

LAND

A Poetic Unmapping of Moshassuck

LAND=BODY

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The land knows you, even when you are lost.
Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass

LAND=BODY is an open and ongoing archive of community resources, collectives, and spaces in Moshassuck, the area currently known as Providence, Rhode Island. Over the course of a few months, we have developed a collaborative digital map that centers essential local organizations, such as libraries, cultural centers, DIY and public spaces, harm reduction sites, queer archives, and shelters.

As we sit on College Hill, we recognize the harm that our institutions enact and perpetuate against the local community - acts of gentrification and displacement, historic exploitation of labor, and artistic and intellectual elitism.

Looking at our map which was built with contributions from students, activists and community leaders, it is clear that the city that truly sustains us is weaved by people prioritizing the health of their neighbors, the accessibility of knowledge, and expression through art. Through this process of unmapping power structures and recentering care, we engage with the land as body, as spirit, as guide. The land is a liminal space - it is alive, beyond the destructive nature of capitalism and war, beyond limiting words, concepts and binaries.

Understanding the history of this place means grappling with the blood-stained foundation that it was built upon. This land was stolen through the displacement, oppression, and genocide of Native People, and 'developed' through the use of slave labor that prolonged colonial wealth and supremacy. This system cannot be decolonized, no matter how many performative land acknowledgments are made.

How can we imagine alternative paths and connections?
Is it possible to instill the ancestral spirit back into this soil ravaged by greed and ecocide? Could humanity be saved by the artists, activists, and poets reinventing our languages? Can we give life back to the sick and rejected bodies in the city? Can we overcome the unhoming and pain triggered by centuries of crime? Can we undo?

And if so, how? This project is an attempt at poetic unmapping—an invitation to navigate place based on relationships, dreams, needs, memories, and desires. It is not meant to be used as a way to get from one point to another, but to activate a connection to the land and to the people who have historically built and stewarded this place that many of us call home. It is a call for love as radical action, as alchemy of transformation.

WHAT IS A MAP?

For some, a map is a sepia-toned sheet of paper frayed at the edges, laid flat on a table while someone on a journey studies it to find their way through the unknown. Today, it might be the image on your phone that accompanies the computer-generated voice guiding you while you head somewhere new.

Maps are commonly understood as orthographic drawings of city blocks, congested together, and pieced in between the rectangular chunks is the label of the land - a name of a city, street, or building, that so often was not a gift, but a designation of ownership. Longitude and latitude trace a grid superimposed over the landscape, the calculating lines cut through the space, butchering the land until she is put into easily digestible and sellable blocks. Maps are prisons.

In the early years of colonization, settlers used Indigenous knowledge to create maps of the "newly discovered" territories. These maps took away Indigenous autonomy of land, and in the hundreds of years following, the land would be broken up to make it more exploitable. What is currently known as Providence, RI, is the result of the erasure of the Narragansett, Pokanoket, and Wampanoag people.

I cannot speak for all Indigenous people, but growing up in Helena, MT in my Anishinaabe and Cree family, I was taught that the land and the body are interconnected. The earth is a living being, and it's our responsibility to take care of her as she takes care of us. If the land and the body are one, then what does it mean to flatten it on a map? To take away its shape and figure? What does it mean to dig into her skin, suffocate her in concrete and trash, and rename her after those who have raped her? And for those whose creation stories are embedded within this place, or who have been forcefully relocated from the places of our own creation stories, how do we work to heal this body? How do we unmap? Where can we be safe?

Unmapping means stripping layers of trauma. Understanding that because the land is being held hostage by corporations, landlords, and institutions that cater to profits instead of people, we need to resist. It's an attempt at liberating ourselves from the systems forced onto us and the land by connecting with the community that surrounds us. Thank you to each and every guide who came our way to show us the profound ways in which we could care for and liberate each other on Stolen Land. We are grateful for the insight of the earth.

OUR DEMANDS

Reparations

- Land Back. Land acknowledgments are meaningless without commitment to return land to the Native community.
- Pay real estate taxes and increase taxes on the wealthy and corporations.
- Unconditional payments to descendants of slaves and Natives.
- Apologize for African enslavement and the genocide of Indigenous peoples.
- Follow and include Native, African-American, BIPOC and LGBTQ+ leadership in all decision-making.
- Return stolen art, human remains, sacred objects and artifacts from all collections unconditionally.

Community and Land Care

- Open classrooms, libraries, resources, studios and spaces for community members.
- Provide free healthcare, harm reduction programs and mental health support for all, including the houseless and refugees.
- Offer stipends and housing for artists and community organizations.
- Urgently launch a comprehensive program for affordable housing and shelters.
- Practice ethical fundraising and transparent leadership.
- Support unionization and free legal access for all.
- Implement environmental policies including improved public transport, emission and waste reduction, and planting initiatives.



CULTURAL SPACES

- La Galeria del Pueblo @RILA
- WBRU
- Small Format
- Misty Blue by Andrew Hem
- Still Here by Gaia
- Anarchestra
- Sine Wave by Carlos Davila
- Riffraff bookstore and bar
- 401: After Winter Must Come Spring by Fu'una
- Recording at Machines with Magnets
- The Avenue Concept
- Central Contemporary Arts
- PVD World Music Institute
- Stay Strong
- E. M. Bannister Art Gallery
- DownCity Design
- AS220 Industries
- Anahid Ypres Art Studio
- Crib (Providence)
- Mixed Magic Theatre
- Nicholson File Art Studios
- Amory Playground-Pronk
- Sprout CoWorking Providence
- Trinity Repertory Company
- Repair Atelier 16 Church St
- ¡City Arts!
- Handicraft Club
- The Steel Yard
- Dirt Palace
- Atrium Gallery
- Providence Art Club
- Rites and Reason Theatre
- New Urban Arts
- Counterform Design & Print Studio
- HQ Arts and Culture Program
- Columbus Theatre
- AS220 Main Stage and Gallery
- Tomaquag Museum
- The WaterFire Arts Center
- Twenty Stories
- PVD Unidos/United Mural
- Morphous by Lionel Smit at Kennedy Plaza

El Coje Pon by Shey Rivera

El Coje Pon is an animated collage or gif highlighting the monument The Hiker created by Gorham Manufacturing Company to memorialize the Spanish American War. This art recognizes Gorham's massive impact on the land and environment in Rhode Island as well as its role in labor, extraction, and monumentalizing colonization.



COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- Creative Reuse Center of Rhode Island
- RIOT RI
- White Electric Coffee
- Sly Fox Den Too Charlestown
- College Unbound
- The Wurks
- George Wiley Center
- Youth In Action
- DARE Direct Action-Rights
- Refugee Dream Center
- Women's Refugee Care
- Project Weber/Renew
- Providence Public Library
- Queer.Archive.Work
- Sarah Doyle Center for Women and Gender
- Southside Cultural Center/Rhode Island
- Black Storytellers
- Red Ink Community Library
- Stages Of Freedom
- Providence Youth Student Movement (PrYSM)
- Better Lives R.I. Homeless Outreach
- RICARES Rhode Island Communities for Addiction Recovery Efforts
- Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island
- Youth Pride Inc
- Queer Art Collective



ToxicMashapaug888 is another animated collage or gif, featuring a landscape photograph of the Mashapaug Pond in Providence, RI, where Gorham Manufacturing Company was located and where it caused brutal damage to the land and the waters.



ToxicMashapaug888 by Shey Rivera



Here's our invitation to navigate a care-centered map of the city

Laney Day (pronouns: they/them) is an Anishinaabe and Cree artist from Montana. They are a painter, bead worker, writer, animator, problem-solver, and friend. Their work focuses on generational trauma and healing, homesickness, and the line between tragedy and comedy. Laney has been living in what is currently known as Providence,

RI for the past five years while attending Brown University and RISD's dual degree program where they're studying Ethnic Studies at Brown and Painting at RISD.

Shey 'Ri Acu' Rivera Rios (pronouns: they/them) is an interdisciplinary artist, cultural strategist, and arts administrator.

Their artistic creations span a myriad of topics, from home to capitalism to queerness and magic. Rivera was born and raised in the island of Borikén and has been living in Providence, RI—land of the Narraganset and Wampanoag peoples—for over a decade.