

Cara Michell

Artist | Urban Planner | Professor

Portfolio of Selected Work

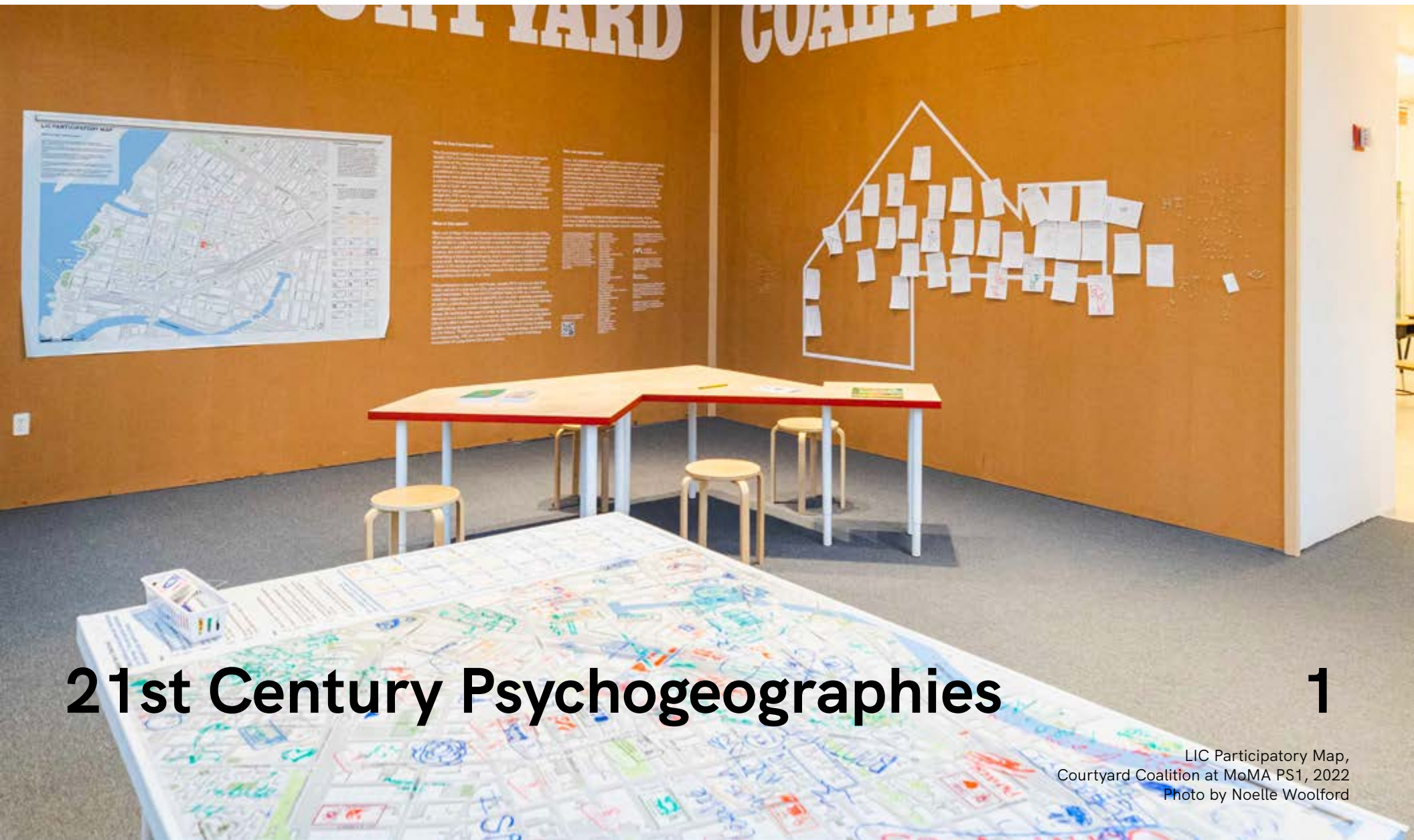
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21st Century Psychogeographies

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LIC Participatory Map,
Courtyard Coalition at MoMA PS1, 2022
Photo by Noelle Woolford

MoMA PS1: Long Island City Participatory Mapping Process

The Long Island City (LIC) Participatory map sits within “Courtyard Coalition, an interactive space at MoMA PS1 that relies on community participation to help shape the museum’s engagement with its neighbors.

I co-developed this anti-exhibition with Assistant Curator Elena Ketelsen-Gonzales, and the Courtyard Coalition. The process-focused program highlights MoMA PS1’s Courtyard as a cultural and spatial asset for critical questions at the intersection of cultural institutions, civic space, and urban life. My mapping installation invited members of the Long Island City (LIC) to co-create their own image of the neighborhood. By inviting visitors to annotate the map with their memories, priorities, and dreams (past, present and future), she asks: What aspects of Long

Island City do we want to keep, and remember from the past? What are the communities, spaces, and initiatives we want to recognize today? What are our hopes for the future, and how can the Courtyard be a meaningful piece of this constellation?

“Courtyard Coalition” was on view at MoMA PS1 in Long Island City, Queens, New York from March 15 to November 15, 2022.

MoMA PS1: Long Island City Participatory Mapping Process

LIC PARTICIPATORY MAP

About the Map / Sobre el mapa:

Join PS1 in mapping the past and present of Long Island City! Tell us what places are most important to you, and what places you would like to see in the future.

Participatory mapping can uncover many histories, those of composition and connection as well as injustices that have shaped Long Island City's legacies.

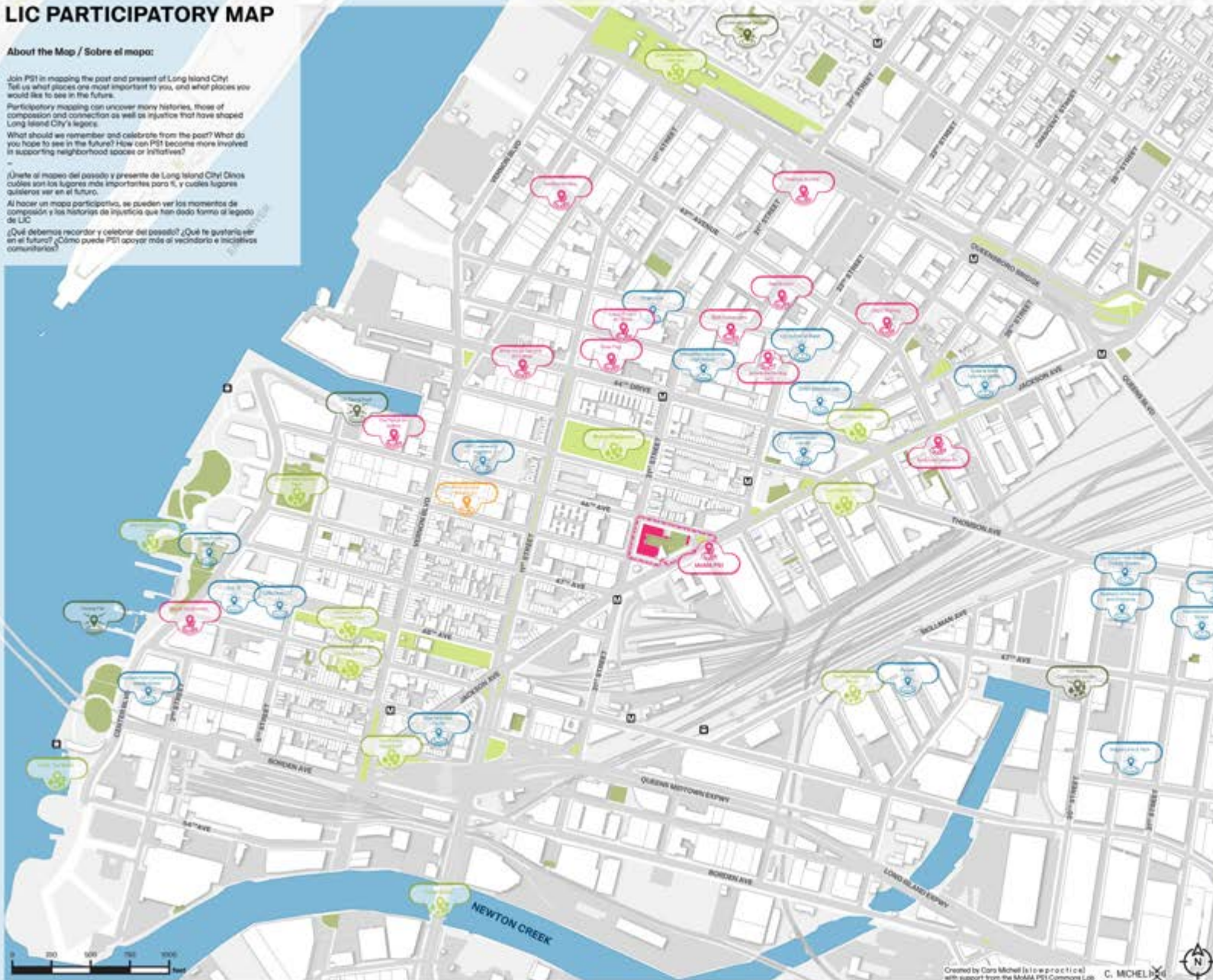
What should we remember and celebrate from the past? What do you hope to see in the future? How can PS1 become more involved in supporting neighborhood spaces or initiatives?

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¡Únete al mapa del pasado y presente de Long Island City! Dinos cuáles son los lugares más importantes para ti, y cuáles lugares quisieras ver en el futuro.

Al hacer un mapa participativo, se pueden ver los momentos de composición y las historias de injusticia que han dado forma al legado de LIC.

¿Qué debemos recordar y celebrar del pasado? ¿Qué te gustaría ver en el futuro? ¿Cómo puede PS1 apoyar más al vecindario e iniciativas comunitarias?

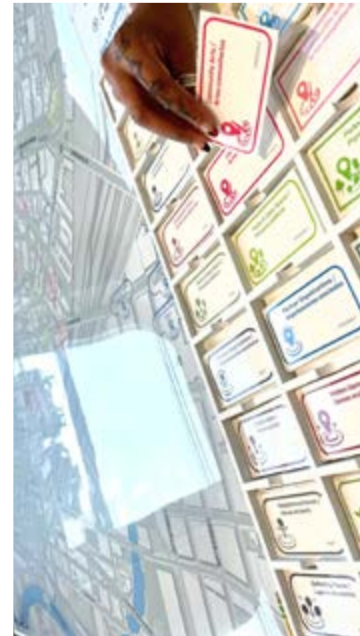


Participatory Mapping:

The Long Island City Participatory Mapping Installation was developed by artist and urban planner Cara Michell (s | o | w | e | r | c | i | e) in partnership with the PS1 Courtyard Coalition. Community members are invited to co-create an atlas of the most important community spaces in Long Island City's (LIC) past, present and future. Turning the traditionally top-down process of map-making on its head, we are calling on the people of LIC to tell PS1 what the institution should pay attention to, by covering over the layers of data that Cara and the Courtyard Coalition have digitally mapped, participants can reassert their power over the narrative of what Long Island City was, is, and will be. Each set of maps reshapes our vision of what the neighborhood looks like, and points to the community-grown resources that deserve more support.

Want to Play?

As the maps become saturated with stickers, drawings and revisions, we preserve them as part of a living archive. Use the base map on this wall as a frame to examine the images of Long Island City that our neighbors have created. Pick a clear from the flat archive below and hang it on top of the base map. Et voila: Now you can read Long Island City like never before!



MoMA PS1: Long Island City Participatory Mapping Process



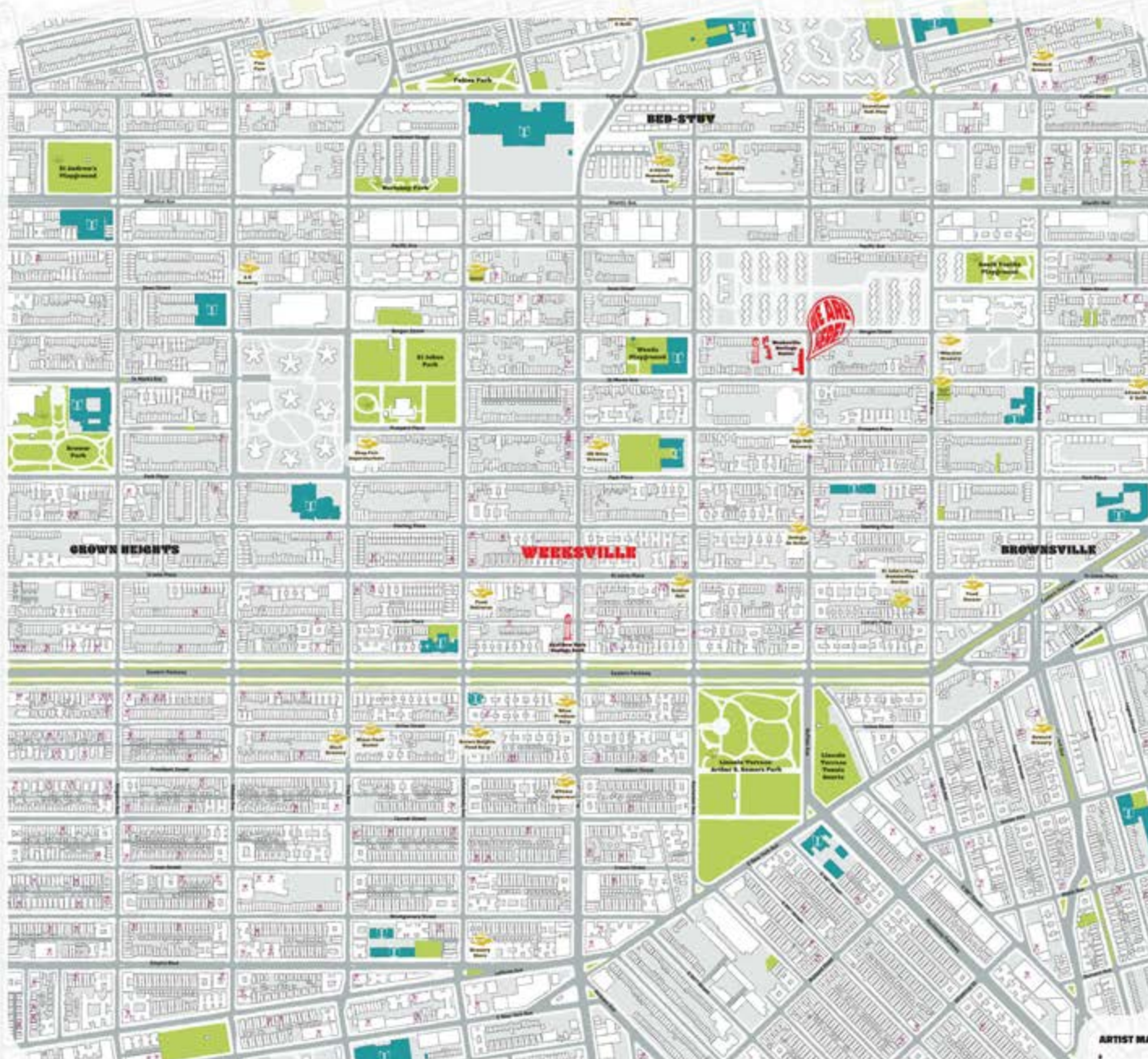
LIC Participatory Map, Workshop Stills
Courtyard Coalition at MoMA PS1, 2022
Photo by Cara Michell, Jinelle Thompson, and T.J

MoMA PS1: Long Island City Participatory Mapping Process



LIC Participatory Map, Workshop Stills
Courtyard Coalition at MoMA PS1, 2022
Photo by Ien Boodan, Jinelle Thompson, and Noelle Woolford

BlackSpace Urbanist Collective - Weeksville Black Food, Joy, & Love Map



BLACKSPACE WEEKSVILLE HERITAGE CENTER

MAPPING MEMORY: **FOOD, JOY & PLACE** JUNETEENTH 2022

WHAT TO LOOK FOR?*

-  LOCAL LANDMARKS
-  SCHOOLS & LIBRARIES
-  HOUSES OF WORSHIP
-  FOOD RESOURCES

BlackSpace, in partnership with the Weeksville Heritage Center, wants to hear about your experiences of Black food, love and joy in historic Weeksville, Brooklyn. Together, we will create a space where community members can reflect on the connections between food, place, and Black identities throughout the diaspora. In this memory mapping activity, BlackSpace seeks to develop a crowdsourced neighborhood map of food and memory. Your input is key! Please share your experiences with us by using the colored blocks to answer the questions below:

- Question 1:**
Where is a space that feels like home? Black-Owned?
- Question 2:**
Where do you get your favorite meal? Black-Owned?
- Question 3:**
Where do you regularly shop for groceries?

ARTIST MAP BY CARA MICHELL (slowpractical)



BlackSpace Urbanist Collective - Weeksville Black Food, Joy, & Love Map

BlackSpace, in partnership with the Weeksville Heritage Center, commissioned my participatory mapping work for their 2-Day Juneteenth Festival. I developed a unique map of Weeksville, Brooklyn to showcase food-based gathering places in the historic Black neighborhood. In this memory mapping activity, BlackSpace sought to develop a crowdsourced neighborhood map of food and memory.

As with most of my work, community input was the key to new knowledge production. So, from June 18-19, 2022, we created a space where community members could reflect on the connections between food, place, and Black identities throughout the diaspora. These individual experiences (hand-written on colored wooden blocks and placed on the map) imbued the map with a layer of information that cannot be found in government-compiled GIS databases.

The real-time community input also revealed the cultural erasure that Weeksville has faced in the wake of its removal from the City's political maps. BlackSpace's team of volunteer facilitators quickly discovered how sparse black-owned or -loved businesses and gathering spaces are within Weeksville. The team asked each participant: 1) Where is a space that feels like home? 2) Where do you get your favorite meal? 3) Where

do you regularly shop for groceries? Black-Owned? Many of those community hubs, we learned, are now concentrated along Weeksville's periphery.

Discoveries like these make Brooklyn-based participatory mapping work bitter-sweet for me. These public-art/urban-planning installations tell stories of loss... while maintaining place-based memories and revealing the resilience of Black joy in a city that historically refused to invest in us. In fact, many of those spaces of joy identified by participants have shifted away from Weeksville's center and towards Brownsville (where I would visit my grandparents), Bed-Stuy (where my father grew up), and Crown Heights (where I currently live). And today, these narratives of disinvestment are slowly transforming into stories of intentional support by institutions like the Brooklyn Museum next door.

BlackSpace Urbanist Collective - Weeksville Black Food, Joy, & Love Map



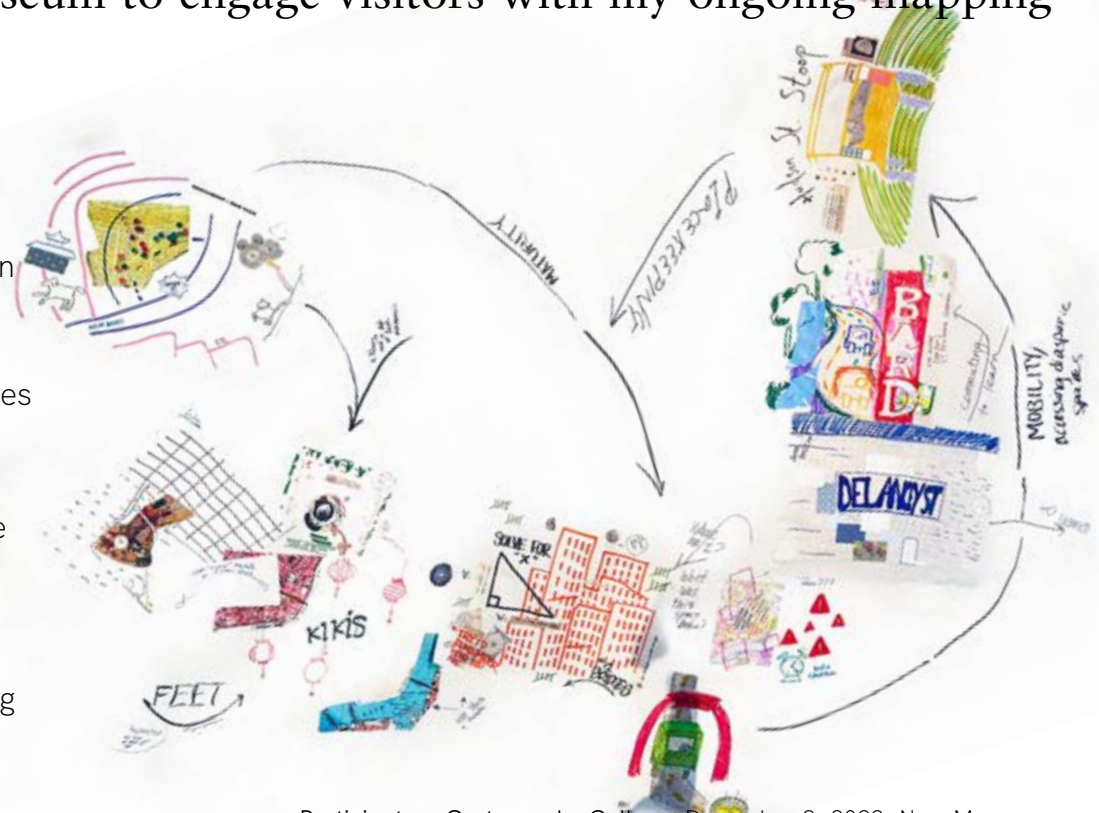
Photos by Cara Michell and BlackSpace Urbanist Collective

Chinatown Memory New Museum Community Day

This participatory mapping workshop invited residents of Manhattan’s Lower East Side and Chinatown to decide what a map of their community can and should look like. On December 3rd, 2022, I was invited by The New Museum to engage visitors with my ongoing mapping work during “Community Day.”

My workshop, entitled “Participatory Cartography: How Do You Map the Lower East Side?” questioned the dominant representations of these neighborhoods on maps. Rather than relying on the traditional styles of mapping these places in neighborhood planning and zoning documents or wayfinding diagrams, I encouraged participants to create their own images of LES and Chinatown.

In each 90 minute workshop, I asked participants to compare their vision of each neighborhood with the representations of these places on popular maps. Following this discussion, participants picked one place that is important to them and made an image or poem to represent it. We ended by creating a collaborative map that connects each participant’s collage. These “psychogeographic” collages are inspired by the work of artists like Asger Jorn of the Situationist International, Mark Bradford, and Frank Bowling.



Participatory Cartography Collage, December 3, 2022, New Museum.
Participant credits: Alicia Buades, Augustin Ludeñe, B. Rogers, Elie Levine, Emma Ishida, Leslie Gladstone, Kaili Chen, Kaitlin Zidar, and Sarah Tessler

Chinatown Memory New Museum Community Day



Performing Spatial Justice

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This ongoing research project responds directly to the heavily mediated spectacle of violence against Black people that is not new, but has experienced renewed attention over the past ten years. While racial profiling is often discussed as a social phenomenon, it always has spatial influences and implications.

The way a person's identity is misread on a street corner differs from the misreadings that might happen in a University classroom, as do the injustices that result from these spatialized misreadings. While developing a theory of the "space of misreading" and "Black transparency", I asked myself, how do these responsibilities, these burdens... and the associated actions, expectations and misunderstandings transform as a Black person moves from one physical site of associations and misreadings to another? This project dares designers and urban planners to ask

ourselves: how does the anticipation of those misreadings in space or the weight of those burdens transform the black body itself and what must we do to eradicate those misreadings?

This ongoing research has resulted in a Masters Thesis presentation at Harvard University in 2016, an installation at the Boston University Art Galleries in 2017, and a publication in The SITE Magazine, an award-winning Canadian literary architecture journal in 2019.

Objects of Transparency



Center: "Black Body Survival Store"
Boston University Art Galleries,
2017, Photo by Nathan Tyrell

Left: "Why We Wear Them"
for The Site Magazine, 2019

Objects of Transparency

With the help of personal accounts and a survey of media and policy responses as well as 20th and 21st century literature on race and space, I used this thesis project to design a series of interventions, engaging the vernacular of a product designer and an urban planner to interrupt potentially violent spatial injustices.

The result is a performance of the way that people of color have always been expected to bear the burden of attempting our survival in landscapes that were created to exploit and subordinate us.

The issues of misreading (racial profiling) and spatial injustice discussed in my essay, "[Why We Wear Them](#)" for *The Site Magazine*, are absurd. So we need an equally absurd language (whether visual, tactile or verbal) to attack them. To illuminate the injustices my friends and I experience in this way (by making clothes and accessories out of other people's trauma) is difficult and ethically tricky.

So I offer the wearable "Objects of Transparency" as rhetorical

devices, not a bandage for racial profiling. The objects include transparent pockets in response to interviewee's fears of being accused of "pocketing something" in a convenience store. They include never-ending ID foldouts with every type of ID the police have asked my interviewees to reveal.

In February 2017, my body-scale objects of transparency were featured at the Boston University Art Galleries for the group show *Occupancies*. As part of an ongoing collaboration with the Brooklyn based creative design lab, Intelligent Mischief, the ID Foldout and Compliant Pockets contribute to an arsenal of surrealist merchandise for survival, made for people who are racialized in urban environments.

Objects of Transparency



"Keep Your Body Safe"
2016
Digital Collage



Installation Shots:
"Black Body Survival Store"
2017. Photo by Nathan Tyrell

Private Objects / Public Space: The Skate Urbanism Journey

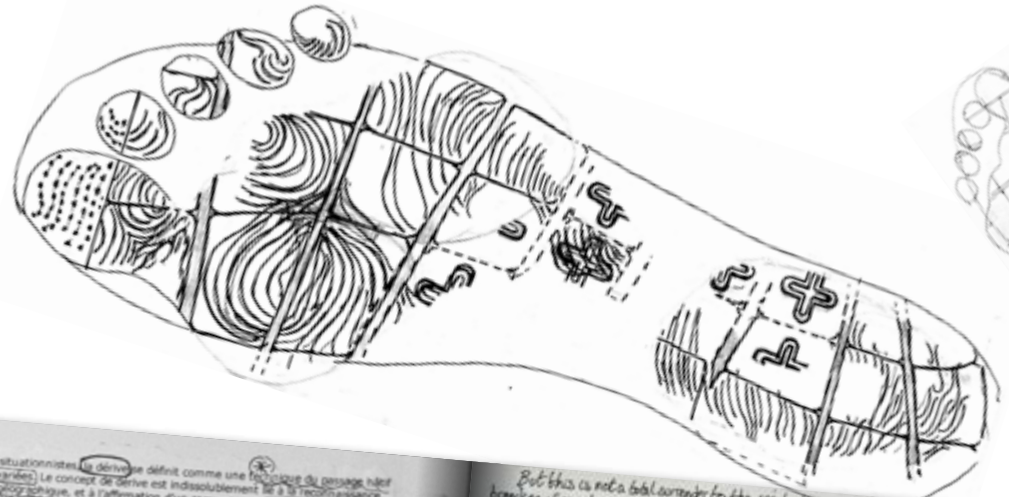
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My sculptures explore the question “who gets to use public space?” from a variety of angles. On a personal level, the focus of those angles alternates between how I fit into “the public,” and how “the public” impacts me.

As a Black woman, the question of how I fit into any public space has always been a tricky one. I have been aware, from too young an age, of how performative my identity needs to be in public space. Whether my goal is to meet, exceed or subvert expectations, I am always performing in order to keep moving, especially in my professional life. That tension between performance and professional practice is present in both my urban planning work and my artwork today.

...I use my personal experience to empathize with the experiences of others. I also use my artistic understanding of form, material and emotion to inform my city-planning work and vice-versa. That is why my work, often influenced by urban systems and social tensions, expands from looking outwards and mimicking what I see to looking inwards and expressing my truth.”

The Spectacle Rewritten



...procédés situationnistes. Le dérive est défini comme une technique de passage à l'acte (action variée). Le concept de dérive est indissociablement lié à la reconnaissance d'un espace psychogéographique, et à l'affirmation d'un comportement ludique-constructif, en trois points aux traditions classiques de voyage et de promenade.

...the delay in the exact transition through which it turns a 2 mile for the clock, other than the 1000 of Thacker, it would be National Geographic material. Our

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History, which throws this twilight world is also the force which could subject space to lived time. Participation is the critique of human geography, through which the relations and circumstances have to be re-created and events re-organized! In this game-changing space, and in the city changes variations in the game's rules, the astrosphere of place can be rediscovered without the reproduction of an exclusive attachment to the land, thus bringing back the reality of the voyage and of life understood as a voyage which contains its entire meaning within itself.

The spectacle is a critique of human geography

—Kevin Thacker, May 2001



"The Spectacle Rewritten"
2013
Pen, Paper, Shoe Scraps

The Spectacle Rewritten

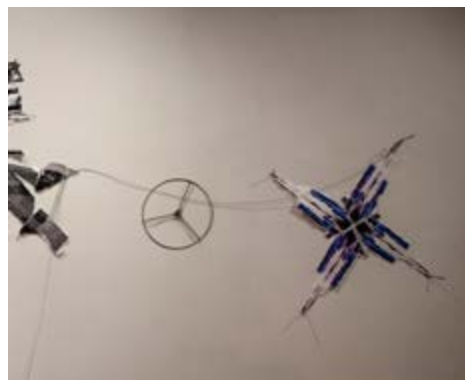
This two-year research project initiated my foray into urbanism. After years of watching my brother and his friends form remarkable relationships with the built environment, I chose to use skateboarding (their sport of choice) as a lens to understand how individuals deal with restrictions imposed by urban policy as it plays out in the built environment.

During a year of preparatory research, I used interviews, photography, film, theoretical texts, case studies and collage to explore the street skater's incredible ability to re-appropriate architecture, to prevail over a stratified city's desire to segregate people, and to communicate problems in urban planning practices through movement.

A preoccupation with the work of Guy Debord led me first to a writing and collage based project (previous page) that compared the everyday movement of the skateboarder to the subversive projects of the Situationist International.

The following year, with collages, painting, and wooden assemblage that I used to create an interactive, yet somewhat hostile environment, I used my thesis installation (Panama Canal) to explore how exclusion is rendered in the architecture of our environments. Working on this extended project led me to discover the question that has motivated all of my work since: "How can the politics of public space be leveraged to address social inequalities?"

The Spectacle Rewritten



Installation Shots, "Panama Canal"
2014
Photos: M. Teresa Simao



Unwinding Time

Kitchen Sculptures (2018-2021)

As I spend more time inside, my more discreet sculptural works meditate on what can still be private. Influenced by the skateboarder's ingenious ability to subvert a public object's symbolic purpose, I've been doing the same with my personal household items. Wearing headphones the proper way feels like nails in my ears ("Chalkboard"), but I do it anyway to conform. Who wants to "use" public space when they have to be

in pain? The resulting objects juxtapose the idiosyncrasies of how I use utilitarian items in private with the external expectations of how they should be used in public.

Unwinding Time

