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**MURAL ARTS PHILADELPHIA AND MURAL ARTS INSTITUTE
ANNOUNCE VIRTUAL ART & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE SYMPOSIUM**

PHILADELPHIA – April 15, 2021 – **The Mural Arts Institute is hosting a virtual and free week-long symposium looking at the transformative work happening at the intersection of community-based cultural practice and environmental justice**. The **Arts + Environmental Justice Symposium**, virtual for the first time, invites artists, activists, scientists, scholars, and government officials to discuss how creative people and practices are helping meet the challenges of this moment, and how everyone can build on that to make a just transition a reality. These changemakers will be logging in from Tribal, urban, rural, and suburban communities throughout the nation for this virtual symposium May 17-21, 2021. For more information and to register, visit: muralarts.org/events/arts-environmental-justice-symposium/.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further stressed the same communities already grappling with acute climate and environmental crises, both economically and in terms of inequitable health care access and outcomes. The compounding injustices of our social systems and extractive economic model are unsustainable and impossible to ignore any longer. Calls for transformative change are growing louder. In times like these, the essential roles that artists and cultural workers play in communities becomes clear including helping us heal, stay connected, make meaning out of pain, imagine our better future together, and take collective action.

The week-long symposium will be book-ended with two keynote sessions – conversations with thought leaders in environmental justice. Attendees may attend all or a few of the sessions which are scheduled in the afternoons of May 17-21. Registration is required, but free.

The opening session will begin with Opening Remarks made by Jane Golden, Executive Director of Mural Arts Philadelphia and Kendra Brooks, Philadelphia Councilmember-At-Large, followed by an **Opening Keynote: The Cultures of a Just Transition**, on Monday,

May 17, 1-2:30pm. Leaders in movements for native sovereignty, disability justice and climate justice will talk about why following the leadership from those most historically marginalized is the key to creating a better future for all of us. They will also talk about how deeply rooted cultural values and creative practices inform and guide their work. Speakers include Judith LeBlanc ([Native Organizers Alliance](#), [NDN Collective](#), [The Natural History Museum](#)), Michelle Mascarenhas-Swan ([Movement Generation](#), [Climate Justice Alliance](#)), and Patty Berne ([Sins Invalid](#)).

The **Closing Keynote: There is an Alternative**, will take place on Friday, May 21, 3:10-4:40pm. As Ursula Le Guin wrote, “It is easier to imagine the end of the world than an alternative to capitalism.” The colonization of our collective imagination by neoliberal capitalism has been extraordinarily effective and is a major barrier to making the economic changes we need to address the climate change and ecological issues we face. Artists and other creative thinkers are helping to reveal and disrupt pervasive and unhelpful economic myths and help us see that there are, in fact, many alternatives to the status quo already alive today. Hear from Esteban Kelley (Executive Director of the [US Federation of Worker Cooperatives](#)), Laura Zabel (Executive Director of [Springboard Public Arts](#)) who recently launched a guaranteed minimum income pilot program for artists and culture workers in St. Paul, Minnesota, and the UK-based artists behind [Bank Job](#), who will talk about how they and others are questioning the basic assumptions of our dominant economy and building alternatives that provide opportunities for joy, beauty and radical connection.

“The Mural Arts Institute is going virtual and opening our annual symposium to a national audience of change makers,” said **Netanel Portier, Director of the Mural Arts Institute**. “We are able to present engaging and important thought leaders on a variety of topics, who can really illustrate the importance of creativity to address vital issues of environmental justice. We are excited to present these ideas and learn from them.”

Full Schedule (all times are Eastern Daylight Time)

Full descriptions are below and are available, along with speaker biographies, in the Mural Arts Philadelphia press room at <http://bit.ly/MuralArtsPressKit>.

Monday, May 17:

12:30-1:00 pm - **Opening Remarks**

1:00-2:30 pm - **Opening Keynote**

Tuesday, May 18:

1:00 - 2:30 pm – Panel - **Land and Liberation: Ecological Freedom as Creative Practice Panel**

3:00-4:00 pm – Workshop - **Climate and the Carceral State: Imagining an Abolitionist Future**

Wednesday, May 19:

1:00 - 2:30 pm – Panel - **Clean Air + Equity During a Global Pandemic**

3:00-4:00 pm – Workshop - **Practicing Environmental Justice for a More Just Future: Interactive “Implosion” Demonstration**

Thursday, May 20:

1:00 - 2:30 pm – Panel - **Water Is Life: Reflections from an Environmental and Cultural Emergency**

3:00-5:00 pm - **Film Festival**

5:30-6:30 pm - Panel - **Art of Activism: Live from East Austin**

Friday, May 21:

3:00-3:10 pm - **Closing Remarks**

3:10-4:40 pm - **Closing Keynote**

4:40-4:50 pm - **Closing Remarks**

“At Mural Arts Philadelphia, we believe that art can move the needle on societal challenges,” stated **Jane Golden, Executive Director of Mural Arts Philadelphia**. “We know that art can help us participate in transformative change, and the Arts + Environmental Justice Symposium will help us, artists, and cultural workers build power in the face of environmental injustice.”

The Arts + Environmental Justice Symposium has been strategized and designed in collaboration with Alexis Frasz and Helicon Collaborative. The Mural Arts Institute is supported by The JPB Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

About the Mural Arts Institute

Established in 2017 as an initiative of Mural Arts Philadelphia, Mural Arts Institute is dedicated to advancing research on and development of participatory and socially-engaged public art practices. The Institute’s approach is centered around connection: building networks, developing partnerships, and convening artists, community and partners to collaborate around participatory, socially engaged public art practices. Our work is in service to a larger movement that values equity, fairness and progress across all of society. We bring the Mural Arts model to other change-oriented cities across the country to help build their capacity

to sustain community-driven public art projects. We work with artists, activists, arts organizations, cultural institutions, municipal governments and more with the goal of igniting change with public art.

About Mural Arts Philadelphia

Mural Arts Philadelphia is the nation's largest public art program, dedicated to the belief that art ignites change. For more than 35 years, Mural Arts has united artists and communities through a collaborative and equitable process, creating nearly 4,000 artworks that have transformed public spaces and individual lives. Mural Arts aims to empower people, stimulate dialogue, and build bridges to understanding with projects that attract artists from Philadelphia and around the world, and programs that focus on youth education, restorative justice, mental health and wellness, and public art and its preservation. Popular mural tours offer a firsthand glimpse into the inspiring stories behind Mural Arts' iconic and unparalleled collection, which has earned Philadelphia worldwide recognition as the "City of Murals." For more information, call 215-685-0750 or visit muralarts.org. Follow along on social media: @muralarts on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#), and @MuralArtsPhiladelphia on Facebook, and [phillymuralarts](#) on YouTube.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: high-resolution images, full schedule, and speaker biographies are available in the Mural Arts Philadelphia press room at <http://bit.ly/MuralArtsPressKit>.

Full panel descriptions are below. For speaker bios, visit <http://bit.ly/MuralArtsPressKit>.

Land and Liberation: Ecological Freedom as Creative Practice

Tuesday, May 18, 1-2:30pm

Pursuing food sovereignty through community agriculture is a way of life. Land based practices can also be liberatory, rooted in resistance and self determination. From Indigenous calls for Land Back, to reparations for ancestors of slaves and the Black freedom farmer movement, to refugees sewing seeds in their clothing to bring to their new communities - agriculture and community sovereignty go hand in hand. Join Indigenous artists and activists Christina Castro co-founder of [Three Sisters Collective](#) and Israel Haros co-founder of Alas de [Agua Art Collective](#) from Oga Po'ogeh (Santa Fe, New Mexico) in conversation with Carlton Turner, Lead Artist and Director of [Sipp Culture](#) as they explore the intersection of farming and creative community-based practices. This panel will be moderated by Kendra Brooks, Philadelphia Councilmember-At-Large.

Climate and the Carceral State: Imagining an Abolitionist Future

Tuesday, May 18, 3-4:30pm

Join Police Free Penn and Fossil Free Penn for a presentation and creative workshop envisioning environmental and racial justice together.

The roads to racial justice and climate justice are one and the same. This event makes the case that neither climate justice nor police and prison abolition can be achieved without the other. We will explore how these movements can work together for a more just and sustainable future. How is the fossil fuel industry tied to institutions of policing and incarceration? What does justice look like for the environment, and all of those who inhabit it? What can art, creativity, and imagination contribute to abolitionism and climate justice? This workshop will be creative and interactive. Please bring a writing utensil, collage materials, or creative medium of your choice with you to this interactive workshop. This workshop will be led by *Police Free Penn and Fossil Free Penn* and moderated by Katelyn Rivas, poet and Manager of the Public Art & Civic Engagement Capacity Building Initiative at the Mural Arts Institute.

Clean Air + Equity During a Global Pandemic

Wednesday, May 19, 1:00-2:30pm

The interconnectedness of our ecological, social, and health crises have never been so clearly visible as they are today. This conversation will center artists and environmental justice leaders who are champions for clean air and equity, as they explore the compounding impacts of COVID-19 on the same communities already harmed by environmental and social injustices, and reflect upon how arts-based strategies can disrupt, educate, and support community centered decision-making. Dr. Catherine Garoupa White is the Executive Director of the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition where she spearheads policy advocacy for clean air in the San Joaquin Valley. Kim Abeles is an artist, Professor Emeritus at California State University Northridge and a Guggenheim Fellow who innovated a method to create images from smog captured from the air. Rosten Woo is a designer, writer, and educator that produces civic-scale works for grassroots and community rooted organizations.

Practicing Environmental Justice for a More Just Future: *Interactive* “Implosion” Demonstration

Wednesday, May 19 3:00-4:30pm

In this session, Mural Art’s Environmental Justice Department will facilitate a LIVE “Implosion,” a creative participatory research tool for building coalitions and exposing the hidden connections that fuel systems of environmental injustices. The implosion activity is a tool for activating networks to discover the complex interconnections and relationships inherent in our life and practices. What does the fossil fuel industry have to do with plastics? How are hidden subsidies driving production and consumption? How do we leverage everyday experiences to build more effective movements? In this session, we will work together to uncover the economic and political systems at work within a seemingly simple object. In order to dismantle the corrupt systems and corporations that benefit from concealment, it is essential for us to understand and realize our interconnectedness. This practice is an accessible tool to help us dive deeper, past the camouflage of globalization and capitalism, and understand how EJ movements can be made more powerful through collective knowledge building and recognition of our interrelatedness.

Water Is Life: Reflections from an Environmental and Cultural Emergency

Thursday, May 20, 1-2:30pm

The United States is in a water crisis. Nearly a tenth of the population does not have access to clean drinking water and millions of Americans cannot pay their skyrocketing water and sewage bills. Children and families from Philadelphia to Fresno to Tribal Nations, are exposed to heightened levels of lead, PFAS, and other toxins. But communities are more than the structural violence they face, and the role of community-driven artists and cultural workers are working to help communities heal from structural violence, reclaim their right to clean water, and find pathways forward that protect and celebrate water. From Boston, Massachusetts will

be joined by [Erin Genia](#), Sisseton-Wahpetin Oyate / Odawa multidisciplinary artist, educator and community organizer currently an Artist-In-Residence with the City of Boston working with the Department of Emergency Affairs. [Emma Robbins](#) is a Diné artist, activist and community organizer who serves as the Executive Director of the Navajo Water Project, part of the human rights nonprofit DigDeep Water. From Flint, Michigan, we will be joined by Joe Schipani, Executive Director of the [Flint Public Art Project](#) who also serves as a City Historic District Commissioner and Vice President of the Martis/Luna Food Pantry. This conversation will be moderated by South Carolina Lowcountry artist Benny Starr, inaugural One Water Artist-in-Residence at the US Water Alliance, who was named Grist's 50 Fixers of 2021.

Film Festival

Thursday, May 20, 3:00-5:00pm

Cities who have worked with the Mural Arts Institute's [Arts and Environment Capacity Building Initiative](#) have created short documentaries about environmental justice issues in their communities, and what a more just future would look like. Join us for live screenings of these 8 films from Akron, Ohio; Austin, Texas; Detroit, Michigan; Kern County, California; Memphis, Tennessee; Santa Fe, New Mexico; and two films from various movements in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Chad Eric Smith, Director of Communications for Mural Arts Philadelphia, will moderate a live discussion with filmmakers, artists, and experts from each city. Check out [@muralarts](#) on Instagram to get a sneak peak of the films.

Art of Activism: Live from East Austin

Thursday, May 20, 5:30-6:30pm

Join us for a conversation about the role of artists as environmental activists. Artist Ginger Rudolph will moderate a conversation with Raasin McInstosh, Founder of [Raasin in the Sun](#), and artists J. Muzacz and Carmen Rangel, co-founders of [The Mosaic Workshop](#) at [Something Cool Studios](#). The artists will discuss their role in the [Arts and Environment Capacity Building Initiative](#) at the Mural Arts Institute, and share about the ways they have been creating opportunities for other artists during the pandemic, combating gentrification in East Austin, and using the arts and creative practice to disrupt environmental injustices faced by the East Austin community.