

Turn the Highways to
RIVERS



Wisconsin
Council of Old & New Wisdom



The Department
of Transportation
Let the Freedoms of Movement

Dedicated to
the future
Department for the Freedom of Movement



Turn the Highways to Rivers

An Art Appendix

by Marcus Young 楊墨 and Or (Laura) Levinson

with the Council of Old and New Wisdom and
Planners from MnDOT's Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan

Design and Illustration by Bayou Bay

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= invitations to pause and connect
with your own body and breath as you read

Listen = links to sound clips from the sessions

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an artist-in-residence program by Smart Growth America,
the McKnight Foundation, and MnDOT.

Turn the Highways to Rivers

An Art Appendix

Introduction

“When you find your way to the circle, to the fire kept burning by the keepers of your soul, you will be welcomed.”

– Joy Harjo, from the poem “For Calling the Spirit Back from Wandering the Earth in Its Human Feet”

Telling stories is a practice to keep ourselves human. Each Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan writes twenty years of the story of transportation and freedom of movement. More than a set of guidelines or rules, a plan can be a human story full of joy and tears, apologies and dreams, love and belonging. Now more than ever, we need story-plans to be fearlessly honest, deeply moving, unwaveringly brave. If the SMTP is not yet the story it needs to be, let the following exploration be a modest yet reverberant move in that direction.

We live in fiction. Dreaming, planning, and belonging are mostly fiction. Fiction keeps us moving forward, and working fiction into

further reality is necessary creation. We urgently need new creation, new options, new ways of being. Once upon a time, a dear friend, wise artist, and elder Douglas R. Ewart offered some counsel: “Turn the highways to rivers.” Live in that fiction and mystery. Let it haunt you and inspire you.

We made up a “Council of Old and New Wisdom” and invited into the SMTP art process grandma and auntie energy, aka profound common sense. We created a way of gathering – a circle – without clear labels of this side or that side, MnDOT staff or community member, young or old. We sought from each other tough love, hard questions, sad stories, life-giving poems, songs,

and deep, deep listening. We had to be willing to say to each other and hear: what if we're getting this wrong?

"Turn the Highways to Rivers" is a pilot art project (within a planning project) that culminated in three sessions of the Council of Old and New Wisdom, with many of the voices and excerpts from those sessions forming the majority of this appendix. What is hard to see on paper or in pixels is the relationship building and trust generously shared all along the way among all the participants. The willingness to explore and make openings is now embedded and embodied in relationships connected to the small team of SMTP planners at MnDOT. Thank you to them and to all who made this work possible. This project is a beginning, an experiment, a wish, an act of awakening.

May this project serve as a reference for future truth and storytelling. May the SMTP team continue to step out of their comfort zone into a new comfort zone. May MnDOT experience more body-, culture-, and land-based ways of knowing to cultivate change at a root level, helping MnDOT live by its other name – The Department for the Freedom of Movement.

May the voices of the Council of Old and New Wisdom continue to sound their profound wisdom. May we turn the highways to everlasting and ever-changing rivers. May we accelerate on the path to living just and beautiful lives.

Every five years, the rewriting of the SMTP is like being at a crossroads in life. Who at those moments would not want to have a grandma or auntie to ask: which path should I take? During this 2022 cycle of the SMTP, the Council of Old and New Wisdom appeared for a while, like the northern lights, before dimming away. It can always reappear in the right conditions to again offer its advice and unforgettable glow.

Marcus Young 楊墨

Behavioral Artist and
Transportation Equity Fellow
December 2021



Council of Old and New Wisdom

Session One: October 18, 2021

with Julia Dinsmore, Marie Chanté Flowers, Gloria Jeff, and Trinity Ek

The circle convenes in digital space, with most participants meeting some new faces. Internet connections are adjusted, and we settle in. Together, we take in Christi Belcourt's painting, *The Wisdom of the Universe*. Then, artist in residence Marcus Young 楊墨 leads us in introductions differently from most meetings. Instead of introducing ourselves, each person in the circle introduces another. We speak, not for another's identities, but of the ways we are in relationship – how we met, what we admire about this person, how we appreciate them in community. In this way, the introductions complete gaps in the circle and are acts of art and celebration.

Listen to Marcus introduce Julia Dinsmore, and Julia introduce Marie Chanté, including this: "Did you know that if people all do the same thing at the same time, the neurons in our brain get activated? That simulates actual connection.

And anything that helps us to be healthier is a good thing to practice. Look at me getting in my grandma mode already, getting bossy. Marie Chanté...Oh, oh, my. I witnessed and first encountered the divine brilliance of Marie Chante' at an open mic..."

After introductions, we each call in an auntie or grandma figure in our lives to join our circle. *Listen* to Marcus call in his 100-year-old grandmother, "who is a tea drinker, like myself. So every time I take a sip of tea, I will bring her into the circle... " Taking the time and care to help everyone practice embodied belonging to the circle is helpful to any meeting.



Reader: Welcome to the first of three conversation circles of the Council. Before you read on...pause. Take a breath. Because this is a council of aunties and grandmas we invite you to call on a connection to an auntie or a grandma in your world – whether connected by blood or in other ways – whose guidance and love are sources of warmth and belonging for you. Bring them into the circle as you read on.

We begin our entry into transportation-related content. As these are the first moments of experimenting with a different kind of Council and public engagement, the MnDOT team of three SMTP planners sets the table for us.

We've asked each of them not for a comprehensive overview but to share only one small corner of this 20-year plan, in a way that keeps their own purpose and humanity at the center. **Listen** to Abdullahi introduce his section of the SMTP.

“It’s important to center our decision making processes on people’s lived experiences and the challenges that they have, and also connect this to who is making decisions. Often, people that are making decisions are people that maybe never had challenging experiences or don’t remember how that was. If you were working at MnDOT for 20-plus years, with a very stable, good paying job, you might not remember the last time that you had to struggle with [not having] a driver’s license, or enough income that you had to worry about changing a tire....So how do we make sure the people that are making decisions have this lived experience...and can resonate with the problems that [they’re] trying to solve?”

- Abdullahi Abdulle,
MnDOT Transportation Equity
Planning Coordinator

How do we help people to be brave and let go of decision-making power, so that that power can go back to the community?

“Unfortunately, too often, we are left defending the system we have, rather than building the system that we want and deserve.... One of our actions says very explicitly to remove freeways, to acknowledge that sometimes the most aware we can be is to understand that we need to undo what we did previously. It’s the infrastructure and concrete version of a great unlearning, to remove things that no longer work for us.”

- Hally Turner,
MnDOT Policy Planning Director

*How do we discern what to fight for
when we’re working within a system that has
limited political capital?*

“This is a new strategy that we’re proposing. And it reads, ‘Provide transportation options to connect people to services, employment, neighborhoods and other destinations.’ This strategy is one that resonates with me so much, because it focuses on people, on that neighborhood scale. All I can see is experiences and journey and life happening...”

- Ashley Zidon,
MnDOT Statewide Multimodal
Program Coordinator

*How can we help people imagine a very new way
of being together?*



After the planners have helped us enter into the world of the SMTP by posing some of their most critical questions, other Council members begin their offerings in response. In that way aunties and grandmas have, the Council of Old and New Wisdom is listening to everything that's being said on many levels at once. Aunties' and grandmas' responses acknowledge not just the words, but the heart, history, and future of what we ask and how we ask our questions. Their guidance helps with the unsticking of stuck places. They remind us that to tend the roads and byways and bridges of a place is a sacred responsibility as it means tending the networks of connection. May we leave no one without safe passage.

Julia Dinsmore – author, poet, singer-songwriter, and poverty abolitionist – grounds us in the reminder that highways in the state of Minnesota carry a heavy history of division and harm.

“My grandfather fought 35W. He lived in Phillips neighborhood before the freeway went all the way to Nicollet Avenue. And it was a fight between Honeywell Corporation and my grandpa’s house, home of 13 children in a three bedroom house, and his neighbors organizing – even brought their shotguns down to St. Stephen’s Catholic Church when they were organizing themselves. So I come from a family, you know, who has had something to say about having our neighborhoods cut up. So therefore, I’ve been watching what’s going on in the Rondo neighborhood right now. And I would just venture to say that if this type of format [referring to the Council of Old and New Wisdom] had been utilized in the discussion about building that land bridge in Rondo, I don’t think there would be the contentions going on right now that people are experiencing with it.”

- Julia Dinsmore

America's KoolAid

By Julia Dinsmore

[Listen to this poem](#)

*america's koolaid was spiked long ago
like back when the founding fathers
wanted to bestow life & liberty to
white land-owning men only*

*back when the spiritual dissonance
of slave owning religion
and "killing the Indian to save the man"
branded Black folk 3/5ths human
and Indigenous peoples savage.*

*america's koolaid features
time-release efficacy
imbedded itself into the DNA
of our collective imagination
to the degree that
social scientists say
a large %
of american whites
are trapped in a coma state
tethered to structural life-support systems
that keep us immobile.*

*some hell of a koolaid
brewed in the hearth of lies.*

*i prefer truth to any kind of drug
that numbs a conscience
or stilts the maturation of a soul.*

*ancestors must have
gave me lie antibodies
'cause
there is american koolaid resistance
in my blood*

*though some days
coma state looks attractive*

*but only for moments
when the friction gets
white hot
for not living fully
under the influence
of its stupor.*



Marie Chanté Flowers – mother, grandma, poet, educator and advocate – reminds us that connection, protection, and care must be the keystone of all we build. This is simple yet profound wisdom which many Council members will help us return to again and again over the course of these three conversations. We all need practice to get it in our bones.

“Both my mind and my heart agree that the bridges that we build – physically, theoretically and spiritually – connect us to a world bigger than ourselves, and will likely impact the safety of my children and my grandchildren. And when I think about that, I want to mix concrete. I want to pour it in all of the places that need something solid. So that the safety of this collective project can more than anything be what matters the most. I feel like the world around us sometimes only focuses on an agenda. We don’t think about the human aspect of it; we don’t think about the people that it might impact.”

- Marie Chanté Flowers

MnDOT veteran Gloria Jeff brings in her own family’s history, reminding us also of the complexity of having these conversations within an institution that is trying to remember how to care for the people that it serves and the people it has harmed.

“For me, my first sense of freedom was having a bicycle. I could ride around the neighborhood....The second sort of freedom came...in the ability to get on a bus on my own with my friends and go down to the Motown Revue....The automobile, unlike for many folks which is this horrible, terrible thing on the freeways, they were actually for me an issue about family. My father was able to take us, my brother and I, to Texas, and be able to visit with his family because of freeways....Yes, the Greyhound bus was available, but it was still segregated. There were trains, but those were still segregated. This way, we have the ability to drive from Detroit to Kansas City where we had a great aunt....And this was a woman full of great wisdom. And then go on down to Texas and see my cousins and their friends.

We’re seeking straightforward answers to problems that are not

very straightforward. The danger of saying we are people-focused, sometimes, is that we end up with the majority voice being the loudest. I can tell you there was not one single POC voice in the decision making process for some of the highways."

- Gloria Jeff,

*Rethinking I-94 Engagement
and Strategy Director*

Marie Chanté grounds us again in what must be at the core of our work: belonging, safety, and home.

"When I think of transportation as a whole...[I think of] what transportation looks like, and what safe ways look like in my life.... And I think about something that's being built as a 20-year plan. That, for me, has set up a really deep reflection on how others might view this world, and how we use all of these bridges and turnways for homes and safety, and how some

of it may not be used by us. There are tent cities underneath a lot of these bridges...and I thought, this is something that is happening all over the world. And bridges and departments of transportation have this really sensitive task to both provide safety for commuters and people who have found no other option other than to build their homes underneath these bridges, these highways, these bypasses. When I think about transportation, I think about home: what does that mean?"

- Marie Chanté Flowers

Home Safe...

By Marie Chanté Flowers

[Listen to this poem](#)

*Take me home
Let me travel alongside the familiar
Learn how to navigate worlds I've never
seen before
Nor been told I belong...*

*Keep me safe
I am an asset to this place
At this time
and
I need to be a bridge
For generations
How can I help others get over
If I am unstable?*

*Let me stay strong.
My infrastructure cracks
At the seams
and
I need not to come undone...*

*Show others how to care for me.
The roads are not as kind as I am
but
They are mine
and
I will travel them in peace...*



(Marie wrote that poem during our session, on the spot! She listened deeply to the conversation, drafted lines off-screen unbeknownst to us, and then shared the fruits of her poetic ear and voice with us.)

Julia brings in the voices and gifts of our non-human relatives, reminding us that the impact on the land must not be forgotten if we are to plan for a thriving future.

"Poisoning the waters is an under-regarded risk because we know that water is life. If freeways and roadways and railways are rivers, what plant, shrub, and tree beings do we encourage and allow to live alongside their pollution-laden winding ways? Especially flora and fauna who are known to doctor other green growing life, like the cottonwood trees....I just recently learned that Native American wisdom is helping the DNR to stop cutting down all the cottonwood trees that look like they're dead. They're not dead. They are doctoring all of the other plants and trees that are sick around them.... My wish for the Department for the Freedom of Movement is that four-leggeds and all other creations

on Big Mama be taken into consideration with 20-year plans - and any other plan, for that matter."

- Julia Dinsmore

"This makes me think of rejuvenation... even though sometimes people may not be actively contributing to dialogue, there's still healing and bridging and caretaking that's happening."

- Ashley Zidon

Carrying these wishes close to our hearts, we end the meeting the same way we entered, with care and celebration of each individual in the circle. Marcus calls this “our gentle Zoom goodbye.” So simple yet so beautiful to watch the smiles spread across the screen, it is never a waste to take the extra time for everyone to feel seen.

Listen to Marcus close the circle: “We have come to the end of our two hours, dear Council of Old and New Wisdom. One way we say goodbye is not the harsh ‘click the red button and just evaporate.’ So, we want to take a little bit of time...”

There is more to every picture than we can see from a comfortable angle.

What is necessary to ensure safe passage for all beings?

What will it take to learn to see differently?

Taking the time and care to help everyone practice embodied belonging to a circle is helpful to any meeting.

Council of Old and New Wisdom

Session Two: October 20, 2021

with Mankwe Ndosì and Douglas Ewart

We gather on a dramatic, stormy morning with Douglas Ewart and Mankwe Ndosì, both cultural workers, musicians, educators, healers, and lovers of life. Marcus opens the circle with the invitation to arrive with joy in our own bodies, swaying, stretching, and bowing.



Reader: Try a little swaying, from side to side, like you're rocking yourself to sweet music. Just a gentle reminder from your body to your thinking brain that we are here to enjoy this moment. We are here to enjoy life. May we not forget. Now, bow your head, maybe just a little. Maybe it deepens, hands nearing your toes or the floor. This bow is connection, gratitude. We offer this bow to the ancestors,

to the earth, to the future – this 20-year future. Gently, return to vertical. Stretch your arms over your head. This move is very challenging because we don't like exposing the soft, vulnerable parts of our bodies, but it reminds us we are connected to the air, the birds, the butterflies, the horizon, the sun, and the blue sky. Inhale, exhale. Trust that your body is always here to inform and guide you.

We begin again with the simple and loving act of introducing one another, the practice we started in session one. Here is another example.

Listen to “A minute for Uncle Douglas Ewart:

Spark, fire and essence of joy. Curious maker of one life into the next, observer of humans, encourager of sparks of creativity and blossoming inventor, one who makes and remakes shapes with his hand, conceiver, educator who questions the structures we’ve been taught to think in and shows us the histories of creativity and human splinter-action that has brought us to where we are. Maker of forms of sound and collector of bells, repairer, one who knows we are of earth and must care for each other and the earth that we will be of again.”

- Mankwe Ndotsi

The SMTP planners once again offer their summaries of the 20-year planning document, sharing what matters to them, what questions,

fears, and wishes they hold for the future of this place so many of us call home. Uncle Douglas and Mankwe respond with eyes and hearts wide open.

“We say people have power, when really they have authority. Because if you have power, you understand where it comes from, and you use it for the betterment of the people; you don’t hijack it and use it against people...”

In thinking about the fight, who takes public transportation, who depends on it, and then what should it look like? What should the bus stop look like? What should a train station look like? And for me, you know, I’m thinking about plants and water and architecture, if we’re talking about 20 years up the road. How many other functions can it have? What are the functions that it already provides that we’ve neglected or actually banned, such as music? Advocating for people is, I think, one of the things that can keep your propulsion pulsating.”

- Douglas Ewart

Public Transportation Is Good for You, I, and We!!!

By Douglas Ewart

[Listen to this poem](#)

(Readers can use we, I, me where indicated/applicable.)

*Public Transportation is what we rely on
It goes hand in hand with my and our daily
plans
I/We are on a fixed income you see
And buses and trains is how I/We get around
the city, which is part of we/me
I/We go shopping, to movies, and visiting my/
our friends and family too
I/We obtain a transportation pass that last
me/we for a while
For that is how I/we check the pulse of this
and other towns too
Public Transportation is how The Salt of the
Earth generally get around
I/We love riding the buses and trains as there
I/We meet the people of my city and those far
flung
I/We meet new people all the time, which
keeps me/us inspired and spry
And relish riding the bus and trains and I/we
make new allies
As I/we listen to their many stories:
Some funny, some challenging, some
sad, some beautiful, some esoteric, some
earthbound, some sexy, all I/we listen to well
Some stories no one has to tell
As people act them out for each and everyone
to see...*

*I/We love to look at the murals,
sculptures, and things and how the people
dress
For they are moving works of art which
keeps my/our heart well
I/We love mass transportation as it is
essential and sustainable too
That goes for yesterday, today, and
tomorrow as it will see us through
It's very simple that mass transportation
is what we must continue to do
For it's good for Mother Earth, the
environment, and all her children too
We must maintain the trains, buses that
we have to do
We need bus stops and train stations with
lots of greenery and trees inside of them
too
For they will keep the air and our lives
fresh and robust you do know
Without these life forms very close by
Our spirits and bodies are bound to get
sick and die...prematurely*

*Public Transportation
Be Wise and Free
Public Transportation
Turn the highways (in)to Rivers Flowing Free
Public Transportation
Public Gardens
Public Transportation
Public Live Music
Public Transportation
Public Theatr
Public Transportation
Organic Gardens...*

Public Transportation
Public Art of All Kinds
Public Transportation
Public Organic Cuisine
Public Transportation
A Place for Neighborhood News
Public Transportation
Public Transcendentalism
Public Transportation
Movement is the People
Public Transportation
Public Transportation
Public Transportation
Is good for I and I





Council members were invited to do only a small amount of standard meeting preparation. Instead, preparation meant how to bring your whole self to the session, be as fully present as possible, and share generously who you are. Around this time, the full moon was hitting its peak. Here, you can sense the fullness and clarity in Mankwe's words. We include this generous, extended excerpt. Everything starts from small, seed, root, from the most basic. With proper, sustained attention to these foundational places, any pattern can shift.

"What can you do with your daily life that can help keep your juiciness, your humanity, your joy, your passion, your fire, your resilience, your perspective? What can help you stay in it?...If you want people to be in it, you have to be in it, which also means being aware of your own limitations....Where you need to bring in someone who knows about the experience of trying to navigate to go to Shakopee with baby and a full time job – two part time jobs – that don't pay nothing. How does that person navigate from Minneapolis, to Maple Grove, to Shakopee? That's something that people who aren't experiencing this reality can make assumptions about. But you

don't actually know how people are twisting and turning and making happen with great effort, trying to make happen, or giving up because they can't. So as important as what keeps you in it, is to use your limitations as crucial pieces of wisdom and knowledge....

How are there ways that you put things into practice, even if they're small, that can root themselves and make space that's big enough for the next thing?

...Everything that doesn't have the seed or the practice that we are here to make manifest, those are the things that go away. Everything else, all the things have to have that seed, so that whichever one gets through, the seed gets through, the practice happens. So then you can be less attached to the particular fight and more understanding from jump. Everything you're asking for has the practices that we want to move forward. So what you're actually doing is trying to connect with the people who think they're fighting you. Because ultimately, if we get what we want, no one is going away."

- Mankwe Ndosì

Listen to Mankwe's three guiding principles: "Seed everything with the patterns we want to grow. Nothing about us without us is for us, no one is going away..."



Reader: "No one is going away." What do these words bring up in your body? What is happening right now in your gut, your chest? Place a hand somewhere on your abdomen. Breathe. Say it to yourself once more: "No one is going away." You can begin practicing this deep knowing with yourself. You are fully deserving of this life. You get to be here. We need you, all of you.

"I think this culture has gotten really good at analysis, and critique and criticism, and being able to see the cracks and the problems and the horrible things that are happening. And that is a crucial step. Right? There were periods of time when the conversation was not even allowed, even though the analysis was always there. [But] we can't chop ourselves up into love, you know. We're not out of the soup. We're never out of the soup; we just want the soup to be sweeter, to be more nourishing, to be less caustic and toxic, to be less divisive, to be more sustaining and less inflammatory.

Part of the answer is bringing in artists, bringing in people who shake, who make, who stretch, who test, and getting used to making mistakes, getting comfortable with being small, imperfect, human. So that you can have room to try. There are periods of time when we're testing things out and seeing what's gonna work and what's not. I feel like this is a huge place...like we're melting down, are we gonna turn from caterpillar into a butterfly?

Or we're just gonna melt down and turn into earth, you know. We can do that; the earth will accept that. Creator will make something else...

...of us if what we decide what we want to make of us is earth again, which would be worth it, because Earth is all the things."

- Mankwe Ndosi

SMTP Team Responds:

"Even in death there's growth. Even if we have to leave something for now, it doesn't mean we leave it or abandon it forever. This has allowed me to proactively grieve some of the things that might not make it in[to the final SMTP document]."

- Hally Turner

Amidst these cycles of birth and death, sprouts and compost, how will we pace ourselves, sustain ourselves? How will we keep strong our ability to relate, connect, and empathize?

"'Professional' structures model overwork, rigidity, exploitation. 'We use you up, we throw you out, next!' Which is the industrial model, which is the enslavement or the slavery model, which we do to ourselves inside as much as other

people do it to us. It promotes us not feeling ourselves, not noticing when we need a break, or a nap, or some water or some food or to take a walk. We don't have to sit inside and do boxes or meetings in a particular way. How can we...

...enliven our daily processes that allow us to notice what we are going through, so that then we have the room and the understanding that other humans are going through their own thing as well? So you make it have something in it for them, too. Because when we constrain our feeling, we constrain the joy just as much as we constrain the pain.

[Choreographer and teacher Kenna Cottman said one day] 'If I make it a dance, I can do it'. So if we make it into a dance, the challenging times we're out of breath, we understand that happens for a period of time. Right? We have to warm up for that dance, make sure that we're ready, and ready because there's no separation

between our brains and the rest of our bodies. We have intelligence in our guts that we listen to, we have folk wisdom and language about it, but we don't actually acknowledge its truth, its science, and the science is just getting back to that. Our whole selves need to be in it. We need to get people actually moving and feeling and experiencing their whole bodies. Because we what we know in terms of somatic study, the more that we can understand what we are going through, the more that we can notice what is happening in our own bodies, notice when we are feeling particular things, the signals and the intelligence that we have recorded through our lives, the more we can access empathy and compassion for others."

- Mankwe Ndotsi



Douglas's closing words came in song, riffing on his own words of advice to Marcus in 2019 that have become the title of this project: "Turn the Highways to Rivers." The bells you hear are Douglas's creations as well, multi-tiered sculptures of sound.

Listen to this musical interlude and the words "highways into rivers, the discipline and practice of persistence."

We end with Session Two of the Council of Old and New Wisdom with gratitude. Listen to Marcus, Ashley, Abdullahi, and Hally offer their reflections and appreciation to Mankwe and Douglas: "Who is going to bring us together in a two hour session to brainstorm, and heart-storm, how that mother of two is going to get – as a whole person, and easily and affordably and safely – from Maple Grove to Shakopee? Let us spend two hours to figure that out..."

Seed everything with the patterns and practices that we want to grow.

Nothing about us without us is for us.

No one is going away.

With great attention and care to the roots and seeds, that which is small, any foundational pattern can be shifted.



Council of Old and New Wisdom

Session Three: October 26, 2021

with Juanita Espinosa, Graci Horne, and Gina Kundan



Reader:

Take a deep breath, stretch a little, maybe even stand up and shake your limbs. Find stillness...Feel the land underneath your feet. This is, and always has been, Dakota and Anishinaabe land. How did you get here?

Many of us who call Mnisota home are not indigenous to this land. And many of the journeys that led us here are those of violence. Some of those journeys started before we ourselves were born, as our ancestors came to this place, carrying with them our futures. Some came of their own free will. Some came out of desperation. Some were forcibly ripped from their own homelands. Others have always been here, in spite of attempts to remove them.

We carry these histories in our bones and our guts, whether our people perpetrated, allowed, were targets of violence, or if they were many of these things tied together and overlapping all at once.

Take a breath. Notice where you are.

Feel the land beneath your feet.

Smell the air.

See what is around you...the plants, the trees, the water, the people, the histories.

Listen.

Take another breath - in, and out.

Feel the ground beneath you, sense the sky above you.

What do you know about this land?

What is your place here?

What does home feel like?

What do you know of your ancestors, their journeys, their reasons for staying or leaving, making the choices they made?

Take one more breath - slowly in, fully out.

Offer gratitude to all the beings who have helped you to live and to thrive.

- Land Acknowledgement written by
Or (Laura) Levinson & Jennings Mergenthal

Juanita Espinosa, of Spirit Lake Nation, is a seasoned community organizer, auntie-extraordinaire, and mentor to many Native artists and young people. **Listen** to Graci Horne introduce her Auntie Juanita: "She's been there through great times and horrible times and times we didn't think we could live through, and she's always there cooking..." Juanita anchors us in the reminder that all cycles of life are connected to the land.

"One of the things I've realized is that Mother Earth, in the way she created herself, and the things that she left on the land were these natural markers in time, and that she always gave us this food to remind us of places that were important. And you find your way to these places, and you see them, and that becomes like your touchstone. I birthed two babies in this town, and both times I had them in a hospital by the river. The whole life cycle of those children, and my relationship to that river, was that connection of how it helped from the morning they were conceived, to the day they were born...But to get to [that] place on the river, it was a bunch of different directions to get there..."

that was always interesting to me, that sometimes those places weren't accessible to you; that you couldn't go there, that someone owned that property, and you had to figure out how to not, you know, offend them, so you could go and look at a place that brought back a nice memory or gave you a sense of connectedness to that river.

We've always been told that in order for our land, and our ideas of that connection to the land to be recognized, or to be for us, to recognize the value of its sacredness, we have to have that relationship. And we didn't need permission to have that relationship, we just had to make that relationship happen. And so that's been my life experience with my kids and my family, is always to say...this is all our land, and we're responsible for it from now until the day we're no longer here. We have to take care of it...We want everyone to have that relationship to the land, to want to care for it. Because it's for their children as well."

- Juanita Espinosa

Juanita guides us to see through the lens of gratitude in order to recognize the land as sacred and prioritize connection with the land as a basic need. If we are to navigate collective care for this land, we must also reckon with the complexities of how many different peoples now call this place home. How do Indigenous relationships to land and place rub up against settler ideas of property and ownership, as well as recent immigrant experiences of diaspora? We are all on this learning journey together.

"I've lived here 40 years, and I worked on the Ave, Franklin Ave, for most of that time. And in those years that I worked there, I saw 19 different immigrant populations come to this country...And each of those populations came like people when Christopher Columbus arrived, for all kinds of thoughts and reasonings on how to be and hunger for a sensibility of home. And we provided that in all kinds of ways, and they recreated that for themselves in all kinds of ways.

Our leadership, our people that cared for us, they always thought seven generations ahead. It wasn't about your child and your grandchild. It was your great, great, great, great, great grandchild. It was thinking about someone who's not here, and the

importance of their care, of there being water, and land, and home, and food...

Everything that we see around us can be taken care of. Everything that we plant...the food that was here can be replanted. It can come back on its own...I always said, we need to have a welcome center to try and explain to people how you need to treat the land here, how you need to treat all the elements here, how you need to be thankful for the land here. And so anyone that grows [up] here, is going to, in essence, eat the spirit of that land in their food, eat the spirit of that thought in how they do things, and it's gonna be over time before they see it, you know, it's not going to happen immediately. But as they see it, I think it starts to resonate...And it always resonates with me how often we forget that the land has the greatest say in how things work around here."

- Juanita Espinosa

"As an immigrant, this resonated with me very much. Both the Latinx and East African communities are here in this area, and are new and learning, alongside the people who have always been here."

- Abdullahi Abdulle



Graci Horne is a Dakota artist, curator, and beloved goddaughter of Juanita. She keeps the conversation centered in Dakota history, thought, and lifeways.

"I'm very much a Minnesota historical buff...I remember hearing after the Dakota War of 1862, there was a law in 1863 to remove Dakota people. And that created the Dakota diaspora today. And from that time, in the cities, there were barely any Native people that were walking the streets. And I've seen pictures from the Minnesota Historical Society of speakeasies and brothels...And I remember reading about how the immigration population was treated horribly, to the point where transportation affected their livelihood every single day, where one side of the of the riverbanks was the migrant community, and then they needed to get to their job and needed to cross over [the river], and there were people that were taking advantage of that and making them pay exorbitant amounts of money just to get to their job, just to for them to be able to live, survive, and take care of their families. That hierarchal bullying has been here [since] the removal of Dakota

people. It wasn't here before, and I still see that today."

- Graci Horne

Graci reminds us that, in times such as these, a common sense approach to the basics of heart and life is what will keep us well. For artists and cultural workers, cultivating feelings of calm, safety, and deep comfort is essential work.

"There was something that was told to me a long time ago by my dad. [He] just said, 'There's going to be a time where...people are just going to go crazy'...And that time is now, and I feel like, well, what can we do on all levels, where we make sure that our mental health is taken care of, where we make sure that people feel safe...Being an artist myself, I think visuals have the ability to make you feel calm."

- Graci Horne



Gina Kundan, Deputy Director of the Office of Equity and Diversity, has been bearing witness to the conversation thus far with loving attention, and offers us the reflection that listening is also an active role.

"I am really coming from a place of deep listening today... What I'm hearing is that, though [people's] identities are tied to their work, they need to also listen and recognize and not assume that they know what is best. They need to connect with community and ask the community what they want to see and what they need and also acknowledge the history."

- Gina Kundan

"I think all of humanity has kind of a constant wake up call, because change is inevitable. You know, it's a constant. It doesn't stay for anybody, and it keeps recurring every day....We get to experience it by seeing it....I live over here on Wabasha and you know, half of the hill fell off into the road and kept people from, you know, we have to find five different ways to travel to the other part of the river in order to get around that. And it always resonates with me how often we forget that the land has the greatest say on how things work around here."

- Juanita Espinosa

Listen to Marcus and Juanita close the circle with their thanks and blessings: “Thank you to each and every one of us here today, and those that were here before us, and those that we touch and love and care for beyond the circle...”

The reality of living through this time of great change and upheaval is that the stakes are high. We know this; we can feel it. The stakes are too high to rush, and too high to thoughtlessly discard parts of ourselves or one another. Writer, educator and cultural worker Dr. Bayo Akomolafe teaches us that slowing down is a hacking of the machine. Remember, you are a glorious, messy, alive being. You require rest, care, and time to dream. May you never forget your humanity. May you recognize your own miraculous life. May you know deep in your bones that you belong. And, may you take seriously the responsibility of care for your own spirit, your fellow beings, and the land you call home.

We are ALL responsible for the land.

We can't ignore our interdependence, nor can we obscure history for long.

Auntie Juanita reminds us: The land itself has the final say in how things work around here.

Cultivating a strong feeling of home is made possible when we tend it not only for ourselves, but for our great-great-grandchildren yet to come.

Turn the Highways to Rivers

An Art Appendix

Closing and Bios

Reader:

We have come to the end of this experiment which is just the beginning of a new story. Mark this transition for yourself. Place a hand on your belly. Slowly breathe in, and slowly breathe out.



There is a lot to digest in this art appendix. Digestion and dreaming are deeply related activities, both only possible when the nervous system is at rest. Digesting transforms the gifts of food from the earth into energy that our bodies can use. Our dreams are a wild spark of life, helping us imagine the possibility of profound transformation in daily life.

Turn the highways to rivers. This was first a piece of advice, an imperative, before it became a title. Always, it is fiction, metaphor,

dream, and reality. This phrase has guided two-plus years of an artist residency, welcomed the appearance of the Council of Old and New Wisdom, and created this companion to a 20-year plan. Based on what you have read and heard here, how do you hear this call? (Is your hand still on your belly or heart?) How do you receive the offerings of the Council? How do you call upon your own old and new wisdom as you face truthfully what you wish to transform? Rest, digest, dream, breathe, transform. May these pages disrupt and inspire you.



Non-MnDOT Council Members (in order of appearance)

Julia Dinsmore is an author, poet, singer-songwriter, and poverty abolitionist who uses creative voice and storytelling to talk about the one thing we too often ignore – class and poverty in America. From church basements to the halls of congress, Julia has presented in her edu-performance style, calling those who listen to join the work of creating a just world for those experiencing poverty and marginalization. Julia is a mother and grandmother who lives in the Twin Cities of Minnesota and is deeply

committed to her communities there. She has been a Community Faculty member with HECUA (Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs) in St Paul for the past 30 years and has been part of shaping the creative community-based pedagogy of the institution. Though functionally illiterate for most of her life, Julia taught herself how to write while writing her first book, “My Name Is Child of God, Not Those People, A First Person Look at Poverty” (Augsburg Fortress).

Marie Chante' Flowers is a Mother of three, Grandma, Poet/Spoken Word Artist, educator and health care advocate for people with ABI and TBI. Her writings include monologues and motivational prose to encourage humans to go deeper inside themselves. She has partnered with community assets and nonprofits with a community engagement background for over 15 years, including HECUA and the Black Women's Wealth Alliance, to promote equities and inclusion. In her spare time, she enjoys being a grandma and traveling.

Trinity Ek (she/her/they/them) is a Minnesotan, student, writer, researcher, sister, and community member. She is currently an Urban Studies student at the University of Minnesota and Seeds Student Worker at MnDOT. Their passions center around environmental justice, water, and community.

Douglas R. Ewart is best known as a composer, improviser, sculptor and maker of masks and instruments. He is also an educator, lecturer, arts organization consultant and all-around visionary. In projects done in diverse media throughout an award-winning and widely-acclaimed 40-year career, Mr. Ewart has woven his remarkably broad gifts into a single sensibility that encourages and celebrates--as an antidote to the divisions and compartmentalization afflicting modern life--the wholeness of individuals in culturally active communities.

Mankwe Ndotsi has been working in the Twin Cities and Chicago for more than 15 years as a music maker, performer, educator and culture weaver focused on sound, story, and expanding the vocabulary of singing. She weaves improvisation/performance composition through worlds of hip hop, blues, afro-soul, world/root and creative music. She collaborates with organizers, musicians, gardeners, farmers, dancers, MC's, visual artists, theater producers, and educators. Her studio and live touring work include national and international dates with Nicole Mitchell, Atmosphere, Brother Ali, Medium Zach, Laurie Carlos, Ananya Dance Theater and Douglas R. Ewart. She has received foundation support from the American Composer's Forum/McKnight, 3Arts, Jerome Foundation, and the Minnesota State Arts Board. Ms. Ndotsi received her B.S. in Social Studies from Harvard/Radcliffe, and uses her social science background to inform her art. She seeks to infuse creative practice back into the worlds of healing, sustainable economic development, incarcerated women, education, and new village community building.

Juanita Espinosa (Spirit Lake Nation) is a Community Program Specialist for the Northern Range Satellite Center. She assists Native-CHART researchers with community outreach. Ms. Espinosa has decades of experience as a community organizer working with health centers and tribes in Minnesota. She currently works with Dr. Tiffany Beckman at the University of Minnesota on study of

obesity entitled “Neural Correlates of Food Reward in American Indian Women.” She has also worked to educate the public about Native art and to build a support system for Native artists in Minnesota. She has served on the boards of numerous community and arts-related organizations.

Hapistinna [female given name; Dakota for third born girl] **Graci Horne**, better known as Graci, was born and raised in Minnesota [Minnesota]. Her bands are the Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota people and Hunkpapa Lakota and Dakota people. She is a multi-

media artist-acrylic paint, ink, watercolor, and also creates works in photography, film, and poetry. Horne holds a degree in Museum Studies from the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, NM. Her specialty is curation and exhibition planning.

MnDOT Planning Team Council Members

Hally Turner (she/her), AICP, is Policy Planning Director at the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT). Her current work in statewide planning includes advancing equity in transportation, planning for connected and automated vehicles, and coordinating updates to and implementation of the 20-year statewide multimodal transportation plan. Each position she has held focused on incorporating public health into policy making. Outside work, Hally co-owns several businesses with her partner. When they are not fixing up rental units or running packages to the post office, they like to spend time with their rescue dog or traveling to far off destinations from Bogota to Ubud.

Abdullahi Abdulle (he/him) is a Somali American immigrant, a parent of two boys under 3, a veteran of the Minnesota Army National Guard, councilmember for the City of New Brighton, MN, and Transportation Equity Planning Coordinator at the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT). He leads MnDOT’s Advancing Transportation Equity Initiative, a suite of activities and efforts established to ensure Minnesota transportation systems, services and decision-making processes fulfil the needs of all Minnesotans, especially people that have historically been left out.

Ashley Zidon (works collaboratively with people and partners across the State

of Minnesota to develop long-range plans that look far into the future to achieve an aspired vision. She is currently leading the development of the Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan at the Minnesota Department of Transportation. Her experience is a culmination of long-range

planning, municipal planning, and community development. It's at the intersection of group collaboration, research, and visioning where her passion exists. Biking, running, and kayaking are great passions and help her feel energized. Especially when she gets to do it with family.

MnDOT At-Large Council Members

Gloria J. Jeff, AICP is a transportation executive, engineer, transportation professional and urban planner. She is co-chair of the Transportation Research Board Committee on Transportation Equity. She is currently serving as MnDOT Metro District's Livability Director. She previously served as the Project Director—Rethinking I-94. Gloria has represented and led United States Department of Transportation delegations in international settings covering transportation issues in the Asian Pacific region and the International Association of Road Congresses. Ms. Jeff holds a BSE and MSE in Civil Engineering and a Master of Urban Planning from the University of Michigan. She also has an honorary doctorate from Bennett College. Gloria serves as an officer in her church and assists seniors with their shopping and errands.

Gina Kundan is Deputy Director and Diversity & Inclusion Manager for the office of Equity and Diversity with MnDOT. She has a strong passion for equity and remains committed to integrating a culture of inclusion into best practices. Gina holds a master's degree in Public Affairs from the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School, focusing on culturally competent leadership and management, and a Master's degree in Social Theory from Hamline University.

Making good use of her BFA in Dance from Wright State University, Gina spent several decades performing and teaching. She is currently board Chair for Ananya Dance Theatre. She's a proud mother, grandmother, spouse, daughter, sister and auntie.

Organizing Artists Council Members

Marcus Young 楊墨 (he/any) makes art to expand the repertoire of human behavior and the expressivity of social forms. Since 2008, he has been creating Don't You Feel It Too?—a participatory street dance practice of social and inner-life liberation. From 2006 to 2015, he served as City Artist in St. Paul, MN, where he transformed the city's sidewalk repair program into a publishing entity for poetry, an ongoing project called Everyday Poems for City Sidewalk. Marcus is currently Stage Director with Ananya Dance Theatre, Faculty and Program Director at HECUA's Art for Social Change, and artist-in-residence at the Minnesota Department of Transportation. He loves texting emojis...

Laura Levinson (they/them), who also goes by Or אור, feels most at home in motion. They call on the magic of queer

Jewish diasporism to remind us that love in transit still has its roots in the earth. We belong to the land - ani l'dodi v'dodi li. Laura has been performing and creating work in Minneapolis, MN, for the past 8 years with Wild Conspiracy, Marcus Young, Sami Pfeffer, Aniccha Arts, BareBones Puppets, and a variety of other beloved collaborators. They are a 2019 recipient of an Artist Initiative grant from the MN State Arts Board to produce DUMPSTER FIRE: an evening of Queer & Trans performance at Franconia Sculpture Park. They've trained with master herbalist Lise Wolff, and their class "Gut, Bones, Ground" combines their research as an improvisation-based choreographer with their work as a politicized healer and forever-apprentice to the plants.

Designer & Illustrator of this Appendix

Bayou Bay [born name Donald Thomas] (he/they/stardust) is a Twin Cities based artist and designer born in St. Paul on the occupied lands of the Dakota & Anishinaabe peoples. Bayou creates mixed-media art called Affirmation Mirrors composed mostly of fabric wrapped wood, yarn, mirrors, and beads. He also creates murals, art installations, digital illustrations, digital and print materials for artists and organizations, woodwork, and works as a teaching artist.

Bayou's art and design embody themes of nature from the micro to the cosmic, black and collective liberation, healing trauma, time, portals, geometry, setting intentions for affirmations, asking questions, symbols, and identity exploration. Water is an especially strong theme in the work as HaHa Wakpa (the Mississippi River) has been a major influence in many levels of Bayou's life.

www.donaldthomasdesign.com

