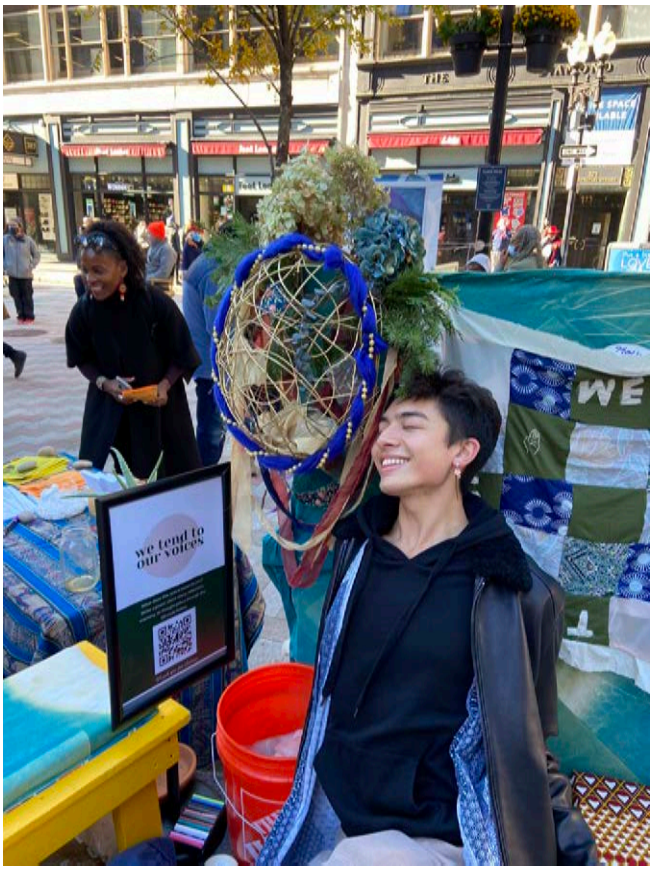
I collaborated with artist, poet, and inPUBLIC Festival producer, Dzidzor Azaglo to source sounds for the Voicemail Project's soundscape. We tested and recorded various instruments, including a tongue drum and a playtronica sound-making device. I cut together the riff from the tongue drum played by Dzidzor, a recording of a field with birds chirping, and singing bowls to create a soundscape on Ableton. I then edited and layered the voicemails into the soundscape. I wanted to create a soundscape that was peaceful and disrupted the present condition of Downtown Crossing - a place that was fast

paced, commercial, hard, and concrete - for something that was more natural, soft, slow, and calm.

I wanted the sound in Downtown Crossing to be something that is explored and discovered, rather than played over speakers. Especially given the intimacy of the voicemails, it was important to me that listening to the messages was a personal experience rather than shared with a large group in Downtown Crossing.

Weaving

I learned how to weave with reed in Nathalie Miebach's course Flexible Structures. In a one-on-one meeting, Nathalie taught me how to use a technique called random weave. Using this technique I made 4 woven sculptures to encase bluetooth speakers which played the voicemail soundscape. I incorporated dried flowers from my mother's garden, thrifted jewelry, and sewn fabric into sections of the sculptures and spray painted them gold and dark blue.



< inPUBLIC artist Micah Rose listens to the soundscape playing from one of the woven structures. Micah collaborated with me to design this particular weaving with jewelry, fabric, and gold paint.

The woven sculptures were hung in trees and on a structure that welcomed people to the festival and invited them to take a plant clipping. The bluetooth speakers were housed in the woven sculptures and played the soundscape. The soundscape invited pockets of calming reflection.

^ Photo Credit: Afro Centered Media.

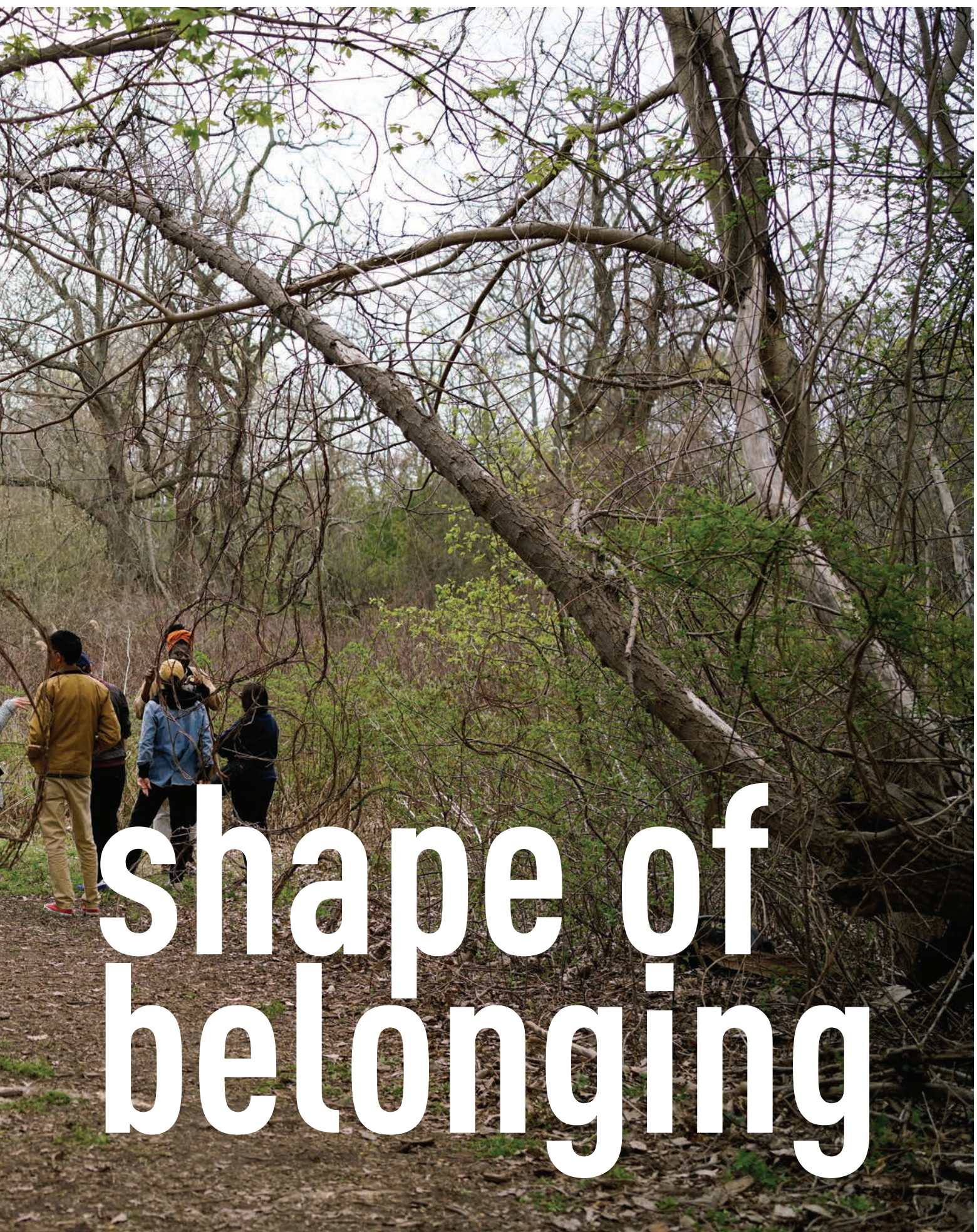
Two of the speakers were located next to a soft seating area where folks could write what they were tending to on a stone and listen to the voicemail soundscape. The soundscape and voicemails were shared as a QR code and bit.ly link on postcards and zines that folks could take home. This allowed visitors to listen and interact with the voicemails, audio pieces, and soundscape after the event.

Conclusions:

This 3-day inPUBLIC Festival event brought care - a largely private aspect of our daily lives and a critical component of our survival during the pandemic - into public space to be interacted with, learned from, and shared. The actions we do for one another impacts our feelings of belonging and is a form of participation. By bringing this aspect of care from our private lives into the public realm - through visual art, poetry, sound, and voice messages - we are able to relate to the trials of others and celebrate the work that is done to keep our communities safe and thriving. inPUBLIC Festival was a world building exercise. The steps are a space that is influenced by wealthy condo residents next to an area dedicated capitalism. inPUBLIC collaboratively reimagined the use of public space to center QTBIPOC individuals, art, experience, laughter, dancing, music, and care and - in doing so - invited folks to reimagine the public realm, how it is used, and who belongs there.

Hopscotch game designed and installed by Ponnapa Prakkamakul invited play into Downtown Crossing. Photo credit - Afro Centered Media >


TOW ZONE
TOW ZONE



shape of belonging

Introduction

Sounding the Planet was an event produced by the Gardarev Center at Mass Audubon's Boston Nature Center and Wildlife Sanctuary. This event invited 4 artists - Letta Neely, Ian Condry, Forbes Graham and myself - to activate spaces in the Boston Nature Center with sound, music, poetry, and artwork around the theme of environmental justice. As part of this event, I created a piece called Shape of Belonging. Shape of Belonging was an installation with woven Bittersweet vine structures, an interactive phone which played voice messages on the theme of belonging, and a soundscape.

Previous Page: Image from the Shape of Belonging installation at Boston Nature Center. Photo credit - Nohemi Rodriguez.

The Space

In the Boston Nature Center, the Bittersweet vines wrap around one another to climb the trees. They wrap around the trees and hang in a dome around the tree canopy. Bittersweet vines were introduced to me as an invasive species that kills the native plant life. They are dangerous and hard to get rid of. At first, I saw the vines as an ample resource with which to weave. I wanted to create structures to hold soundscapes like the ones I had made for inPUBLIC Festival. The Boston Nature Center groundskeepers were happy to let me cut and gather the vines. In their work, they also worked hard to cut and remove the vines.

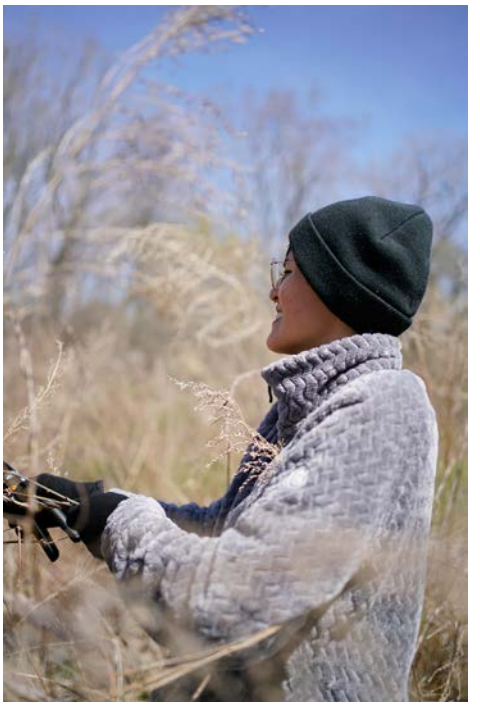
I started visiting the Boston Nature Center regularly in January to cut and collect Bittersweet vines. It was peaceful and quiet. In the winter, there was snow on the ground. Slowly the earth grew softer and greener. As I collected the vines I felt a connection to the plant and to the space. Eventually, the time spent with Bittersweet and my thesis advisor, Stephanie Cardon, encouraged me to research the origins of the vines. I learned that the vines were called Asian, Oriental, or Chinese Bittersweet. From what I learned, Chinese Bittersweet immigrated to the United States over 200 years ago. They were first brought here for ornamental purposes, for their exotic beauty featuring bright red berries. They are beautiful and hard to get rid of. Poisonous and resilient. Dangerous to native plant life, competing for natural resources, and thriving. Upon reading about the plant, I saw parallels between the history and perception of the plants and how Asian Americans (especially women and femme folks) are perceived in the white imagination in this country.

^ Stills from video footage by Rene Dongo in the Boston Nature Center.

Asian Americans are perpetually seen as foreign, no matter how long we have been in this country. Asian women and femmes are fetishized for their beauty and are thought to be meek and demure - a close synonym for ornamental, something that is valuable for its aethetic quality but has no utility or voice. In the same breath, Asian Americans are saddled with the model minority myth which paints a simplistic picture of all Asians as hard-working and high-acheiving in order to pit them against other marginalized groups to justify "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" ideology in the

^ Images from the Boston Nature Center. Photo credit - Nohemi Rodriguez

United States. Finally, within the current context, Asian Americans are scapegoated for the Covid-19 pandemic and seen as dangerous or diseased and a danger to the local population. In summary, Asian Americans are beautiful and ornamental, dangerous, diseased, competing for natural resources with locals, and perpetually foreign. These stereotypes paralleled the words that described Chinese Bittersweet vines. I felt more connected to the vines as I wove them. We had shared identities and I considered them to be a strong metaphor for the



experience of immigration. What does it mean to be an immigrant to this land? How do you find belonging to place when you are considered foreign and othered?

I also considered the term "invasive species" which assumed that plant life adhered to the national borders that are drawn by human life. Do plants know that they are foreign? Do they have the same sense of time or competition that humans do?

Weaving and Imagining

In the beginning I imagined the vines creating a dome or 3D orb structure. As I worked with the vines, it felt more like a collaboration. The vines knew which way they wanted to move and the shape they wanted to take. In my studio, the vine sculpture as a 3D form seemed to shrink in the space. When they were up on the white wall they were monumental. I decided to do as they told me. I wove them to twist around one another in natural, adjoining ovals.

While I created weavings with Bittersweet, I listened to *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer. In her book, Kimmerer spoke about invasive plant species. One plant that she described is called White Man's Footstep. The plant came over and moved West, following European colonizers, thriving in the lands where they settled. However, despite their relationship to colonizers, the plant brought so many medicinal gifts that they began to be seen as a native to the land. Inspired by the teachings of this plant, Kimmerer asks us to consider how we become indigenous to place. This question resonated with me. I framed it within my own project featuring invasive plants. Using bittersweet vines as a metaphor for immigrantion, how do we, as immigrants ourselves or the children, grandchildren, or great grandchildren of immigrants belong to this stolen land? How do we cultivate a shared sense of care and stewardship to the land that increases our sense of belonging to it? How do we collectively steward the earth and remember our connection to her?

^ A weaving with Bittersweet Vines installed at the Fresh Media Show at Cyber Arts Gallery

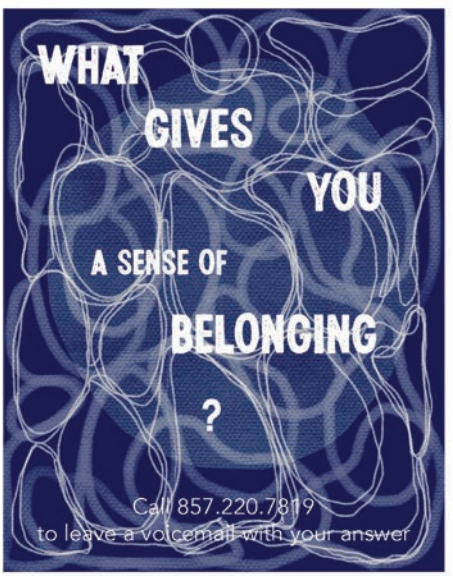
This itself is an imagination exercise. Collectively and collaboratively, we can imagine new relationships with the land, the earth and with one another. Care for one another, our communities, and the earth is a form of participation which establishes our belonging to place.

Designing Participation

The Phone

From the beginning, I wanted to create a phone that visitors could encounter in the woods. I found the idea magical. I did an independent study with Fred Wolflink and brought him an iconic 90's transparent phone and we discussed the various possibilities. Fred mentioned Adafruit's cellular breakout that could allow the landline phone to function as a cell phone. Visitors could pick up the landline phone in the middle of the woods, a switch or button would enable a call to my cell phone, and the visitor and I would be connected to have a conversation. After some trial and error with the cellular breakout, Fred found that the version had a lot of bugs and was not going to work. Instead, we used Adafruit's play and record breakout device to upload 10 voicemail messages from inPUBLIC onto the phone. When the phone's receiver was lifted it would trigger a switch to play 1 of the 10 voicemail messages at random. The effect was beautiful; to lift the phone and hear an intimate voice message about collective care felt magical. This version of the phone was installed in the 2021 Fresh Media show at Cyber Arts Gallery.

^ Taewee Kahrs listening to voice messages on the phone installation at the Fresh Media Show at Cyber Arts Gallery.



^ Postcards to invite participants to call the Google Voice number and leave a message about belonging.

Voicemail Project

I created another postcard and voicemail prompt around the theme of belonging for the event at Boston Nature Center. Visitors were invited to call the Google Voice number, listen to the prompt, and leave a message with their thoughts and musings around belonging.

On the back of the postcard were more prompts to consider:

Where do you feel belonging?
Who do you feel belonging with?
How do we feel belonging to ourselves?
To others? To our bodies?
To a place? To the earth?

Around the same time of developing the prompts for belonging, I met Jenny Oliver, a local artist and dancer. She was creating her own project, a performance called "A Closer Look at Belonging". She had the dancers in her performance call into the number to leave a voicemail. These voice messages and others were included on the installed phone at the Boston Nature Center.

Weaving and Sound: A Shape of Belonging

The installation at Boston Nature Center included 12 weavings made of bittersweet vines. The weavings were connected and hung from the trees to create an archway. The site that I activated is called Wetland Wonders and had a pathway lined with trees which opened up into a grassy circular area surrounded by cattails. The weavings framed this opening and drew visitors to the open space.

< Images from the Boston Nature Center. Photo credit - Nohemi Rodriguez

In the circular clearing, the phone sat atop a small wooden table where visitors could lift the phone to hear voice messages about belonging.

Image from the Boston Nature Center. Photo credit - Nohemi Rodriguez >

The voicemail messages about belonging talked about spaces where folks could be their full selves, activities they felt confident in such as dance and theater, people that made them laugh, physical contact, and their belonging to the earth.

^ Image from the Boston Nature Center. Photo credit - Rene Dongo.

Excerpts from the Voicemail Messages on Belonging:

"Belonging is when you're dancing and singing to your favorite song it's that full sense of freedom to be your full self. I feel belonging with other people when we're all in a car blasting a throwback on a summer's night knowing that I don't have to go home for the next couple hours and we can just vibe." - Dawry Ruiz

"I feel belonging to myself when I can experience quiet. When I'm at home and I'm with my turtles *laughs*. When I'm able to just be with my thoughts, I go into my mind and being in my own mind is another world and that is a world that no one else can experience but me." - Jenny Oliver

"I feel belonging when laughs are contangious and body language is understood and a part of me rips away the curtain to reveal the small man behind the great wizard of Oz."- Rene Dongo

Image from the Boston Nature Center. Photo credit - Nohemi Rodriguez >

^ Images from the Boston Nature Center. Photo credit - Rene Dongo.

Two groups of 30 people were led to each of the activiated spaces at the Boston Nature Center. I introduced myself and the artwork. Visitors were invited to consider where they feel belonging, take a postcard and leave their own voicemail, hum along with the soundscape, and weave with bittersweet vines to add to the structure.

Conclusions

Collecting and weaving with Chinese Bittersweet gave me time to reflect on my own sense of belonging within the United States and to this land. The history and identity of Bittersweet vine, as an invasive species and an immigrant herself, is a powerful metaphor for the immigrant experience in this country. The vines further inspired contemplation on how we can show respect, care, and reverence for the earth and for one another and how this care and reverence for place offers a source of belonging.

conclusion

How do we create a sense of belonging?

We participate. We say hello to our neighbors. We embrace our loved ones. We share meals. We celebrate the wins in our community and grieve the losses.

We notice that our spaces are designed to exclude. Our spaces support the systematic ways that we stay divided. We start to see the ways that our spaces welcome some and keep out others.

We reimagine and redesign our spaces. As artists, designers, advocates, or anyone who cares to make a change, we can rearrange spaces to welcome more people in. We do this collectively so that our spaces reflect diverse perspectives. We reimagine to make more equitable and just places. This work is a form of participation which, in turn, gives us a sense of belonging.

In this thesis, I explored the theme of belonging and new genre public art. I shared four case studies of public art projects (shapes) that intervene in the current orientations of public space and design new structures and interactions. These projects invite participation, imagination of new worlds, and increase our sense of belonging to place.

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