

Acknowledgments	321
<i>Archive</i>	158
Colophon	328
Contributor Biographies	312
Glossary	30
How to Use This Book	1
Selected Bibliography	318
<i>Sunrise</i>	2
<i>Sunset</i>	322

2007

February 15

NL submits first funding proposal for artistic programming.

FROM AGENCY TO WONDER



northernlights.mn

Sarah Peters, Ady Olson McNair, Steve Dietz
EDITORS



How to Use This Book

Northern Lights.mn from Agency to Wonder tells our stories about Northern Lights.mn in the format of a glossary. We invite you to wander.

We begin with a sunrise and end with a sunset and in between is the future and the past—an archive.

Along the margins is a chronology of selected events from NL's seventeen years as well as occasional notes.

Images from our archives appear throughout the book as do lists of artists, staff, and collaborators.

Acknowledgments are at the end of the book, along with an index of the contributors, a selected bibliography, and a colophon.

Once in a while the book will be interrupted with an artistic interlude. Enjoy.

A toolkit of resources mentioned in these pages will be available on the NL website at northern.lights.mn/toolkit until June 2026. After that, it will live on in our archive at the University of Minnesota (SEE: ARCHIVE).

Everything else you must find.

➤ **Sarah Peters, Ady Olson McNair, Steve Dietz**

Sunrise

Steve Dietz

Sunrise is already a narrative as old as . . . the sun. Rise, transit, set. Repeat. Depending on your time frame, it is a reliable constant or a journey to extinction. Or a daily surprise (SEE: COLLECTIVE EFFERVESCENCE).

This sunrise is as much a theoretical construct as it is a historical accounting. No doubt blinkered in so many ways. Or it is a meander. A Dietz tour, as my family likes to call it, when they claim we are lost (SEE: WANDER).

2006. Around 2 am outside City Hall in San Jose, California. It was the first night of the first year of the O1SJ Global Festival of Art on the Edge, which I founded, along with many individuals (always) and organizations, and directed. Akira Hasegawa's *Digital Kakejiku* was about to close down for the night (SEE: PERMIT). It was spectacular, yes, but what was most remarkable to me was all the people sitting in the plaza, in folding chairs they had brought themselves (SEE: AMENITIES), watching with evident joy. What's more, they were talking to each other as casual strangers (SEE: TOGETHER). This was the center of a downtown that was usually deserted by 5:30 pm unless a handful of skateboarders showed up, until they were shooed away by security (SEE: POWER).

This was the kind of "creative city" we had promised funders, of course (SEE: CREATIVE PLACEMAKING), but to experience it was nevertheless unexpected and truly transformative. Nominally, the festival was about art and technology, whatever that means (SEE: NEW MEDIA), but I was beginning to understand in my bones what many of the artists had been preaching all along. At its most potent, their practice is about public space and agency. It is a call to arms with and for the imagination to run riot and create the conditions for real change (SEE: PUBLIC ART ALCHEMY).



2007. The story I tell about this next stage of my work is that I was tired of commuting to California for the O1SJ festival, and I wanted to work where I lived (SEE: BURNOUT). With the help of Neal Cuthbert, who became NL's first board chair, the McKnight Foundation provided a three-year grant (SEE: BEGINNINGS) for a program with these key attributes: "artist-focused, multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary, beyond plop art, the new public sphere, participation, catalyst and bridge."

Initially Northern Lights.mn was a semi-independent program of Intermedia Arts because McKnight did not grant to fiscal sponsors. Part of the goal of that first grant was to determine whether the vision was desirable and in what form it would be most feasible.

We quickly discovered that generally funders allow only a single application from an organization. Since Intermedia Arts was already applying for its core programming to funders such as the Minnesota State Arts Board and the NEA, we were essentially locked out of those opportunities (SEE: FUNDERS). In our 2008 report to McKnight we stated that it would be necessary to form an independent 501(c)(3) to have any chance of continuing our work.

In the meantime, we took on several projects, which both intentionally and unintentionally became touchstones for how the new organization would proceed.

Akira Hasegawa, *Digital Kakejiku*, San Jose, O1SJ Global Festival of Art on the Edge, 2006. Courtesy Zer-01.

Looking back fifteen-plus years later, NL's early projects retain an aspirational grip on my imagination, while at the same time acknowledging the gap of insight into how to intersect such activities with equitable community participation (SEE: COMMUNITY).

Nighttime at Peavey Plaza,
The UnConvention, 2008.
Photo: NL.



In 2008 the Republican National Convention took place in St. Paul. In collaboration with more than two dozen other organizations, we proposed to hold the UnConvention as a “non-partisan collaboration of local and national cultural organizations and citizens . . . exploring the creative intersection of participatory media and participatory democracy.” The process of this event taught us invaluable lessons that we both built on and had to unlearn over the years.

The UnConvention culminated in a two-day, 9 am–midnight (still not all night!) event of mostly participatory artist projects. It was a petri dish for what would become the first Northern Spark in 2011 (SEE: ITERATION).

Platform. The 1960s architects Archigram proposed many imaginative designs. One that held particular resonance for me as a festival instigator was *Instant City*. The proposition on its face was pejorative—an event descending on a “sleeping town” (even if it occurred overnight)—and the opposite of our goal(s) with Northern Spark. The last panel of the Archigram illustration says, however, “Network Takes Over,” and there was something appealingly hopeful about an event being a catalyst for the rise of a network independent of the original instant city. To make it their own. This would be core to our idea of a platform: the network takes over (SEE: PLATFORM).

In time we learned that “joining the night” wasn’t as simple as bringing together mostly white-led, mostly artist-focused organizations mostly in downtown spaces like Peavey Plaza in Minneapolis, where much of the UnConvention took place. We needed to create a programmatic container flexible enough that other organizations could see a way to meet their mission, not ours, by contributing to it. Using our platform, they could engage their ideas, their people, their artists. Part of the idea was that as we

“The goal of NS is not to take over the night like a giant big-top tent, but to join it.” —NS 2011 guidebook



Archigram, *Instant City*, installation view
in *Edge Conditions*, San Jose Museum of Art,
August 6–September 30, 2006. Photo: NL.

were a “floating organization” (SEE: PLACE), our partners knew their constituencies better than we ever could.

How could NL help enable such a network–platform? Learning how to respond to and support issues that would resonate with the cultural workers and residents of a given community was a journey of baby steps and missteps and hasty bridges and affirming attempts that is embedded throughout this book.

2009. Before the glow of that first Northern Spark sunrise, another important strand of programming dawned, Art(ists) On the Verge or AOV. As the parenthetical spelling of the program title is intended to indicate, AOV was focused on both emerging artists and an emerging art form, which transmogrified significantly over the years.

If UnConvention-to-Northern Spark was, at least initially, like the evolution of a Mardi Gras festival of public art, AOV was the behind-the-scenes, year-long, painstakingly detailed workshopping to make such an event possible. Even though AOV was never directly connected to Northern Spark, the focus on “artists working experimentally at the intersection of art and technology, with a focus on practices that are social, collaborative, and/or participatory” was symbiotic organizationally. Much of what we learned about supporting artists for the one-night festival was, in essence, workshopped in the intensive, year-long program supporting the aspirations of AOV fellows.

One interesting aspect of the AOV program that is easy to overlook after seventeen years is its twin goals: to support artists and “to create sustainable habitat for the local ecology of

From April 2008, 36-page proposal to the Jerome Foundation for a “Two-Track Commissioning and Mentoring Program: Art, Media, Technology, Social Practice.”

experimental art practice with the following key elements: critical support and evaluation, monetary and technical resources, audience development, and institutional recognition.” At the time of the first AOV program, even though MCAD had a nationally recognized new media art program and the U of M had a specific new media track in its visual arts program, exactly none of the local presenting arts institutions had any manifested commitment to new media art. One of the goals of AOV was not to “convert” these institutions but to support and present the work of compelling artists they might be interested in despite the technological bent of some of their art.

This second goal may seem archaic in retrospect, but it felt critically important at the time. And over time, NL shifted the specificity of its early focus on technology to the underlying motivations that some technologies enabled: participation, self-identified networks, personalized responsiveness, user creation, dynamic media. This transformation was embodied in the evolving ways we came to describe the organization (SEE: MISSION).

2009. Northern Lights.mn is incorporated. First artist commission by Stephen Vitiello (SEE: AURORA BOREALIS).

2010. NL collaborates with Walker Art Center’s Open Field to commission a project by Futurefarmers, *A People Without a Voice Cannot Be Heard*. NL had previously collaborated with Walker to co-present Sharon Hayes’s *Revolutionary Love 2: I Am Your Best Fantasy* at the Minnesota State Capitol as part of the UnConvention, but the Futurefarmers project was the first time I worked closely with Sarah Peters, who became a crucial leader of NL—after taking necessary time off to travel to Tajikistan. While there is a lot of me in the dawning of NL, there is no transit without Sarah.

Teamwork. It is important to acknowledge that NL was formed over years of generative discussion, with many, many people, a conversation that essentially never ended. This was also a huge lesson of the first year of AOV. As program director, I quickly learned that even with individual mentors for the artists, it was important to have more points of view in the room. In subsequent years, Piotr Szyhalski codirected the program, and our partnership during the course of a decade was a joy, both personally and programmatically.

The same was true for NL. Once Sarah came on board, initially as director of public engagement and then as codirector, and Ady Olson joined as projects manager and later as sunset codirector, no idea was owned by any one person. It would get worked over and massaged and cut and expanded to such an extent that while the original plan may have been almost unrecognizable, what

resulted was always better, the product of sometimes agonistic discussion and often heated agreement (SEE: AGONISM). This perhaps sounds trite but it still feels true.

Over the years, the team changed, and the process improved, especially in our understanding of community and the importance of multivocality (SEE: ARTIST COUNCIL), but the work of NL has always remained collaborative—with each other, with artists, with partner organizations, and with audiences.

2011. Getting back to Northern Spark, the festival was at most a buried dream at the time of the UnConvention. I remember one early morning toward the beginning of the millennium when I had been doing curatorial research in Paris and caught a dawn bus to the airport. I was astonished to pass what appeared to be large public art projects with hundreds of people milling about, clearly not morning commuters. It turns out this was the dawn end of a Paris nuit blanche, which I knew about but had never experienced. The memory stuck with me. In 2006, I wondered why the OISJ festival had to end at 2 am. As one writer put it later in regard to the inaugural Northern Spark, “like a whiskey-jonesing bar-goer just diving into his second wind, Dietz wanted still more.”¹

Then, in 2010, the Minnesota State Arts Board announced a new festival grant program. The amount of funding available would later be greatly reduced, but a generous award was offered for the first year. Now that we were an official 501(c)(3), we could apply directly for these funds! And we did.

Northern Spark 2011 was one of those you-only-do-it-because-you-don’t-know-any-better events: 87 artist projects by well over 100 artists with 60 partner organizations spread over 5 primary hubs in 2 cities. At the time, we said things like “The goal is that this will attract people to places—whether it’s going into a museum or down to the river or staying out past 10 pm at night—they might not normally gather . . . They’ll congregate, they’ll have social interactions, and it will really change how they think about their city and the relationship to it. That would be success for me if we have a lot of people out there enjoying themselves.”² And “if we find an audience, that’s fantastic.”³

The evening before the first Northern Spark, I think I was spray painting event signage behind The Soap Factory with our first producer, Andrea Steudel, in her first producing experience. Buses and river ferries had been hired, electricity had been located, partners were on board, but it still wasn’t entirely clear exactly what would happen.

By the day of, only one project had been canceled. But even an hour before at a small launch party of supporters, Neal Cuthbert

“We remember these conversations slightly differently, perhaps because we were in different cohorts (Who was the bad cop? Who came up with that idea?), but we both recall being put on the spot, challenged, and pushed to consider solutions outside of our known visual and technological vocabulary.” —MLL and KH, AOV fellows (SEE: CRITIQUÉ)

Matthew Rezac worked on nearly every project we did. His design briefs made us think even harder about what we were doing, and his final designs always made us “punch above our weight,” as they say—as is evident throughout this book (SEE: DESIGN).

In 2011, the second year the festival grant was offered, MSAB required that a festival must have been presented at least once in order to receive funding, yet this application was due a few days before the first Northern Spark took place (SEE: BUREAUCRACY).



Neel Cuthbert (left) and Steve Diaz address attendees of the inaugural Northern Spark festival on the Stone Arch Bridge, June 4, 2011. Photo: Patrick Kelley.

and I really didn't know if anyone besides family would show up to hear us welcome them. We were so unprepared in that regard that the portable speaker system broadcast to about twenty people on the Stone Arch Bridge where we stood. But Northern Spark was a success by many measures. We estimated there were 50,000 visits to the projects in the festival (SEE: METRICS). More significantly, from subsequent published comments of various reports, the first Twin Cities nuit blanche exceeded expectations and fulfilled some of our hopes.

"Later that evening/morning, I saw a building's neon sign with a few letters burned out. For a second I thought it must be part of the event and watched those letters, waiting for something to happen. Something about the gorgeous, gorgeous weather, the lack of sleep, and the buzzing energy of the crowds all contributed to this slightly warm, fuzzy feeling of community potency."⁴

"You think you know a view, a city, a building, a park—and then to see it at night, it's a different experience," I said, explaining the nuit blanche concept to local media before the first festival. "So to do that in a safe, fun, active environment where you're more excited about what's around the corner than nervous about it, it really changes how people can experience the city. And the flipside is our commitment to reaching a broad audience and engaging them in really fine art. Part of the mission of the nuit blanche is that it's free culture for everyone."⁵

It's worth noting that the projects for Northern Spark were selected by me, as artistic director of the festival; by our partners, independently of NL; and through a juried open call for submissions. With many modifications along the way, this was an essential aspect of all of our programming (SEE: JURATE).



Daily tous les jours, Giant Sing Along, co-commissioned with the Minnesota State Fair since 2011. Photo: NL.

Sunrise and sunset. Dusk to dawn. One night, all year. AOV and Northern Spark were not the only programs of NL. In 2011, the same year as the inaugural NS, we worked with the Minnesota State Fair to commission a project by Daily tous les jours called *Giant Sing Along*. One of our last projects was the Telethon in 2022. These projects enabled us to expand our programming geographically, work with new partners and old partners differently, and try out alternative approaches to programming.

Yet one could say that Northern Spark and Art(ists) On the Verge were the sun and moon of our ecosystem. One illuminated our efforts while the other was like a powerful tide, constantly tugging us to our core mission to support—and challenge—the artist.

This book is intended to tell the story of Northern Lights.mn from many different points of view. You can follow the chronology in the margins, but we invite you to wander through the glossary, perhaps interweaving your own memorable NL experiences from the past seventeen years.

Notes

- 1 Regan Smith, "White Night," martists.org, May 18, 2011.
- 2 Amy Carlson Gustafson, "All-night Event a Chance for Twin Cities Artists to Shine," *Pioneer Press*, May 8, 2011.
- 3 Mary Abbe, "New Festival Provides a Spark in the Dark," *Star Tribune*, June 2, 2011.
- 4 Marianne Combs, "The Reviews Are In for Northern Spark," *Minnesota Public Radio News*, June 7, 2011.
- 5 Amy Carlson Gustafson, "All-night Event a Chance for Twin Cities Artists to Shine," *Pioneer Press*, May 8, 2011.

NL beyond NS and AOV: Alma Lights, A People Without a Voice Cannot Be Heard, Aquanesia, AAA, ARTation, Artist Council, Aurora Borealis, B-Lectric, Creative City Challenge, Discourse and Discord, fwd//, Giant Sing Along, Illuminate South Loop, Illuminate the Lock, IN Light IN, INsite, Jamestown ArtSpark, Living Banners, Neighbors by Way of Water, ReGeneration, Revolutionary Love, Ruination, Spring Howl, Telethon, Unconvention, Union Depot, Words for Winter.

The UnConvention

All projects presented by NL
(unless otherwise indicated).

ArtOrg, *1000 Print Summer*
Christopher Baker and J. Anthony Allen,
Urban Echo
Beatrix*JAR, JAO, Ripple Effect:
performances at Peavey Plaza
Black Bean Associates, *F-30 Pedal Cloud*
(Forecast Public Art)
CODEPINK, *Walk in Their Shoes*
Margaret Crane/Jon Winet, *The Electoral*
College
Steven Gagnon, *Border Cruiser Video*
Sculpture
Marlina Gonzales and Jane Powers,
One-on-One Film Festival
Sharon Hayes, *Revolutionary Love 2: I Am*
Your Best Fantasy (NL, Creative Time,
Walker Art Center)
I Approve This Message (The UpTake,
Walker Art Center)
Kulture Klub Art Shanties (Art Shanty
Projects, Kulture Klub Collaborative)
LigoranoReese, *The State of Things*
Make an Effort (Campbell Mithun)
Minneapolis Art on Wheels (MAW)
My Yard Our Message (NL, martists.org,
Walker Art Center)
Chris Pennington, *Liberty Parade*
Red76, *Revolutionary Table*
Monica Sheets, *Free Speech Surrogate*
spark24 (various artists)
Spontaneous Storefronts: Projecting
Democracy (NL, Forecast Public Art)
Andrea Steudel, *Backbone, Values,*
Hairstyle
Chris Strouth, *UnConvention TV*
Piotr Szyhalski, *IF/THEN: Honor Will Never*
Be Regained



LigoranoReese, *The State of Things*, 2008,
installed on the St. Paul Capitol grounds for
The UnConvention. Photo: Nora Ligorano

Art(ists) On the Verge 1

Artists

Ayvee Alexandres, *Once*

Aniccha Arts (Pramila Vasudevan with
Mark Fox, Jennifer Jurgens, and Mike
Westerlund), *The Weather Vein Project*
Cloud Turn

We Can Change the Weather blog

Christopher Baker

*HPVS (Human Phantom Vibration
Syndrome)*

Murmur Study

Kevin Obsatz, *The Gate to the Enclosure*

Andrea Steudel, *Mobile Shadow*

Projection Theater

Krista Kelley Walsh, *Public Eye Action*

Director

Steve Dietz

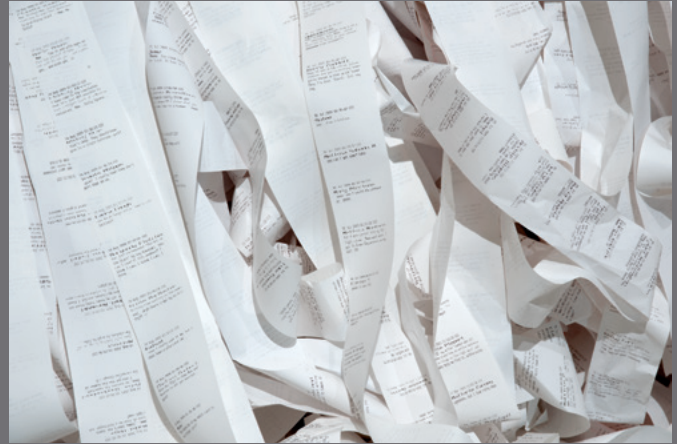
aurora borealis

Stephen Vitiello, *aurora borealis*

2022



Stephen Vitiello struck out in his search for the northern lights for NL's first artist commission. SEE: AURORA BOREALIS. Photos: Stephen Vitiello.



Art(ists) On the Verge 1: (clockwise from upper left) Krista Kelley Walsh, *Public Eye Action*; Aniccha Arts (Pramila Vasudevan with Mark Fox, Jennifer Jurgens, and Mike Westerlund), *The Weather Vein Project*; Christopher Baker, *Murmur Study*; Kevin Obsatz, *The Gate to the Enclosure*; Aveye Alexandres, *Once*; Andrea Steudel, *Mobile Shadow Projection Theater*; Christopher Baker, *HPVS (Human Phantom Vibration Syndrome)*. Weisman Art Museum. Photos: Rik Sferra, except Andrea Steudel by NL.

A People Without a Voice Cannot Be Heard

Futurefarmers, *A People Without a Voice Cannot Be Heard* (NL, Walker Art Center)

Art(ists) On the Verge 2 Artists

Arlene Birt, *Visualizing Grocery Footprints*
Kyle Phillips, *Indexical Architecture*
Janaki Ranpura, *Egg and Sperm Ride*
Tyler Stefanich, *Re-Presented Narratives*
tectonic industries, *Perhaps this is the only way of knowing if anything was ever important to you*

Codirectors

Steve Dietz
Piotr Szyhalski

Mentors

Christopher Baker
Stevie Rexroth
Piotr Szyhalski
Diane Willow

Essayists

Ann Klefstad, "The Inside and the Outside: Art(ists) On the Verge, 2009-10"
Stephen R. Miller, "Egg Gone Sperm"

University Avenue Project(ion)

Wing Young Huie, *Project(ion) Site* for University Avenue Project, Public Art Saint Paul

2012



Futurefarmers, *A People Without a Voice Cannot Be Heard*, commissioned with Walker Art Center, 2010. Photo: Gene Pittman for Walker Art Center.



Art(ists) On the Verge 2: (clockwise from upper left) Arlene Birt, *Visualizing Grocery Footprints*; Kyle Phillips, *Indexical Architecture*; tectonic industries, *Perhaps this is the only way of knowing if anything was ever important to you*; Janaki Ranpura, *Egg and Sperm Ride*; Tyler Stefanich, *Re-Presented Narratives*. Regis Art Center. Photos courtesy of the artists.

Collaborative Entanglements

Piotr Szyhalski &
Pramila Vasudevan
in conversation

Piotr Szyhalski This book is a lovely way to wrap up the decade of the various doings that you and I have been entangled in various aspects of. We don't even have to talk about Northern Lights, mn or Northern Spark or Art(ists) On the Verge directly—the conversation we just had looking at the plants in your garden and discussing learning or relearning a relationship with the land, or our place on it, feels so important. So much of NS was about finding yourself in a different place, or finding an opportunity to connect with people in unexpected locations. A lot happened outdoors, literally with your feet planted on the land. I don't know how much of this kind of thinking was happening during that decade, but we are here, looking back, so we can reflect on the changes in our attitude, the changes in our perspective on what matters.

Pramila Vasudevan It is interesting to reflect on significant events that created shifts in my perspective of how to live and cultivate a transdisciplinary movement practice. Somehow my tumor was willed away through my doing what I love the most: art. I came to learn that art practices have certain qualities that help me acknowledge my vibration and relationship to my surroundings. When I was sick, during the pandemic, I was mostly low energy, and I just started to water plants in and around the house. The act of supporting their growth was truly fulfilling. I was in reading groups and listened to many discussions about caste, race, and land-based social justice issues. I began an intentional process of looking at my own personal history and cutting back the harmful habits in my daily living and art practice while also searching for connections with this place, Dakota land. I continue to search for ways to let go of aesthetic markers of disconnection, exoticism, ego stroking endeavors—all values of capitalism. I want to learn from the ecologies of trees and plants around me as I repattern my ways as a culture worker.

PS I read in a book on deep time that humans have always had a damaging relationship to nature. I immediately wanted to reject that idea but then considered that even the communities we look to and think of as living the closest with nature manage and alter it (for example, through agriculture) or somehow find ways to make nature useful to themselves. That convinced me to pause and ask how I fully acknowledge this truth.

At this point everything feels so finally broken that no matter how hard you try to devote your life to actually undoing, or at least minimizing, the damage, you recognize that the house you live in, the car you drive, all the systemic layers are so deeply enmeshed and so widespread that it feels impossible.

This brings us to the culture work, as you called it, or just to the idea that art actually does have healing capacity. It's not always easy to figure out exactly how to strategize about that, or how to enhance these aspects and diminish others, but I agree that it is definitely important and worthwhile to explore.

PV This makes me think about how artworks can access and activate connection among people and maybe even across communities. NS harnessed this catalyzing capacity of artists through thoughtful disruptions of our collective patterns that I usually experienced in galleries and theaters in the Twin Cities. I witnessed artists create new possibilities of connection with visitors.

Yet sometimes the porosity of events could be challenging. For instance, at NS 2016 we had difficulties with huge intoxicated audiences late in the night at *Census*, near the Stone Arch Bridge; they disrespected our performers, who largely represented BIPOC and LGBTQ+ identities. We were grateful when the promise of a storm compelled most of these visitors to leave early.

There was a lot of learning at these events, and my collaborators and I reflected deeply. This idea of safety brings me to ask the question, What does it mean to be a host where I may be an (un/welcome) guest? As a settler, how do I understand my relationship to the performance sites at NS? As an upper-caste south asian american, what does it mean to be a facilitator who truly participates in questions of safety and social justice, and simultaneously engages in a decolonizing art practice?

PS I can't even begin to sort out the layers of complexity in that.

But you cut right to the heart of the matter and point out the mindset of settler colonialism: we're going to take over this space. All sorts of important questions arise. How do you acknowledge that as an artist, and then pursue a new project that takes place in a so-called "public space"? How do you somehow mitigate that side of it? To me that's the nature of cultural work: you work on



Anucha Arts, *In Habit: Living Patterns*, NS 2012. Photo: Patrick Kelley.

yourself, but in relation to others, even though it's happening in that complex space.

Awareness can change a lot, too. You carry yourself differently, you engage with people in different ways, and, again, that porosity of the work may somehow diffuse your presence and you just become part of the environment. Strategies or attitudes can begin to transform that relationship to a place. You have to figure out exactly how to be, how to continue, with informed understanding of the complexities of the space, the complexities of being here, in relation to the ecologies, recognizing that we're not the only beings here. We can be so self-centered.

I wonder if the experience of working on several projects, within however fraught the NS framework, if that helped to inform your thinking as an artist. Absolutely, without a doubt, this is the case for me: the idea of relationality and how we learn that art is in essence rooted in social or communal experience.

PV You bring up a lot of important points. I am learning at this moment that it may not be possible to create something in isolation, as hard as one might try. Maybe our own bodies and minds are implicated in every creative act and in that way carry history, (un)relationality, and (dis)connection with our environments. Maybe our intentions and ways of patterning in the world are almost always a social and communal experience.

Your point about our not being the only beings here is also significant. I often wonder how art practices have facilitated or

could facilitate a shift in our culture to consider the dominant tone of our connection and communication with other (non)beings around us, whether plants or animals or even rocks. How have art practices in the outdoors supported—and how could they support—cultural movement from an intellectual point of view toward one that is embodied and (non)human engaged?

PS Thinking about this work could be a bit like growing a garden, cultivating a culture. The yearly cycle, the cycle of day to night, thinking about all these things in relation to the healing quality that you talked about earlier. A seeding happens in that moment—not just for audiences who stumble into these strange things happening but for all the artists involved in the process.

When I try to subtract from my life all the experiences that were connected to NS or AOV, I feel much less of myself. I can't imagine how I would be as an artist now if I hadn't had the chance to be part of so many of those events, working with you. If I extract all of these things from my experience, I feel so much poorer intellectually, poorer emotionally.

We learn from doing, and even that is something I was able to verbalize, or organize in my head, only as a result of these experiences. When I meet with students today I tell them that if you don't know what to do in the moment, well, it doesn't matter: just start doing it, and you watch your hands, learn from what's happening in front of you, notice how your body guides you through this process, and sooner or later you will arrive. I don't know if I'd be able to say this with a straight face, or believe it, if it weren't for NS projects. I'm acknowledging a value in this, and it's hard to imagine myself as an artist without it.

PV I totally appreciate what you are saying. We have all that we need within us. And I love embodied improvisational practices because of what is possible. The not knowing makes the moment come alive and allows for people to have agency in witnessing, absorbing, creating, and letting go.

This modality is so different from a project like *In Habit: Living Patterns* from NS 2012, where the choreography of every movement was planned with as much meticulous attention as we could muster within the collaboration. This project was performed under the Third Avenue bridge but could have been just as powerful in a theater. The postmodern framing of a classical and contemporary Indian dance aesthetic and rigor was challenging to present outside a theater. We needed wooden floors to do our dance. Would it have been ethical for me as the choreographer to ask performers to dance on any other surface? I wonder about our placemaking values when we developed this project at this site.

PS I love the image that you're painting and that it literally had to happen for *In Habit: Living Patterns*. We had to build a floor! Everything about this feels so right to acknowledge. You could not dance on that particular spot, and we had to transplant a floor suitable for that project to happen outdoors. One could ask, well, why not just do it where the floor is to begin with? But that's the point: there is a value in actually taking something out of one environment and putting it in a different environment, because it resonates differently. The word *resonate* (thinking of acoustics) makes sense, too: through acoustics you acknowledge, learn, and experience the space. That's what the entire festival does.

PV The idea of a festival resonating across the Twin Cities makes me think about how communities have a chance to engage in a practice that challenges time and space together. Unlike the enclosed spaces of museums and theaters, the rhythms of the night sky from dusk till dawn, the variable weather, and the time to navigate vast distances of the urban landscape are compelling. I also think about the prior conditions and labor that make that resonance possible.

PS Right. What you describe is what good art experience should do. Those are values that art has to offer, plus the healing. Or maybe the healing comes from all of these things embedded in the experience, speaking to each other, producing this growth or change in each of us. I don't know.

Let's wind back to your initial point about taking over the space, taking over the place, and the echo of a colonial dynamic. I want to acknowledge that a balancing act takes place there, with all these things happening simultaneously.

PV Yes. How can a criticality of our togetherness here in this place move us toward reflection and a decolonizing modality? It is easier to ask the question than to implement, as there are many obstacles to overcome at every level of making a festival happen. Organizers work with limited funding, try to create zero waste scenarios, obtain all kinds of permits from city officials; artists manage very short timelines of setup and takedown; visitors safely navigate vast landscapes of events—just a few examples of the many, many hurdles for everyone involved. The planning had to be incredibly meticulous and was often tremendously challenging because of so much uncertainty, which meant there was a heightened sense of aliveness and freshness about the events. I could never predict how the community would interact with any of our works.



PS Yeah, in Street Lab, my annual summer class at MCAD, I tell students that this is working “close to the chest.” The distance between you and the thing you make becomes so small. Everything happens in the same moment, same space.

I describe this way of working, and the work produced, as “thin.” Not pejoratively—it’s thin and almost translucent! The thing between you and me, the work, is so delicate and transparent that we can see each other. The criticality is not gone, it just all has to happen at a different pace. It’s compressed, and there is something exciting about that, almost liberating. Really freeing. There’s a permission given to work differently, to be different in that moment, and that becomes part of the audience’s experience, too. They’re also offering through their sense of wonder. There’s something cosmic about it that is actually visible through the night!

PV Speaking of cosmic, I have been taking a pranayama class. The teacher spoke at length about aligning our internal body rhythms with the external rhythms of sun and moon cycles, seasons, and so on. I feel like values of capitalism are expressed in the ways that systems around us work, like the medical system, where we have become reliant on an expert to tell us how we feel and what our bodies need. So many systems ask us to disconnect from our internal body rhythms, our environment, our community knowledge, and our own personal wisdoms. The NS festival felt like an opportunity for a different philosophical approach. It was

Pranika Vasudevan and Piotr Szymbalski perform in *3600 cells* by Anucha Arts, Southern Theater, NS 2017. Photo: Bill Cameron

a platform for so many voices that reminded us to listen, connect with each other and look at the stars together, literally walk into the sunrise, and contemplate our (non)possibilities.

PS Yes, there is definitely an awareness of all sorts of rhythmic structures at work: from internal, bodily rhythms through communal or urban patterns, the cycles of nature all the way to cosmic resonances. A lot of the work (sometimes intentionally, sometimes not) explored resonances, harmonies and disharmonies emerging from these layered rhythms.

Maybe those are the healing moments we were talking about earlier, when we don't even understand exactly what's happening but perhaps it has to do with these rhythm alignments.

PV I am curious about these rhythm (mis)alignments as well, and at the same time I am ready to pivot from them as needed. I wonder what conditions of togetherness are essential for any of us to be able to take a path and make a different choice later. Is it possible to access our individual agency and agitate unsustainable paths with proposals for alternate ways of being? How is inquiry embedded in our daily living so that we can be present to our individual and accumulated actions? How can our diverse art practices facilitate our many collective shallows and depths through soft curiosities and passion-filled play?

PS Speaking of cosmic alignments, Pamela and I were on a long roadtrip just before the pandemic. We drove out west, and we were at Joshua Tree National Park, one of those designated places with no light pollution. We had this amazing experience at night when the rangers showed up with telescopes. One of their points was that here, in the middle of the night, looking at the sky is one of the few remaining experiences that we share with our ancestors. We see the same thing they saw, embodying this direct line of connection through many generations past, perhaps even into the deep time. Then suddenly we noticed a long line of perfectly steadily moving points of light. A murmur passed through the group as people asked, "What is this?" The rangers grasped for some plausible explanation, but no one knew what we were seeing. Energy shifted in the group as we were all baffled and confused. Next morning on the way out I googled "weird lights in the sky" and it turned out that was the launch of the first batch of satellites of the Starlink network released into orbit by Elon Musk. Slicing right through our ability to commune with our ancestors. I am not sure if this is the best way to end our conversation, but something about it makes sense. It goes back to your initial points acknowledging the complexities of public space framed by the

context of colonial history. What we were witnessing in the sky was a tragic, contemporary extension of this corrosive mindset, unfolding on a cosmic scale.

There will always be layers of problematics, and maybe complicity, or guilt, or shame, intertwined with everything we do. Perhaps this is the price we pay for paying attention? But maybe this is what we're supposed to do. First, figure out how to be meaningfully present in all this mess. And then to acknowledge each other, and those around us, and together start building something through mutual support, understanding, and empathy.

Even though this book marks the end of NL, I don't believe the value of this work ends here. The energy of the shared experiences of artists and audiences, multiplied many thousand times, will continue to reverberate in all of us.

↪ **SEE ALSO: AGENCY, ALL NIGHT, ART(ISTS) ON THE VERGE, COEVOLUTION, COMMUNITY, CONNECTIONS, DECOLONIZE, DURATION, ECOSYSTEM, EXPERIMENT/AL, FESTIVAL, HEALING, HOSPITALITY, INTERCONNECTION, PLACE, PLAY, POSSIBILITY, RECIPROCITY, SUNSET, TOGETHER, TRANSFORMATIVE, TIME**



Aaron Dysart, *Celebrate*, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Northern Spark 2012. Photo: Jayme Halbritter.

FROM AGENCY TO WONDER



northernlights.mn

Sarah Peters, Ady Olson McNair, Steve Dietz
EDITORS

agency In the mission statement for Northern Lights.mn we refer to imagination, expanded possibilities, civic engagement—each authentically important to us—but internally we perhaps talked most about fomenting agency.

We wanted artists and audiences to “see the city in a new light,” yes, but our prime directive, so to speak, was to enable artists to have agency in relation to the city. During Northern Spark, for one night, “regular order” was suspended. Artists could project their stories the size of a building; they could sign the Stone Arch Bridge to “think and wonder”; they could warn in anguish “just breathe” in a parking lot in St. Paul—a phrase that would come to hold even deeper meaning years later with the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

We wanted audiences to feel an equal agency: to not just be the subject of towering spectacles but to populate them; to actively listen to the silent river; to turn the city into a game board.

Maybe, just maybe, we were agents of change. To the extent we were, our calling card was agency. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: CITY, MISSION, PARTICIPATORY, PLAY, PUBLIC SPHERE

agonism An approach to politics that embraces difference and disagreement as an important part of democracy. Agonism reinforces that democracy thrives on, and even requires, an argumentative foundation: the friction of varied publics and participation by people of many different minds, views, and beliefs. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: CONFLICT, DISCOURSE AND DISCORD

all night

8:59 pm–10 pm

It’s always hard to tell if the projectors are working at dusk, because it’s still light out. And things work great during testing the night before, but something inevitably goes wrong with one projector right when the festival is about to start. As the producer, I had to rush to swap out a projector with a backup to get a project up and running before the night went totally dark. We spread staff across the seven neighborhoods, just waiting for a call to help troubleshoot. It’s hard for me to enjoy the festival before midnight because I want to make sure all the artists feel good and confident, all the tech is working, and the audiences are having a good time. And you just pray it doesn’t rain. >SS

10 pm–12 am

It’s all in full swing. Look how the night is filled with flashlights—films projected ten stories tall on warehouse walls—machines to find what you’ve lost—paper and pencil to send letters to fish, to your ancestors, to your future self. Hear the sounds of dancers’

synchronized feet on the pavement—levers pulled on printing presses—typewriters clacking in poetic competition—music played only on fruit—voices rising in shape-note harmonies. And that’s just two of your senses! Tonight you will paint, learn, write, breathe, taste, sing, set fire, dance, and see beauty that exists only for this brief time. It is breathtaking and collective. By now, you have a plan, a path through this night city. On foot, in a train or bus, on a bike, in a backseat—hopefully with enough caffeine and snacks. At Northern Spark, that plan is itself a work of art. Fractal, evolving, and joy-driven. You are on your way. >SVN

12 am–2 am

Midnight—time to add fodder to fire
time to cuddle up stay out
cuz time is out
it’s never today, at 1 am, it’s yesterday
and it’ll be for hours
now
you can take time
it’s not a given
time is the logs the woods bear
the power the city
2 am—leap
year, every night
>MS

2 am–3:45 am

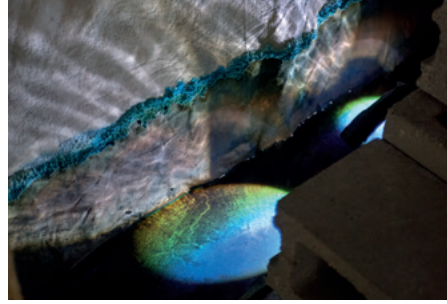
The post-bar close crowd gives the festival a second wind, but it’s fleeting. There’s a dampness in the air. These are the chilliest hours and that may be the only thing keeping anybody awake. If you can push through, you can make it to the end. You can make it to pancakes. >RM

3:45 am–5:26 am

annual practice
of what 4:30 sounds like.
silence breaks: birdsong.
around is gentle.
the light, a buoy.
new point on your map.
once a whole, now one,
you sit summarily. it’s
been wonder, brightly so.

>EJ

↪ SEE ALSO: DAWN, DURATION, JOY, NORTHERN SPARK, PRODUCTION, PROJECTION, STAFFING



Left: Prabh Manasour, *Labyrinth, The Spill, Alma Lights*, 2015.
Right: Laura Biggar, *Threshold, Alma Lights*, 2015. Photos: Rie Sjerra.

Alma Lights It was a somewhat magical time for Northern Lights.mn. We were taking it “easy,” planning a “small” version of Northern Spark 2015 (16 commissioned projects and 56 partner projects) to give us more time to strategize for future years. We had a solid core of three nearly full-time staff.

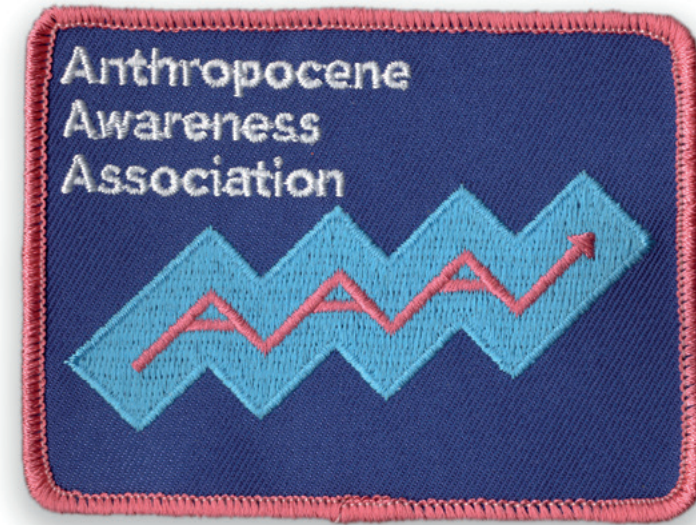
Restaurant Alma on University Avenue offered us the opportunity to host artists in the empty spaces in its building before planned renovations took place, giving rise to a new platform and virtually no-strings-attached use of exhibition and office space. We invited twelve artists to create interventions and installations in nooks and crannies throughout the building. As construction was yet to begin, there was nothing precious to Alma about its appearance. Artists were free to follow their whims, to resonant results: they busted through ceilings, walls, and doors; played with light and dark and the weight of gravity; painted and projected in forgotten corners and thresholds. They transformed a dusty space into one enlivened with contemplation and delight.

We were surprised by the willingness, enthusiasm, and hospitality of our partners at Alma. Admittedly, over the years we’d become jaded by the distrust and skepticism of property owners, but the folks at Alma were refreshingly lovely and encouraging. >AM ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST-CENTRIC, EPISODIC, EXPERIMENT/AL, GENEROSITY, HOSPITALITY, MAGICAL, NIMBLE, OFFICE, PARTNERSHIP, PLACE, PLAY, PRIVILEGE, STAFFING

amenities Information tents, port-a-potties, food trucks, drinking water, recycling and zero waste stations, directional signage, warming areas, bike racks, and bus stops all identified on the event map, printed and online: this is a standard list of the sorts of amenities Northern Lights.mn staff planned for each of our outdoor, durational events. The presence (or lack) of these resources determined whether participants felt welcome and cared for—or left to get their needs met elsewhere. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: AUDIENCE, DIY, HOSPITALITY, INFRASTRUCTURE, MAP, PRODUCTION, SUSTAINABLE, TRANSPORTATION, WASTE

Anthropocene Awareness Association (AAA) This program grew out of Northern Spark 2016, Climate Chaos | Climate Rising, and Northern Spark 2017, Climate Chaos | People Rising. It attempted to recreate publicly the transformative conversations of our advisory committee that helped scope these two events.

As with many Northern Lights.mn projects, the attempt was not only to play off widespread knowledge of an existing cultural phenomenon (AA, Alcoholics Anonymous) but to at least imply certain necessary stages of Anthropocene Awareness, such as denial, grief, anger, acceptance, and, most important, action. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: CLIMATE CHAOS, CULTURE, NORTHERN SPARK, PEOPLE RISING, POSSIBILITY, TRANSFORMATIVE



AAA membership patch

Aquanesia *Water flows downhill. Water has memory.*

These were the “simple” ideas that inspired the project that was first test-driven as *Big Watershed Game: Neighbors by Way of Water* (2013). This morphed into its first public presentation as *Ruination: City of Dust* (2014), and then iterated as *Aquanesia* (2018). It now lives in the collection of the Dunn County Historical Society in Menomonie, Wisconsin. *Ruination* was a watershed-focused, landscape-based, immersive mystery game set in a dystopian not-so-distant future. Teams of players on bicycles gathered and interpreted clues, conversed with eclectic characters, ate small gustatory delights of invasive species, and engaged in mental and physical challenges.

Aquanesia was the result of an experimental, iterative process and a foray into partnerships with more traditionally science-focused organizations to connect people, ideas, and the

environment through art, unconventional theater, and gameplay. It also realized a dream of ours: to kit-ify a platform and take it on the road to produce a series of site-specific versions.

We made our way, team and kit, to Rochester and Grand Rapids, Minnesota, where we worked with local watershed and arts and theater organizations to develop the site-specific portions of the game: selecting locations, adapting to landscape features and conditions, casting actors. The physical kit was admittedly not nearly as portable as we had envisioned: it included a multipiece set that required a box truck for transportation. But so goes the process of iteration.

Did players solve the mystery? Some did. Did they learn “facts”? Perhaps! Did they have fun? Yes. And they finished the game with a new relationship to water and an increased sense of responsibility for its health. Ultimately, *Aquanesia* brought artists and scientists together to create a cooperative game that prompted players to connect with water, land, and each other. >AM ↪ SEE ALSO: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, CLIMATE CHAOS, COLLABORATION, DRAMATURG, GAME, INTERCONNECTION, ITERATION, NIMBLE, PARTNERSHIP, PERFORMANCE, PLACE, PLATFORM, PLAY, POSSIBILITY, WATER

Art(ists) On the Verge *Art(ists) On the Verge (AOV) is an intensive, mentor-based fellowship program for emerging Minnesota-based artists or artist groups working experimentally at the intersection of art, technology, and digital culture with a focus on network-based practices that are interactive and/or participatory.*

For eleven iterations, this is the description of AOV that went out with every call for participation. As with most Northern Lights. mn programs, we (initially myself and Piotr Szyhalski, and later Mike Hoyt and Sarah Peters) were inventing as we went along.

Nominally, AOV was the “new media” program for the Jerome Foundation, which supported much of AOV. Projects included a grocery checkout system, custom bikes, dance by telephone, dinner conversations, painting, the post office, architecture, recombinant libraries, direct marketing, artificial sentience, pirate gardens, kevlar knapsacks, shoebox dioramas, and so much more: a total of 56 projects from 2008 to 2021.

Organizationally, AOV was the complementary counterweight to Northern Spark’s dozens of projects. We had the privilege and responsibility to work closely with five artists for an entire year. After monthly meetings and critiques with outside interlocutors, there was a final exhibition. This was critical. After plenty of time to think and iterate and sketch and prototype and iterate, in the end there was a project the public was invited to experience.

We quickly learned, as we did with most of NL’s programs, that our goal was not merely to instantiate an artist’s first project proposal. It was to support where they were going; where they wanted to be; what they were actually trying to accomplish, which was often not within the confines of specific disciplines as traditionally understood. And to help them be comfortable with technology, neither in awe of nor alarmed by it, to use just as much as they needed and wanted for their work.

AOV was a year-long journey. For the artists *and* the mentors. Of listening. Of challenges. Of critically responding. Of dreaming. Of discovery. Of being pragmatic. Of producing. Of transformation. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST-CENTRIC, COMMUNICATIONS, CRITIQUE, DIY, EXPERIMENT/AL, MENTORSHIP, NEW MEDIA, PLATFORM, SUNRISE, TECHNOLOGY, TRANSFORMATIVE

ARTathlon Our first outdoor winter platform. Held in single-degree temperatures in January 2015, and modeled after exercise courses in public parks, the ARTathlon was a series of eight artist projects that highlighted observation, contemplation, communication, and play. This event marked the dawning of our relationships with beloved organizational partners Mississippi Park Connection and the National Park Service, with whom we went on to create many more projects in all kinds of weather. >AM ↪ SEE ALSO: AUDIENCE, B-LECTRIC, EPISODIC, EXPERIMENT/AL, ILLUMINATE THE LOCK, ILLUMINATE SOUTH LOOP, PARTNERSHIP, WEATHER, WINTER

artist Our working assumption was that if someone self-defines as an artist, then they are an artist. What quickly became clear was that our outreach and application requirements needed to match our assumptions. How could we reach the textile artists, DJs, crop artists, community organizers, storytellers, and soil scientists with a creative bent? How could we make our proposals open to self-taught artists and creative tech workers and weekend tinkerers if we truly wanted to represent the communities within which and with whom we were partnering?

The solution wasn’t easy or perfect, but it definitely involved engaging with trusted members of a community to promote opportunities; minimizing reliance on documents such as CVs and exhibition histories; inviting co-curators; expanding the jury pool; mentoring info sessions; and much other rewiring of our processes. This is the necessary work not just of equity but of not assuming you know what artistic excellence is. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST COUNCIL, ARTIST-CENTRIC, COEVOLUTION, COMMUNITY, EQUITY, GATEKEEPER, GRATITUDE, OPEN CALL, PARTNERS

artist-centric Our “corest” value was to support artists. We were not interested in finding artists who fit a preconception of art we thought we wanted to present. We were more interested in supporting artists who challenged and expanded the terms of our mission: innovative, participatory, public sphere . . .

Artist-centric meant working with artists toward the best expression of their work, sometimes critically challenging their ideas and production plans. Of course, there were pragmatic issues to consider, but ultimately our mission was to support their vision.



Chris Larson, Celebration/Lowe/Lass
NS 2013. Photo: Olga Ivanova.

Probably every arts organization believes this. I like to think we went the extra mile. When Chris Larson proposed burning a full-scale replica of a Marcel Breuer–designed St. Paul house on a barge on the Mississippi, we said great. Let’s go for it. In the end, we couldn’t find a barge company that would agree to this, but we did get the recently reopened Union Depot to consent to host this magnificent conflagration on its grounds. ➤SD ↪ SEE ALSO: [ART\(ISTS\) ON THE VERGE](#), [ARTWORK](#), [GATEKEEPER](#), [INNOVATIVE](#), [MISSION](#), [PRODUCTION](#), [UNION DEPOT](#), [VALUES](#)

Artist Council First known as the Program Council, the Artist Council was a rotating cohort of artists of color who worked with Northern Lights.mn staff to identify and remove barriers to participation for BIPOC artists in Northern Spark.

The group convened in 2016 in preparation for NS 2017 along the Green Line. The Council was tasked with revising, promoting,

and jurying an open call for artists with “cultural connections to one or more of the cultural communities of Little Africa, Little Mekong, West Bank/Cedar–Riverside”—all neighborhoods along the transit corridor between Minneapolis and St. Paul that would be sites for NS 2017.

Twelve artists were in this inaugural group, with multidisciplinary, multiskilled identities of poet, storyteller, filmmaker, printmaker, writer, DJ, actress, curator, entrepreneur, environmentalist, painter, and more. Each brought their own cultural connections to festival neighborhoods for which they would be programming. Some had worked together before, but not all. Along with being artists, they had strong social engagement practices in common with each other; each had deeply rooted networks and saw community organizing as central to their work.

This group coalesced because we were fortunate to hire Teeko Yang as the first Artist Council coordinator. Teeko is a skilled and connected organizer who had already been working with artists on University Avenue for a few years. Her knowledge was indispensable in recruiting and coordinating twelve of the busiest artist organizers in town and then managing a ten-month collaborative process.

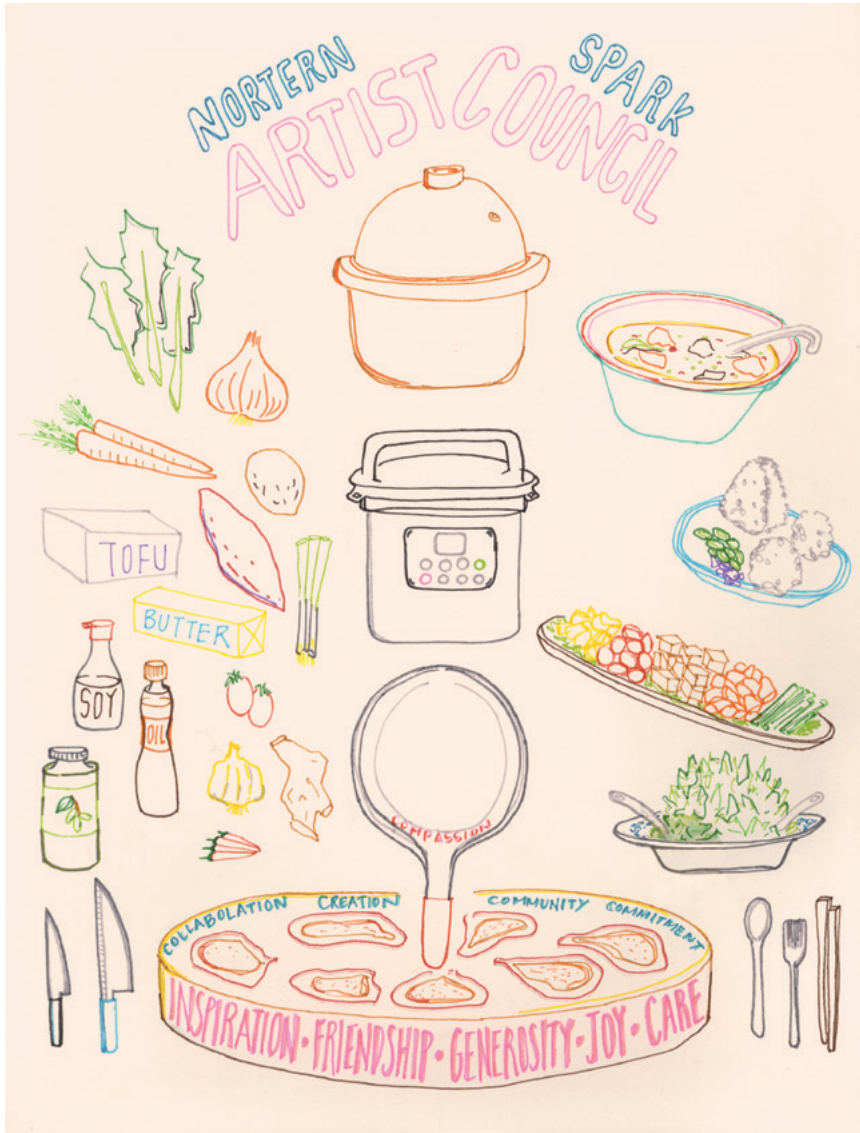
After that time, and after the long night of Northern Spark, jumping on and off the train, spanning the cities, we knew we were just at the beginning of this new-to-us way of working. The artists told us as much: the real test of your commitment to community engagement and sharing power is what you do next.

What we did next was make the Council permanent in our organization, with its own budget line. Teeko’s part-time, grant-funded staff position became permanent and full time, although with additional non-Council responsibilities. Many original Council members returned to constitute the next group, and the next, onward through five iterations from 2016 until 2022.

It is not enough to say that the intelligent generosity of this group of artists changed our organizational identity and understanding of ourselves. But that is true. Many groups like this are merely advisory for established organizations or institutions; they make suggestions and/or connections that may or may not be implemented. At NL, this effort focused on being willing to receive criticism and to respond by changing as much about our way of working as we practically could—not once, but as often as needed. After several cohorts, I believe we finally reached a mutual understanding that the Council worked *with* NL, rather than *for* NL. Together.

We could have written an entire book about bringing a council of artist collaborators into the creation of a complex, public festival. Instead, here is a summary of key lessons. Many of these will be

basic knowledge for people doing reciprocal community work. We acknowledge being late to the learning, but we still wanted to share how we profoundly changed our approach to collaborative work.



Drawing by Aki Shibata. To commemorate a meal cooked and consumed by members of the Artist Council, 2023

1. Don't make all the major decisions before you invite advisors to the table. A significant lesson from the first Council was that we made too many core decisions about the festival (theme, location, partners) before we included them in the process. By the time they sat around a big conference table to edit and promote a pre-written open call, there was less agency left than we initially understood. It was a big deal for us to open up our curatorial

process; to them it was an obvious and overdue requirement. With grace, that first group stayed with the process, but the feedback at our debrief was clear: they would not necessarily have chosen that theme, or perhaps that geography, if they had been invited to contribute and participate earlier. The opportunity to truly work together was curtailed by the limitations we placed, naively, on their agency.

2. Be clear about what you are inviting people to do and what their responsibilities are. Even with the resounding clarity of the call to engage the Council earlier, it took us two years to remedy that. The second Council was invited to work in an eighteen-month timeline to plan for NS 2019. At the outset that seemed like enough time to develop a theme, work with site-based partners, design an open call, and get artists excited to apply.

When we expanded the timeline, we created a different problem. In wanting to work both with individual artists via the Council and also organizational partners who would serve as festival site hosts, we set up a planning process with essentially two planning groups that never met together. The planning ran on two different tracks that we hoped, clumsily, would somehow entwine. By not involving the Council in our selection of site partners, we also prevented the artists from exercising a say in where the festival took place—something many of them were excited to help determine. This caused friction between Council members and NL staff, and the departure of one member from the group. With even more patience, the others stayed and we jurated a three-site festival under the collectively composed theme “We Are Here: Resilience, Renewal & Regeneration.” After that year, we clarified that NL should work with the Council to determine the key site partners on a timeline that would allow for those relationships to be built or reignited.

3. Representation. The Artist Council was not representative advocacy. The members expressly rejected the idea that they “represented” their communities—or anyone other than themselves. We included the language of “represent” in an early document describing the Council’s work, which, fortunately, we edited as a group. This was one of the first and clearest changes, and one of the tenets of antiracism work: historically marginalized peoples are not monolithic.

4. Develop tools to address conflict and use them. Collaborative work can be intensely difficult, especially when it involves territories of race and power and resource allocation. At first we had no actual strategies for resolving conflict either between

group members, or between group members and NL staff. When conflicts arose, they were not appropriately tended, resulting in damaged relationships and harm. Eventually we established a committee to help gather conflict resolution tools and agreements for the group. When working collaboratively, grow these skills as a key part of the work. Establish a group agreement on conflict resolution at the beginning of any collaborative process.

5. Complexify consensus. When is 100% agreement necessary? Is it? Valerie Oliveira was hired by the 2020 Council as Artist Council coordinator after a series of NL staffing changes. We thank Val for so much wisdom on the complexities of the collaborative process, particularly among creative people. One of the key ideas Val introduced was this question about consensus. This thinking allowed us to break from the notion that an equitable process meant everyone had to weigh in on every decision, large or small, a near-impossibility with a group of six, let alone twelve people. When the group dynamics had settled into healthy trust for each other (including NL staff), then smaller committees could be established to build proposals that could then be adopted by the larger group. This strategy allowed us to give senior members more leadership responsibility—an idea originally formulated in our coauthored *Relationships & Reciprocity* framework.

6. Honor and work within the capacity of the group. The Covid-19 pandemic interrupted the 2020 Council and was an underlying context for the rest of the work we did together until our sunset. Like everyone who could, we moved our meetings to Zoom, and for a glorious minute scheduling became blissfully simple (the only upside of artist gigs being canceled when lockdown started). As time went on, people showed up in Zoom squares with increasingly exhausted faces. We had important work to do, but rather than push at the “normal” strenuous pace, we scaled back where we could. We made meetings shorter. We created an optional open period of thirty minutes prior to each meeting for folks to socialize, then we started on time and got to business. We set the tone of honoring whatever contribution members could make, with the group agreement that if you missed the discussion and didn’t do the homework to catch up, you couldn’t re-legislate a decision.

A criticism we received from the first Council was that, overall, NL staff centered the needs of the festival rather than asking what Council members or site partners needed to be successful in our common endeavor. I’m proud that by the time we decided to sunset, we had arrived at a very good working process that felt truly collaborative. It was heartbreaking to let go. Which brings me to the final lesson.

7. Always work with artists. In everything you do. It makes things harder and better and more beautiful. >SP ↔ SEE ALSO: AGENCY, COLLABORATION, CONFLICT, DECOLONIZE, EQUITY, HARM, JOY, GATEKEEPER, GENEROSITY, GREEN LINE, NORTHERN SPARK, POWER, PRIVILEGE, RECIPROCITY

Artist Council Members, 2016–2022

Bayou Bay
Ricardo Beard
Alex Buffalohead
Courtney Cochran
Adan Dirie
Sara Endalew
Graci Horne
Filsan Ibrahim
Hawona Sullivan Janzen
May Lee-Yang

Pa Na Lor
Heather C. Lou
Khadijah Zahra Muse
Mary Anne Quiroz
SEE MORE PERSPECTIVE
Sagira Shahid
Aki Shibata
Dameun Strange
Brittany Wright
Ahmed Yusuf

artwork Northern Lights.mn presented a range of artworks from dance-based performances to puppets to location-based multiplayer games to installations to fiber works to bioluminescence to storytelling to photography, including “new media.”

This nondisciplinarity wasn’t always easy to convey, perhaps especially to funders, but it allowed us to support and offer to the public a wide range of exciting projects in public spaces. >SD ↔ SEE ALSO: ARTIST, ARTIST-CENTRIC, COMMUNICATIONS, NEW MEDIA

audience I was first introduced to Northern Lights.mn through the Northern Spark festival project *Mississippi Megalops*, the brainchild of Works Progress Studio. The event, which transformed the Jonathan Padelford Riverboat into a cabaret of sorts, was exactly the kind of opportunity I was looking for to broaden the audience for my work on the Mississippi River.

My job at Mississippi Park Connection (MPC) was to raise the relevance and visibility of our community’s little-known national park, the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. I wanted to expand beyond the typical park visitor. At the time, we offered education programs only for children, and I didn’t know how we could connect with a broader community until NL opened a funhouse door to a room full of other river lovers who created art that people cherished. Over the years, these artists helped reveal the magic and mystery of the river in new ways—from projection to theater performance.

Why do we need an audience? We need to create connection and affinity before we can create a constituency of stewards of the river. We need river stewards because the health of the river and the health of the people who live here are intertwined. By

- E stands at service counter.
A enters inquisitively.
- A (looking around) What is this . . . supposed to be . . . exactly?
E Supposed to be?
- A Exactly.
E Whatever you want it to be.
- A Oh, boy. We're gonna go down that road? Really?
E We'll go down whichever road you choose.
- A So I make the choices.
E Precisely.
- A Is this like some kind of twelve-step program or something?
E Not at all.
- A Because I've been down that road, and it didn't really work for me.
E Why do you think it didn't work?
- A I didn't trust the process. It didn't resonate.
E Trust is crucial.
- A I'm with you on that.
E Maybe try a different path?
- A Yeah.
E Okay.
- A I guess so.
E The journey begins.
- A So, is this really a travel agency?
E Philosophically?
- A No, like reality-ly. Can you book a flight to Cancún, for example?
E We're a philosophical travel agency.
- A What does that even mean?
E It means we help you figure out where it is you really want to go.
- A Philosophically.
E Existentially.

engaging with a large, diverse audience in our community, we raised the relevancy of our organization and the national park.

NL and MPC partnered on several programs and art installations that created “you had to be there” moments and gave artists new platforms and spaces in which to work. More important, these programs centered on the river and reminded all of us of our symbiotic relationship with the Mississippi. >KN ↪ SEE ALSO: CLIMATE CHAOS, CONNECTIONS, CULTURE, ILLUMINATE THE LOCK, INTERCONNECTION, PARTNERSHIP, PEOPLE RISING, RIVER, WATER

aurora borealis If the UnConvention (2008) became a template for many future Northern Lights.mn platforms, *aurora borealis* was an early object lesson in unlearning the meaning of “failure.”

In 2009, NL's first commissioned art project was for sound artist Stephen Vitiello with cinematographer Matt Flowers to create a composition based on Very Low Frequency recordings of the aurora borealis (northern lights). They flew to Fort McMurray in Alberta, Canada, in October, and this is an excerpt from Vitiello's report from the field: “no NL to be seen. . . . I can certainly make something but it's more of a ‘waiting for the lights’ piece.”

In the end, the only presentation of the project was a couple of blog entries. Initially disappointed, we soon came to recognize this as not failure but a fundamental aspect of commissioning art. Not unlike a science experiment, a result different from what is hypothesized is still valuable if the process is well executed. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: BEGINNINGS, COMMISSION, EXPERIMENT/AL, FAILURE, PLATFORM, PROCESS, UNCONVENTION

B-Lectric In January 2017 Northern Lights.mn participated in an early version of the Great Northern festival to celebrate winter in Minnesota. We presented a selection of climate-focused artist projects at an outdoor event called B-Lectric, organized in partnership with the restaurant Barquette in Uptown Minneapolis. A continuation of our winter explorations and our focus on Climate Chaos, B-Lectric included custom-built ice walls that served as projection surfaces for artists' video projects. >AM ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTATHLON, CLIMATE CHAOS, EXPERIMENT/AL, ILLUMINATE SOUTH LOOP, PARTNERSHIP, PROJECTION, WINTER

beginnings One version of the Northern Lights.mn genesis story opens with the relationship between Steve Dietz and Neal Cuthbert. We became collaborators and friends while building a social and market networking website for artists in Minnesota, mnartists.org, which supported and connected thousands of artists prior to Facebook. Dietz was at the Walker Art Center and

I was at the McKnight Foundation. Dietz left the Walker and started an international art and technology festival in California. This annoyed me because I thought he should do this work in Minnesota. I asked Dietz once, twice, maybe three times to consider creating an arts organization in Minnesota. He finally relented, and NL began to develop in concept and soon in actuality. Dietz might tell this story differently (SEE: SUNRISE). >NC ↪ SEE ALSO: FUNDERS, PRIVILEGE

belonging If you feel like you don't belong anywhere, you'll belong here. You need not worry about fitting in; misfits, outcasts, and nonconformists are all welcome. You'll be met with a variety of art experiences that will encourage your participation (or at least your rumination). Joiner or wallflower, don't fret about doing the wrong thing as you enjoy Northern Spark. Everybody else is also making it up as they go. >RM ↪ SEE ALSO: COMMUNITY, CRITIQUE, DURATION, NORTHERN SPARK, TOGETHER

bicycle We created a bike-powered festival! The years of peak bike at Northern Spark brought a certain electricity to the festival. Thousands of art-exploring cyclists riding on bicycles in the empty streets, their two-wheeled rides in the sticky summer air moving them between sites with style and good spirits.

Minneapolis will lend you racks for your event (St. Paul will not)—but not enough! I have never before or since seen such giant piles of bicycles locked to one another on fences, railings, trash cans, tree trunks, architectural details—any and all infrastructure that will hold a U-Lock.

Left: Bicycles at NS 2016.
Right: NS 2011.
Photos: Dusty Haskovec.



As a producer of the festival, I discovered my bike provided nimble, quick, and pleasurable transport between sites, the physical labor keeping my momentum spinning forward all night and the breeze of the ride cooling me off. As an artist, I built an entire mythology around delivering mail by bicycle: a *Nighttime Post* that happens only after dark. Messages passed gradually through the night—from the heart and mind to the mouth, the ear, the

typewriter, the bicycle, and finally the hands of the match-made recipient. As a visitor (only once!), I experienced the camaraderie and collective effervescence of people in tandem motion not found when driving cars. A sense of awe lingered in our bodies after the dismount and amid the art. >EL ↪ SEE ALSO: CITY, COLLECTIVE EFFERVESCENCE, CONNECTIONS, NIMBLE, NORTHERN SPARK, TOGETHER, TRANSPORTATION, WONDER

board, sunrise The first Northern Lights.mn board was assembled with a couple of goals in mind: it was to be a group of smart people who had excellent networks, who believed and wanted to support the unique vision the organization was promulgating, and who knew enough about nonprofits to understand what being a board member meant. This group included an architect, a curator, an art college VP, an art collector, a person with a network of private donors, a foundation person, and the executive director, Steve Dietz. They functioned fairly well in supporting NL as it pursued and produced a series of innovative, public-facing new media projects. In other words, they met the needs of the organization's activities. Then Northern Spark was born. >NC ↪ SEE ALSO: BEGINNINGS; BOARD, SUNSET; SUNRISE

board, sunset A board is the entity that guides the direction of a nonprofit organization, ensures the rules are followed, undertakes tasks in accordance with the bylaws, and so on. Any guide to nonprofits would tell you the same. What distinguished the Northern Lights.mn board was its alchemy of diverse thinkers. On our sunset board we counted many kinds of makers and advocates—a poet, a grant writer, a visual artist, an architect, an entrepreneur, a construction manager, a lawyer, an environmental science professor, an accountant, a theater director, a nonprofit manager, a fundraiser. We are parents, partners, and volunteers. We each held (and hold) more than one of these identities (and more), and we each tried to bring our whole and best selves to this board.

During the past couple of years we worked hard to navigate and meet the challenges of the moment, taking our cues from the voices on the Artist Council and centering social justice and community partnership. Through public art, we sought to respond to the needs of our community after George Floyd's murder and the subsequent uprising, as well as during the Covid-19 pandemic, all despite decreased funding for the arts.

We on the sunset board have had to call on all our collective resources to make what is both a heartbreaking and practical decision to close down. This publication is our final project. We offer it in a spirit of gratitude for all the extraordinary artists NL

has been privileged to support, and we hope that this book will make our stories public for the benefit of others, now and into the future. >SVN ↪ SEE ALSO: BOARD, SUNRISE; SUNSET; VALUES

Northern Lights.mn Board Members, 2009–2024

Elizabeth Armstrong	Paul Johnson	Roopali Phadke
Jen Brennan	Michelle Klein	Anh-Thu Pham
Neal Cuthbert	Vince Leo	Abby Rakun
Steve Dietz	Sarah Lutman	Jeffrey Scherer
Colleen Doran	Jennifer Newsom	Gary Smaby
Jeff Evans	Jennifer Pennington	Sara K. Van Norman
Rob Hunter, AIA	Sarah Peters	

budget 1. In the simplest sense, a budget is an estimate of the financial resources required for an organization to carry out its work for a period of time, usually one year. The expense budget reflects the annual plan for that work, including program activities and core management of the organization. The budget includes the revenue side as well, which requires making assumptions, estimates, and sometimes hopes for the resources that will be received during the year. Tension is embedded in the budget process, with pulls from the demands of expenses to deliver the programs and maintain the organization, and a realistic assessment of feasible revenue. A surplus creates a reserve fund to use when needed, and a deficit reduces any reserves that have been accumulated. Budgets can't be written in stone and need to adapt to the volatility and uncertainty of the times. Budgets need to breathe, flex, and bend as the external and internal factors that influence the organization change. >KB

2. Tension! Yes, there was tension! Sometimes tension seemed programmed into the equations of the spreadsheet cells. Budget numbers are more than numerals; they represent people's livelihoods and denote support for artists in the way of direct fees and production and materials costs. They also tell a story about an organization's support, and part of our tension was the not knowing. We had very few multiyear sources of secure funding, and a budget toward the end of a fiscal year might have to be significantly rejiggered depending on fundraising success at the beginning of the year.

Budgets are subject to secrecy. This has begun to break open during the past couple of years, as equity-minded calls for change (such as listing salary ranges on job descriptions) make our sector's financial picture less opaque. In a gesture toward transparency, here are figures from NL's financial history that show highs and lows we were dealing with.

OUR LARGEST BUDGET WAS FISCAL YEAR 2017:

INCOME

Grants, including carryover from previous FY	\$655,211
Individual donations	\$22,188
Contracted services	\$172,094
Earned income	\$69,279
TOTAL	\$918,772

EXPENSE

Personnel (for 3 full time, 1 part time employees)	\$225,572
Artist fees	\$287,301
Consultants and professional services	\$122,413
Program expenses	\$132,839
Operating	\$7,102
Marketing and design	\$50,627
TOTAL	\$825,854

OUR SMALLEST BUDGET WAS FISCAL YEAR 2023:

INCOME

Grants, including carryover from previous FY	\$207,682
Individual donations	\$19,338
Contracted services	\$5,000
Earned income	\$1,895
TOTAL	\$233,915

EXPENSE

Personnel (for 3 part time employees)	\$79,697
Artist fees	\$22,600
Consultants and professional services	\$32,093
Program expenses	\$12,711
Operating	\$4,395
Marketing and design	\$10,860
TOTAL	\$162,356

For either year, this is a lot more and a lot less than other organizations have. We were lucky to be mentored by the best non-profit financial guide (SEE: BUDGET, #1) and honored to steward these dollars into art and connection. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTISTS 2017 AND 2023 (PAGES 214–15, 308), COMMUNICATIONS, COSTS, CREW, DESIGN, DOCUMENTATION, DONORS, ECOSYSTEM, FREE, FUNDERS, FUNDRAISING, GRATITUDE, HOSPITALITY, MERCH, OFFICE, POSSIBILITY, PRODUCTION, STAFFING, SPONSORSHIP, SUNSET, TELETHON, VALUES

bureaucracy 1. Some of the most rewarding professional work I ever accomplished at the National Park Service (NPS) was partnering with Northern Lights.mn. The public art I worked on with NL was unlike anything else the NPS did. I saw my role to be “bureaucracy translator”: I would help NL shape projects that would work for the NPS in our spaces.

For example, I helped the National Park Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers understand that giant projections of Spirit Island on the lock wall at Upper St. Anthony Falls or filling the lock chamber with fog and lights was art.

This was fun, but it was also valuable and satisfying work. In my job I was responsible for helping people enjoy the Mississippi River. Through NL and art I was able to let people enjoy it in an entirely nontraditional way. Projects like Illuminate the Lock brought thousands of people to the river who may never have otherwise visited. I felt like I had truly arrived in the art world when Sarah Peters once called me subversive and meant it as a compliment! >DD

2. I’m an artist-turned-producer. I carry a decades-old clipboard, an accessory I have used regularly since childhood. I swear I never intended to be a bureaucrat, though my clipboard might indicate otherwise.

Bureaucrats are official, have strict and early office hours, sit behind piles of paper with rubber stamps that are judiciously used, and are somewhere at the top of a chain of command that is accessible to ordinary permit-pursuers! I sit atop my bicycle seat zig-zagging through open air public spaces after dark, piecing together maps and lists of artists’ needs.

The bureaucracies of various permit-granting authorities (parks, cities, private property owners) are not set up for artists or our unconventional requests. There is no checky-box for structures that are neither a “stage” nor a “wedding tent” nor “playground equipment.” I learned quickly to say little on paper (while completing forms with honest intent) and to use the phone frequently. Sometimes showing up in person got the deal done faster and with more understanding. Bureaucrats don’t actually check boxes in spoken conversation.

The flip side is that when you’re motivating hundreds of artists toward producing successful projects, being good neighbors, sharing literal power (electricity!), ensuring safety and weather preparedness, and being able to run all night long while welcoming large crowds, you start to learn the neat and tidy efficiencies of setting up (bureaucratic) systems to collect and evaluate information and to approve (or request edits to) artists’ production plans. At NL, approval of the production plan prompted the second payment of an artist’s stipend! How’s that for a rewarding system!

One notable difference: in the “real” bureaucracy the arts org PAYS upon approval. In our “play” bureaucracy, artists GET PAID upon approval. >EL ↪ SEE ALSO: AUDIENCE, CITY, ILLUMINATE THE LOCK, PARTNERSHIP, PERMIT, POWER, PROCESS, PRODUCTION, SITE VISIT

burnout “In summary, the festival is run and staffed by very talented and dedicated people, but the current structure does not lend itself to sustainable operations due to high levels of staff burnout, resulting in turnover and loss of institutional knowledge.” † ↪ SEE ALSO: ECOSYSTEM, FUNDRAISING, GIG ECONOMY, NORTHERN SPARK, STAFFING, SUNSET, SUSTAINABLE

capital Access and willingness to activate intersecting types of capital are required by an organization, and often its members, for arts work in the public sphere.

SOCIAL CAPITAL Who is in an organization’s network? What might those people be persuaded to lend to the organization in terms of labor, money, influence, or further connection? Who is in the personal networks of staff members? Are the staff willing to expend their personal connections to benefit the organization if it doesn’t have equivalent ties? When do personal social connections become organizational connections? Are they inseparable? Do these connections happen to be independent artists without salaried work? Do you need to compensate them for their time and advice? Or are they a person of means, and is the staff or board of the organization willing to ask them for money (*financial capital*) to support your public arts work?

CULTURAL CAPITAL Are you working with people who have different cultural identities, practices, and habits from you or your organization or each other? Are you aware of these? If you don’t know, whom can you ask (*social capital*)? Are you already in a reciprocal relationship with them? If not, have you considered offering them financial compensation (*financial capital*)?

FINANCIAL CAPITAL The actual cash required to pay for the actual costs of the project. How will you get it? Grants? Donations? Earned income? Sponsorship? Could any of the required resources be used for free (in-kind) or for trade? Enter *social capital* and around we go. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: BUDGET, COSTS, FUNDRAISING, POWER, PUBLIC SPHERE, RECIPROCITY, RELATIONAL, SPONSORSHIP

city From dusk to dawn the city surprises you: friendly crowds, glowing groups of cyclists, an unexpected path through the urban landscape, the magic of sunrise after a night of amazing art and experiences.

All too often the city feels fixed, a stolid entity that we as individuals have little opportunity to affect. For Northern Spark 2014, we asked dozens of artists to project onto Minneapolis—onto its architecture and its infrastructure—their idea of what the city could be, might aspire to be, never should become. These projections were literal or imaginative and took many forms, from video to dance to music to interactive events.

The public participated in this reimagining of the city, whether by performing as a *Folkalopolis* singer, sending a missive by bicycle through the *Nighttime Post*, attempting to solve the great Northern Spark murder mystery, visualizing the Minnesota Orchestra play in a new light (or conducting your own *Gossip Orchestra*), adjudicating a friendly *Write Fight*, rebalancing life on a seesaw, or playing *Electronic Hopscotch* at 2 in the morning.

This invitation was specific to NS 2014's theme of Projecting the City, but it also was NL's omnipresent thesis: *This is your city. What will you make of it? This is your community. How will you participate in it? This will become our future. How will you shape it? What will you discover at Northern Spark that encourages you not only to see the city in a new light but to act on it, every day?* >NL ↪ SEE ALSO: AGENCY, ALL NIGHT, AUDIENCE, CIVIC CO-PRODUCTION, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, MAGICAL, NORTHERN SPARK, POSSIBILITY, PROJECTION, THEME

civic co-production Northern Lights.mn worked primarily in urban contexts, which often meant working with city government apparatus as well as other civic organizations, such as a convention center or business group or civic foundation. The questions that arose usually were about bureaucratic authorization rather than shared programming vision. Could we hang a rope bridge under that overpass? Was it really a problem to have a trumpet fanfare at 2 am? Could we burn a house down? Could we leave our tents up overnight in the park?

This was all well and good, as part of our mission was precisely to mediate the strictures of bureaucracy in support of an artist's vision. But sometimes the collaboration was different. Sometimes an organization or an individual in the civic system believed in the value of "creative placemaking"—or at least wanted to experiment with this concept in their city. They wanted the innovative public sphere they had seen NL create.

We collaborated not only in Minneapolis and St. Paul but also in Bloomington and Rochester and Grand Rapids, Minnesota, Jamestown, North Dakota, and Indianapolis, usually with local

intermediaries who had a similar vision for their city. Together we produced unique epic events (Creative City Challenge, Illuminate South Loop, *Aquanesia*, ArtSpark, IN Light IN), which, we hope, provided a playbook for other cities to use and modify and rip pages from in making their particular places vibrant and alive. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: AQUANESIA, BUREAUCRACY, CITY, COMMUNITY, CREATIVE CITY CHALLENGE, CREATIVE PLACEMAKING, ILLUMINATE SOUTH LOOP, IN LIGHT IN, JAMESTOWN ARTSPARK, PERMIT, PLACE, PLATFORM, PLAYBOOK, PRODUCTION, POWER, TRANSFORMATIVE, VISION

civic engagement There are at least a couple of reasons to present artwork in public spaces. One is to activate an audience who might not self-define as arts goers. This leads to another reason: to "activate" the public. If spectacle is (part of) the attraction, participation is the secret sauce. It lays the groundwork for a more fulsome and, ideally, reciprocal relationship.

Relationship with whom or what, you ask? For individual artists, the answer varied: it might be the plight of Syrian refugees or the idea of intellectual democracy as embodied in and by a library or reduced air quality in neighborhoods of color or . . . Artists presented by Northern Lights.mn brought a huge diversity of social and civic issues into their work.

For a lot of people, civic engagement means voting. For NL, civic engagement was more tenuous or indirect. We programmed specific themes such as climate chaos, but more often we wanted to open the audience to the possibility of imagining their own agency, first in and through the artwork, and more broadly by experiencing the transformation of familiar spaces.

Agency toward what? Ultimately, the question was about imagination: what could happen in cities, neighborhoods, and parking lots that mattered to you, and how and with whom could you engage, civically, to make it happen? >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: AGENCY, AUDIENCE, CITY, CLIMATE CHAOS, LIBRARY, PARTICIPATORY, PEOPLE RISING, POSSIBILITY, RECIPROCITY, SPECTACLE, TRANSFORMATIVE, TRUISM

Climate Chaos "Climate change is so much more than the science and even so much more than the critical actions that must be taken to mitigate the worst-case scenarios of rising temperatures. Climate change is also a justice issue. It is about the way resource use in the global north affects the global south, which relates directly to complex issues of power and privilege. Through its causes and effects, climate change fundamentally challenges us to think about and act upon what it means to be human."

—NORTHERN SPARK 2016 STEERING COMMITTEE

In 2016 and 2017 Northern Lights.mn shifted gears by selecting a two-year theme for Northern Spark that was deep in the hearts of staff and our artist community: Climate Chaos | People Rising. This marked a pivotal step in our transition away from centering spectacle and toward centering community. >AM ↪ SEE ALSO: ANTHROPOCENE AWARENESS ASSOCIATION (AAA), AQUANESIA, COMMUNITY, CULTURE, GREEN LINE, NORTHERN SPARK, PEOPLE RISING, POWER, THEME

coevolution The influence of closely associated species on each other in their evolution.

What if art was not made for humans?

What if art was not made by humans?

What if art was found—an expression of beauty, excess, or accident made by all and available for all? We'd approach flowers and tree beds as flourishing museums, nests as magnificent architecture, howls as stirring sonatas. We'd be assistants and docents for planetary art, which is mountain and river and ocean life. Art would be life itself. We humans would help to allow it to flourish and astound us.

A classic example of coevolution is a flower and its pollinator. These coevolved relationships are not predetermined but arise as the expression of dynamic, emergent systems in response to environmental forces, competition, cooperation, and chance. When I try to map coevolution onto a social ecosystem, these dynamic emergent systems are visible as human-constructed boundaries around what a culture imagines is included in the systems we are examining—as well as what is left out. Zoom out, and I see that culture is also a human-constructed boundary.

Arts workers—makers, performers, fabricators, presenters, commissioners, grantors, producers, packers, shippers, promoters, and of course publics—perform within larger ecosystems that we often disregard or think we have no control over. These systems are not static. We *are* coevolving together within numerous bounded and interwoven systems: art worlds, economics, education, health-care, and well-being in general, many of which value scarcity.

Much contemporary art is consumed (with eyes, ears, and sometimes mouths), observed, and admired. Some art disrupts, challenges, and disturbs how we perceive systems of being-in-the-world. Much happens within bounded spaces that reflect complex systemic agreements (where art can be found, and under what economic circumstances).

What if we undid the current maker/receiver dichotomy?

What if there were no word for “audience”?

We actually have the imaginative and energetic capacity to change both the actors and their boundaries in these systems. As

arts workers, we *could* see ourselves as existing in a petri dish in the center of a Venn diagram of myriad systems, and we *can* design new terms, new economies of exchange, new definitions—to see what unfolds. This can happen at a structural level (the art context) or as a performative model (the artwork).

What if the word “art” did not exist?

Going forward, where would the things-not-known-as-art happen? Who would make them? How would they be found? What relationships might coevolve?

What if art were a scent in the air? A song wafting out of the shower on steam? Or unnameable and indistinguishable, omnipresent and ephemeral sensations, like a shimmer of a bird wing on the sky, a fleeting hand gesture?

Would there be a public as we know it? What if *every* body engaged in art were called a “participant”? What if the primary verb to describe public engagement were “tinker” or “spiral” or “sing”?

As “arts actors” in this network of networks, we negotiate between the systemic and our personal stakes, beliefs, and passions. My prompt is to keep lively that bounce between the systemic and personal, in order to question the assumed, contemporary explanation of art’s purpose and relationships in this complex world. >MZ ↪ SEE ALSO: AUDIENCE, ECOSYSTEM, PUBLIC SPHERE, RECIPROCITY, RELATIONAL

collaboration Among persons collaboration is assumed, but also with objects, plants, earth, elements, sound, particles, organs, air, river, etc., a persistent commitment to the availability of deep awarenesses to the present self / an opening palm / a clear relationship with accountability and the fervent resourcing to hold, hear, deeply receive. Generosity without the abandonment of self. The arrivals in spaces of all the middles. Compassion and a tolerance for versions of agreement that consistently need clarification in process. Versatility. A messy love. >VO ↪ SEE ALSO: COEVOLUTION, CONFLICT, GENEROSITY, PARTNERSHIP, PROCESS, RECIPROCITY, VALUES

collective effervescence *Saint Paul Public Library invites all people to connect, discover, learn, and grow while feeling seen, safe, and welcome, and able to experience hope, joy, and creativity.* Northern Spark’s return to Rondo Community Library in the summer of 2022 after the pandemic offered opportunities for visitors and staff to experience our city, our neighborhood, and our library in ways that led to collective effervescence, something that has been sorely lacking in our shared experience of public space. >RR ↪ SEE ALSO: COMMUNITY, JOY, NEIGHBORHOOD, PUBLIC SPHERE, TOGETHER

The “what if?” form of speculation is integral to worldbuilding. Investing in Futures, a creative worldbuilding framework developed by More&More Unlimited (Sarah Rothberg and Marina Zurkow) draws from WHAT IF? thinking.

commission Northern Lights.mn partnered with many organizations that presented art projects at Northern Spark and at other events, independently of NL. Of the projects we presented, across all our platforms, many were commissions (sometimes with substantial budgets) that had not previously been exhibited or publicly available. One of our goals was to support and enable the best and most ambitious ideas of artists that other venues might not take on—and to gather an audience for that work. >SD

↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST-CENTRIC, ARTWORK, AUDIENCE, EXPERIMENT/AL, PARTNERS, PLATFORM, PROJECTS, VISION

communications Multiple platforms—direct marketing, websites, blog posts, newsletters, Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, TikTok, Telegram, the next social media phenomenon—make communicating complicated enough, but how did we message the multiple platforms of Northern Lights.mn and Northern Spark? What was our elevator pitch?

The first hurdle was distinguishing between Northern Lights.mn the organization and Northern Spark the event. Why not just name it all Northern Spark? Why even do anything besides Northern Spark, our program most familiar to the public? This vexing question was asked and discussed for years.

Multidisciplinarity and multivocality were critical to our vision, making simple messaging difficult. NS was a one-night event for hundreds of artists and thousands of participants. Art(ists) On the Verge was one year, intensively, with five artists. And “in between” were other platforms and projects like Creative City Challenge or Illuminate the Lock, which grew directly from our collaborations during NS but were also distinctly different opportunities for artists.

Once someone had been to NS or an AOV exhibition or another event, they usually “got it,” but until then it could be difficult to communicate, efficiently, NL. We weren’t just a presenter. We weren’t just a festival. We weren’t just a commissioner. We weren’t medium-specific. We weren’t place-specific. If we were truly committed to “imagining new interactions between audience, artwork, and place and exploring expanded possibilities for civic engagement,” it was mission-critical to remain open to other possibilities.

Am I communicating clearly? >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: ART(ISTS) ON THE VERGE, ARTWORK, AUDIENCE, COMPLICATED, DESIGN, MISSION, NORTHERN SPARK, PLACE, PLATFORM, POSSIBILITY

community Hannah Arendt once eloquently stated, “For us, appearing in public signifies being seen and heard by others, and whatever lacks this appearance comes and passes away like a dream.”

In 2018, a team of five artists (Zoe Cinel, Preston Drum, Aki Shibata, Peng Wu, Shun Jie Yong) embarked on creating a public art installation in the heart of downtown Minneapolis, nestled within The Commons, shadowed by the looming U.S. Bank Stadium. The design of the project was multifaceted: a lush garden, a house-shaped wall adorned with the portraits of immigrants and refugees, inviting picnic tables, and a stage primed for performance and gatherings. Over the course of that summer, as part of the Creative City Challenge, we hosted more than fifteen events on that stage. Each gathering, each shared experience, became a fleeting opportunity for us to be seen and heard. The laughter and dialogues that our efforts sparked transformed The Commons into something beautifully unreal.

Yet these intense, vibrant moments seemed to pass away like a dream.

After the project’s conclusion, I hadn’t returned to the site for a few years. But once, as I was driving nearby, something tugged at my memory. I stopped following my GPS and let my memory lead me instead. I had been away from my home in Minnesota for two years because I couldn’t get a visa during the Covid pandemic. On a whim, I wanted to see that place again, remembering all the fun we had. I found The Commons, slowed down, but didn’t stop the car. Everything looked the same, like time hadn’t touched it, but it was now as clean and empty as any “good” American city park, nothing like the loud, messy, happy chaos of our events. As if we had never been there. It made me wonder: can public art really make a lasting change?

The temporary art installation was like summer rain; it left little trace on the hot concrete, yet it nourished the weeds growing in the cracks. I met this same team of collaborators just days ago at a restaurant as we planned the budget for our upcoming project. Five years have passed since *Carry On Homes*, and we are still working together, united by our shared mission to create public spaces for immigrant communities and various marginalized voices. I feel that we are like the weeds in the concrete cracks—not intended by the designed system, but very much alive and real. Our roots are expanding these cracks, creating more room for others like us. Unwanted, uninvited, we simply arrived—and we choose to stay. >PW ↪ SEE ALSO: ARCHIVE, BELONGING, CITY, COLLABORATION, CREATIVE CITY CHALLENGE, DOCUMENTATION, PLACE, TEMPORARY, TOGETHER

complicated Our work at Northern Lights.mn was complex. Part of this was due to the nature of working in public spaces, where we did not have ownership or authority, and at sites that were often outdoors, with weather we could not control. In any

later. Seeing and experiencing the power of that platform to seed new ideas and relationships inspired hope for what these kinds of spaces can do—and the ripple effect that never ends. >LB ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST, ARTIST COUNCIL, AUDIENCE, BELONGING, CITY, COEVOLUTION, COLLABORATION, COMMUNITY, GENEROSITY, MAGICAL, MEMORY, NORTHERN SPARK, PLACE, PRODUCTION, RELATIONAL, STAFFING, TOGETHER, TRANSFORMATIVE, WANDER, WONDER

constellation A dynamic network of relationships that may include individuals, teams, collectives, communities, organizations, and institutions over varied distances and temporal contexts. While certain arrangements may be constant, their orientation to each other is in flux. Through our individual and collective imaginations, we draw connections, see patterns, and reconfigure the order, depending on our point of view.

Gravitational spheres of influence may alter trajectories or pull bodies into orbit. Over time new partners, artists, participants, and audiences may emerge, while others remain bright and steady.

Constellations reflect a choreography of moving parts and assist in navigation, allowing wanderers to find their way through the dark. And while stars may disappear, their light continues to shine long after they are extinguished. >CB ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST, AUDIENCE, COMMUNITY, ECOSYSTEM, INTERCONNECTION, NETWORK, PARTNERS, PLACE, TIME, WANDER

costs There is a common misperception that complex public artworks and festivals “just happen.” People, especially funders, wondered how a one-night event such as Northern Spark could be so expensive. Here is a list of common expenditures for Northern Lights.mn projects.

Artist fees • Contract staff (crew, electrician, technical director, producer, graphic designer, production assistants, volunteer coordinator, communications and PR, interns or apprentices) • Equipment rental (generators, projectors, scaffolding, walkie talkies, port-a-potties, hand wash stations, bike racks, production box trucks, sound + lighting, tents) • Expendables (hand-warmers, bug spray, sunscreen) • Honoraria (jurors) • Hospitality for volunteers, crew • Liability insurance • Marketing (e-newsletter subscription, social media, radio, and print ads) • Parking (for production vehicles) • Permits • Production materials (tape, tie-line, zip ties) • Professional fees (accountant, payroll, legal) • Rent (office, storage) • Salary and wages for staff • Services (waste disposal) • Signage >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: AMENITIES, ARTIST, BUDGET, FUNDRAISING, GIG ECONOMY, INFRASTRUCTURE, PERMIT, PRODUCTION, STAFFING

given project we looked to balance the needs, values, and desires of our own, the artist(s), our organizational partners, a civic entity (if involved), the potential audience, and the site. We worked within many inequitable systems where we had some influence (we tried) but often not much. We couldn’t always meet every goal; we often had to compromise or make a tradeoff. Did we succeed? It’s complicated. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST, AUDIENCE, CONFLICT, FAILURE, PARTNERSHIP, PLACE, PUBLIC SPHERE, RELATIONAL, VALUES, WEATHER

conflict In one sense, conflict is easy to understand (albeit simplistically): two or more contradictory views. At Northern Lights.mn, we did not shy away from supporting artists whose work represented strongly held views. Perhaps counterintuitively, my concern was more about consensus than conflict. If everyone agreed about something, that might be nice, but in general in the public sphere, consensus is a chimera. There are always going to be differences of opinion even when in heated agreement. The question for NL as a platform was how to present a project in a way that acknowledges the possibility and the likelihood of differences of opinion. In this light, conflict is as much a question of transparency and the ability to respond—even if slowly and over time—as it is about a strongly held point of view. We didn’t always succeed, but we always tried to create platforms and support projects that engaged others’ agency. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: AGENCY, AGONISM, BUREAUCRACY, COLLABORATION, COMPLICATED, DISCOURSE AND DISCORD, HARM, OPEN CALL, PARTNERSHIP, PLATFORM, POSSIBILITY, POWER, PUBLIC SPHERE

connections 1. Northern Lights.mn created conditions for connection: webs of people and ideas and places and memory emerged through NL platforms. We’ve heard many tales of love and friendship with origins at a night of Northern Spark. Countless artistic collaborations have spun off after artists met through NL, whether attending an artist production meeting or an AOV critique or serving on the Artist Council. Even fleeting interactions between friendly strangers linger. We are honored to be part of your stories. >AM

2. Working with Northern Lights.mn gave me insight into how much work, coordination, heart, and a little spontaneous magic go into bringing artists and communities together in big events. As I went on to support artists in other kinds of spaces, I never forgot what I learned from NL, especially Northern Spark. I felt more confident building events of my own. Plus, folks I met through Northern Spark became my own collaborators months and years

Creative City Challenge 1. A competition for Minnesota-resident artists and architects to create a temporary, destination artwork that functioned as a summer-long sociable and participatory platform. Originally a partnership between Northern Lights.mn and the City of Minneapolis's Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy (ACCE), Minneapolis Convention Center (MCC), and later Green Minneapolis, the goal was to activate downtown green spaces through artistic activity.

The project benefited NL in many ways: it expanded our connections within the City of Minneapolis, and it provided a larger budget for artists to scale-up their work and make a public installation of longer duration and durability than our other annual commissions. For many of the CCC artists, this advanced their careers and gave them opportunities. It also helped stabilize funding for Northern Spark, which featured the opening night for the winning CCC artwork as part of the festival each year. >SP



Creative City Challenge winners *Balancing Ground* (2015, left) and *Carry On Homes* (2018). Photos: NL and Christopher Sticha Photography.

2. Each partner of Creative City Challenge identified a set of goals. MCC wanted to activate an underutilized plaza with creative activities during the summer. ACCE wished to develop temporary public art programming that also fostered disciplinary and racial diversity in the local public art community and supported capacity building for emerging public artists. NL sought sustainable funding for a tentpole project for its annual Northern Spark festival as well as the opportunity to build close relationships within the city power structures.

After four years on the MCC Plaza, CCC moved to The Commons, a new 4.5-acre green space in front of the U.S. Bank Stadium that was managed by Green Minneapolis. With this new and higher profile location, NL and ACCE refined the program's goals and emphasized a showcase for local creative talent and public art as a strategic intervention into the corporate narratives that dominate the built environment around The Commons.

Creative City Challenge was closed in 2020 as part of the City of Minneapolis's budget cuts in response to the projected revenue losses of \$156 million because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The

program was targeted for cuts because the annual, one-time-use funding structure made it vulnerable to yearly scrutiny by elected officials. This budget instability made it difficult to plan and build program capacity, grow and attract partnerships, or further stabilize support. Program partners needed to continually advocate and educate elected officials for the base funding. Ultimately, elected officials and City leadership were not sufficiently convinced by the program's impacts and did not buy into the value of utilizing temporary public art programming as a platform for community activation, engagement, and capacity building for public artists. Community advocacy was necessary to build and grow elected support, and this advocacy was not available during the crisis that emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic. >GK ↪ SEE ALSO: BUREAUCRACY, CITY, CIVIC CO-PRODUCTION, COLLABORATION, COMMUNITY, NORTHERN SPARK, PARTNERSHIP, TEMPORARY

creative placemaking According to Americans for the Arts, creative placemaking is "the use of arts and culture by diverse partners to strategically shape the physical and social character of a place in order to spur economic development, promote enduring social change, and improve the physical environment." Okay, but what about creative problem making?

Creative placemaking sometimes felt like a slogan without nuance. Funders would promote it without fully providing the resources, or timelines, that were truly needed to accomplish their stated goals.

At its worst, creative placemaking was a failure to see the people and culture that already made a place what it was in favor of uncritical assumptions about what it might mean to "improve" the environment and who should engage in the process.

Northern Lights.mn had a complex relationship to these ideas. We were an organization that was frequently able to resource our projects within this realm, but it sometimes felt like the relationship to artists and to places was transactional: "Do this for us in this place." We tried to shift the playbook. We were most interested in working with artists' imaginations to creatively hook a place and its community into a conversation about how they might transform our understanding of that place, to see the city and each other in a new light. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: CITY, CIVIC CO-PRODUCTION, COMPLICATED, DECOLONIZE, FUNDERS, PLACE, TRUISM

crew We are so thankful for the time and talents of the people listed on the next two pages who worked NL events as our crew. >NL ↪ SEE ALSO: BURNOUT, COLLABORATION, GIG ECONOMY, GRATITUDE, INFRASTRUCTURE, NIMBLE, PRODUCTION, STAFFING

Northern Spark Crew, 2011–2023

Jeremy Anderson
Shelby Anderson
Tierra Anderson
Emily Ankeny
Clara Baker-Myhre
Paul Bernhardt
Aundrea Billings
Emily Bloudek
Tori Breen
Elbira Marysol Capatillo Cortez
Jacob Carrigan
Mackenzie Catton
Rafael Cervantes
Matthew Clark
Courtney Cochran
Hannah Priscilla Craig
Kathleen Crook
Xochi de la Luna
Alem Debebe
Meg Dolan
Megan Fae Dougherty
Dumont Doumbe
Jeremy Ellarby
Alexandra Eninsche
Paul Epton
Collette Fahey
Alexander Farino
William Farr
Moe Flaherty
Shayanna Flanigan
Lurelia Freeman
Isaac Gamoran
Madilynn Garcia
Rakel Garcia
Jordan Goebel
Adrienne Gorney
Richard Graham
Joanna Griffith
Zoe Haas-Biel
Karin Haase
Lacy Habdas
scottie hall
Jake Hanson
Sequoia Hauck
Bob Helland
Daniel Hnilicka
Eric Hofstad
Libby Holden
Cassandra Holmes
Talon Howdahl
Zeb Huits
Nicholas Jensen
Joel Kado
Michael Karadsheh

Alison Kennedy
Kristin (Kiki) Klun
Eben Kowler
Margaret Kuchan
Nate Kulenkamp
Shontal LaJeunesse
Eric Larson
Sydney Latimer
Raymond Lee
Stacy Lee King
Louisa Leone Sauro
Kassa Lesinski
Benjamin Lickerman
D. Long
Steve Loop
Grace Lowe
Meena Mangalvedhekar
Josina Manu
Ben Marcy
Emma Marlar
Avi Marshall
Courtney M. Mason
Kathy Maxwell
Ryan McGoff
Sarah Faye McPherson
Lauren Melzer
Elisa Meyer
Jason Millard
Mariana Morgan
Chloe Murnane
Chris Murnane
Evan Murnane
Meghan Murray
Aaron Newman
Jack Nobles
Joseph Nordenstam
Nichole Norman
Sheila Novak
Phillip O'Toole
Carly Odegard
Tyler Olsen
Karin Olson
Kevin Gregory Opatz
Taryn Payer
Taylor Rose Payer
Tiffany Payne
Jeff Pedersen
Adrian Perryman
Laura M. Peters
Sydney Petersen
Kendra Plant
Thomas Quinn Johnson
Adam Raine
Scotty Reynolds

Matthew Ribar
David Roberts
Paola Rodriguez
Viviana Rodriguez
Andrew Saboe
Razik Saifullah
Marc Scamp
Courtney Schmitz
Salima Seale
Rachel Sear
Jeffrey Sherman
Sara Shives
Danny Sigelman
Cassandra Solis-Corona
Tony Stoeri
Jack Swift
Sandra Taylor
Jay Terry
Mina Thao

Micayla Thebault-Spieker
Timothy Thole
Ben Thompson
Maggie Thompson
Elle Thoni
Shannon Thorson
Phillip Uttech
Joni Van Bockel
Pamela Vazquez Torres
Dudley Voigt
Tyler Waters
Kyle Weir
Amber Wiedenhoef
Natalie Wilson
Teresa Wilson
Chou Xiong
BobbiAnn Zaccarelli
Trevor Zapiecki
Jeremiah Zortman

critique Although critique is a foundational component of art school, once we leave the confines of the academy it's a rare pleasure to find yourself in a rigorous discussion dedicated to hashing out ideas in progress. Inherent in any good critique is questioning and constructive disagreement, and this requires trust and generosity from all participants. It's easy to find someone who will say, "Oh, I like your work." It's much harder to find someone who will ask you a pointed question and then engage with the response.

We participated in Art(ists) On the Verge at a pivotal time in our careers—in 2013 and 2014, after we had finished graduate school but hadn't yet gotten full-time academic jobs. In the transitory space between student and professional, we missed the heated conversations that had built our now far-flung graduate school community. Two elements made AOV unique: regular critiques and mentorship. Through both of these mechanisms, the fellowship fostered a rigorous dialogue that showed us the value of relationship building, now a deeply important part of our practice and ethic as artists.

AOV "crits" brought together the cohort of fellows, mentors, and program leaders. During the year, the projects changed—grew, shrank, became physical—and the developments that emerged from the crit process formed their shape. We remember these conversations slightly differently, perhaps because we were in different cohorts (Who was the bad cop? Who came up with that idea?), but we both recall being put on the spot, challenged, and pushed to consider solutions outside our known visual and technological vocabulary.

Ten years later, we are collaborators and we are both art professors. In our collaboration, we bring the methods of critique to

our own work, pushing each other and ourselves. In our universities, we are charged with considering how critique contributes to a lifelong pursuit of creativity and engagement. Asking questions, providing critical feedback, responding to the world around us, and having our minds changed by the ideas of others are privileges of being artists, and AOV was a formative professional experience that created the time, space, and community for productive and supportive critique. >KH and MLL ↪ SEE ALSO: AGONISM, ART(ISTS) ON THE VERGE, COEVOLUTION, COLLABORATION, COMMUNITY, GENEROSITY, MENTORSHIP, TRANSFORMATIVE

crowdfunding 1. One of our strategies to fund Northern Spark was crowdfunding. From 2012 to 2015 we used Kickstarter and Indiegogo to raise money for the festival and for individual artist projects. In the initial techno-optimist glow of these efforts we reasoned that if just some of the thousands of people who attended Northern Spark contributed—for a reward!—we could wrest the control of our fate from chasing a few funders.

We had a modicum of success but quickly understood that marketing the effort was a campaign in itself, as was the fulfillment. More to the point, to be successful we were being asked to take on an entirely new role in the arts ecosystem: self-funding. Is it too much to say that this is a move parallel to the big oil companies inventing the notion of personal carbon footprints to shift the focus and responsibility away from more systemic solutions? >SD

2. Remember Kickstarter? The all-or-nothing crowdfunding platform that condenses fundraising into a brief, self-imposed time frame? The gamble: deciding how long you need to meet your goal. Too short and raise nothing versus too long and lose your sanity. I'm so proud we raised more than \$20,000 from 413 backers in 30 days in 2014. But I won't lie. Fundraising that way is nerve-wracking as hell.

My favorite Kickstarter memory is of the video we created with voices from our creative community describing Northern Spark in one word. The video sweetly and succinctly encapsulated the event. It still gives me goosebumps to see the impact we had on our community. As one participant said, "This is what it means for a community to have a soul." >KJ ↪ SEE ALSO: AUDIENCE, COSTS, FREE, FUNDRAISING, IMPACT, PEOPLE RISING, SUSTAINABLE, TIME

culture People need facts to make informed decisions, but it is culture-making—stories, art, community—that changes our behavior. Artists create connection points to issues that may seem tired or impossibly contentious. We follow them through

beauty, wonder, and curiosity, and quickly find ourselves engaged in a complex issue seen differently. >NS 2016–17 Steering Committee ↪ SEE ALSO: CLIMATE CHAOS, COMMUNITY, PEOPLE RISING, RESPONSE, THEME, TRANSFORMATIVE, TRUISM

curate ↪ SEE: JURATE

dawn

That precise moment
of first light
before sunrise
when you know
without a doubt
that change is coming, and this time
it's good.

At last! Illumination!

A breaking open
breakthrough
maybe a breakdown, but let it.

We suddenly find ourselves alive all over again.

Behold!
with absolutely none of your effort, the skies peel back their
radiant layers
and bathe us all in the light and warmth of a star.

And you, small thing, may gaze upon it
knowing all that it took to get here
precisely how much night makes up one dawn.

The first light occurs within you. It's the one you can feel coming.
Unstoppable, perhaps unjustified—
sometimes beginnings happen for their own sake.

There are organizations that, when closing, call it a sunset.
But our festival happened overnight, so how about—a dawn?
Dawning

sense of gratitude. Of wonder that any of it
happened at all.

>ET ↪ SEE ALSO: ALL NIGHT, DURATION, ILLUMINATE,
MAGICAL, WONDER

decolonize At Northern Lights.mn we never wrote a land acknowledgment statement. Initially this was because we operated without a full awareness of Native histories and present meanings of the land we worked on. Later, as we were more involved with projects and partnerships with Indigenous artists and Native-led organizations, a land acknowledgment felt like a performative task less important than the work we were doing in collaboration to support Native artists.

The fact is that all NL projects took place on Native land. Whether that land was a parking lot or a grassy field or an indoor gallery, it is Native land, as is all land of Turtle Island in the place called the United States. Our annual Northern Spark festival always took place on unceded Dakota land in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Mni Sota Makoce.


Very often we failed to acknowledge this. For eleven years of Northern Spark we used language and ideas about "taking over the city" without recognition that this is a major concept of settler colonialism. We "welcomed" people to Northern Spark on lands and in neighborhoods that were not ours, in that the majority of NL leadership and to some degree staff did not live or work there. We were always guests, from St. Paul to Rochester to Indianapolis. We were invited—but by all members of those communities? Hard to say, but very unlikely. What would that have looked like?

During our final years as an organization we focused on ending practices within our projects that were extractive—a way of being in relationship to people or places that takes more than gives. This can be as basic as paying a living wage to crew or artists. Ideally, the relationship is circular, reciprocal.

We are thankful for conversations with many Native, Indigenous, Black, Asian, Queer, Disabled, and Trans artists, collaborators, and staff, who trusted us enough to surface our extractive practices so we could work on altering them. >SP ↔ SEE ALSO: COLLABORATION, COLLABORATIVE ENTANGLEMENTS (PAGES 20–27), HARM, LIBRARY, PLACE, POWER, RECIPROCITY

design Northern Lights.mn projects presented numerous design challenges, but Northern Spark was the most unique of the bunch. For example, designing a wayfinding system for a sprawling city-wide festival that was mostly outdoors (problem 1: no walls to attach signs to), overnight (problem 2: low light or no light), within a very modest production budget (problem 3: not enough money to fabricate innovative signage solutions), and included, at times, more than one hundred artist projects (problem 4: scaling any of our scrappy DIY solutions rarely worked); an entire chapter, or more, could be written about the many design problems we faced. I'm choosing to focus on one I would call a

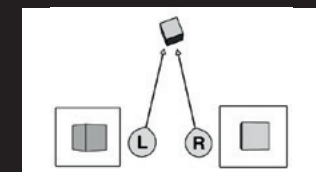
"good problem." As a graphic designer I enjoy projects that are rich in content, with depth; they are satisfying to work on and inspire strong design solutions. NL projects—NS, specifically—often had *too much* substance. Distilling the complex themes and ideas the team would develop for each iteration of NS into a concise and visually pleasing graphic image was always difficult—but welcome. What follows is an abridged look at the design thinking and process behind what I consider the most successful NS designs.

Throughout this book you will see graphic elements overlaid in this color: . These images are nonlinear fragments from NL's design history. Some are early sketches or outtakes, others are bits and pieces from final designs. They are graphic ghosts drifting in and out of view. >MR ↔ SEE ALSO: BUDGET, COMMUNICATIONS, COMPLICATED, DIY, DOCUMENTATION, ICONS, NORTHERN SPARK, PRODUCTION, THEME

Northern Spark 2016, Climate Chaos | Climate Rising

In 2016 and 2017 NL took on the challenge of addressing climate chaos through the lens of the artists (SEE: CLIMATE CHAOS).

Nested within the overarching concept in 2016 were subthemes: *move*, *nourish*, *interconnect*, *perceive*, and *act*. When gathering research around these themes I quickly noticed a common visual element, the arrow, which had a welcome relation to the chaos symbol.



An early sketch used the chaos symbol, which felt too literal, conceptually, and wasn't very engaging, visually.

Research and reference images, clockwise from upper left: move, interconnect, perceive, act, and nourish.

Act was the only theme that didn't immediately lend itself to an arrow treatment, but it was fairly easy to pull it into that world. Personally, this is still one of my favorite NS designs: expressing all five themes with a single device was smart and efficient, both visually and conceptually.



Northern Spark 2017, Climate Chaos | People Rising

Continuing with the climate theme, NS 2017 upped the ante by programming exclusively along the Metro Transit Green Line. This key aspect of the festival needed to be part of the visual identity.



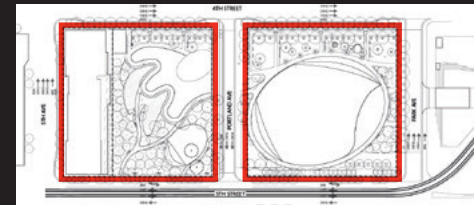
Initially I wanted to visually connect 2016 and 2017 through the arrow motif. This early sketch expresses each programmatic metro stop with an arrow extending off the Green Line into the city. The proposal was rejected by the NS team in favor of a design that focused explicitly on each neighborhood.



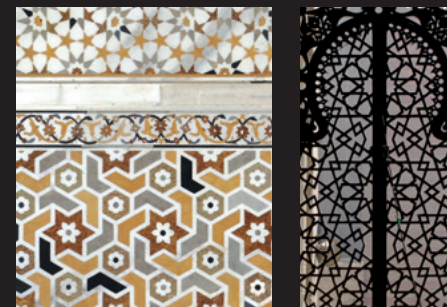
We pivoted away from the arrows and toward a more common wayfinding solution. One touchpoint was the distinctly named parking lots for each theme at large parks or shopping centers. Following this model, each NS zone was assigned a distinct visual icon based on attributes of either the neighborhood or the artistic programming.



The Commons combined the shape of the physical space with the general idea of common, expressed through Venn diagrams.



Cedar-Riverside was inspired by geometric patterning in traditional Islamic designs to honor the neighborhood's Muslim residents. NL and partners engaged people from the neighborhood in programming an iftar and call to prayer since the festival occurred during Ramadan that year. The icon with seven points was a nod to the "seven corners" intersection.



Weisman Art Museum's mark was a simplified representation of its iconic Frank Gehry architecture.



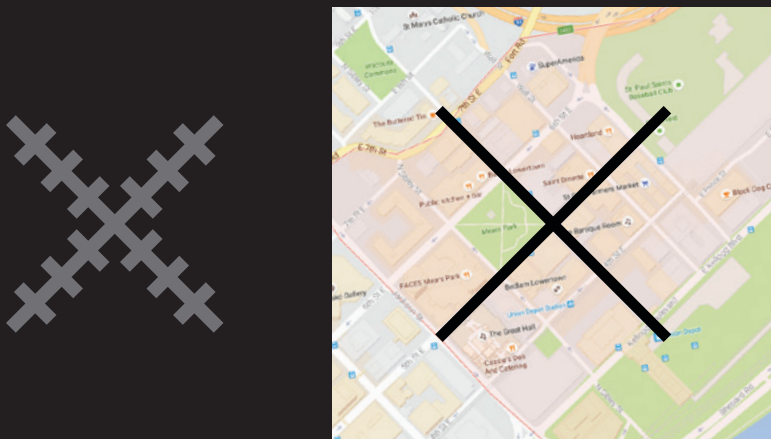
Little Africa's icon was inspired by the geometric patterns in African textiles to reference the pan-African focus of the district as well as its efforts to support artisans and business owners of African heritage.



Rondo partners suggested an icon of a tree with roots to express being “rooted in Rondo” despite the destruction caused by the creation of the freeway in the 1960s. **Little Mekong** organizers requested a mark that aligned with the water theme for their year of existing programming.



Lowertown's programming centered around a specific intersection in the neighborhood and the Union Depot train station: those two places were combined in a single icon.



Northern Spark 2018, Commonality

The initial design proposal for Commonality was rejected. Here are excerpts from the second proposal deck. This design—a much stronger solution—was approved. It was nice to shift away from the more literal icons of 2016 and 2017 into something both more abstract and more universal.

The key question posed by the NS team in their statement explaining the Commonality theme directly influenced the revised design direction: *What common ground can we find that doesn't ignore our differences and conflicts but engages them?*

- a plain/simple circle acts as a metaphor for baseline “commonality”
- divergence and diversity are then expressed as a series of modified circles



- a family of disparate circular shapes then becomes the graphic identity
- they share the same basic form but they are all different



- colors are also varied, to further the diversity of each group
- two adjacent circles are colored the same to emphasize the core idea of same but different as well as recognize the two nights of the 2018 festival



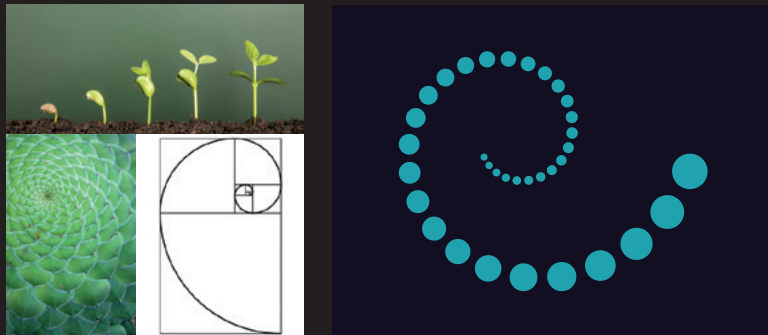
Northern Spark 2019, We Are Here: Resilience, Renewal & Regeneration

This excerpt from a Public Address blog post was published February 20, 2019, on Northern Lights.mn.

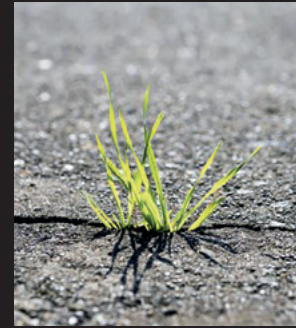
NL: This year’s theme has a lot of ideas packed into the title. How did you approach translating the ideas into graphics?

Matthew Rezac: I originally started thinking about the literal sense of “We Are Here”—such as maps and the visual language that goes along with them. However, after an informal meeting with some core Northern Lights.mn staff it became clear that the design should come from the ideas held within the “Resilience, Renewal & Regeneration” portion of the theme. Broad symbols and ideas mentioned during that meeting included roots, plants/trees, growth, and cycles. The challenge then became how to present these ubiquitous themes in a unique (or at least less common) way that also looked like Northern Spark.

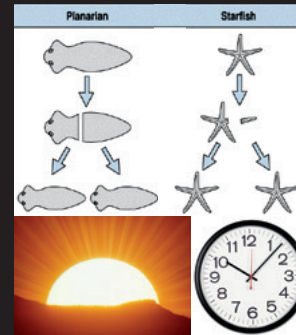
From there I took a deep dive into the world of fractals, hoping a micro view would lead me to something that a macro view could not. In the end most of the visual studies related to fractals ended up on the cutting-room floor, but that process led me to the spiral graphic. I was thinking about the simplest graphic representation of “growth,” each circle larger than the previous. In those early sketches I liked how the spiral interplayed with the Northern Spark logo—and how it could also be a representation of “renewal”—so I set off to create visuals for “resilience” and “regeneration.”



For “resilience” I kept thinking about “defiant growth” and specifically how you often see grass/weeds/plants growing out of the cracks in a concrete sidewalk. The extreme angles in the crack portion of the icon give the whole thing a defiant feeling, like it could be the symbol for a resistance movement.



Then for “regeneration” I went the direct biological route, thinking about things in nature that can regenerate tissue or limbs. The resulting symbol is a more abstract shape that has been cut in a circle, with the new pieces along the outer edge growing in a clockwise pattern, each line longer than the one before it.



Finally, the way the three icons interact with the typography once again references the idea of “defiant growth” as the icons move from the background to the foreground, growing around the type.



>MR ↪ SEE ALSO: CLIMATE CHAOS, COMMUNITY, GREEN LINE, ICONS, IFTAR, INTERCONNECTION, ITERATION, NEIGHBORHOOD, NORTHERN SPARK, PEOPLE RISING, PLACE, RESPONSE

Ding an sich Our pilot project for the platform fwd:// was to rebuild *Ding an sich* (*The Canon Series*) by Piotr Szyhalski, a work originally commissioned for the Walker Art Center in 1997. The project consists of twelve “canons,” which are looping visual and sound scores that change based on user interaction. *Ding an sich*, like many early media art projects, was no longer able to function with current technology.

In 2012, Piotr and I met at a coffee shop, and he walked me through the *Ding an sich* files he had gathered. We perused an eclectic mix of sketches, audio files, Photoshop files, half-working animations, and the final published Macromedia Director files. We needed to open those Macromedia files to know for sure which art assets were in the final production.

I dug out an old computer from my parents’ house, went to PirateBay.org, and was able to procure a working version of Macromedia Director MX 2004. Each canon had its respective Director file, containing all the necessary assets, scripts, animations, visual components, and audio files, but there wasn’t a straightforward method to export these assets. I devoted a few weeks to experimenting with dated shareware asset exporter applications, many of which I had to retrieve from Archive.org’s Wayback Machine, as they were no longer accessible elsewhere. After too many failed attempts, I emailed one of my professors who had used Director frequently for projects and got a quick and concise reply: “try copy and paste.” Sure enough, assets could be simply copied from the Director files, one at a time, into either a photo or audio editor. As a trial, Piotr suggested that I reconstruct Canon 2, which he thought was the more straightforward of the canons, without any hover interactions with the mouse.

After Canon 2 was prepared, we gathered as a group, with excitement and expectation, to assess the progress. Ultimately, there was disappointment. The canon functioned mostly as intended, but with sporadic performance glitches. The primary issue stemmed from iOS 7, which imposed stringent limitations on the amount of performance available for HTML/JavaScript apps to preserve battery life. I distinctly recall a moment when someone remarked, “How can an iPad have performance issues with an application that ran smoothly on a computer from fifteen years ago?”

Following the meeting, we set out to improve the performance of our HTML/JavaScript app and stumbled on AppMobi, which enabled standard HTML/JavaScript apps to leverage GPU acceleration with minimal modifications. We ported Canon 2 to AppMobi, resulting in exceptionally smooth performance.

Throughout the following year, I completed the construction of all remaining canons, although during this period AppMobi

was acquired by Intel, which introduced an update that rendered GPU acceleration obsolete!

Eventually, Apple released iOS 8, resulting in a fourfold improvement in HTML/JavaScript performance. With this enhancement, we gained the capability to utilize almost any other HTML/JavaScript framework.

After several months of extensive meetings focused on bug fixing and implementing accessibility features for blind and deaf individuals, *Ding an sich* was officially launched on the App Store on February 13, 2015.

Ding an sich on fwd:// embodies the complicated journey of conserving media art and its inherent link to Silicon Valley capitalism. I hope this journey of resurrecting *Ding an sich* encourages developers to see themselves not only as technical problem solvers addressing immediate issues but, more significantly, as stewards and caretakers dedicated to crafting enduring solutions for media art. >TS ↪ SEE ALSO: ARCHIVE, FAILURE, FWD://, NEW MEDIA, PLATFORM, PUBLIC SPHERE

Discourse and Discord Curated by Northern Lights.mn and presented with the Walker Art Center, Discourse and Discord: Architecture of Agonism from the Kitchen Table to the City Street was a three-day event of talks, workshops, actions, and playful experiments. It aimed to explore how different “architectures” can bring people together for genuine dialogue and debate.

What was true at the time of this event in 2012 is even more urgent now. “In an era of cultural conservatives and the liberal elite, Occupiers and Tea Partiers, civil uprisings and government crackdowns, perhaps the one point of agreement today is there’s no shortage of disagreement. But if that’s true, then why isn’t there more debate—not online flame wars, not the televised jockeying of political candidates, but live, in-person dialogue?”† >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: AGONISM, CONFLICT

DIY So much of what Northern Lights.mn did had never been done before: producing an all-night festival in multiple locations; burning down a full-scale, artist-made model house in public; turning the facade of a twenty-story building into an interactive game controller; hanging a woven bridge from an underpass. We often had to co-invent the process with our collaborators—artists, government entities, property owners, corporate partners, and staff and crew.

We took inspiration from the DIY movement with its sometimes MacGyveresque solutions and, most important, its ethics of community sharing of skills, knowledge, and resources (particularly by artists, the most DIY of all). Every project modeled

† Protagonist: The Art of Opposition. Northern Lights.mn, Walker Art Center, and REV.

Throughout this book are images of NL projects. Additional documentation of our work can be seen in the 19,732 image and video files in our records at the University of Minnesota Performing Arts Archives.

a template or modified an existing template for future projects, which we learned from iteratively and freely shared with our collaborators. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: COLLABORATION, EXPERIMENT/AL, ITERATION, PLAYBOOK, POSSIBILITY, TOGETHER

documentation Challenges characterize documentation of temporary, time-based, site-specific work that was often presented in low-light conditions. Among the quandaries we sorted through consistently:

- If a project is not visually documented, did it really happen?
- If a project is documented, the images or video cannot convey the true experience.
- If a project is documented it sometimes looks much better than it did in reality.
- If a camera is between you and a project, can you really experience it?
- To document a durational project faithfully, how many other projects are then undocumented?
- To document one moment of a durational project, how many other moments of that project remain undocumented? Does that matter?
- Still images or video or both? What's the budget?

There is text that describes every Northern Lights.mn project, but images call memories forth most forcefully—or the desire to have a memory, if you weren't there. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: ARCHIVE, BUDGET, DESIGN, MEMORY

Photographers and Videographers, 2008–2023

Alea Adigweme	Patrick Kelley	Wendy Schreier
Jules Ameal	Marie Ketring	Stacy Schwartz
Drew Arrieta	Kory Lidstrom	Rik Sferra
Bethany Birnie	Hal Lovemelt	Bruce Silcox
Gisell Calderón	Chaddix Malchow	Erin Smith
Courtney Cochran	Adrienne Mathiowetz	Sean Smuda
Curtis Craven	Ben McGinley	Ryan Stopera
Seth Dahlseid	Dane McFarlane	Sam Thompson
Gus Ganley	Phillip McGraw	Caleb Timmerman
Jess Grams	Anna Min	Brennan Vance
Ne-Dah-Ness Greene	Nance Musinguzi	Ubuntu Media
Hamil Griffin-Cassidy	Sarah Nienaber	Productions
Hayden Grooms	Dan Norman	
Jayne Halbritter	Kyra Nygard	
Ian Hanson	Ian Plant	
Max Haynes	Jon Reynolds	
Reggie Henderson	Jonn Robinet	
Dusty Hoskovec	Bobby Rogers	
Olga Ivanova	Brooke Ross	

donors A nonprofit cannot survive without the generosity of individual donors, as entire books about donor relationships and strategies will tell you. Development director—less as we were, we never read those books, but we also never took our donors for granted. A development consultant calculated that at one point we had a donor retention rate of 87.8 percent, which she said was astonishing. We felt equally astonished and grateful to every single person who ever gave us money. A small but extremely dedicated group of about twenty individuals gave us between \$2 and \$25 monthly for years to support our work. A great many of our donors also volunteered, took on temporary staff roles, or were involved with our programs as artists. NL was truly powered by the people.

As much as we appreciated our donors, and attempted to express this in various communications, these actions were never robust enough. Donor cultivation was not a strong suit of either staff or board. We can see this most clearly now in hindsight. Nevertheless, we are forever grateful for their monetary cheerleading of NL! >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: BUDGET, FUNDERS, FUNDRAISING, GENEROSITY, GRATITUDE, STAFFING

dramaturg No one knows what a dramaturg is because it's not the dramaturg, it's the play. The play's the thing. The thing that we base everything else on. Even *how* we play. How we work. How we engage in togetherness. What if more of us named ourselves after how we can be of service to one another? Say: I am a fire-tender. An alchemist. A water carrier. I move the stones out of the way when they are too large for your wheels. I am the person who asks "why?" when you are too afraid. I am the person who loves the thing you love enough to stay and help you make it even better. >ET ↪ SEE ALSO: AQUANESIA, PERFORMANCE, PLAY

duration
See not,
what is its
See
how much it holds
As in, a time between two spaces
a space between two times
Metaphysical things can happen
"if we stay for the duration," as in
If there's a show every hour till 2 am
And the performance is 28 minutes
And the artist needs 5 to change 10 costumes
How long will it take to
feel really feel the beauty

so moving
 at a gesture per word per pang per strumming?
 How long does it take to look at art
 And what if it's two cities big? This canvas
 of swatches of pigment cement people objects
 How long to let our eyes and mind adjust and wander
 like a waxed moon curling over humidnight—
 it's getting late finally—how late can we
 feel our way across the streets and lots or around
 an entire depot or stadium? How long will it take us
 between two stations
 when the streetlights are beating quiet red
 and the lampposts flickering every
 second second and our phone is puddle dead
 Should we endure? If we can't map it time it
 see it look it all
 up at home instead
 What if we get hungry tired lose focus
 cry all night long and the words blur and
 the meaning veering sleepin dreami
 How deep between the lines
 to read

What if we make it all the way through/to
 the period—how many times to reread?
 The night is only so vast
 We don't want it to end but
 just to stop a couple times as it passes
 like a constellation-inflected cat trotting
 into view from out the grass and
 flopping down for pets before it purrs its last
 to then descend on all these other loving strangers
 You have to attend the entire spell
 And touch, yes
 Everything has a beginning a
 dance play movie song recital
 But how long does it take
 a thing-like joy
 to stay
 To be taken in
 not seen
 See not,
 “what is its duration”

>MS ↪ SEE ALSO: ALL NIGHT, DAWN, NORTHERN SPARK

ecosystem If the arts world is a kind of ecosystem, what happens when it is disturbed? The field of ecology describes the concept of the intermediate disturbance hypothesis, which suggests that “local species diversity is maximized when ecological disturbance is neither too rare nor too frequent.” In theory, for example, when a tree falls in a forest canopy, the light it newly allows onto ground level encourages a growth spurt of other species. What happens when too much of the canopy collapses at once: Heart of the Beast's May Day Parade and Festival, Patrick's Cabaret, Intermedia Arts, Northern Lights.mn, The Soap Factory? We hope that the extinction of NL will inspire new organizations to flourish in the rich loam of our experiences. We fear that too much disturbance may indicate a lack of robust support for the arts due to a too-extractive mentality toward individual artists and individual arts organizations by society, in particular civic and funding entities. If everything must be self-sustaining, what kind of an ecosystem will survive? >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST-CENTRIC, COEVOLUTION, COLLABORATIVE ENTANGLEMENTS (PAGES 20–27), FUNDERS, SUNSET

emergent ↪ SEE : NEW MEDIA

emerging ↪ SEE: ART(ISTS) ON THE VERGE

enduring Through Northern Spark we experimented. We applied our organizational ethos to projects outside our expertise of curating SWANA artists, primarily in film and literary arts. Beginning with what Mizna is and what we care about, we approached urgent and enduring moments: the Arab Spring, the ongoing aftermath of Western violence in Iraq, the devastating war on the Syrian people, the destructive legacy of oil extraction in the Gulf on the global environment and on Bahrain's cultural heritage. We dreamt up large, consuming, abundant, meaningful projects that included give-and-take with audiences. The projects involved curation, art-directing, commissioning, resourcefulness. In 2013 we created a concept and worked with many street artists in the United States and Egypt to capture our vision; in 2014, we created a concept and worked closely with a videographer in Najaf, Iraq; in 2015, we worked with local Syrian artist Osama Esid to conceive a project and funded travel, research, and production; and in 2017, we worked with skilled local fabricator Trevor Nicholas to bring to life a large, wondrous sculpture by the Bahraini artist Monira Al Qadiri. Each project was vastly different, but they were always messy, difficult, exhilarating. Each project required a leap of faith. Each had to happen in the interstices of the regular work, budget, and pressures of a small, culturally specific arts organization. Each necessitated a depth



Hamza Salim, Dunya Alwan, Islam Shabana, and Hend Kheera, *Underpass of the Eyes of Freedom*, NS 2013, curated and produced by Mizna. Photo: Olga Ivanova.



Confluent, NS 2014, curated and produced by Mizna. Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.



Osama Esid, *Still/Life/Syria*, NS 2015, curated and produced by Mizna. Photo: Ian Plant.



Monira Al Qadiri, *Alien Technology II*, NS 2017, curated and produced by Mizna. Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.

of care, good humor, and more than a bit of recklessness. These projects were fueled by the determination and problem solving abilities of Moheb Soliman, Mizna's program director from 2013 until 2018. These projects are a reflection of caring relationships with our partners at Northern Spark, with each critical artist, and, within the Mizna collective, between one another. Ultimately, these projects and the experimentation they engendered helped bring shape and texture to an ongoing dialectic for us at Mizna—our praxis is necessarily audacious. It feels simultaneously overwhelming and just right. There may never be a business-as-usual at Mizna. I write this on the seventy-third day of the genocide in Gaza, and now the Mizna team and I are living this dialectic for Gaza. We're working to make spaces for our community to create, grieve, rage, resist, and fight for liberation. The work is overwhelming and it is just right. **>LSB ↪ SEE ALSO: AGENCY, COMMUNITY, EQUITY, EXPERIMENT/AL, NORTHERN SPARK, RESPONSE, TOGETHER**

episodic Northern Lights.mn generally tried to create replicable platforms that could accommodate a range of projects, Northern Spark and Art(ists) On the Verge being two primary

examples. Often we were able to reuse these experiences to create one-off events such as IN Light IN, B-Lectric, and ARTathlon, all of which were platforms for multiple artist projects that happened only once for various reasons but could have happened again, like *Illuminate the Lock*, which started as a one-off and continued for four years. *Aquanesia* grew through several iterations, which could be thought of as episodes of a long-running project. **>SD ↪ SEE ALSO: AQUANESIA, ART(ISTS) ON THE VERGE, ARTATHLON, B-LECTRIC, ILLUMINATE THE LOCK, IN LIGHT IN, NIMBLE, NORTHERN SPARK, PLATFORM, PLAYBOOK**

equity This important concept should not be a bunch of words but a way of working. An operationalized value. It can also be a theme we ask artists to respond to. At Northern Lights.mn we tried to do both: to conduct our business with an awareness of race and power dynamics and to weave equity into the subjects of our programs.

From the beginning, expressions of social justice and critiques of power were part of artist projects we supported, as artists are often provocateurs and truth-tellers. Yet after the double-year focus on Climate Chaos at Northern Spark in 2016–17, ideas of equity moved from operational and artistic to thematic in our work.

We proceeded to engage with the Artist Council and neighborhood partners to design themes that addressed equity issues more directly, such as “We Are Here: Resilience, Renewal & Regeneration” for NS 2019, developed in collaboration with the Artist Council and partners in the historically African-American St. Paul neighborhood of Rondo and the American Indian Cultural Corridor in Minneapolis.

One of the most illuminating conversations we had with the Artist Council was about the complicated idea that sometimes overt social justice themes can be barriers to participation—even with equity-minded audiences. NS was popular, in large part, because it was fun. Couldn't we invite people to have fun, and then lift up notions of equity (environmental justice, immigrant stories, breaking down walls, Indigenous water rights) once we caught their attention? From the NS 2021 theme, authored by the Artist Council: “Artists are the modern-day alchemists. We mix form, materials, and ideas to transform the collective emotional matter of this world into new shapes. If art were a universal elixir for healing, how do we hold space for grief and loss as well as concoct recipes to honor our hunger for joy?” **>SP ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST COUNCIL, CLIMATE CHAOS, CONFLICT, DECOLONIZE, GATEKEEPER, GREEN LINE, IMPACT, JOY, MISSION, PARTNERSHIP, PEOPLE RISING, PRODUCTION, RECIPROCITY, VALUES**

Giant Sing Along

Daily tous les jours, *Giant Sing Along*

Northern Spark

All projects presented by NL
(unless otherwise indicated).

A Little Overnight Music (American Composers Forum, Innova Recordings)

Art Shanties Shanty (Board Shanty)
(Art Shanty Projects, NL)

Artifact Shore, *Living Cloud Cave* (Burnet Gallery at Le Méridien Chambers Minneapolis)

ARTwalk (night version) (Flint Hills International Children's Festival)

Christopher Baker, *Waste Not Bedtime Stories* (Rain Taxi Review of Books)
Philip Blackburn

Sewer Pipe Organ (Public Art Saint Paul)
Wind-harps and Wind-flutes

Philip Blackburn and ArtCars of Minnesota, *Car Horn Fanfare*

BodyCartography Project, *HOUSEBOAT*
(canceled because of weather)

Brass Fanfare (Schubert Club)

Bart Buch, *nature boy—livedraw research*
(NL, MAW)

Jim Campbell, *Scattered Light* (NL, The M)
Melinda Childs, *Dream Interpretation Station* (Forecast Public Art)

Barbara Claussen, *Modern Monoliths Migrating*

Corbian the Dinosaur (Flint Hills International Children's Festival)

Thupten Dadak, curator, *Art of Tibetan Survival: Artists' Vision of Tibet and the Tibetan Diaspora* (Intermedia Arts and the Tibetan Community of Minnesota)

Dark to Light: A Short Film Festival
(The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library)

Emily Darnell, Molly Roth, and Terese Elhard, *Snap Shot Shanty* (Art Shanty Projects, NL)

Daniel Dean and Ben Moren, *Mobile Experiential Cinema* (MAW, NL)

Drawing NIGHTCLUB (Walker Art Center, mnartists.org)

Dreamland: Big Dreams at the Black Dog
(Forecast Public Art, Springboard for the Arts, Black Dog Cafe and Wine Bar, NL)

Exposed: Voyeurism, Surveillance, and the Camera since 1870 (Walker Art Center)

Chris Farstad and Alex Dyba, *Bicycle Synthesizer Ride*

Ben Garthus, *The Mobile Creative Outpost*

Group Show, *The Erasers*
(The Soap Factory)

Mike Hallenbeck, *Sound Spandrel: Science Museum*

Alexa Horochowski
Cloud Cave (Burnet Gallery at Le Méridien Chambers Minneapolis)

Rock and Ships (Burnet Gallery at Le Méridien Chambers Minneapolis)

Wing Young Huie, *A Ping Pong Retrospective*

Illuminated Stream (St. Anthony Falls Laboratory, U of M College of Science and Engineering)

JoJo of Murals by Eros, and Peyton of House of Daskarone, *Northern Lights Mural* (Intermedia Arts)

Chris Kallmyer, *for dawn or dusk // homeward* (NL, Northrop Concerts and Lectures)

Mero Cocinero Karimi, *Power of the People Community Breakfast*
(Intermedia Arts, Kaotic Good Productions)

Noah Keesecker and Betsy McDermott Altheimer, *Two Story Love Story*
(Springboard for the Arts)

Leslie Kelman and Mark O'Brien, *Domestic Storefront*

Osman Khan, *Ceiling*
John Kim, Anthony Tran, and Vasily Trubetskoy, *Security Gate 26.11*
(Macalester College)

Suzanne Kosmalski and CVA students, *The White Night Memory Theatre*
(CVA)

Laser Tag (The Soap Factory)

Mina Leierwood and Mike Haeg, *ParADICE*
(Art Shanty Projects, NL)

Live performances (Black Dog Cafe and Wine Bar, NL)

Amanda Lovelee, *Call and Answer Project*
(MCBA)

Goshka Macuga, *It Broke from Within*
(Walker Art Center)

Aaron Marx, *Mobile Hot Spot* (MAW, NL)

Material Matters: MCAD Students and Alumni Explore Fiber Arts (MCAD)

Megan Mayer, *The Shape of Night: Busby Berkeley Nocturne* (Walker Art Center)

Peter McLarnan, *Dreaming à la Carte: Take Out for the Subconscious*
(Forecast Public Art, NL)

Megan Mertaugh, *Diaspora* (MAW, NL)

Debora Miller, *MURMUR*

Ali Momeni and Jenny Schmid, *The Battle of Everyouth* (Mia)

Michael Murnane and Andrew Saboe, *Landmark in a River City*

Nightshift (Walker Art Center, Rain Taxi Review of Books, mnartists.org)

Northern Spark Livestream (The UpTake, CoCo)

Nostalgia vs Jonathan Gering, and Dirty Talk, *Future Dance Music Showcase*
(McNally Smith College of Music)

Angela Olson, *wanderlust* (MAW, NL)

Panelectric Living Cinema, *Panelectric Dream Streams*

Pianos on Parade (Keys 4/4 Kids)

PRAIRIEFORM and Placel!, *Twin Cities Re-Imagined* (Science Museum of Minnesota)

Projections: MCAD All-nighter (MCAD)

Janaki Ranpura, *Egg & Sperm :: Hide & Seek Red76, Follow the Light, Let the Light Be Your Guide.*

Rigo 23, *Oglala Oyate*

Rigo 23 and Tom Poor Bear, *Community Conversation* (All My Relations Arts, NACDI, NL)

ROLU, *A Simple Chair (Returning Home)*
(NL, The Soap Factory)

Carissa Samaniego and Bridget Beck, *GLOW-a-BOUT*

Sideshow Soo (Soo Visual Arts Center)

Skewed Visions, *Please Remain Seated Skyspace Headphone Concerts* (Walker Art Center, Rain Taxi Review of Books, mnartists.org)

slöjd: Make Your Own Wire Craft (ASI)

Spark Your Imagination (Highpoint Center for Printmaking)

Angela Sprunger, Kaara Nilsson, Julie Kesti, Dana Maiden, and Scott Kesti, *Art Swap Shanty* (Art Shanty Projects, NL)

Andréa Stanislav, *Nightmare* (canceled due to weather; presented in August 2011)

Student Spark (Art Institutes International Minnesota)

Piotr Szyhalski, *Empty Words (so that we can do our living)*

The Notion Collective, *Station Identification*

The Shape of Night: The Language of Sleep (Walker Art Center, McSweeney's)

Trash Film Debauchery, *Insomniac Animated Film Fest* (Franklin Art Works)

U of M BFA Group, *Hot Air/Red Light/Hot Night* (U of M Department of Art)

Roman Verostko, *Three-Story Drawing Machine*

Diane Willow, *beneath a glowing ceiling veil of living light*

Jim Woodring, artist talk and performance
(Walker Art Center, mnartists.org, Rain Taxi Review of Books)

Works Progress with Andy Sturdevant, *Mississippi Megalops—A Floating Chautauqua* (Works Progress, NL)

Writing with Light (Mpls Photo Center)

Liu Xuguang, *Classic of the Mountains and Seas* (Beijing Film Academy, U of M Department of Art)

Marcus Young and Grace Minnesota, *The Lullaby Experiment*



Jim Campbell, *Scattered Light*, Upper Landing Park, Northern Spark 2011. Presented by the Minnesota Museum of American Art and NL. Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.



Wing Young Huie, *A Ping Pong Retrospective*, Cedar-Riverside, Northern Spark 2011. Photo: Wing Young Huie.



Philip Blackburn and ArtCars of Minnesota, *Car Horn Fanfare*, St. Paul, Northern Spark 2011. Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.

Piotr Szyhalski, *Empty Words (so that we can do our living)*, Father Hennepin Park, Minneapolis, Northern Spark 2011. Photo: Patrick Kelley.





Debora Miller, *MURMUR*, Northern Spark 2011.
The first time we used the Mill City grain silos
as a projection surface. Photo: Patrick Kelley.



Daily tous les jours, *Giant Sing Along*,
Minnesota State Fair, annually since 2011.
Photo: NL.

Art(ists) On the Verge 3

Artists

Drew Anderson, *Near the Ghosts of Sugarloaf*
Michael Hoyt, *Poho Posit*
Caly McMorrow, *Status Update*
Anthony Tran, *Wire less*
Aaron Westre, *City Fight!*

Codirectors

Steve Dietz
Piotr Szyhalski

Mentors

Christopher Baker
Wing Young Huie
Katherine Milton
Sarah Peters (writing mentor)
Jenny Schmid
Diane Willow

Essayist

Patricia Briggs, "Art(ists) On the Verge, 2011-12"

Discourse and Discord: Architecture of Agonism from the Kitchen Table to the City Street (NL, Walker Art Center)

Northern Spark

All projects presented by NL (unless otherwise indicated).

A Night of Arts and Healing (Center for Spirituality and Healing, U of M)

About Change: MCAD Alumni and Acts of Transformation (MCAD)

Acoustic Campfire & Bedtime Stories (Walker Art Center, Rain Taxi Review of Books)

Ta-coumba Aiken and Kitty Andersen Youth Science Center youth, *Celebration of Life, Energy, and Power: Views of Our World* (Science Museum of Minnesota)

Christopher Alday and Kate Thomas, *Spark in the Park* (MCAD)

All About Owls (The Raptor Center)

Aniccha Arts, *In Habit: Living Patterns*

Tim Armato and Brian Rowe, *Pix-aural Sensorium* (Art Institutes International Minnesota)

ARTifacts in the Gallery, Live CoLab in the Alley (Gamut Gallery)

Christine Baeumler, *Reconstituting the Landscape: A Tamarack Rooftop Restoration* (MCAD)

Molly Balcom Raleigh, *FEED/FEED* (NL, Forecast Public Art)

Bat Detection (Bell Museum of Natural History)

Bridget Beck and Carissa Samaniego, *GLOWaBOUT*

Jackie Beckey, *Psychedelic Art Parade Between Earth and Sky: Indigenous Star Lessons from Turtle Island* (Bell Museum of Natural History)

Kermit Boyum and Matt Nupen, *Shanty of Wonder* (Art Shanty Projects)

Busk until Dawn (Whittier Artists in Storefronts)

Jim Campbell, *Material World Capturing Insects* (Bell Museum of Natural History)

Capturing the Night (Bell Museum of Natural History)

Catalog Projects, *Fire Works* (Walker Art Center)

CSA: *Community Supported Art pick-up* (Springboard for the Arts, mnartists.org)

Dakota Combo Jazz Ensemble (MacPhail Center for Music)

Dancing in the Dark (Four Seasons Dance Studio)

Daniel Dean and Ben Moren, *Mobile Experiential Cinema*

Keetra Dean Dixon, *Swing Hall, Swing All* (MCAD)

Don't Wake the Neighbors Concert (WAM)

Drawing NIGHTclub (mnartists.org, Walker Art Center)

Aaron Dysart, *Celebrate Each, Rasmussen, Pederson, and Clark, The Dance Shanty* (Art Shanty Projects)

Mona El Khafif and Marcella del Signore, *iLounge* (NL, ZERO1)

Explorations on Non-Intention (MCBA)

Amber Ginsburg and Joseph Madrigal, *FLO(we){u}R* (The Soap Factory)

Glow & Go (ASI)

David Goldes and Jonathan Bruce Williams, *THE Northern Spark Hedge Magic*, with projects by Jess Hirsch and David Hamlow (The Soap Factory)

Honeywell, Jones, Heinlein, and Jones, *The Shiny Shadow Show Shanty* (Art Shanty Projects)

HOTTEA, *letting go* (Mia)

Christopher Houltberg and Max Harper, *Wonder/Think Project*

Ryan Hughes and Matt Reimers, *Door to the River* (MCAD)

Hyland, Peterson, and Peterson, *The Letterpress Shanty* (Art Shanty Projects)

Ben Johnson and Elizabeth Johnson, *PixelTron150*

Eunsu Kang, *Shin'm Piñata* (NL, W Minneapolis-The Foshay)

Keepers, *The Owls Are Not What They Seem*

Leslie Kelman, *Night Walk*

Kim, Dean, Moore, Reichert, and Stover, *TönöSauna* (Macalester College, Art Shanty Projects)

Rachel Knoll and Michael Selle, *The Eye of the Walker* (Walker Art Center and Burnet Gallery at Le Méridien Chambers)

Käthe Kollwitz: Making Human (WAM)

Helen Koo, *Lighted Recycled T-shirt Rain* (Science Museum of Minnesota)

Ethan Kruszka, *It was the burden that made us great and the part that caused us to stumble again: (the greatest)*. (Science Museum of Minnesota)

Lake Street Luminary Promenade (Highpoint Center for Printmaking, The Bakken Museum)

Landscape of the Mind (Katherine E. Nash Gallery, U of M Department of Art)

Late Night Improv (Brave New Workshop)

Letterpress Lock-In (Lunalux)

Nathan Lewis, *Where the Chill Came From* (Walker Art Center)

Lauren McCarthy and David Wicks, *Bumps in the Night* (NL, Eyeo)

Caly McMorrow, *Observation Tape Deck* (NL, W Minneapolis-The Foshay)

Patty Mitchell and Robert Lockheed, *Palace of Wonder* (Mia)

MN Film Shorts (The Film Society of Minneapolis/Saint Paul)

Michael Murnane, *Under Ice*

Wil Natzel, *Night Blooms*

Night Vision Tours: All Will Be Illuminated (WAM)

NOT TO SCALE (Art of This)

Angela Olson, *AutoNocturnal* (WAM)

Paper Darts, *Captured Dreams* (The Loft Literary Center)

Margaret Pezalla-Granlund, *Extramundane* (Burnet Gallery at Le Méridien Chambers)

Journey to the Surface of Mars (Burnet Gallery at Le Méridien Chambers)

Picturing Peace: PhotoVoice, 2012 (Mpls DID, Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support)

Presented by Midtown Greenway Coalition

Bicycle Projections (Freewheel Bike)

Dorothy Doring, Semiconductor Orchestra, Retro Spectacle, and Au NaturElle, *Warm Up the Greenway*

ICE-Cycles, *ICE-Cycles Bike Puppets*

Illuminated Art Bikes, *Night Bikes*

Jack Brass Band

Ellie Kingsbury, *Greenway GoPro: Live Video Projection Project*

Light Up the Greenway

MNKINO, *Short Films Inspired by the Word "TRAIL"*

Sparkler Conversations (EXCO: Experimental Community Education of the Twin Cities)

Star Spectacle on the Greenway (In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre)

Transdiaspora Project, *Dream Lab and Greenway Glow Party* (Intermedia Arts)

Treadprint Posters (ARTCRANK, LOCUS Architecture)

Trylon microcinema and the Poor Nobodys, *The Black Pirate*

Vine Arts Center 2012 Spring Member Show (Vine Arts Center)

Yonic Arts Collective, *Yoga meditation—That Sweet Moon Language*

Jessica Zeglin, *Cycle Saints Installation*

Janaki Ranpura, *The Peloton* (NL, Forecast Public Art)

Raptor Meet-and-Greet (The Raptor Center)

Tamsie Ringle, *Car Dreams* (NL, Forecast Public Art)

Roff, Beck, Briden, Samuel, and Isaacs, *Sit and Spin Shanty* (Art Shanty Projects)

Rosenblum, Gramm, Rivenburgh, Kutvirt, O'Hare, and Valelly, *Capitol HILL Shanty* (Art Shanty Projects)

David Rueter, *The Kuramoto Model (1000 Fireflies)*

Scott Sayre and Vanessa Voskuil, *Midnight Pathhandling* (Walker Art Center)

Jenny Schmid, Drew Anderson, and MAW, *nightdemons* (WAM)

Schroeter, Schoen, Everine, Stramer, Ogren, Baumann, Rhyner, Miller, and Blomgren, *Thee Sashay Shantay* (Art Shanty Projects)

Robin Schwartzman, *THINK AND WONDER, WONDER AND THINK*

Miriam Simun and Dan Scofield, *O.21*

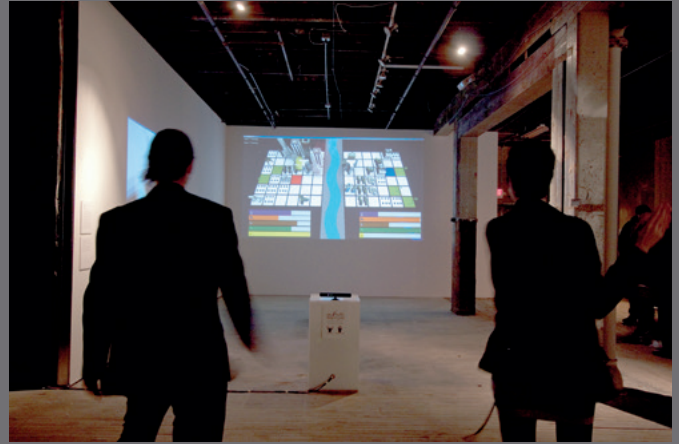
Sketching the Night (Bell Museum of Natural History)
Sleepers Awake (NL, PUNY Entertainment)
 Mona Smith, *Cloudy Waters: Dakota Reflections on the River* (Mill City Museum)
 Colin Snow and Natural Step Tai Chi, *Tai Chi: Movements for Well Being* (Open Book)
Soar through the Universe (Bell Museum of Natural History)
SPARK3DS (Gallery13)
Student Spark (Art Institutes International Minnesota)
 Eve Sussman and Rufus Corporation, *whiteonwhite: algorithmic noir* (Walker Art Center)
Ten Second Film Festival (The Soap Factory)
The Art of iPhone Slideshow Exhibit (Mpls Photo Center)
The Two Wheel Tour: A Parade of Oddities (Open Eye Figure Theater)
 Karl Unnasch, *The Birdhouse: A Guild-of-One Art Extrusion* (Soo Visual Arts Center, WAM)
 Vanessa Voskuil, *SHIFT*
 Asia Ward, *Body Pong* (Science Museum of Minnesota)
Water Works Temporary (Minneapolis Parks Foundation, ASLA-MN, Mpls DID, Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support)
 Rosemary Williams, *Mom's Cookies*
 Diane Willow, *tuning the sky* (WAM)
 Peng Wu and Jack Pavlik, *Light Fall* (MCAD)
 Peng Wu, Matthew Szklarz, and Jack Pavlik, *Midnight Mario* (MCAD)
 Liu Xuguang and Diane Willow, *Yellow River @ Mississippi River :: seeking what a river carries* (WAM)
 Tetsuya Yamada and Clive Murphy with U of M students, *Pizza/Calliope* (WAM)

ReGeneration (New York Hall of Science) biomodd [nyc4], *BIOMODD*
 Futurefarmers, *Ethnobotanical New York*
 Shih Chieh Huang, *99plus*
 Marisa Jahn and Stephanie Rothenberg, *World's Fair 2.0*
 Scott Kildall, *2049*
 Zach Lieberman, *Face By Face*
 Ricardo Miranda Zúñiga, *A Geography of Being: Una Geografía de ser*
 Carl Skelton, *Tomorrow 2.0*

The Living and SOFTlab, *Common Weathers*
 Nick Yulman, *New York Immigration Song*



Futurefarmers, *Ethnobotanical New York*, 2012.
 ReGeneration, Steve Dietz and Amanda Parkes,
 co-curators, New York Hall of Science. Photo: NL.



Art(ists) On the Verge 3: (clockwise from upper left) Drew Anderson, *Near the Ghosts of Sugarloaf*; Michael Hoyt, *Poho Posit*; Aaron Westre, *City Fight!*; Caly McMorrow, *Status Update*; Anthony Tran, *Wire Jess*. The Soap Factory. Photos: Dane McFarlane and Sarah Nienaber.



Marisa Jahn designed a deck of cards based on the Discourse and Discord symposium, co-presented with the Walker Art Center, 2012.



Robin Schwartzman, *THINK AND WONDER, WONDER AND THINK* on the Stone Arch Bridge, Northern Spark 2012. Photo: Patrick Kelley.



Keetra Dean Dixon, *Swing Hall, Swing All*, MCAD, Northern Spark 2012. Photo: Jayme Halbritter.



Northern Spark crowds hardly ever felt like something to be overcome—more like something to surf and enjoy. Stone Arch Bridge, Minneapolis, Northern Spark 2012. Photo: Patrick Kelley.



Mona El Khafif and Marcella del Signore, *iLounge*,
and (background) Rosemary Williams, *Mom's Cookies*,
West River Parkway, Northern Spark 2012. *iLounge*
presented by NL and ZER01. Photo: Patrick Kelley.



Wil Natzel, *Night Blooms*, West River Parkway,
Northern Spark 2012. Photo: Patrick Kelley.

Aniccha Arts, *In Haÿit: Living Patterns*, under Third Avenue Bridge, Minneapolis, Northern Spark 2012. Photo: Patrick Kelley.



Michael Murnane, *Under Ice*, including a performance by Kevin Kling, Pillsbury A Mill, Minneapolis, Northern Spark 2012. Photo: Patrick Kelley.



Art(ists) On the Verge 4

Artists

Christopher Houltberg, *Profile Cube*
Sarah Julson, *This Way*
Mad King Thomas, *Phone Dances (colon) Dances for the Telephone*
Asia Ward, *Subterranean*
Anthony Warnick, *The Library*

Codirectors

Steve Dietz
Piotr Szyhalski

Mentors

Melinda Childs
Jeff Crouse
Alexa Horochowski
Matt Olson
Sarah Peters (writing mentor)
Marcus Young

Essayist

Christina Schmid, "Out of the Box:
Art(ists) On the Verge, 2012-13"

Creative City Challenge

Urbain DRC, *Minneapolis Interactive Macro Mood Installation (MIMMI)*

Northern Spark

All projects presented by NL
(unless otherwise indicated).

Kjellgren Alkire, *Farmers' Market Review Analog Cave* (mnartists.org, Rain Taxi Review of Books)
astronaut spirit academy (air sweet air, Real Engineer's Club)
Beaker + Brush Discussions—Maya (Science Museum of Minnesota)
Anne Bertram and George Maurer, *Empire Builder* (Nautilus Music-Theater)
Bicycle First Aid Station (Lowertown Bike Shop)
Big Table Studio, Lunalux, and Printland Press, *Print Central Station* (Print Central Station)
Cindy Sherman Bishop and Martha Bourne, *Ghosts of the Twin Cities* (TPT)
Michael Bissonnette, Louis Sinclair, and Steve Clark, *Music from Dusk to Dawn* (Black Dog Cafe and Wine Bar)
Philip Blackburn, *Habanera: A Soundwalk through Old Havana, Cuba* (Innova Recordings)
David Bryan
Steel, Exquisite Corpse of (The Hack Factory)
Strange Attractor (The Hack Factory)

Vickie Burgett, *Urban Aurora*
Pritika Chowdhry, *Empty Time* (ASI)
Adam Conrad, Benjamin Kelly, and Max McDougal, *Gossip Orchestra Dance of a Thousand Water Dreams* (Ananya Dance Theatre)
Daniel Dean and Ben Moren, *Secret City*
Alicia Dvorak and Mitchell Dose, *Hover* (Springboard for the Arts)
Christopher Field and Sarah West, *Give me a setting sun*
Fresh Traditions Fashion Show Rewind (CHAT)
Patrick Gantert, *Untitled* (The Soap Factory)
Go Fish! (Minnesota Children's Museum)
Gospel Assembly of St. Jude, *Gospel after Dark* (Minnesota Sacred Harp Singers)
Monica Haller, *Can you listen to the same river twice?*
Riley Harrison, *Siege Engines* (The Hack Factory)
Justin Heideman, *Big Wall of Thanks*
Robyn Hendrix, *The Land of Parcheesopoly: A Living Life-sized Board Game* (Springboard for the Arts)
Paul Herwig, *Working from Home*
Jess Hirsch, Daniel Green, Mark La Venture, Jessie McClurg, Amber Sausen, and The Shiny Naughty Collective, *ASP: Abstracted* (Art Shanty Projects)
IgNite: Lowertown Art Project (AZ Gallery)
Christian Jankowski, *Rooftop Routine*
Seitu Jones, Amanda Lovelee, Colin Harris, and Emily Stover, *Create: The Community Meal* (Public Art Saint Paul)
Noah Keesecker, Andrew MacGuffie, and Peter Haakon Thompson, *Union Table* (Union Depot)
Mira and Tom Kehoe with Xibaba, *Spark Your Imagination!* (Springboard for the Arts)
John Keston, *Instant Cinema: Teleportation Platform X*
Chris Larson, *Celebration/Love/Loss*
David Lefkowitz, *Peripatetic Lower Course* (Students for Design Activism)
Bob Lunning and Jack Becker, *Forecast Labyrinth* (Forecast Public Art)
Christopher Lutter-Gardella, *Get Wrapped!* (Public Art Saint Paul)
Shanai Matteson, Colin Kloecker, and Ady Olson, *Ippississim* (Works Progress)

Mayda, Northern Spark Opening Ceremony performance (NL, TPT)
MN Original Episode Screenings (TPT)
MNKINO, *MNKINO38: Arrivals and Departures*
The Mobile Unit (Screen Printing on the Cheap)
Moonlight Sonata (The Schubert Club)
Michael and Abigail Mouw, *Arriving/ Departing in Central Standard Time* (Minnesota Historical Society)
Jeff Nelson, *Traveling Art Emporium* (Lowertown Bike Shop)
Jennifer Newsom Carruthers and Tom Carruthers, *The World Is Rated X*
Linda Nguyễn and Oanh Vu, *Collective Currents* (Springboard for the Arts)
Roger Nieboer and lesser mortals, *Existencia*
Northern Spark Kazoo Band
Angela Olson and Gilberto Vazquez Valle, *Who Is That Masked Stranger?*
Owl Feathers (Bell Museum of Natural History)
Prairie Fire Lady Choir, *Fiery Songs in the Night by the Ladies of the Prairie*
Lacy Prpić Hedtke and Nathan Lewis, *Manifestations* (MCAD)
Nina Rivera, *Messier 4* (MCAD)
Nickey Robare, Kevin Kalla, and Pete Poire-Odegard, *Telephonic Videophonic* (SPNN)
Monica Rojas and Nicole Infinity, *Community Clothesline* (Springboard for the Arts)
Aaron Rosenblum, Zach Morgan, and Sami Pfeffer, *Inside Spaces* (Springboard for the Arts)
Hamza Salim, D. Alwan, Islam Shabana, and Hend Kheera, *Underpass of the Eyes of Freedom* (Mizna)
Rambo Salinas, *Bedlam Lowertown* (Bedlam Theatre)
Singing from the Sacred Harp (Minnesota Sacred Harp Singers)
Soar through the Night in the ExploraDome (Bell Museum of Natural History)
Lea Sorrentino and Forever Young Dance, *Forever Young Dance Installation*
Chris Strouth and James Gladman, *Suddenly Petunia Pig Wasn't a Thing* (CoCo)
Paul Stucker, Kalen Keir, and Peter Rusk, *Popular Science* (Springboard for the Arts)

Studio Z in Flux (Zeitgeist)
Matte Szklarz, *War Drum Hero* (MCAD)
Piotr Szyhalski, *Permanent Labor*
Randy Walker, Liz Miller, and Andréa Stanislav
Connect | Repeat | Reflect (The M)
String | Felt | Theory (The M)
Clarence White, *Love Letters in Lowertown*
The Whitesidewalls and Arthur Murray Dance, *50s-style Sock Hop* (Ordway Center for the Performing Arts)
The Women of the Dark Carnival: Mystery, Intrigue, and Beauty in Movement (Studio Sendero)
Write Fight (Revolver)
Yoga Out of Captivity and Roaming the Urban Jungle (Gorilla Yogis)



Art(ists) On the Verge 4: (clockwise from upper left) Sarah Julson, *This Way*; Mad King Thomas, *Phone Dances* (colon) *Dances for the Telephone*; Anthony Warnick, *The Library*; Christopher Houlberg, *Profile Cu6e*; Asia Ward, *Su6teranean*. The Soap Factory. Photos: Rik Serra.



Urban DRC, *Minneapolis Interactive Macro Mood Installation (MIMMI)*, winner of inaugural Creative City Challenge, Minneapolis Convention Center Plaza, 2013. Photo: NL.



astronaut spirit academy, Union Depot, Northern Spark 2013. Presented by air sweet air and Real Engineer's Club. Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.

Pritika Chowdhry, *Empty Time*, Union Depot, Northern Spark 2013. Presented by American Swedish Institute. Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.



Piotr Szyhalski, *Permanent Labor*, Union Depot, Northern Spark 2013. Photo: Jayme Halbritter.



Ananya Dance Theatre, *Dance of a Thousand Water Dreams*, participatory dance, Union Depot, Northern Spark 2013. Photo: Erin Smith.



Revolver, *Write Fight* and Ananya Dance Theatre, *Dance of a Thousand Water Dreams*, Union Depot, Northern Spark 2013. Photo: Jayme Halbritter.

Art(ists) On the Verge 5

Artists

Katie Hargrave, *In Poor Tastes Good*
Alison Hiltner, *Survival Tactics*
Aaron Marx, *Builders of the Universe*
Peter Sowinski, *Autonomous*
Emily Stover, *General Delivery*

Codirectors

Steve Dietz
Piotr Szyhalski

Mentors

Ta-coumba Aiken
Christine Baeumler
Chris Larson
Abinadi Meza
Sarah Peters (writing mentor)
Diane Willow

Essayist

Susannah Schouweiler, "Art(ists)
On the Verge, 2013-14"

Creative City Challenge

Amanda Lovelee, Christopher Field,
Kyle Waites, and Sarah West,
Balancing Ground

fwd://

Piotr Szyhalski, *Ding an sich*
(*The Canon Series*)

INsite

Luftwerk, *INsite*

Interactive Multimedia Artwork

Platform at Union Depot

Jim Campbell, *8 1/2 x 11*
Daily tous les jours, *Amateur Intelligence*
Radio (AIR)

Northern Spark

All projects presented by NL
(unless otherwise indicated).

15-Minute Art Classes (MCAD)

Aesthetic Apparatus, Suzanne Hughes,
and Monica Edwards Larson, *1978*
(MCBA)
Christopher Alday, Kara Gregory, Jennifer
Hibbard, and Natasha Pestich, *Lost,
Found, & Wanted Shanty* (MCAD)
Christopher Alday, Nathan Lewis, and
Jo Yeh, *Archive Fever* (MCAD)
Eric F. Avery, *Minneapolis*³
Christine Baeumler, *Eco-Oracle* (WAM)

Gary Batzloff, Vince Donarski, Shannon
Estlund, Kelly Ludeking, Alissa
McCourt, and Scott Szarkowicz, *Shape
Shifting: A re-installation of the MCAD
Sculpture Garden* (MCAD)

Kelley Bell, *Garden of Earthly Delights
Birds of a Feather* (Raptor Center)
*Blasts from the Past: MCAD Student Short
Films, Videos, and Animations* (MCAD)
Blue Dream Journeys (Ananya Dance
Theatre)

Yael Braha and Ana Herruzo, */ärt fakts/
motion* (The Eyeo Festival, Minnesota
Orchestra)

Mary Bruno, Ruthann Godollei, Bill Moran,
Chip Schilling, and Jenni Undis,
Printers Local 403 (Lunalux)

Busker Stage at Northern Spark Coffee
Garden on the Greenway, various
artists (Midtown Greenway Coalition)

Chris Campbell, Michael Crosswell,
and Grant Cutler, *Field Frequency*
(American Composers Forum)

Kate Casanova, *A Natural History of
Chimneys* (Leav)

Kate Casanova, Daniel Dean, and Ben
Moren, *Hotel Hotel*

Close Range / Far Afield (Bell Museum
of Natural History)

Chris Cloud and Lea Devon Sorrentino,
Hannah Howard and Luke Axelson, and
others, *1612 Harmon Place: A Place to
Gather* (1612 Harmon Place)

Confluent (Mizna)

Sean Connaughty, *The Ark of the
Anthropocene* (WAM)

Bill Cottman, Kenna Cottman, Lewis Hill,
Kevin Obsatz, and Junauda Petrus,
beyond the LOOP

Crank Art Collective, *Pedal Bear*
(Midtown Greenway Coalition)

Crazy Cozy (HECUA)

Dakota Combo, *Live Jazz Performance*
(MacPhail Center for Music)

Alex DeArmond and Peter Haakon
Thompson, *Babies Sleep Tonight**

Venus DeMars, Emily Kaplan, Brian Hart, and
Jaime Carrera, *OCULUS* (Made Here)

Daniel Dean, John Kim, John Moore, Molly
Reichert, Emily Stover, Lara Avery,
Matt Barthalemy, and Bill Lindeke,
TönöSauna (ASI)

Keetra Dean Dixon, *Swing Hall, Swing All*
(MCAD)

Coal Dorius, *Pomp* (Midtown Greenway
Coalition)

Dosh, Northern Spark Launch Party
performance

Andy DuCett

fragment, why we do this (MCAD)
RARP! (Bell Museum of Natural History)

Asher Edes, Hannah Holman, and Vanessa
Ramos, *The Loft's Galactic Web of
Wonder* (The Loft Literary Center)

Sergei Eisenstein, Alexander Dovzhenko,
and Vsevolod Pudovkin, *Russian Avant-
Garde Film Festival* (The Museum of
Russian Art)

Benjamin Entner, *Ego Sum* (The Soap
Factory)

Tara Fahey and Kristi Ternes, *Dowsing Wild
Beauty* (Midtown Greenway Coalition)

Renae Ferrario, Nhia Lee, Amy Luong, and
Austin Shoemaker, *The Personality
Translator* (Art Institutes International
Minnesota)

The Flightless Bird Brothers and The
Shiny Naughty Collective, *Razing
Minneapolis—or—The Ghostly Streetcar
History Tour*

Jacquie Fuller, Northern Spark Pancake
Feed DJ

Trent Gilliss, Lily Percy, and Chris Heagle,
Your Audio Selfie (On Being / Krista
Tippett Public Productions)

Greycoats, *Per Aspera Ad Astra* (Le
Mériidien Chambers, Burnet Gallery)

GRRRL PRTY, Mu Daiko, Northern Spark
Opening Ceremony

Andy Hall, *Outdoor Activity for George
Kubler* (American Craft Council)

Holly Hansen, *The Weight of Church Bells*
(Leav)

Riley Harrison, *Lighting Up the City with
Dreams* (Twin Cities Maker—The Hack
Factory)

Zoé Henrot, Brittany Adams, and Jarod
Boltjes, *Footsteps* (Saint Paul Ballet)

Oliver Herring, *TASK Party* (MCAD)

Jess Hirsch and Ginny Sims, *Dosha Kitchen*
Jess Hirsch, Stefanie Motta, Brett Smith,
Eamonn McLain, Terese Elhardt, and
Sam Hoolihan, *Meta Shanty* (Art
Shanty Projects)

Soozin Hirschmugl, *sPARKit Mobile Unit*
Sam Hoolihan and John Marks, *City
Symphony in 16mm: A New Work for
Expanded Cinema*

HOTTEA, *La Maroma*

Seth Hunter, Victoria Fang, and Dimitri
Diakopoulos, *Amplify Us* (The Eyeo
Festival, Minnesota Orchestra)

Nicole Infinity and Monica Rojas, *Are You a
Robot/Monster?* (Art Shanty Projects)

Emily Johnson/Catalyst, *Be Mountain*
(*preview excerpts from SHORE*) (Mill
City Museum)

Jxta Kru, *Mobile Jxta* (Juxtaposition Arts)
Brad Kaspari, *Sound Observation*
(Midtown Greenway Coalition)

Benjamin Kelly, Adam Conrad, and Jamie
Johnson, *Gossip Orchestra* (NL, WAM)

Jin Hi Kim and Douglas Ewart, *Night
Mirrors* (Zeitgeist)

Kevin Kirsch, *Talking Head* (Midtown
Greenway Coalition)

Lucas Koski, *Projecting Lowertown*
(Artspace)

Chris Koza, *Transient Melody* (Leav)
Anne Labovitz, *Conversant Portraits*
(WAM)

Late Night Improv (Brave New Workshop)
Erin Lavelle and Anthony Chapin,

Nighttime Post

Local Music on Loring, various artists
(HiFi Hair and Records)

David Luke, *Upstream Animated*
(Upstream Arts)

MakeSh!t, *Public Acts of Drawing*
Meena Mangalvedhekar, *Take the Field*
(Midtown Greenway Coalition)

Christian Marclay, *The Clock*
(Walker Art Center)

Cali Mastny, Claire Alexander, Dan Bayn,
Rachel Bendtsen, David Bryan, Lauren
DeSteno, Laura Gerald, Marc Gutman,
Caly McMorro, Matt Mackall, Aaron
Prust, Scott Raleigh, Cole Sarar, and
Beth Scudder, *The Elevator Shanty*
(Art Shanty Projects)

Miwa Matreyek, *Myth and Infrastructure*
Abinadi Meza, *The Sky Opens Twice* (Mia)

MINN_LAB, *POSTography*

Minneapolis Art on Wheels, *Chimera*
(Bell Museum of Natural History)

MNKINO, *MNKINO42: Connect the Dots*
(Midtown Greenway Coalition, NL)

Monkey with a Mustache, *MysteryPhone:
Art of Darkness*

Jim Moore and Tim Carl, *Architectural
Tours of Renovated Northrop*
(Northrop, U of M IAS)

Wil Natzel, *Aura Info Hub*

Nik Nerburn, *In the Shadow of Paul Bunyan*

Roger Nieboer and lesser mortals,

Folkalopolis
Night Lights (Vine Arts Center)

Matt One Up, Hannah Howard, Hal Lovemelt, and Slam Academy, *Intergalactic Garden* (Gamut Gallery)

Outdoor Cinema, various artists (U of M Department of Art)

Scott Pampuch, *100 Course Dinner on the Mall* (Northrop, U of M IAS)

Piazza on the Mall (The Musicant Group)

Stuart Pimsler Dance and Theater, *Fancy Folk* (Leav)

Jefferson Pinder, *Relay*

David Pittman, *Stargazing Shanty* (Art Shanty Projects)

Projecting the Greenway (Midtown Greenway Coalition)

Ragamala Dance, *Honoring Tagore: Ragamala's Sacred Earth* (On Being / Krista Tippett Public Productions)

Rain Taxi, *Poetry Tarot* (Walker Art Center)

Joellyn Rock, Kathy McTavish, and Rob Wittig, *Graffiti Angel in Sophronia* (Walker Art Center)

Areca Roe, *Watchtowers* (Midtown Greenway Coalition)

Jes Rosenberg and Nan Arundel, *Midnight Sparkler Yoga* (Gorilla Yogis)

Erik Satie (interpreted by nine pianists), Sophie Erlund, Charles Stankieveh, and others, *Vexations / A long, long, long night (and day) at the piano* (Northrop, U of M IAS)

Luke Savisky, *E/x MN**

Singing from the Sacred Harp (Minnesota Sacred Harp Singers)

Moheb Soliman, *Great Lakes Overhead*

Tyler Stefanich and others, *Arcade Backpack* (MCAD)

Students for Design Activism, *Flicker & Spore* (Midtown Greenway Coalition)

Subterranean Café, *Plinko Poetry* (Midtown Greenway Coalition)

SuperGroup, Brute Heart, Rachel Jendrzewski, and Liz Miller, *Circumstances for We* (Northrop, U of M IAS)

Joko Sutrisno, Tri Sutrisno, and others, *Sumunar Gamelan Ensemble* (Northrop, U of M IAS)

David Swenson, *Toast the Gods* (Northern Clay Center)

Symphony No. 4: From Mission San Juan (Minnesota Orchestra, The Eyeo Festival)

Scott Szarkowicz and John Vieno, *Interactive Image Craft* (Midtown Greenway Coalition)

Piotr Szyhalski, *Public Print Works*

The Unicorn Show, various artists (The Nicollet)

United Media Brigade, *The Journey Never Ends* *The River Simply Bends* (St. Cloud State University)

Karl Unnasch, *Glassicles* (Soo Visual Arts Center)

Roman Verostko, *The Magic Hand of Chance* (MCAD)

vidtiger, *FUTUREKAVE* (vidtiger, Mia, MCAD)

Kawandeep Virdee of New American Public Art, *CELLULAR* (The Eyeo Festival, Minnesota Orchestra)

Stephen Vitiello and Michael J. Schumacher, *The Audible Edge* (Katherine E. Nash Gallery)

WAM@20:MN exhibition opening (WAM)

Asia Ward, *Electric Hopscotch*

Christopher Williams and Andrew Foreman, *All Night In C*

Write Fight II (Revolver)

*Due to historic rains these projects did not operate on the night of the festival.

Ruination: City of Dust
Game designer: Ken Ecklund
Art director: Erin Lavelle
Artists and designers

Molly Balcom Raleigh
 Tony Chapin
 Tim Cronin Hnilicka
 Neal Cuthbert
 Jake Davis
 Jeff Hnilicka
 Michael Murnane
 Rehm Design Team

Performers
 Parker Anderson-Genne
 Windy Bowlsby
 Molly Budke
 Beverly Cottman
 Gaea Dill-D'Ascoli
 Lauren Fechner
 Katherine Glover
 Karin Haase
 John Heimbuch
 Soozin Hirschmugl
 Damian Johnson
 Ted Klyce
 Thalia Bea Kostman
 Emily Lund
 Peter Rusk
 Breanna Schneidewent
 Natalie Wass



Luftwerk, *Ruination: City of Dust*, 7-channel video installation, Farnsworth House, Plano, Illinois, 2014. Curator: Steve Dietz, NL. Photo: Kate Joyce.



Art(ists) On the Verge 5: (clockwise from upper left)
 Katie Hargrave, *In Poor Tastes Good*; Aaron Marx,
Builders of the Universe; Emily Stover, *General Delivery*.
 Alison Hiltner, *Survival Tactics*; Peter Sowinski,
Autonomous. The Soap Factory. Photos: Rik Sferra.



Interactive Multimedia Artwork Platform(s) at Union Depot, St. Paul.
 Jim Campbell, *8 1/2 x 11* (hanging from ceiling); *Daily tous les jours*,
Amateur Intelligence Radio (AIR) (far corner), 2014. Photo: Rik Sferra.



Amanda Lovelee, Christopher Field, Kyle Waites,
 and Sarah West, *Balancing Ground*, Creative City
 Challenge winner, 2014. Minneapolis Convention
 Center Plaza. Photo courtesy the artists.



Erin Lavelle and Anthony Chapin, *Nighttime Post*,
West River Parkway, Northern Spark 2014.
Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.



Lightning over Stone Arch Bridge, Northern
Spark 2014. A deluge: it rained more than 2
inches from dusk to dawn. Photo: Ian Hanson.

Jefferson Pinder, *Relay*, Minneapolis,
Northern Spark 2014. Photo: Jon Reynolds.



Ruination: City of Dust, Reactor Pool Breach, along
Minnehaha Creek, 2014. Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.

Alma Lights

Laura Bigger
Portal
Threshold
Aaron Dysart, *Second Growth*
James Garrett Jr., *SCHMO: stratum, surface, time*
Jess Hirsch, *Doorway Effect*
Ifrah Mansour, *Lablaab The Spill*
Wil Natzel, *Dazzle*
Molly Reichert + Sean Higgins, *Boolean View*
Robin Schwartzman, *SubPar*
Piotr Szyhalski, *Malignum Aditum Puncti*
Peter Haakon Thompson, *House Flags for Alma Lights*
JoAnn Verburg
Untitled (for Robert Wilson), Signe
Untitled (pietà), Ashley and Keegan
Untitled (reflection), Bonnie

Art(ists) On the Verge 6

Artists

Ryan Aasen, *NSA*
Molly Balcom Raleigh, *Personal Appeal*
Claire Barber, *when you know you know*
Daniel Dean, *Center for Advanced Applications*
Meredith Lynn, *West Fargo, MN*

Codirectors

Steve Dietz
Piotr Szyhalski

Mentors

Morgan Adamson
Kirsten Valentine Cadieux
Peter Happel Christian
Jan Estep
Natasha Pestich
Sarah Peters (writing mentor)

Essayist

Kirsten Valentine Cadieux, "Methodologies on the Verge, Art(ists) On the Verge, 2014-15"

Creative City Challenge

Niko Kubota, Jon Reynolds, and Micah Roth, *mini_polis*

Northern Spark

All projects presented by NL (unless otherwise indicated).

Adam Levy and The Professors, Northern Spark Launch Party performance

David Andree, Josh Mason, Jonathan Kaiser, Nathan McLaughlin, John Marks, Casey Deming, and Ryan Potts (Aquarelle), *An Overture in Seven Parts* (MCAD)

Alyssa Baguss, *HB2U: A Northern Spark Birthday Surprise* (Mia)

Bear Fox Chalk, *A Crafted Adventure* (Caribou Coffee)

Dave Beck, *Logjam* (MCAD)

Tony Biele, *Origami Fishtank* (Northrop, U of M IAS and Honors Program)

BodyCartography Project, *CLOSER, Part 1*
Miranda Brandon

DIY Bird Populator (Bell Museum of Natural History)

Impact (Bell Museum of Natural History)

Valentine Cadieux, Valentin Fiala, Milena Klimek, Rebecca Paxton, and Peter Shea, *Picture-a-Farmer: Farmer Photobooth* (Northrop, U of M IAS and Honors Program)

Eric William Carroll, *Golden Hour* (NL, Leav)

Charanga Tropical, *Dance Party with Charanga Tropical* (Walker Art Center)

Mary Ellen Childs, *Ear and Nose* (Northrop, U of M IAS and Honors Program)

Cloud Cult, Northern Spark Opening Ceremony performance (NL with TPT, ACCE, City of Minneapolis)

Christina Collins and Danielle Fleming-Carr, *The Oracle Test* (Northrop, U of M IAS and Honors Program)

Creative Studio, *Sparkle Smash!* (Target)
Dreamland Faces, *Epics of the Toilers: Working Class Silent Films* (Mill City Museum)

Sam Easterson, *Animal Secrets* (Bell Museum of Natural History)

D. Mort Eicher, *Disco Roller Printing Party* (MCAD)

Osama Esid, *Still/Life/Syria* (Mizna)

Mark Estlund, Shannon Estlund, Scott Hochhalter, and Nathan Lewis, *Midnight Shadows* (MCAD)

Michael Friedman, *Martian Dawn* (Walker Art Center)

Grace Minnesota with Theresa Madaus, Diane Helleckson, and Aki Shibata, *Don't You Feel It Too?* (WAM)

Hunter Jonakin, *Can You Hear Me Now? You'll Never Hear Me Again* (MCAD)

Jxta Kru, *Mobile JXTA* (Juxtaposition Arts)

Kevin R. Kao and Xia Zhang, *Bumfuck Co.* (Northern Clay Center)

John Keston with Ai MN students, *Instant Composer: Mad-libbed Music* (Art Institutes International Minnesota)

John Kim and Ben Moren, *Game Grid*

Rebecca Krinke, *Dream Window*

Liudmila + Nelson, *Absolut Revolution: La Isla* (Mia)

Local Time, various artists (WAM)

Amanda Lovelee and Julie Benda, *We Are Great!* (Greater MSP)

Julian McFaul and Mark Safford, *The Night Library* (Hennepin County Library)

Kathy McTavish

Map It (Greater MSP)

mill city requiem: for solo instrument & distance

Mill City Summer Opera, *Mill City Summer Opera Next: Opera Redux* (Mill City Museum)

MN Orchestra String Quartet, *From Amber Frozen* (Minnesota Orchestra)

Ali Momeni and Jenny Schmid, *Gutless Warrior* (Walker Art Center)

Stefanie Motta, *She Lives Free*

MSR Design, *Top of the Mill to You* (Mill City Museum)

Richard Mueller and Stefon BIONIK Taylor, *You Are Hear*

Roger Nieboer and lesser mortals, *Marketopia*

Philip Noyed, *Rainbow Pyramid* (Northrop, U of M IAS and Honors Program)

Owls and Stars, various artists (WAM)

Chris Pennington, Rob Clapp, John Grider, and David Pitman, *Tron Human*

Foosball (Can Can Wonderland)

Franziska Pierwoss & SISKI, *KINO Holly*ood* (NL, FD13)

Pierwoss & SISKI with Cole Pulice, DJ Brian Engel: Northern Spark Pancake

Feed performances

Pollen, *MSPortraits* (Greater MSP)

Revolver, *The Dark Room* (MCAD)

Tamsie Ringler, *River of Iron: Pouring the Mississippi* (WAM)

Luke Savisky, *E/x MN*

Tom Schroeder and others, *Sound/FUN/Fury* (MCAD)

Shapiro & Smith Dance, *HANDS*

(Northrop, U of M IAS and Honors Program)

Witt Siasoco, *Pop Collab Lab* (Walker Art Center)

Miko S. Simmons, *In Ruins: A History of the Future's Past* (NL, Mill City Museum)

Eddo Stern with Steve Amrhein, Nick Crockett, and Jessica Hutchins, *Vietnam Romance*

Emily Stover, *The Thing about Words* (Northrop, U of M IAS and Honors Program)

Andy Sturdevant, *Footpaths '92: A Spiritual Health and Psychic Wealth Expo*

Sumunar Gamelan and Dance Ensembles, *Klenengan—All-Night Gamelan Performance* (Northrop, U of M IAS and Honors Program)

Sun Silo, *Endlessly Repeating Endlessly* (Northrop, U of M IAS and Honors Program)

Morgan Thorson, *Still Life* (WAM)

Topographies and Raster, Vector, Voxel, various artists (MCAD)

U of M School of Architecture students, *CityScope* (MINN_LAB / College of Design)

UCLA Game Lab

Big Phoney Games Game Bar

United Media Brigade, *ReKinect with the Seasons* (St. Cloud State University Art Department)

Voices in the Dark, various artists

WAM Collective, *Picnic in the Park* (WAM)

Aaron Westre and J Wynia, *People Pixels* (Northrop, U of M IAS and Honors Program)

Diane Willow, *nightlife* (Bell Museum of Natural History)

Works Progress Studio, *Water Bar* (Northrop, U of M IAS and Honors Program)

Write Fight III (Revolver)



Art(ists) On the Verge 6: (clockwise from upper left)
 Ryan Aasen, *NSA*; Molly Balcom Raleigh, *Personal Appeal*;
 Meredith Lynn, *West Fargo, MN*; Claire Barber, *when
 you know you know*; Daniel Dean, *Center for Advanced
 Applications*. The Soap Factory. Photos: Rik Sferra.



James Garrett Jr., *SCHMO: stratum, surface, time* (left), and Aaron Dysart, *Second Growth* at Alma Lights, 2015. Photo: Rik Sferra.



Niko Kubota, Jon Reynolds, and Micah Roth, *mini_polis*. Creative City Challenge winner, Minneapolis Convention Center Plaza, Northern Spark 2015. Photo: Kory Lidstrom.



The Lowertown Line: Cloud Cult, Opening Ceremony performance, Minneapolis Convention Center, Northern Spark 2015. Photo: Kory Lidstrom.



Osama Esid, *Still/Life/Syria*, Mill Ruins Park, Northern Spark 2015. Presented by Mizna. Photo: Ian Plant.



Eddo Stern with Steve Amrhein, Nick Crockett, and Jessica Hutchins, *Vietnam Romance*, Peavey Plaza, Northern Spark 2015. Photo: Shawn Orton.



Julian McFaul and Mark Safford, *The Night Library*, Mill Ruins Park, Northern Spark 2015. Presented by Hennepin County Library. Photo: Ian Plant.



Jxta Kru, *Mobile JXTA*, Peavey Plaza, Northern Spark 2015. Presented by Juxtaposition Arts. Photo: Shawn Orton.

Luke Savisky, *E/x MN*, Mill Ruins Park and Gold Medal silos, Northern Spark 2015. Photo: Ian Plant.





Andy Sturdevant, *Footpaths '92: A Spiritual Health and Psychic Wealth Expo*, Minneapolis Convention Center, Northern Spark 2015. Photo: Kory Lidstrom.



Northern Spark 2015 volunteers at Minneapolis Convention Center. Photo: Kory Lidstrom.

experiment/al In my creative contexts, the word “experiment” feels ancient. It needs a makeover / redo / expansion set. Being entwined in “experimental art and performance” most of my life, I think that when someone says “let’s experiment,” it implies some future site of arrival. Maybe there is a hypothesis, or an unproven supposition or possibly messy outcome. It implies innovation, daring, “discovery,” or the ability to persevere through an unknown, requiring “rigor.” It suggests that the experiment is new and exciting and needed to bring “fresh ideas” to the foreground. It could be because our imaginations and their manifestations require unusual thinking or process. Maybe it’s a combination of materials, technique, fields, combinations new-to-us-all.

We situate the possibility and spectatorship of failure almost solely in this context—as if failure is not permissible in any other creative context, and the mirage (and definition) of “success” is the goal. How many times, when we’re not sure, when we’re insecure or uncommitted, do we offer “it’s just an experiment” to manage expectations and create curiosity?

Experimental sites relate to a normative, a mainstream, directly. It claims a place of alterity. A place for “weird shit” and a small following of people who appreciate “weird shit.” But spaces for “weird shit” amid a dynamic where this is an established normative make “weird shit” . . . normal?

I think “contemporary” artmaking fetishizes the new, the innovative, similarly to capitalist culture. I’ve been nauseous with the experimental / mainstream binary for a long time. In my practice, I push on binaries. My lived experience in this constellation of peripheries has shown me that my sustainability relies on my grounding in these spaces, this art, this walk, this life. I make sure as much as I can that they are not relating to / responding to / being defined by a center.

Finally, only a narrow definition of “experimental” is tolerated as experimental by “experimental artists” in the field of experimental art and performance. It’s not inclusive—I’ve worked to unravel and acknowledge the *many* ways communities and artists of color experiment: the ways we work with community, our positionality, methodology, combination of materials, how materials are obtained, the ways bodies are activated, surfacings of sound, how we move through time, etc., etc. It really is time to unravel this culture that has claimed and defined “experimental” to the exclusion of so many. >VO ↪ SEE ALSO: BELONGING, EQUITY, FAILURE, INNOVATIVE, MISSION, NETWORK, POSSIBILITY, PUBLIC ART ALCHEMY

Experimenting with Art in Public Places This 2008 symposium explored how to support and present experimental art practices in public places, including in the virtual realm, outside the traditional white cubes and black boxes of cultural institutions.

In many ways this was a generative discussion: presentations by artists and curators from around the country sparked Northern Lights.mn’s imagination of the possible. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: EXPERIMENT/AL, PLATFORM, PUBLIC SPHERE

extinction ↪ SEE: ECOSYSTEM

failure In Silicon Valley, the meme “fail fast” was overhyped and later perhaps undervalued. At Northern Lights.mn failure certainly wasn’t a goal, but we tried not to fear it. At the first Northern Spark, we didn’t know if anyone besides colleagues and family would show. There were 50,000 visits. At other events, when we expected thousands, we had hundreds. Failure? Not necessarily. It’s important to distinguish between some kind of structural or planning error (no toilets, no promotion, not the right skill set to support a project) and what might be called an experimental failure. If an NL platform or an artist project didn’t meet expectations, that was not necessarily a failure. In many instances something completely unexpected and exciting happened. In all cases, we tried to learn from the experience. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: AURORA BOREALIS, COEVOLUTION, ECOSYSTEM, EXPERIMENT/AL, FWD://, PLAYBOOK, PROCESS

festival More than a celebratory occasion for enthusiastic activity, the structure of a festival provided an opportunity for artists and others to experiment. In the festival context, many parts make a whole, which means that no one part needs to be everything. Artists or organizations could make projects that may have been too weird or small scale or “unproven” to merit their own billing, given the resources required to produce and promote new artwork. When we made a festival, all projects—though individually distinct—were collected under a common theme, place, or time to support each other in the creation of a wandering, fulsome, diverse artistic experience. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: AUDIENCE, EXPERIMENT/AL, NORTHERN SPARK, PLATFORM, POSSIBILITY, THEME

foment ↪ SEE: AGENCY

food One way that Northern Lights.mn artists pushed boundaries of participatory public art was through food-related projects. NL staff became intimately familiar with food permit regulations in every location we worked, as artists proposed projects that would invite the public to make dumplings or eat pickled

dandelion roots. Strawberry shortcake, Somali tea, and smoked carp with salad of creeping charlie are among the delights consumed at NL projects.

① Artist Molly Balcom Raleigh connected the Twin Cities during NS 2012: festival goers on the street in Minneapolis shared shortcakes around a half-table while speaking via live feed with the artist and her guests around the other half of the table in her home in St. Paul. ② Some artists referenced food to discuss a larger subject, as Katie Hargrave's AOV5 installation did: sugar records slowly degraded while they played on turntables as a soundtrack to address the entwined history of beet sugar production and abolitionism. ③ Drinking dosha-specific tea in a trailer-turned-kitchen in the rain at 3 am. ④ Community members in Jamestown, North Dakota, made dumplings together from family recipes in the dumpling-shaped house of artists Molly Balcom Raleigh and Emily Stover. ⑤ Late into the night at NS 2016, festival goers munched on pickled dandelion roots, dandelion greens, and flower cakes as they discussed future foods for climate-changed Minnesota. ⑥ A taste of sweet honey after an afternoon of bicycle riding and watershed mystery solving. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: AQUANESIA, ART(ISTS) ON THE VERGE, HOSPITALITY, ILLUMINATE SOUTH LOOP, JAMESTOWN ARTSPARK, NORTHERN SPARK, PARTICIPATORY, PERMIT, SNACKS



① Molly Balcom Raleigh, *FEED/FEED*, NS 2012. Photo: Sean Smuda.



② Katie Hargrave, *In Poor, Tastes Good*, AOV5, 2015. Photo: Rik Sjerra.



③ Jess Hirsch and Ginny Sims, *Dosha Kitchen*, NS 2014. Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.



④ Molly Balcom Raleigh and Emily Stover, *Dumpling House*, Jamestown ArtSpark, 2017.



⑤ Marina Zurkow with Valentine Cadieux, Aaron Marx, and Sarah Petersen, *Making the Best of It: Dandelion*, NS 2016. Photo: Jayme Halbritter.



⑥ The Understory, *Ruination: City of Dust*, 2014. Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.

free For better or worse, Northern Lights.mn held fiercely to our value of free access to culture with our programming. The exceptions were fundraisers and offerings with partners that charged gallery admission or required tickets. This was a practicality as much as a value: charging for art in sprawling public space is difficult and expensive. What about the people who wander through without intending to be there but instead find themselves entranced in a surprise joy? What does that cost? >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: AUDIENCE, COSTS, CULTURE, FUNDRAISING, PARTNERSHIP, PUBLIC SPHERE, SPONSORSHIP, SUNSET, TICKETING, WANDER

funders I technically entered Northern Lights.mn through my role as a funder, though it was important to my soul as an artist and citizen. As a funder, at that time, we sought to invest in organizations and people that would and could make a material difference to the quality of life for everyone in our community.

To me NL was a no brainer. Why wouldn't a community want to invest in and develop some of the leading talent and thinking and ideas in new media and create moments in the community and in people's lives that opened very unique doors of thinking and perception? It was a serious win-win-win-win. It benefits everyone. This seemed obvious to a small group of funders—private and public and individual—but to many others, not so much.

NL, especially when it was conflated with Northern Spark, was often perceived as yet another festival, yet another event in the cavalcade of creative and important events in the Twin Cities. That was hard. When you believe in something and see its transformative potential and power, and you know that's truly its nature, waiting for others to catch its wave is frustrating.

I believe that many funders believe that the Twin Cities are blessed with an enormous amount of artistic activity, and that's wonderful and true. More isn't necessary, there's already more.

What people fail to understand is that, like a fire, culture needs to be fed, not just maintained. That's when it goes out. >NC ↪ SEE ALSO: COMMUNICATIONS, DONORS, FUNDRAISING, NORTHERN SPARK, SUNSET

Northern Lights.mn Funders, 2008–2024

Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts	John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
Arts Midwest	Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC)
Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy Program of the City of Minneapolis	Lowertown Future Fund
Artspace	MAP Fund
Bush Foundation	McKnight Foundation
Capitol Region Watershed District (CRWD)	Minneapolis Downtown Improvement District
Carolyn Foundation	Minneapolis Foundation
Central Indiana Community Foundation (CICF)	Minneapolis Parks Foundation
City of Bloomington Placemaking Commission	Minnehaha Creek Watershed District
City of Minneapolis	Minnesota Regional Arts Council (MRAC)
Dominium	Minnesota State Arts Board
Efroymsen Family Foundation	Minnesota State Fair
F. R. Bigelow Foundation	National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)
Greater MSP	Restaurant Alma
Green Minneapolis	Saint Paul and Minnesota Foundation
Horncrest Foundation	Saint Paul Cultural STAR Program
Japan Foundation	Smaby Family Foundation
Jerome Foundation	St. Anthony Falls Heritage Board

fundraising A foundation president, a corporate CEO, a wealthy philanthropist, and a government bureaucrat walk into a bar. They each order a Mission and a Vision, no longer than 250 words, in the next three minutes. You're short staffed. Who do you serve?

If only it were a joke!

The fine art of raising money is hard. At Northern Lights.mn, we were plagued by the classic conundrum of not having enough staff to successfully tackle all fundraising strategies, thus reducing our ability to raise more money, to hire more staff, to do more fundraising. In the absence of a dedicated development director (save for a year or so when we had a consultant) we leaned heavily on what we were good at: writing grants. Our applications were successful, for the most part, but many were restricted funds for specific programs.

We were not necessarily naive about raising money: we brought considerable privilege into the task of fundraising, including professional training at large (white) institutions, and the connections and familiarity with the (white) fundraising playbook



of those realms. But we were programmers at heart, and doubling our overhead to hire full-ish time staff to raise money seemed to run headlong into a desire to be nimble. Our downfall, perhaps?

We organized an annual Launch Party fundraiser coinciding with Northern Spark, which started out lucrative but dwindled in donations, oddly, as the festival grew in popularity. A late-winter NS fundraiser reboot, Spring Howl, lacked the energy of festival night.

We tried to garner sponsorships, we made and sold merch, we “crowdfunded,” we assembled a ragtag kazoo band, we participated warily in Minnesota’s Give to the Max Day. We tried to cultivate “major” donors, yet for lack of skill, Rolodex, or, admittedly, interest in that kind of relationship tending, this was not successful. We did maintain a very loyal group of monthly donors for the better part of a decade, but not enough for us to be stable.

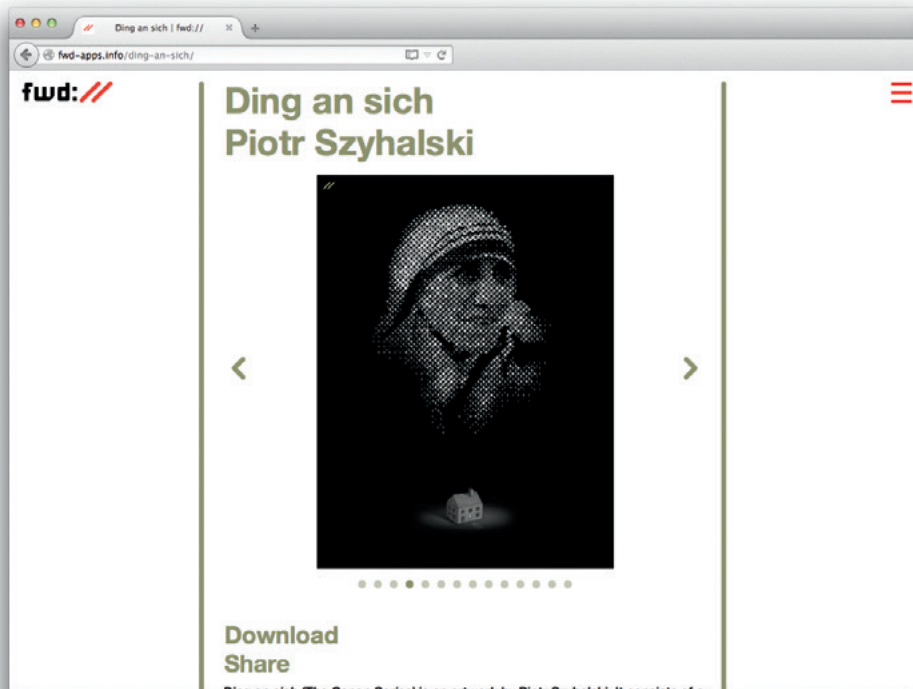
Our final year of sunset operations was funded, almost entirely, by a close-down grant from the McKnight Foundation, the Minnesota-based philanthropy responsible for NL’s existence in the first place. Being able to work on this publication, its parallel archive, and other close-down activities without the grinding tasks of constant fundraising has been close to liberatory. We wish this experience for other organizations . . . if only closing were not required to achieve it. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: BUDGET, COSTS, CROWDFUNDING, FAILURE, FUNDERS, NIMBLE, SPONSORSHIP, SPRING HOWL, STAFFING, SUNRISE, SUNSET, SUSTAINABLE, TELETHON, VALUES

future One of the favorite sayings at Northern Lights.mn HQ was the perhaps apocryphal maxim from William Gibson: “The future has already arrived—it’s just not evenly distributed yet.” We proselytized how artists would use, reuse, and misuse technology to spark our imagination of the possible. Over time, we became less attached to technology per se and focused on how to more evenly distribute opportunities. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: ARCHIVE, EQUITY, POSSIBILITY, TECHNOLOGY

Left: Northern Spark Kazoo Band, NS 2013. Photo: Erin Smith. Right: Screenshot of Telethon Host John Gebratadze, 2022. Graphics by Matthew Rezac. Image: NL.

fwd:// In 2015 Northern Lights.mn launched fwd://, a new platform to explore digital artist apps and extend the realm of the public into the digital sphere. We were planning to use this platform to support new projects as well as resurrect early media art projects (such as Piotr Szyhalski's *Ding an sich*) that may have “decayed” through software updates, corporate mergers, and digital obsolescence.

We soon discovered that “recovering” a project was difficult and time-consuming, but dealing with the requirements of the Apple Store to distribute the app was a bureaucratic nightmare. fwd:// did not move forward as our platform. >TS ↪ [SEE ALSO: ARCHIVE, BUREAUCRACY, DING AN SICH, EXPERIMENT/AL, FAILURE, NEW MEDIA, PLATFORM, PUBLIC SPHERE](#)



game An invitation to play within agreed-upon fictions and constraints. An interactive system to explore and understand any topic, thus promoting knowledge and empathy. An activity that is equally serious and fun. A construct of intertwining cause-and-effect choices.

>KL ↪ [SEE ALSO: AQUANESIA, GAME DESIGNER, PLAY](#)

game designer A keen observer of human behavior. They watch, listen, and learn the essential elements and special details of their subjects—the topic, the game system, the playtesters.

Meaningful actions and interactions exist in environments that afford them. The game designer is a worldbuilder, a

storyteller, a systems designer. They naturally blend (and invite) the skills of a programmer, a project manager, an editor, an architect, an urban planner, an artist, a dramaturg, a product designer, a costume designer, a graphic designer, a psychologist, a sound designer, an athlete, an economist, a historian, a futurist.

Synthesizing the respective talents of the *Aquanesia* creative and production team yielded what can only be described as a megagame—the very name of the genre suggests the epic. Leaving the confined dimensions and controlled lighting of a soundstage, a theater, or an escape room, immersion in the magic circle of the game world is an ever-larger challenge for designers to fulfill audience expectations for immersive experiences.

Together we created a location-based game and performance set one hundred years in the future. Players test their skills at different watershed-based activities to decipher a set of clues, which help them unlock the mystery of how and why people are losing their memories of the past century. The goal of *Aquanesia* is to create a fun-filled adventure that gets people outside to play and connect with their city and local watershed on bicycle or on foot. As they play the game, they become familiar with specific aspects of the local environment as well as general principles about a watershed and clean water. The intended result is to encourage players to become ever-better stewards of their watershed.

While the scientific context of the game provided a rigorous system to work within, the magic came from the myriad, iterative conversations that led us to cast the players as “the best version of themselves,” juxtaposing their increasing in-game knowledge and accomplishments against the challenges wrought by both greedy antagonists and systemic vicious cycles. Clever logos and illustrations, as well as carefully placed clues in cheeky dialogue, are critical in complementing the game’s water-based mechanics, providing actionable information to move the players toward victory and enriching the worldbuilding.

Game designers—and players—are collaborators. Their suspension of disbelief in the game’s fictional world is shared, nurtured from the moment of greeting to the triumphal finish. How fully the players feel included is a barometer of a successful experience. >KL ↪ [SEE ALSO: AQUANESIA, DRAMATURG, GAME, PARTICIPATORY, PLAY](#)

gatekeeper People rarely name themselves as gatekeepers. If you have resources (community or societal) and influence, and you control and protect these resources, then you gotta really think about how to participate within community. Particularly if you leverage your influence such that bodies are held back (intentionally or not).

Maybe you're afraid of competition, change, or avoid staying uncomfortable / maybe you're just in the stream of "this is how it's always been" / maybe you've worked so hard for your success, experienced that inequity, that you believe other bodies should have it be as hard, and bearing that inequity is just part of it. // Maybe you're an authority in your field and are unable to perceive the possibilities in your field from beyond your vantage. Stay soft. Stay open. It is inevitable that you will manage resources and have influence—gosh it's a complicated path but trust the process and don't be a jerk—create sustainable paths for access that are thoughtful, earnest, and complex—and lift, lift, LIFT. >VO ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST COUNCIL, EQUITY, JURATE, OPEN CALL, POWER

generosity units = time, compassion, empathy, availability, resources, patience, love, care, effort, emotions, hugs, nourishment, and anything else one can give or provide. An awareness of one's depths and earnest possibilities of one's ability to offer. Most important and sometimes so hard for me: toward oneself. >VO ↪ SEE ALSO: COLLABORATION, HEALING, PARTNERSHIP, RECIPROCITY

Giant Sing Along Bringing the *Giant Sing Along* to the Minnesota State Fair has been one of the highlights of my career. Our early meetings with Northern Lights.mn were so inspiring as we talked about different ways to incorporate public art into the fair.

Once we landed on a plan to commission a multimedia art project, we invited several artists from around the world to visit the fair in 2010. This was a new and unique process for us, and seeing the fair through their eyes was enlightening. I'll never forget when Melissa Mongiat with Daily tous les jours said, "There is no tension here." That powerful observation has stayed with me.

We selected Daily tous les jours's *Giant Sing Along* as the installation and got to work. Their home base was in Montreal and our team was in Minnesota, so we communicated by phone and email in those days before Zoom. NL was a great steward of the project, ensuring that the artists' vision was realized while we problem-solved production and logistics. The installation needed to be sturdy enough to withstand twelve days of wear and tear by more than 1.6 million fair guests; it needed to immediately and clearly explain what was expected of participants; and, most important, it needed to be joyful.

My biggest concern throughout the project planning was if reticent Minnesotans would go to a microphone and sing with strangers. On opening day of the 2011 Minnesota State Fair, I recall standing on the site of the *Giant Sing Along*, with brightly



colored microphones appearing to grow out of a field and bold pink letters bouncing across the video screen. I felt a tremendous sense of relief as people of all ages eagerly stepped up to the microphones and sang their hearts out.

At the 2023 State Fair, a guest who is blind was riding the SkyGlider above the *Giant Sing Along*. He describes hearing people "singing at the top of their lungs" and proclaimed, "I need to find out what that is." He could feel their joy!

The *Giant Sing Along* brings something magical and beautiful to the Minnesota State Fair. It's a place for people to be together, let their guard down, and just sing. It is public art at its finest. I'm proud that after twelve years it is woven into the fabric of the fair and is just as much a part of the Great Minnesota Get-Together as animals, rides, and deep-fried foods. >RA ↪ SEE ALSO: COMMISSION, JOY, PARTICIPATORY, SINGING, SPECTACLE

gig economy An initial idea of Northern Lights.mn was to function as a network of skilled contractors who would assemble into teams around an artist project, overseen by an artistic director. This structure aimed to give artists meaningful contract work without the schedule constraints of a 9–5 job. Very soon a minimal staff became necessary to keep the wheels turning. Contractors filled in the rest. The work was deeply meaningful, the flexibility useful, the benefits and stability less so. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: BEGINNINGS, BURNOUT, COSTS, CREW, NIMBLE, STAFFING

gratitude We say so throughout this book, but it is worth repeating that Northern Lights.mn is immensely grateful to the many people and entities who enabled our work for seventeen years. First, the artists who trusted us with their visions, THANK YOU. Organizational partners, and their staff, already overworked souls, who said yes to unconventional programming in the middle of the night or outdoors in frigid temps, THANK YOU. To our dedicated staff and crew, you truly went the extra mile (or hour) with us, THANK YOU. To our Artist Council and advisors, formal and informal, who entered into messy conversations

with the hope of making something better, THANK YOU. To the funders, large and small, who gave us money, THANK YOU. To our twenty board members who buoyed, advised, and agreed to keep trying again and again and again, THANK YOU. To our enduring, enthusiastic, and risk-taking audiences, THANK YOU. To our volunteers, whether one night or eleven years, THANK YOU. To the tireless civil servants, evaluators, mentors, medics, Sequeerity and other community safety folks, accountants, game testers, ASL interpreters, sign builders, projector lenders, zero wasters, and even the permit office stampers, THANK YOU. Thank you all, for everything. >SP, AM, SD ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST COUNCIL, ARTIST, BOARD, BUREAUCRACY, CREW, DONORS, FUNDERS, PARTNERSHIP, PERMIT, PRODUCTION, STAFFING, VOLUNTEERS

Green Line In 2017 Northern Spark took place in seven neighborhoods along the Green Line, a light rail transit corridor that connects the downtowns of Minneapolis and St. Paul. This was the second year of our climate theme—and the year that permanently changed how we organized NS.

The Metro Green Line opened in 2014 along University Avenue, linking several “cultural districts”: West Bank, Little Mekong, Little Africa, and Rondo–Frogtown. During the line’s construction, a local funding initiative brought together community development organizations in the districts to support culturally specific businesses in the corridor. NL stepped into this network and partnered with those anchor organizations (West Bank Business Association, Asian Economic Development Association, African Economic Development Solutions, and Aurora St. Anthony Neighborhood Development Corporation) to host festival sites and add programming.

In parallel, we convened an Artist Council of individual artists with cultural connections in those neighborhoods. These advisors each had overlapping agency over certain decisions, which was messy but game changing for NS and NL. Many of the artists we co-presented with our partners that year were new to NL; for several of these artists this was the beginning of a multiyear relationship with our organization. NS 2017 along the Green Line was epic and powerful. And although it was our largest undertaking and impossible to replicate on that scale, we ended that festival knowing we had just begun our most important work: to unravel our whiteness and learn how to share power and resources. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST COUNCIL, CITY, CLIMATE CHAOS, COMMUNITY, COMPLICATED, CONNECTIONS, JURATE, NEIGHBORHOOD, NORTHERN SPARK, PARTNERSHIP, PLACE, THEME, TRANSPORTATION

harm Over the course of our work at Northern Lights.mn, we acknowledge that we occasionally caused harm. At times we inflicted a troubling mix of scarcity mentality, racism, ableism, tokenism, and unreasonable expectations on artists and staff, as well as some partner organizations. Much of this extractive behavior came from ignorance of our own power and privilege. We apologize for these choices. Though NL is ending as an organization, we as individuals take these lessons into our future work and relationships. >SP, AM, SD ↪ SEE ALSO: CONFLICT, POWER, PRIVILEGE

healing An ambiguous word, encompassing the body, mind, spirit, but also the body and spirit of community, holding the ache of the world at large. Art has always been my favorite space to play with healing. The audience is an open vessel, expecting a new experience and seeking a new idea. My work investigates the individual’s ability to heal the body/mind/spirit. Northern Lights.mn presented the perfect opportunity to play with the public and create the space for wondering how healing could be different.

My sculpture practice addresses the gaps in western medicine by filling a space with different healing modalities. My first project for NL was a hot tub dumpster situated under a bridge in St. Paul (NS 2013). Bathers experienced a simulation of the healing water of Iceland’s Blue Lagoon. Passersby looked puzzled as they saw people soaking in the murky salt/silica bath, but then they asked questions: why, how, what about my body could heal in mineral baths?

My last project at NL was a collaboration with Emily Stover and Andrew Jansen that amounted to a moving van full of medicinal plants (NS 2017). We imagined a world where healing was relocated to the black market, and you had to go through a series of exercises to get the seeds required for healing. The public learned about medicinal plants and was challenged to imagine their scarcity.

One of my favorite projects was *Dosha Kitchen* with Ginny Sims (NS 2014). We built a food truck based on the three doshas of Ayurvedic medicine, a 5,000-year-old modality originating in India. Participants took a quiz to figure out their dosha and then received a snack and tea that supports that dosha—a simple concept that can be life changing when you learn how your body is influenced by seasons, foods, shapes, even the time of day.

Then the community healing comes. The special benefits of NL events are the playful audience, the intimate moments of connection with a stranger, the confessions of deep sorrow, and the elation of humorous memories. NL created an opportunity for all of this, and the summation of that work brought healing to our community. >JH ↪ SEE ALSO: ART(ISTS) ON THE VERGE, COMMUNITY, EXPERIMENT/AL, INTIMATE, TRANSFORMATIVE

hospitality “No eatin’, no meetin’!” a colleague of mine used to say. It’s true that one of the most direct ways to care for people is to feed them. That’s one thing for meetings with a small staff, and another when an event involves more than 20 crew, 100 volunteers, and as many artists. Part of our production process was always to find a spot for the “back of house” tent and fill it with snacks, water, and hot coffee. Feeding people well can be a big part of a budget. To mitigate that, you’d find NL’s leadership behind the grill at the post-festival party, flipping Costco burgers.

We also received so much hospitality—from partners who shared their work spaces to communities who welcomed our unconventional programming with curiosity, to artists who let us into the inner workings of their creative processes, which, yes, sometimes included baked goods. We are forever grateful.

As we follow funder rhetoric about embracing equity and social justice, let’s get on board with funding hospitality, ‘kay? >SP ↔ SEE ALSO: BUDGET, COSTS, GENEROSITY, GRATITUDE, OFFICE, PARTNERSHIP, PRODUCTION, RECIPROCITY, SNACKS, VALUES, VOLUNTEERS

hypotheticals ↔ SEE: TRUISM

icons The design identity for the inaugural year of Northern Spark leaned heavily into journey and discovery. The visual language of mapping and iconography became integral to NS for most of its existence, although the usage evolved over time. The one year I strayed from an icon-centric design (for 2014’s Projecting the City theme) we were punished with an all-night torrential rainstorm. Lesson learned. >MR ↔ SEE ALSO: DESIGN, NORTHERN SPARK, THEME, WEATHER



2011–2013





iftar The sun was about to set, and participants and organizers held their breath in anticipation of something that hadn't occurred yet in this city. "Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar" (God is great), the Mu'azin melodiously called from the balcony of the Mill City Museum. The great Mississippi River carried the call toward the Gulf and out to Cedar-Riverside, where we had to close down the busy street of Cedar Avenue at the last minute because we now expected so many more people to come to the interfaith iftar during Northern Spark 2017. Remembering how spectacular those NS events were still gives me goosebumps, and sometimes tears: how groups could come together to show that all our issues are connected, and we can have fun and be inspired while finding solutions through building relationships. Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light couldn't have asked for better collaborators and organizers of these events. MNIPL honors the experience of all and helps create spaces where we can talk about climate justice and its interconnections, along with solutions that are part of the world we all want to see and know is possible.

Our interfaith iftars, with the Adhan (call to prayer) kicking off both NS 2016 and NS 2017, brought people together to share a meal and connect on a deeply human level. Like the entire NS festival, this engaged and united many community partners, from restaurants and nonprofits to artists and community leaders.

"Labbayk!" Here I am, time and again . . . I HEAR YOUR CALL! >MJ ↔ SEE ALSO: COMMUNITY, EQUITY, INTERCONNECTION, NORTHERN SPARK, PARTNERSHIP, POSSIBILITY, PUBLIC SPHERE, RELATIONAL, RESPONSE

illuminate An intriguing term that refers to both light sources brightening darkness and also an enlightening of the mind. This was central to the vision of Northern Lights.mn: for people to see the city in a new light, lighting a pathway to agency in their surroundings. The visual experience was a wonder. Ideally, the mental aftermath, the memory and the prod to consideration, was equally illuminating. >SD ↔ SEE ALSO: AGENCY, ALL NIGHT, CITY, ILLUMINATE SOUTH LOOP, ILLUMINATE THE LOCK, MEMORY, PROJECTION, SPECTACLE, TRANSFORMATIVE, WONDER

Illuminate South Loop 1. Illuminate South Loop was a civic collaboration with the City of Bloomington prior to Super Bowl LII in Minneapolis in 2018: Northern Lights.mn curated, produced, and presented nine large-scale, outdoor, illuminated artworks that showcased a variety of interactive art installations and performances designed and produced by Minnesota and international artists.

For NL, ISL was an opportunity to build on our Northern Spark platform and explore programming during the winter. Advantages in the winter include precipitation that, in the form of snow, is often an enhancement for the audience, creating a “wonderland” effect. The arrival of dark at 5 pm instead of 9:30 pm made a big difference. On the other hand, the extreme cold could feel debilitating and fears of frostbite may have diminished the enthusiasm of the audience—and artists—to attend. >SD

2. The artist projects of Illuminate South Loop were innovative, creative, locally relevant, site specific, and demonstrated a range of perspectives. Those who attended enjoyed the event, describing it as unique, magical, special, creative, and fun.

Attendance fell short of our expectations. The weather was very cold, even by Minnesota standards, ranging from 15 to -7 degrees before factoring in the bitter wind chill. Many local residents stayed home that weekend to avoid the cold and Super Bowl traffic, but it was inspiring to see the artists’ wholehearted commitment to their projects.

ISL had many transformative and positive outcomes. It increased internal staff capacity; it strengthened relationships with area artists, property owners, volunteers, and other stakeholders; it sparked interest in and more awareness of our creative place-making work and the South Loop District in general.

One of my favorite outcomes was that it acted as an incubator for future projects and events: we connected ISL artist Pramila Vasudevan to a property owner and facilitated the use of a parking ramp for a dance performance. *Parking Ramp Project* from Aniccha Arts premiered later that year with fifty performers. It asked questions about transience, migration, and stability in a space that temporarily stores cars and is home to nothing. Performers pervaded the parking structure with their bodies, working against the visible slant of the ramp to find their individual verticality. Audiences experienced the performance within the geometry of the setting sun, as the ramp turned into a theater with live sound and a tactile score. *Parking Ramp Project* was recognized as the top dance performance of 2018 in the Twin Cities by the *Star Tribune* newspaper. Hosting this type of performance changed the perception of what we could accomplish—and we could not have planned it without the experience of ISL. >AP
> SEE ALSO: B-LECTRIC, CITY, CIVIC CO-PRODUCTION, CONNECTIONS, CREATIVE PLACEMAKING, PARTNERSHIP, PLATFORM, TRANSFORMATIVE, WINTER

Illuminate the Lock This collaborative platform created by Northern Lights.mn, Mississippi Park Connection, and the National Park Service used the 49-foot-tall chamber of the Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam as a site for artistic intervention. We commissioned four projects over four years, including large-scale projections, a multimedia live opera, and a data-driven fog and light show, engaging ideas about the history of the lock, the settler destruction of Spirit Island, rewilding the river, and the resilience of Indigenous women.

During the first years of this program our approach lacked an awareness of the Dakota history and present meaning of this site, Owámmiyomni. Although the commissions addressed that history and other issues relevant to contemporary Indigenous life, an important conversation arose about the need for Dakota artists, specifically, to make work in, with, and for a place of Dakota spiritual significance.

Illuminate the Lock is a prime example of an episodic project that became an ongoing platform, the result of a long-term partnership with our collaborators. What began as an experiment to bring artists and arts audiences into the formidable architecture of a lock built by the Army Corps of Engineers became, for us, a complex site of learning about place, decolonization, and Indigenous history. >SP > SEE ALSO: AUDIENCE, BUREAUCRACY, COMPLICATED, CONFLICT, DECOLONIZE, EXPERIMENT/AL, PARTNERSHIP, PROJECTION, RECIPROCITY, RIVER, SPECTACLE, WEATHER

impact Explain how the proposed activities will benefit the community in which they will occur, being as clear as you can about the **impact** you expect to have.

- We are interested in outcomes, rather than outputs, so speak to how grant-funded activities **impact** and benefit the community.
- We are very interested in the long-term **impact** of your activities.
- We are looking for a few key aspects in assessing an application, specifically broad community **impact** and access.
- Within the primary area of focus, what is the top social **impact** metric?
- Describe your organization’s track record of innovation. Include outcome data or other evidence of the **impact** of your breakthroughs.
- What **impact** did the project activities have on the participants served? Was this the **impact** you proposed in your application? If the project activities did not result in the **impact** you proposed, what, if anything, would you do next time?

- Describe how the social **impact** of the project will be measured.
- What are you doing to share your innovations and **impact** your field?
- Please share brief stories and documentation representative of the project's **impact**.
- Tell one story about how this grant had an **impact**, how it opened someone's mind or eyes or made a difference in someone's life.
- How will the **impact** and success of this one-time grant be evaluated?
- How will the organization sustain the **impact** of this potential investment beyond the original grant period?

Should your organization be awarded a foundation grant, at the close of your grant period and potentially during an established interim period, you will need to submit an **impact** report(s). The interim **impact** report will report on progress toward meeting goals while the final **impact** report will assess the success of the program and serve as an indicator of the return on investment (ROI) made by both the foundation and your nonprofit organization, i.e., whether the program operates efficiently and makes an **impact** via intended behavior changes in the societal area of need. Grantees will be instructed where to log on online and will be provided guidance as to how to complete the **impact** report(s). **>NL** **↔ SEE ALSO: BUREAUCRACY, BURNOUT, COMPLICATED, FUNDRAISING, METRICS**

IN Light IN One instance of taking our show on the road.

- Instead of the Mississippi: a canal.
- Instead of the Twin Cities: Indianapolis.
- Instead of all night: two nights until 2 am.
- Instead of a \$300,000 budget: \$1 million.
- Instead of a weird, abandoned-feeling office space downtown: oh, yes, a weird, abandoned-feeling office space downtown.

In 2016 Northern Lights.mn was invited to partner with the Central Indiana Community Foundation to create a Northern Spark-like festival in Indianapolis. We commissioned artists from around the country whose work we had long admired and presented projects that artists (and we) had long dreamt of: music emanating from under the ground (Piotr Szyhalski's *Geophone*); video projected onto a screen of fountaining water (Luke Savisky's *ST/x*). We worked with the foundation to include amazing local artists, such as Tiffany Carbonneau and Susanna Crum, whose

project *A Place in Time* projected site-specific imagery onto the facade of a historic African American church.

The night felt remarkably familiar despite being in a different city, except for one notable difference: the audience's slight reluctance to engage with projects. There was hesitancy, lingering, sussing out from the sidelines before deciding to participate, a different tone from the eager crowds of the Twin Cities. We surmise that to its credit the Minnesota community has been socialized to approach and engage with art, just as Minnesotans (mostly) know how to drive in snow. We are honored to have had the chance to share a bit of participatory culture with Indianapolis. **>AM** **↔ SEE ALSO: AUDIENCE, CITY, COMMISSION, DURATION, MAGICAL, PARTICIPATORY, PARTNERSHIP, PLAYBOOK**

infrastructure Whether we needed an office, electricity for an outdoor project, or a compost bin, infrastructure was a constant conundrum for Northern Lights.mn. Resourcing basic operational needs is a common challenge for small businesses and nonprofits, and in our work making public events and installations we were surrounded by sourcing challenges. **>SP** **↔ SEE ALSO: AMENITIES, OFFICE, PRODUCTION, WASTE**

innovative The vision of Northern Lights.mn was, in part, to "experiment with and experience innovative art in the public sphere." Who knows exactly what *innovative* means? We often referred to the example of a pencil—a form of technology—being used innovatively. In the end, *innovative* may be a term used so much that it is more fundraising or news media hype than curatorial or artistic strategy. **>SD** **↔ SEE ALSO: ARTIST-CENTRIC, EXPERIMENT/AL, FUNDRAISING, MISSION, TECHNOLOGY, VISION**

interaction A central term whose overuse can possibly lead to meaninglessness. Often deployed in relation to the burgeoning field of "interactive media," in which an artwork could respond dynamically to inputs, soon people were suggesting that there was an "interaction" in viewing the Mona Lisa—as if to say that interaction is inherent to all art. Well, yes, although not all art changes materially from a user's interaction with it.

In the Northern Lights.mn mission statement, we both took advantage of this ambi-meaning and modified it with "new," allowing us to support artists in any way, in any medium they wanted to work. Interaction was a marker of a specific albeit broad territory of commitment and exploration. **>SD** **↔ SEE ALSO: ARTIST-CENTRIC, ARTWORK, AUDIENCE, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, EXPERIMENT/AL, MISSION, NEW MEDIA, PARTICIPATORY**

Archive

Ady Olson McNair

Like right now, how the sun is coming on, low behind the elms, and I can't tell the difference between a sunset and a sunrise. The world, reddening, appears the same to me—and I lose track of east and west. The colors this morning have the frayed tint of something already leaving. [. . .] Because the sunset, like survival, exists only on the verge of its own disappearing.

—OCEAN VUONG, *ON EARTH WE'RE BRIEFLY GORGEOUS*

∞

It just so happens that my heart clutches its pearls at any off-hand mention of the word “delete,” sending me scrambling to recover the little bits that others intend to leave behind, rescuing crumpled scraps from the recycling and tenderly flattening them back out.

Sketches, drafts, and abandoned ideas are evidence of how we got here: who we were on the path to now. They're traces of what didn't happen, allusions to possibility that tell a story different from the polished public version. Fragments that when put together form an unintentional map.

And you need some kind of map, even a piecemeal one, to do this kind of work. As the projects manager and de facto librarian at Northern Lights.mn, I sorted, categorized, tracked, communicated, archived, and retrieved the scraps that comprised our work. Controlled chaos, as we called it, but my job was to create from the chaos some semblance of cosmic order to help artists, staff, and partners navigate the many moving parts of our programs. The process of recordkeeping through accumulation and organization was also a gesture to my future self and to future others: an ambiguous urge to share with an unknown audience who might one day look back through these files.

But now our colleagues—artists, staff, partners, and audiences too—have fanned out and are doing other things, thinking about other things, while NL sets course for the horizon. So who needs the map now?

∞

When we started thinking about sunsetting our organization, one of the big questions was “What will become of our stuff?” Not just the zip ties and clicker counters and rain ponchos: we knew other organizations could put those to good use. But what would become of the files and images and videos that had accumulated over the years, the so-called intellectual property uniquely specific to the identity of Northern Lights.mn?

Our Google Drive had 149 GB of files of all sorts that supported the production of our work; many of those files hadn't been touched since they were last in active use. Vimeo held a dynamic collection of videos. Our Flickr site, with 19,626 photographs, was a beautiful visual record of the wondrous projects artists created over the years and the personal interactions that resulted. Not to mention our website, an entire recorded history in itself.

We were loath to let it all disappear just because NL would no longer be creating new work. There were so many treasures in those troves, so much learning and energy that we poured into and cultivated through our programs, and so much finely tuned process. It would be a shame to let the elaborate scaffolding that had been beneath the public-facing experiences all fall away.

Enter the University of Minnesota Performing Arts Archives. The archivists welcomed our materials with enthusiasm, even though technically we're not a performing arts organization. We felt relief knowing our materials would have a permanent and publicly accessible place to land, especially among such rich historical records of the arts.

We wanted the materials we shared to be useful so others could incorporate them into their work, and so our growth, learning, and intention might keep spinning out into the future, bumping into other things. To that end, NL's archive will include a small downloadable toolkit of resources—templates, primarily—that we hope will be useful to others who do temporary work in public space. In addition, this book serves as a small, analog version of our archive. It surfaces some of the ideas that flowed within and around our efforts of the past seventeen years.

∞

We lovingly called NL “scrappy.” And there were a gracious plenty of scraps to collect.

This book project gave us the opportunity to wade through our past work, and as we did we were delighted to come across many artifactual gems:

- Stephen Vitiello's report *Looking for art in all the wrong places*, from his visit in 2009 to Fort McMurray, Canada, where the northern lights failed to show—NL's very first commissioned artist project. Vitiello still came back with fascinating findings to share.
- Proposals for NL's original design identity. What if we had gone a different way?
- The first ever AOV grant proposal, before we even knew what this would become.
- Paperwork. So much paperwork. Everything you'd expect: Certificates of insurance. Bylaws and policies. Contracts and agreements.
- A spreadsheet of *Words for Winter* poems written one letter per cell, to facilitate their entry into the extremely finicky programming system for road construction signs.
- A video of a Telethon rehearsal that begins with teleprompter operator Sara Shives calling out the countdown, leading into a lively and surprising performance by the Northern Spark Kazoo Band.



Over the past few months as I plumbed the depths of the labyrinthine folder structure of our Google Drive, finding remnants filed away and long forgotten, it felt like walking through a high school during summer: a little unnerving and lonely as the only one in a place typically bustling with people and activity. The echoes are too loud, the veil between past and present notably threadbare. It's interesting: our Google Drive was essentially the one office space that never relocated.

This opportunity to reflect has been a gift. When we were in the thick of creating public programs, we'd wrap up one project and move on to the next with little time for contemplation. There was always more work to do. In this rare stillness now, it's striking to me how thorough we all were, and how thoughtful. How we cared: for something, about something. For trying something new, for dismantling assumptions that had built up, for un-knowing.

Though until the end ours was a story of taking the long, convoluted, and sometimes frantic way, this was mostly in an effort to live into our values. To keep trying. To do better. To do softer, sometimes. To be with attention and intention. Even when we missed.

Not that we weren't overly ambitious with this final project, too, even amid the quiet and fading light—we were NL all the way through, dedicated perfectionists, all. Though there were plenty of drawbacks, over the years these qualities served us well in many ways. On the whole we had little capacity to tolerate doing something with anything less than maximum possible thoroughness. Efficiency was not necessarily our way. Getting in over our heads was just how we went about this work.



Archiving presented another opportunity to get in over our heads. When we first learned that we might partner with the University of Minnesota, I immediately set to work planning how to structure the materials to clearly and creatively tell the story of NL: highlighting the good, acknowledging the harm, pointing out the connections, and providing context for the contradictions and complexities.

I had envisioned that the glossary terms in this book would serve as keywords within the archive to guide exploration of related materials. It would be a choose-your-own adventure of unexpected discoveries, mediated by annotation. Artifacts would be stumbled upon by researchers, who would find supplemental explanations and contextualizations attached. There would be a map for those who wanted one, and those who preferred to wander could, just like at Northern Spark.

This dream archive would be readily accessible. Its audience would find exactly what they needed, and with ease. We'd keep a whole bunch of mundane stuff: the giant grant reports, the data tracking, the collected receipts. We'd reveal all of the invisible, often unrewarding work that keeps a nonprofit financially and legally afloat. Those who were part of the NL community would feel seen and appreciated. Nonprofit peers would identify with the ambition and struggles. Institutions with money and power would feel a twinge of regret that unconventional arts organizations are floundering, and they would feel spurred to improve the way funds and power are distributed. There would be something for everyone.

Ultimately, this particular vision for the archive is an endeavor well beyond what could actually be realized with our limited resources. Without a doubt, the archive will show our work. As it was, not as an after-the-fact explanation. This is perhaps the most honest record: the raw, unedited, often incomplete remnants without the comprehensive commentary I had imagined. A story closer to the spirit of truth, maybe, than any we could tell about ourselves.

interconnection I made the diagram on the back cover of this book to illustrate the challenge of figuring out where to start when organizing the Northern Spark festival. Which element comes first? Work with the Artist Council to choose a place, and then partners to organize locally? Or partners first, for whom place is implicit? What if that grant deadline passes before we can build the relationships? Even more additional connective lines are missing from the diagram: it is truly an interconnected web. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST COUNCIL, COLLABORATION, COMMUNITY, CONSTELLATION, NORTHERN SPARK, PARTNERSHIP, PLACE, RECIPROCITY, RELATIONAL

intimate Northern Lights.mn projects were known for being large and dazzling, but participants also encountered many moments of intimacy at our events. Stringing rosehips with neighbors. Sewing quilts around a small table. A one-on-one dance in the library hallway. Huddling in a camping tent for poetic conversation around a glowing overhead projector. Listening via headphones, with your eyes closed, to a melodic story of Rondo elders. Writing a letter to Earth on handmade paper. Small moments of big connection. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: NORTHERN SPARK, PARTICIPATORY, SPECTACLE, TOGETHER

iteration “You can’t step into the same Northern Lights.mn platform twice.” Is that how it goes? Something like that.

NL supported artists who looked beyond the way things were. We tried to do a similar thing with the structure of our platforms. No two instances of a platform were ever the same—there was constant change, successive attempts to improve. We were not content to settle: no process was considered final, undeserving of review or tweaking. We created not through duplication but through iteration. Each platform was an experiment, scaffolded by the wisdom of prior experience but always with new variables strategically (sometimes painstakingly) dialed in: theme, location, partnerships, process.

Each successive instance became an inflection point between the past and the future. *Here we are now. What’s next, based on what we’ve learned?*

Steve and Sarah often signed their emails, appropriately, “onward,” >AM ↪ SEE ALSO: BEGINNINGS, BURNOUT, EXPERIMENT/AL, GIG ECONOMY, INTERCONNECTION, NIMBLE, OFFICE, PLATFORM, PLAYBOOK, POSSIBILITY, STAFFING, SUNSET, SUNRISE

Jamestown ArtSpark Northern Lights.mn presented a “mini-Spark” opening event with multiple artist projects in Jamestown, North Dakota, in 2017. We also helped plan and present various

reasons the community might want an “art park” with permanent public art and public art infrastructure in its historic downtown.

Consulting allows many public arts organizations to “make a living.” It made sense for us when the end result was programmatic. We were less committed to writing guidelines for public art contexts than to creating platforms for actually commissioning, presenting, and learning from the work of artists. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST-CENTRIC, CIVIC CO-PRODUCTION, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, COMMISSION, CREATIVE PLACEMAKING, PARTNERSHIP, PLATFORM

joy

Joy of togetherness.
Of sharing space,
of voices speaking together,
of answers and of questions.

Joy of understanding.
But also of wandering through the night,
searching and finding.
Joy in stillness,
of silence,
and joy of expanding breath:
expressing.

Joy of time collapsing, forgotten, unimportant, and
Joy of dusk, when singing, eyes closed, breeze and birds waking
up at dawn.

Joy of being there.
Joy of finding the way,
and of losing yourself again.

Joy of steps made slowly, methodically and with intention.
Joy of communicating without words, of dialogue by means
of light.
Joy of changing one thing into another, of changing places,
of changing your mind at 5:00 am

Joy of as if, reluctantly, if only,
And the uncontained joy of what if.
>PS ↪ SEE ALSO: ALL NIGHT, COEVOLUTION, DAWN, INTIMATE,
PUBLIC ART ALCHEMY, TIME, TOGETHER, WANDER

jurate The 2022 Artist Council coined this term, a portmanteau of “curate” and “jury,” to describe the process of selecting projects from the Northern Spark open call. This process involved ranking

proposals according to the stated criteria, then curating the top projects into groups assigned to various festival locations. A diversity of artist identities as well as art forms had to be considered to create a balanced, dynamic festival program. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST COUNCIL, ARTWORK, GATEKEEPER, NORTHERN SPARK, OPEN CALL, PLATFORM

kazoo band ↪ SEE: FUNDRAISING

launch party ↪ SEE: FUNDRAISING

library Northern Spark taught us that the library knows no bounds. As a physical place, it can be a building the size of an entire city block or a pop-up cardboard construction. It exists for two nights or two centuries. A living, breathing organism, the library thrives on human interaction and activation. It is most magical at night.

When artists intervene in the library with focused intention, creating with care new constructs to explore and examine where you are and what you know, it unfolds and displays its potential for connectivity. The library is a place to exchange and encounter ideas; to share histories and stories; to find community with friends and strangers; to deepen connections with place, past and present; to envision individual potential and collective dreams. It transports people across time and place to catalyze both learning and unlearning. Northern Spark created a critical and creative space within which the library and the community could show how we might come together to defend intellectual freedom and creative expression and promote climate justice.

The Night Library was an immersive, interactive art and theatrical installation. Each iteration included a script and story related to the festival theme, which was then brought to life by actors, artists, volunteers, and library staff.

In the five years *The Night Library* was presented at NS, Hennepin County Library (HCL) worked with many individual artists and performers. These partnerships and connections demonstrate the role and strength of the public library as a public and community resource and place of gathering, where a broad spectrum of knowledge and ideas are shared openly, and dialogue and interaction with others are encouraged and supported. The list of partners and collaborators is too lengthy to include in full, but it is important to highlight key organizational partners who worked closely with HCL on *The Night Library*: Bedlam Theatre, New Native Theatre, Sheep Theater, zAmya Theater, and Leonardo's Basement.

Some years the physical installation was created of cardboard and wood; for others, the library building was transformed to become the installation, with art and performance throughout the space. In 2018 Minneapolis Central Library hosted *The Night Library* and was also a site for projects by other NS artists. The library was filled with art, music, dance, and performance throughout the festival nights that year.

The final iteration of *The Night Library* took place at NS 2019 in the American Indian Cultural Corridor at Franklin Library. Library staff worked with a team of Native American artists to create the script and form all elements of the experience for the audience. After many creative sessions between library staff and artists, *Hanyétu Wórwapi Thípi (Night Library)* was born. For two nights, the Franklin Library was an "Indigenized" experience: Native art, stories, language, sports, performance, and knowledge were shared with all who entered. Decolonization of the Franklin Library, even if glimpsed only for the duration of the festival, was a radical act where artists imposed Indigeneity onto the space, projecting images, storytelling, and lore on and throughout the Carnegie library's exterior and interior spaces.

The Night Library became an inspiration and catalyst for HCL to further incorporate Indigenous knowledge and histories into our collections, our programs, and our services. >EC, ALM, MW ↪ SEE ALSO: ARCHIVE, BELONGING, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, COMMUNITY, CONNECTIONS, DECOLONIZE, DURATION, MAGICAL, POSSIBILITY, TOGETHER

light ↪ SEE: ILLUMINATE

Living Banners | Words for Winter While Nicollet Mall was under construction in January and February 2017, Northern Lights.mn turned the construction site into a platform for public poetry with two projects. For *Living Banners*, Piotr Szyhalski and his team hand-printed hundreds of one-word banners and installed them in different combinations on the bare metal barricades lining both sides of a seven-block stretch of the street, resulting in a poetic sequence nearly a mile long. *Words for Winter* was a collection of winter-themed poetry by seventeen local writers that was displayed on electronic road construction signs near the corners of the blocks-long construction site.

On the opening night of these projects, we also presented a winter sound and light show created by University of Minnesota engineering students on Peavey Plaza-turned-ice-rink. All of these projects contributed to an early version of the Great Northern festival. >AM ↪ SEE ALSO: B-LECTRIC, CITY, EPISODIC, NIMBLE, PUBLIC SPHERE, TEMPORARY, TRANSFORMATIVE, WINTER

magical 1. The moment when you are sitting on the banks of the Mississippi River at sunrise with a basket full of letters written to the ancestors on water soluble paper. As the sky turns pink with the first light of dawn, and you hear the drums and singing of Native dancers as a train goes by and you watch as these papers full of poems and drawings and words of love—anger—sadness—remorse—forgiveness—beauty disintegrate and join the ancestors of the water, whisked away by a current that has and will continue to pull water south to the Gulf of Mexico for millennia. You listen to the conversation of the kids next to you as they talk about a new app that can make your phone photos look like polaroids, and you recognize that time does not exist at all. Then you think back to the hundreds of people you were able to share just a moment with tonight, who entrusted you with their words to the beyond. Each of those moments may as well be an eternity or a blink of a hummingbird’s eye, and you marvel at how remarkably lucky you are to be able to be here right now with this basket and letters and sun and river and train and song and dance and life. And when you finally get up from this moment, you turn around and discover there is one more trick: a cup of Café de Olla and a donut waiting for you. Not tired but exhausted, you wonder wander away, the birds singing the fanfare of impossibility. >**TO-H**

2. Many Northern Lights.mn projects had magic, in that when people ran across the project in whatever public space it was living in, they would have unexpected interactions with the art piece and with each other. It would surprise and delight. This was taken to a different level with Northern Spark. NS took as its canvas different locations around the city. Wherever it landed—downtown along the river, a college campus, a commercial corridor, a specific building—NS created a platform for local and visiting artists to transform the location to something vibrant and unique. People would look at the landscape and see it with new eyes and new considerations. It was like we had all entered a parallel quantum reality that was beautiful and clever and funny and profound. We shared a dream together of the city reimaged and saw it as a community and could point and laugh and cry. It created moments of grace and magic. >**NC** ↪ **SEE ALSO: CITY, COMMUNITY, NORTHERN SPARK, POSSIBILITY, PROJECTION, RIVER, TIME, TOGETHER, WANDER**

memory It is remarkable how an image can prompt a memory of an event or a person or a feeling that has been forgotten for a long time—or perhaps was never previously remembered. And the same image can inspire very different memories in different people.

Throughout this book we feature images of various Northern Lights.mn projects and events. These do not necessarily relate to a specific glossary entry, and they are not intended to be any kind of definitive assessment. Together, they form a community palimpsest of NL’s seventeen years, and we hope many related memories will surface in the reader-viewer. >**SD** ↪ **SEE ALSO: ARCHIVE, COMMUNITY, DOCUMENTATION, PARTICIPATORY**

mentorship I make no claim to knowing what makes a “good” mentor or that anyone might attribute value to my past offerings. But I was invited to reflect, so here are things a mentee or mentor might consider.

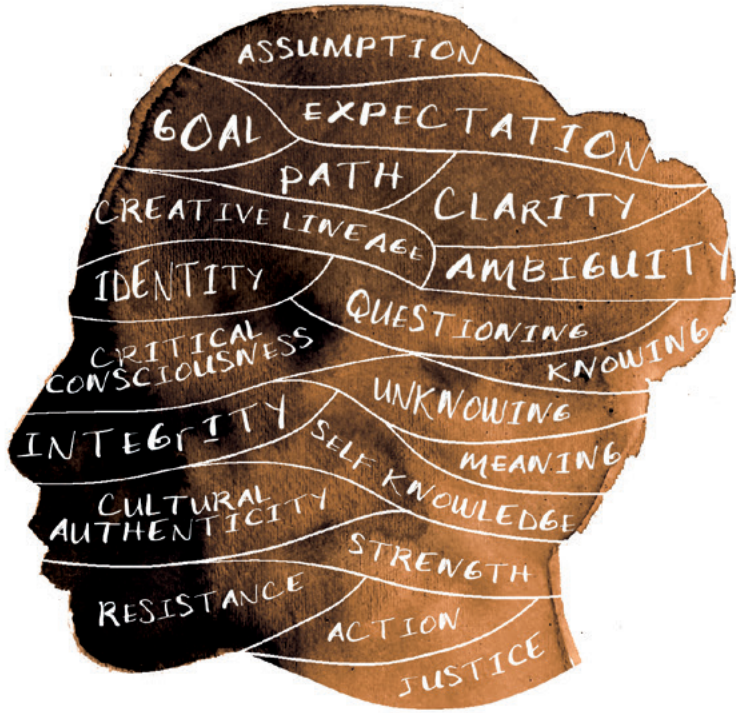
Mentorship is inherently hierarchical.
Mentorship is vaguely aspirational.
Mentorship is confounding and slow.
Mentorship is interaction beyond isolation.
Mentorship is navigating shifting variables.
Mentorship is an opportunity for (in)tangible benefit.

How might we chart a course of curious conversation?
(SEE PAGES 170–71)

Embrace iteration.
Welcome divergence.
Be attuned to time travel.
Detour toward obstacle.
Maintain momentum.
Tend to each and other.

>**MH** ↪ **SEE ALSO: ART(ISTS) ON THE VERGE, COEVOLUTION, COLLABORATION, POSSIBILITY, POWER, RELATIONAL**

merch As organizers of a very popular annual arts festival, it was easy to fall into the trap of thinking that merchandise could be a way out of our financial woes. Not so much. In our experiments with retail, these are the things we produced that did not make money: T-shirts with the Northern Spark logo; glow-in-the-dark T-shirts and hoodies with the Northern Spark logo; 10,000 plastic “sparker” toys with the Northern Spark logo; five commissioned art prints for the festival’s fifth anniversary; an edition of ten high-end art objects by a well-known Twin Cities artist. Each time these attempts failed, but we kept trying. What is that called? Waste. >**SP** ↪ **SEE ALSO: FAILURE, FUNDRAISING, NORTHERN SPARK, WASTE**



metrics Most funders require metrics of some kind before awarding grant dollars. They want to know who will be “served,” and what degree of change will take place in those individuals or groups. How do you measure transformation? Life-long connections? A sense of belonging gained through an artistic cohort or a city-wide event? After the sun sets on Northern Lights.mn and there are no more staff or grant reports, our impact will go on. How to measure that? >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: BELONGING, FUNDERS, IMPACT, SUNSET, TRANSFORMATIVE

mission Northern Lights.mn To supports emerging and established artists in the creation and presentation of art in the public sphere, focusing on innovative uses of technology, old and new, to imagine new interactions between audience, artwork, and place; and explore expanded possibilities for civic engagement; and encourage pluralistic community.

What you see here is the evolution of the mission statement of NL, in two phases. The pink text, from our original statement in 2008, was changed in 2014 and the blue in 2019.

The mission statement is an essential building block of the nonprofit world. It communicates why an organization exists and aims to convey its culture, goals, and values. That is a tall ask of one sentence.

The changes we made to our mission statement were attempts to encapsulate our evolution as an organization, in simplified language, and reflect a learning process we experienced about ourselves. Our mighty sentence aimed to both broaden the scope of our work (deleting “technology”) while retaining our focus and values within the broad field of public art.

To this day we take pride in our mission. It was expansive enough to encompass our big dreams but still a container to focus our efforts. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST, ARTIST-CENTRIC, ARTWORK, AUDIENCE, BUREAUCRACY, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, COMPLICATED, PLACE, POSSIBILITY, PUBLIC SPHERE, TECHNOLOGY, VALUES

Mississippi ↪ SEE: RIVER

multidisciplinary ↪ SEE: ARTWORK

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Crafts, mixed media ▲ Crafts, paper ▲ Crafts, plastic ▲ Crafts, wood ▲ Dance ▲ Dance, ballet ▲ Dance, ethnic/jazz/folk-inspired ▲ Dance, modern ▲ Design arts ▲ Design arts, architecture ▲ Design arts, fashion ▲ Design arts, graphic ▲ Design arts, industrial ▲ Design arts, interior ▲ Design arts, landscape architecture ▲ Design arts, urban/metro ▲ Folk/Traditional Arts ▲ Folk/Traditional crafts/visual arts ▲ Folk/Traditional dance ▲ Folk/Traditional music ▲ Folk/Traditional storytelling ▲ Humanities ▲ Interdisciplinary ▲ Literature, fiction ▲ Literature, non-fiction ▲ Literature, poetry ▲ Media Arts ▲ Media Arts, audio ▲ Media Arts, film ▲ Media Arts, screen/scriptwriting ▲ Media Arts, technology/experimental ▲ Media Arts, video ▼ Multidisciplinary ▲ Music ▲ Music, band ▲ Music, chamber ▲ Music, choral ▲ Music, ethnic/folk-inspired ▲ Music, jazz ▲ Music, new-experimental, elec ▲ Music, orchestral ▲ Music, popular ▲ Music, solo/rectal ▲ Opera ▲ Opera, musical theater ▲ Photography ▼

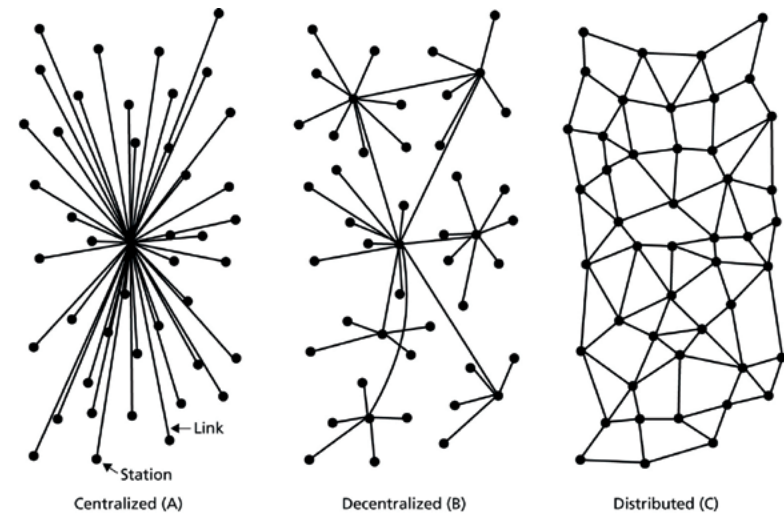
neighborhood A place to carry:

- 50-pound bags of flour into the bakery because the elders who own it are sick
- countless tents, chairs, and tables every year for a festival that blows your mind with local richness
- a child who is not yours but is just too tired to walk anymore
- flyers and tape at all times, because you know that old school is still the best way to connect
- trays of sambusas, chips, hamburgers, hot dogs, shrimp, egg rolls, cheese puffs, bánh mì, fruit, guacamole, pizza, coffee, donuts, croissants . . .
- signs of protest, celebration, and memorial
- pieces of plywood to businesses during times of civil unrest
- cans of paint to paint that plywood, turning your streets into an art gallery for solidarity and resistance
- each other’s dreams and visions for the future

You carry it all, because we make it together, or we don’t make it.

>TO-H ↪ SEE ALSO: CITY, COLLABORATION, COMMUNITY, GREEN LINE, PARTNERSHIP, PLACE, RECIPROCITY, TOGETHER

network In 1962, Paul Baran identified the distributed network as the most resilient to a nuclear attack among three network models. This model most closely resembles the Internet’s architecture: from any point you can communicate with any other point without everything going through a fixed route or centralized node. This was also part of the “new media” model of art we were interested in and that was the basis for our call in Art(ists) On the Verge for projects with a “focus on network-based practices.” It was one of the characteristics that differentiated media art from other practices.



Paul Baran, “On Distributed Communications Networks.” Santa Monica, Calif: RAND Corporation, 1962.

It also represents how we tried to maintain our partnerships with other organizations: usually directly, perhaps through other partners, but seldom through a central hub that controlled the relationship with another organization.

There is nothing “wrong” with other types of networks. They are common and have many benefits. Probably every organizational seminar we ever attended had us draw some version of our “network,” and this was usually instructive.

The reality was that the ecosystem we lived in as an organization was decentralized at best. Our funding sources—philanthropic, governmental, or corporate—were all highly centralized. There was no nuclear attack in the arts ecosystem, but Covid, long-simmering issues of equity and justice, and lower tolerance for risk taking among funders caused a major shift in funding priorities. As these changed, the centralized funding system communicated an outsized “message” to dependent grantees, and we were not prepared or able to find alternative routes to funding. Time to sunset. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: ART(ISTS) ON THE VERGE, ART-IST, FUNDRAISING, GATEKEEPER, INFRASTRUCTURE, NEW MEDIA, PARTNERS, RELATIONAL, SUNSET

new media Even in 2008, when Northern Lights.mn was just an idea, “new media” was losing its cachet in the . . . new media world. But it was still of great interest to funders and the public as well as artists and many arts institutions.

We were genuinely interested in what machine-based, interactive practice could do for art in the public sphere. We had knowledge and skills to support artists who were also interested in expanding these boundaries. On occasion, we may have over-emphasized “new media” as a moniker when it might be efficacious in communicating NL’s vision, especially, perhaps, to funders.

The strongest objection to the term besides its fuzziness may be that it implied a known field of endeavor and that we knew what it was. There was not, and we did not. We never wanted to be in the position of leading the field: we were more committed to following the artists. And yes, sometimes that did put us at the head of the field among our peers. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: ART(ISTS) ON THE VERGE, ARTIST-CENTRIC, ARTWORK, BEGINNINGS, EXPERIMENT/AL, FUNDRAISING, INNOVATIVE, INTERACTION, MISSION, PUBLIC SPHERE, TECHNOLOGY, VISION

night ↪ SEE: ALL NIGHT

nimble With a small staff and miniscule overhead costs, Northern Lights.mn could move quickly when desired or necessary. A lack of bureaucracy within our operations combined

with a curiosity and enthusiasm for trying new things allowed us to pursue opportunities that landed before us, particularly for partnerships and programmatic experiments. For example, on relatively short notice we were able to orchestrate a summer of artistic interventions in a former Dunn Brothers coffee shop in Minneapolis as its owners, and our project partner Restaurant Alma, prepared the space for construction.

Of course, the shadow side of being nimble is a feeling of instability, whether that meant moving to a new office space every year, or nervously waiting for grants to come through, or dealing with staffing changes. Being nimble was a value, a strategy, and at times a struggle. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: ALMA LIGHTS, ARTATHLON, BEGINNINGS, COLLABORATION, EPISODIC, EXPERIMENT/AL, GIG ECONOMY, ITERATION, LIVING BANNERS | WORDS FOR WINTER, OFFICE, PROCESS, RESPONSE, STAFFING, VALUES

Northern Spark Originally a dusk-to-dawn, free, public art festival, Northern Spark was an overnight, runaway success that debuted in 2011 and took place every year (except for 2020) through 2022.

On the second Saturday in June, tens of thousands of people gather throughout the city to explore giant video projections, play in temporary installations in the streets, and enjoy experimental performances in green spaces. Late into the night the city surprises you: friendly crowds, glowing groups of cyclists, an unexpected path through the urban landscape, the magic of dawn after a night of amazing art and experiences.

NS was our largest and most visible program, beloved by many. Each year the festival took place in a different set of locations, with new and repeat venues, presenting partners’ and commissioned artists’ projects. The largest, NS 2014, had 35 venues, 62 partnering organizations, and 125 artist projects by 531 artists. The “smallest,” our last in 2022, had five venues, 10 partners, and 15 artist projects. In 2015, 53,000 people attended from 9:00 pm to 5:26 am.

But those are just the numbers. Sentiment is another matter. “I went by myself but I never felt alone.” “On the night of Northern Spark we have the city we deserve.” “Northern Spark fueled my soul for months,” said attendees. “It was great to be a part of something that felt like more than a sum of its parts . . . Ideas, concerns, hopes expressed through each project felt magnified, louder, bigger since we were all making this together at the same time.” “It made me think big, bigger, outside the box and the realm of previously considered possibilities,” said commissioned artists.

“NS was great community building; it brought new people to the neighborhood, and we met people who already live here but didn’t know about our organization,” said venue partners.

COLLABORATION

Northern Spark was built on partnerships with organizations from small art galleries and the largest museums, to governmental entities and environmental groups who saw a place for art in their mission. This collaborative spirit was both ideological (even if we could do it alone, we shouldn’t) and practical (who are we kidding, we couldn’t do it alone). NL curated and commissioned between 20 and 50 percent of each year’s dozens of artist projects and festival events. The rest of the art was produced and funded by our numerous partners—our signature participatory “platform.” Organizations wanted to be part of NS because the festival afforded an opportunity for their work to be seen by hundreds, even thousands, of people in one weekend, without needing to do much, if any, marketing. Through this model the festival was able to gain its considerable footprint and scale.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARTISTS

What NS had in scale it also had in exploratory spirit, for attendees and for artists. Once the festival became known in various creative circles, artists applied because, in their own words, similar opportunities to present experimental, participatory work for large, new audiences didn’t exist elsewhere. Being an NS artist wasn’t easy—it was a grueling 24-hour affair for payment that was never enough—but many returned and claimed it helped them expand their practice into a realm they could not have reached on their own. A small sampling of projects created for NS are featured in images throughout this book.

FROM “ZONES” TO NEIGHBORHOODS

In the festival’s formative early years, the locations where projects took place were determined both by partners who served as venues (museums, galleries, storefronts) and by NL staff, who clustered most of the NL commissioned projects into one or two public areas, primarily for ease of production. Internally and externally we referred to these areas as festival “zones.”

The shift from zones to “neighborhoods” occurred in the year of the grand adventure down the Green Line, in collaboration with the Artist Council and community development partners. This was more than a change of language in our festival communications: it was a shift in our organizing and curatorial processes. In the “zones” era staff did minimal outreach to the neighboring residents, and we did not make an attempt to link artists’ cultural

Proclamation

WHEREAS, the Mississippi River is one of the natural marvels of the world; and

WHEREAS, the cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul are two of the most marvelous cities of the world; and

WHEREAS, the inaugural Northern Spark “nuit blanche” Festival is a dusk-to-dawn participatory art event along the Mississippi River and in Minneapolis and Saint Paul; and

WHEREAS, Northern Spark is a world-class event that focuses on Minnesota-based artists; and

WHEREAS, more than 40 organizations from around Minneapolis-Saint Paul will participate in Northern Spark; and

WHEREAS, more than 60 public art projects will turn Minneapolis and Saint Paul into all night “cities of light”; and

WHEREAS, Northern Spark will include a wide diversity of art forms and projects including multi-story projections, audio environments with vistas, installations traveling down the Mississippi on barges, houseboats and paddleboats, headphone concerts, and the use of everything from bioluminescent algae and sewer pipes for organs to more traditional media such as banjos and puppets; and

WHEREAS, Northern Spark expands the boundaries of contemporary art by transforming the urban environment into a city-wide art gallery; and

WHEREAS, Northern Spark invites a broad and diverse audience to participate; and

WHEREAS, Northern Spark showcases the natural and urban splendors and the cultural magnificence of Minneapolis-Saint Paul;

NOW, THEREFORE, WE, R.T. RYBAK, Mayor of the City of Minneapolis and CHRIS COLEMAN, Mayor of the City of Saint Paul do hereby jointly proclaim June 4, 2011 as:

**NORTHERN SPARK NIGHT
IN THE CITIES OF
MINNEAPOLIS AND SAINT
PAUL**

[Signature]
Mayor of Minneapolis

Chris D. Coleman
Mayor of Saint Paul

Cities around the world have or had highly successful nuits blanches, with hundreds of thousands of participants. Through our research of those events we learned that each has significant corporate and committed civic support: two important ingredients missing from Northern Spark.

We sometimes encountered funders who would support the festival if it was “only in Minneapolis” or “only in St. Paul.” As we tried to make a truly cities-wide experience, this was frustrating.

identities to the sites where their work was presented. For better or worse, we didn’t think of locations like Peavey Plaza or the Minneapolis Convention Center as “neighborhoods” despite the fact that people lived near them. Choosing to place artistic programming in places home to primarily BIPOC and immigrant residents required that we approach those places as communities of people rather than merely sites. This added significant staff time and energy, as it should.

POSSIBILITIES FOR CITIES

After the Green Line Northern Spark, as we continued to focus artistic and creative energy into culturally specific neighborhoods, a strategy emerged to align NS with the growing efforts of both St. Paul and Minneapolis to designate certain neighborhoods as Cultural Districts. A trend in urban planning, these efforts trace a lineage to placemaking and its problems but are also part of correcting the historic lack of public investment in neighborhoods of working class, immigrant, and Native residents and communities of color. These districts played an important organizational role in NS on the Green Line; while the scale of seven neighborhoods at once wasn’t replicable, using the model in one, two, or three neighborhoods seemed doable. This was the active plan at the time of our decision to sunset: to continue small in St. Paul and build back to both cities.

TOO MUCH CHANGE?

Northern Spark was never static: we tried many shapes and sizes along the way to find a rhythm. It’s not an exaggeration to say that we spent eleven years of the eleven years of NS trying to find a magical answer to its holistic sustainability troubles. Many issues contributed to its demise, but some key points can be summarized as too much change or, perhaps ironically, too much experimentation.

CHANGING LOCATIONS. Moving the festival around town enabled many unforgettable, once-in-a-lifetime experiences, but ended up hindering our ability to build a more solid foundation for the event, at least with the values of community engagement we adopted. Each year required nearly starting over on site scouting, permitting, neighborhood relationship building, and artist outreach, on a timeline of less than twelve months.

Our reasons for moving around were varied. Primarily it was an opportunity to work with a particular partner in a certain place (Union Depot, NS 2013; Hennepin County Library, NS 2018; NACDI/Franklin Avenue and Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, NS 2019). Funding that was restricted or attached to one place or another was also a factor in these decisions.

CHANGE OF TIMING. After seven years we tried moving away from all night to “two nights until 2 am” (NS 2018 and NS 2019). This made weather planning much easier but had an overall effect of decreased energy and excitement. We finally landed on an ideal situation in 2022: one night from 9 pm until 2 am with a closing event in one (spectacular) location from 2 until 5:30 am. It worked with four venues and 2,000 attendees, but wouldn’t have in previous years with many thousands more people.

CHANGING PHILANTHROPIC AND DONOR INTERESTS. Despite its popularity, our annual free event was surprisingly difficult to fund. Some funders didn’t want to pay for a “one-night party.” For some donors it wasn’t high art enough. For others, not community-centered enough. At one point, it was no longer a shiny new festival, despite the fact that it changed every year. This classic plateau problem occurred: once an event happens with regularity a handful of times, people (and institutions) come to expect it will continue, without necessarily pitching in to ensure that it does.

CHANGING STAFF ENERGY AND CAPACITY. When Northern Spark started in 2011 a truly scrappy team of a handful of people worked for a year to pull it off from the NL side of things. By 2017 we had fifteen festival staff roles (not including night-of crew), but the year-round NL staff peaked at three full-time people the same year. By 2021, the organization’s staff was down to two part-time positions that together were just over forty hours a week. Ten years on, not having been able to build more permanent staff capacity, the essential and grinding tasks of event planning became an exhaustion not easily solved. The festival itself was always an energy blast—eight hours of refueling for the work ahead—but in the last few years the same amount of joy filled our batteries less and less.

There is much more to say about this festival-as-phenomenon. In many ways, trying to understand what we built is why we made this book. Keep reading. >SP ↔ SEE ALSO: ARTIST, ARTIST COUNCIL, BEGINNINGS, BELONGING, BURNOUT, CITY, CIVIC CO-PRODUCTION, CLIMATE CHAOS, COLLABORATION, COMMUNITY, CONFLICT, CONNECTION, COSTS, CREATIVE PLACEMAKING, CREW, EXPERIMENT/AL, EXTINCTION, FAILURE, FREE, FUNDRAISING, GREEN LINE, HARM, INFRASTRUCTURE, ITERATION, MERCH, NIMBLE, NUIT BLANCHE, PARTNERSHIPS, PARTICIPATORY, PLATFORM, PRODUCTION, RELATIONAL, SPONSORSHIPS, STAFFING, SUNRISE, SUNSET, TICKETING, TRANSPORTATION, WASTE

nuit blanche “White Night”: an all-night festival of the arts. The original White Nights was held in St. Petersburg, Russia, for several nights around the summer solstice, and the first under the name *nuit blanche* occurred in Paris in 2001. As early as 1989 Helsinki hosted a “night of the arts” when many cultural institutions were open for free until midnight. More than one hundred cities around the world have hosted *nuit blanche* events since 2001, and Northern Spark was inspired in part by this model. >SD ↪ [SEE ALSO: NORTHERN SPARK, SUNRISE](#)

office It is remarkable that we at Northern Lights.mn, with our commitment to site-specific artwork and the idea of “place,” did not initially think of ourselves as a “place-based” organization. Our priority in the beginning was to be nimble, so our team coalesced and dispersed as the work required, relying on the hospitality of our partners and scrounging temporary meeting spots around the city. We resembled a remote office before working remotely became A Thing.

Here are some of the places we found ourselves, in rough chronological order, from 2008 to 2023.

- Intermedia Arts (*our first “home”*)
- Pow Wow Grounds
- staff members’ kitchen tables
- Open Book
- public libraries (*gotta love ‘em*)
- Bedlam Community Design Center
- Black Dog Cafe
- Union Depot
- Common Roots (*cafe and meeting room*)
- Traffic Zone Building in downtown Minneapolis (*an empty room with an unsettling collection of dead wasps*)
- Tallmadge Building in downtown Minneapolis (*an empty two-level office space with no internet*)
- Verdant Tea (*a glorious summer of all-day tea flights*)
- HotHouse co-working space at Mia
- The Soap Factory (*Unbeated. In winter. Freezing cold.*)
- Dunn Brothers on Hennepin Avenue (*with a meeting room*)
- The Soap Factory, second floor (*A not-technically-legal space due to code violations. Doubled as a storage unit. Unbeated again.*)
- empty spaces next door to Restaurant Alma (*Vast. Slated for renovation.*)
- The Soap Factory, renovated office (*This time with heat!*)
- Hennepin Made / Glass House
- Zoom



NS 2013 staff meeting at Frank Lloyd Wright’s Nails House. Photo: Megan Lejjblad Gottschalk.

If the space blessedly allowed us to leave our things, there were always rogue projectors stacked in corners, boxes of equipment strewn about, and unwieldy pieces of performance sets looming. We grew to recognize the importance of being together in a space about the time that someone brought in an electric kettle so we could make our own tea. Why hadn’t we thought of that earlier? >AM ↪ [SEE ALSO: CITY, COMMUNITY, GENEROSITY, GIG ECONOMY, HOSPITALITY, NIMBLE, PARTNERSHIP, PLACE, SNACKS, SOAP FACTORY, STAFFING, UNION DEPOT](#)

omission This book is not a complete record of all activities undertaken by Northern Lights.mn in the organization’s seventeen-year history. Nor does it account for all points of view. “Completeness” is perhaps an illusion in the first place. Approximately fifty people contributed to this volume, and the lists you see among these pages name many hundreds more who contributed time and talent to NL. There’s also the tens of thousands of people who comprised our audiences. The nature of memory involves forgetting, thus some information and sentiment will be left out. This is not intentional, but merely human. >SP ↪ [SEE ALSO: ARCHIVE, MEMORY](#)

open call Some platforms, such as Northern Spark, had a curated component, but every platform we presented always had an open call to any artist who wanted to apply. Inevitably, we were surprised by at least some of the projects proposed. Our values around equity motivated this support for the open call: no matter how wide we think our network is, there are gaps and blind spots in curation. An open call helped mitigate that.

One important lesson we learned was that it was not enough to simply post an open call. We needed a system for distribution to artists and communities outside the core network of Northern Lights.mn, as well as a process to support the ideation, writing, and submission of proposals. We had to reformulate our requested submission package several times in order to be open to emerging, self-taught, and community-based artists, who might not have backgrounds and experiences similar to those of academically trained artists. >SD ↪ [SEE ALSO: ARTIST, ARTIST COUNCIL, EQUITY, GATEKEEPER, JURATE, NETWORK, PLATFORM, PRIVILEGE](#)

organizational transitions 2008–2011 A transition-in-organizational-focus story: Northern Lights.mn was established with a set of assumptions that were shared (mostly) between staff and the board. One key assumption, and the foundation on which NL was built, was the curatorial independence of the artistic director, Steve Dietz, to formulate and produce artistic projects that were compelling and within the realm of NL's abilities. After producing a series of outstanding public projects, NL became interested in replicating a nuit blanche, or White Night festival, which was popular throughout the world.

Thus began Northern Spark. With its introduction into what had been a portfolio of activities, NS soon became the central event. NL had to evolve to meet the demands of an annual, ambitious all-night arts festival.

A transition to this new organizational focus began. NL staff found great success in assembling a team of talented people to produce the festival and artists to participate, but, skilled though they all were, NL board and staff leadership struggled to put together the robust and wired board that could help garner the required resources to support and sustain NS.

2018–2020 A founder-transition story: NL had a founder in Steve Dietz. As NL continued to become more centered around the annual NS festival, Dietz found and formed a team of ongoing collaborators. With each year this group gained deeper experience and expertise and agency, and after a few years there was a true, collegial partnership to produce the festival.

Dietz was getting old, or older, and also saw the changing requirements and demands for NS in the community and among artists and funders and partners. A multiyear transition plan was formulated between him and codirector Sarah Peters. The board thought it was a good idea, too. Because everyone was on board, and Dietz was a willing and interested party and Peters was a skilled and thoughtful leader, the transition occurred without drama. This was a testament to good planning and communication but also to the quality and character of the principals involved. In the world of nonprofit founder-transition horror stories, this one was a wonderful exception. >NC ↪ SEE ALSO: BEGINNINGS; BOARD, SUNRISE; BOARD, SUNSET; CAPITAL; NORTHERN SPARK; STAFFING; SUCCESSION; SUNSET

participatory A primary concept that defined our work at Northern Lights.mn is participation. Every artist project we commissioned had a participatory element, from group karaoke at the State Fair to an outdoor game about watersheds played in teams on bicycles. Audience members were welcomed to take an active

For your consideration:

>Pramila Vasudevan

Take a moment to observe your breath.
(Inhale and exhale for two or three cycles.)

Observe the contours of this paper.
Feel its weight.
What were the trees of these fibers?
What was the shape of the invitation that brought you here, to this question?

Notice the space around you as you hold this binding.
How are you connected with this book?
What personal and community histories brought you to this surface?
What gentle curiosities and passion-filled inquiries are provoked?

Who are the risk takers: the reader, the artist, or the institution?
Who is missing? More specifically, which perspectives are missing from these pages? Why?
What does it mean to be a cultural space that is searching, learning, and embracing dissent?

Notice the fibers of this sheet and the ink patterned into words across this paper.
How do the formulations of words and phrases on this page activate your senses?
Use your imagination to draw a line connecting any phrase on this page to you.
Inhale and simultaneously compress this line so as to bring this phrase closer to you.
When you exhale, let the line expand your connection with the phrase. (Inhale and exhale for two or three cycles.)

Let yourself linger in this connection.

What contradictions and complexities do you hold as you lift this sheet and turn toward something else?

role in projects, often with other people, mostly strangers. This is in contrast to the common art experience of “viewing,” which is valuable as an experience of revelation, joy, critical thinking, and beauty. Our work sought to go further to invite direct engagement. In fact, much of the artwork required engagement for it to be fully realized. Without singers, *Giant Sing Along* was just a field of colorful microphones and a voiceless song.

Much has been written about the definitions, boundaries, and value of participation and so-called social practice or community-engaged artworks. NL located this work in our mission to support “expanded possibilities for civic engagement.” Participatory art practices are a step toward more engaged communities as participants break social or perceptual boundaries of each other and a place. At their best, these actions lead to expanded agency of individuals and social bodies, temporary as they might be. The art we supported allowed artists, audiences, neighborhoods, and entire cities to practice being together in different ways. Better ways, we hope. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: AGENCY, AQUANESIA, AUDIENCE, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, COMMISSION, COMMUNITY, GIANT SING ALONG, INTERACTION, MISSION, NEIGHBORHOOD, NORTHERN SPARK, PLACE, TEMPORARY, TOGETHER

Left: Aki Shibata, *Dear Earth*, NS 2017. Photo: Anna Min of Min Enterprises Photography, LLC.
Right: Danielle Everine & David Heiserer, *Merne Weaver*, NS 2018. Photo: Sean Sruada.



partnership Everything we did at Northern Lights.mn was in collaboration. In part, this was a necessity. As a “floating” organization with no real estate, no permanent location or specific place of embedded focus (other than the Twin Cities at large), we required the partnership of other cultural and civic organizations to help us with everything from securing project sites to community-specific engagement.

We preferred working in collaboration. Even if we had been a larger team, our projects were so varied in themes, subjects, and places that we never would have had the expertise or knowledge such as theories of game design or the hydrology of a karst-based watershed system or the internal dynamics of a neighborhood. Working with place-based partners in particular required us to look outside ourselves for information that we knew we didn’t

have about that place and which was necessary to achieve the project’s engagement and artistic goals.

Collaboration is not the easier path. Our needs for the expertise of our partners often created a power imbalance, especially when resources came into the picture. Admittedly our playbook on partnership was initially drawn from the large institutions NL leadership had previously worked with: the nonequitable notion that all partners need to bring something of equal value to a project, regardless of everyone’s resources. We learned to shift, to work together more reciprocally, to more bravely talk about resources, power, and privilege in constructing a project budget and timeline. We thank our many partners, especially the BIPOC-run and community-rooted groups, for that education: a tireless and too often unacknowledged job.

Often our own expertise did bring value to our partners. Depending on the circumstance, we were able to utilize a cultural power or name recognition from events like Northern Spark, which could cut through bureaucracy to achieve deceptively simple tasks like turning on the lights at the Central Library after hours. The notoriety of NS brought thousands of people to places they wouldn’t usually go, and when they got there they found artistic expression rooted in the cultural communities of that place. We shared our knowledge about public event insurance and tiny-but-important production details. We tried to connect people to funders, to stellar contract staff, to artists. We made joy, fun, critical engagement, conflict, and memories together. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: COLLABORATION, COMMUNITY, COMPLICATED, CONFLICT, CONNECTIONS, ECOSYSTEM, NIMBLE, NORTHERN SPARK, PLACE, PROCESS, RECIPROCITY, TOGETHER

Partner Organizations, 2008–2023

1612 Harmon Place	Aniccha Arts
African Economic Development Solutions	Aria
air sweet air	Art Institutes International Minnesota
Al’s Breakfast	Art of This
Alchemy Architects	Art Shanty Projects
All My Relations Arts	Artistry
Alley Cat Cycles	Artists in Storefronts
Altered Esthetics	Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy Program of the City of Minneapolis
American Composers Forum	Artspace
American Craft Council	Asian Economic Development Association (AEDA)
American Indian Cultural Corridor	Aurora St. Anthony Neighborhood Development Corporation (ASANDC)
American Society of Landscape Architects MN	AZ Gallery
American Swedish Institute	
Americans for the Arts	
Ananya Dance Theatre	

Barbette
Bauhaus
Bedlam Theatre
Beijing Film Academy
Bell Museum of Natural History
Big Table Studio
Black Dog Cafe
Brave New Workshop
Burnet Gallery at Le Méridien
Chambers
Campaign to Save the Boundary
Waters
Campbell Mithun
Can Can Wonderland
Center for Energy and Environment
Center for Hmong Arts and Talent
Center for Spirituality and Healing
Chicago Avenue Fire Arts Center
City of Bloomington
City of Minneapolis
City of Saint Paul
CITYDESKSTUDIO
Climate Generation
Code Pink
Coffee House Press
College of Visual Arts
Conservation MN
Creative Time
CSA: Community Supported Art
Deborah Elias Danza Española
Dialog City
Douglas Dayton YMCA at Gaviidae
Eyeo Festival
FD13
Flint Hills International Children's
Festival
Foci Minnesota Center for Glass Art
Forecast Public Art
Form + Content Gallery
Four Seasons Dance Studio
Franklin Art Works
Franklin Library
Frogtown Radio
Gallery13
Gamut Gallery
George Latimer Central Library
Glitch
Gorilla Yogis
Great Waters Brewing Company
Greater MSP
Green Minneapolis and The
Commons
Guthrie Theater
Hallie Q. Brown Community Center
Hennepin & Co
Hennepin County Library

Hennepin Energy Recovery Center
(HERC)
Hennepin Theater Trust
HiFi Hair and Records
High School for Recording Arts
Higher Education Consortium for
Urban Affairs (HECUA)
Highpoint Center for Printmaking
Hmong Museum
Indigenous Roots
Innova Recordings
Intermedia Arts
International Indigenous Youth
Council—Twin Cities
Irrigate
Itasca Waters
Jamestown Arts Center
Juxtaposition Arts
Katherine E. Nash Gallery
Ketzal Coatlicue
Keys 4/4 Kids
Kulture Klub Collaborative
Landmark Center
Leav
Liberty Parade
Local Initiative Support
Corporation (LISC)
Lowertown Bike Shop
Lunalux
Macalester College
MacPhail Center for Music
Made Here
Make It. MSP.
McNally Smith College of Music
Meet Minneapolis
Metro State University
Metro Transit
Midtown Greenway Coalition
MIGIZI Communications
Mill City Museum
Minneapolis American Indian Center
Minneapolis Art Lending Library
Minneapolis Bicycle Coalition
Minneapolis College of Art
and Design
Minneapolis Convention Center
Minneapolis Downtown
Improvement District
Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia)
Minneapolis Park and Recreation
Board
Minneapolis Parks Foundation
Minnehaha Creek Watershed
District
Minnesota Artists Exhibition
Program

Minnesota Center for Book Arts
Minnesota Children's Museum
Minnesota Chippewa Tribe
Minnesota Community Network
Channel 6 (MCN6)
Minnesota Historical Society
Minnesota History Center
Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light
Minnesota Museum of American Art
Minnesota Orchestra
Minnesota Original (MNO)
and Twin Cities PBS
Minnesota Planetarium Society
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
Minnesota Sacred Harp Singers
Minnesota State Fair
Mississippi Park Connection
Mizna
MN350.org
mnartists.org
Model Cities
Motionpoems
MPLS Photo Center
Museum of Minneapolis
NanoTako Studios
National Park Service
National Trust for Historic
Preservation
Native American Community
Development Institute (NACDI)
Nautilus Music-Theater
New York Hall of Science
Nice Ride Minnesota
Nomad World Pub
Northern Voice Festival
Northrop
On Being / Krista Tippett Public
Productions
Open Book
Open Eye Figure Theater
Ordway Center for the Performing
Arts
OverExposure
Palace Theatre
Peace Island Picnic
Penumbra Theatre
Performa
Print Central Station
Printland Press
Provisions Public Arts
Public Art Saint Paul
Rain Taxi Review of Books
Recovery Bike Shop
Red Stag Supperclub
Regis Center for Art
Reif Performing Arts Center

Restaurant Alma
Revolver
Robischon Gallery
Rochester Art Center
Rondo Community Library
St. Anthony Falls Laboratory,
University of Minnesota College
of Science and Engineering
St. Cloud State University
Saint Paul Almanac
Saint Paul City Ballet
Saint Paul Neighborhood Network
(SPNN)
Saint Paul Public Library
St. Paul Saints
Sandbox Studios
Schubert Club
Science Museum of Minnesota
Screen Printing on the Cheap
Soo Visual Arts Center
Spark24
Springboard for the Arts
Students for Design Activism
Studio Sendero
Sumunar Indonesian Music
and Dance
Sundance Institute
TakeAction Minnesota
The 100% Campaign
The Bachelor Farmer
The Bakken Museum
The Commons
The Cycling Museum of Minnesota
The Film Society of Minneapolis
St. Paul (MSP Film Society)
The Friends of the Saint Paul
Public Library
The Great Northern
The Loft Literary Center
The Museum of Russian Art
The Musicant Group
The Nicollet
The Raptor Center
The Saint Paul Hotel
The Soap Factory
The Somali Museum of Minnesota
The Southern Theater
The Textile Center
The UpTake
Traffic Zone Gallery
Traveling Museum
Twin Cities Maker / The Hack
Factory
Twin Cities Public Television (TPT)
Two Rivers Gallery
UCLA Game Lab

Union Depot
 University of Minnesota
 Collaborative Arts
 University of Minnesota College
 of Design
 University of Minnesota
 Department of Art
 University of Minnesota Grand
 Challenges Curriculum
 University of Minnesota Honors
 Program
 University of Minnesota Institute
 for Advanced Study
 University of Wisconsin–Stout
 School of Art and Design
 Upstream Arts
 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Victoria Theater Arts Center
 VidTiger
 Vine Arts Center
 W Minneapolis—The Foshay
 Walker Art Center
 Water Bar + Public Studio
 Weavers Guild of Minnesota
 Weisman Art Museum
 West Bank Business Association
 (WBBA)
 Whittier Artists in Storefronts
 zAmya Theater Project of St.
 Stephen's Human Services
 Zeitgeist
 ZERO1
 Zumbro Watershed Partnership

People Rising Look, this whole climate change thing is scary for a lot of people. There are good reasons for that. It's producing more extreme weather, ecosystem damage, and serious downstream political impacts: disaster recovery, migration, conflict with the fossil fuel industry, and more. And climate change can be a Rorschach test. If you want to see it everywhere, there's lots of evidence. If you want to deny it, there are readily available rationalizations. Climate change means uncertainty mixed with dread. These are not useful feelings if you want to organize constructive, scaled solutions. To do that, folks need a vision and a realistic belief that climate justice is possible if they come together to demand it. That's where the partnership between The 100% Campaign and Northern Lights.mn kicked off.

When we first met with NL, it was clear they were committed to leveraging public art to have an impact in Minnesota. And after the 2014 downpour soaked the Northern Spark festival, they were already focused on climate. At The 100% Campaign, we were convinced that traditional issue advocacy around this beastly, depressing issue was going to fall short without a tangible vision and a shared sense of efficacy. We each had something the other organization wanted. Multiple rounds of collaboration began, each bigger than the last, culminating in our installation *Mnisota 2055: Postcards from an (im)Possible Future*, hosted at Springboard for the Arts for NS 2022. 100% made the journey all the way from arts-adjacent to straight-up artmaking, but we were still grounded in organizing: we signed up 283 new supporters that night.

100% is committed to advancing equitable climate solutions at scale. We feel uncertainty and dread, too, but we also feel inspired and hopeful. We've seen everyday Minnesotans impact public policy and private corporations. We're seeing, right now, in our own neighborhoods, investments in solar energy and transit routes and soil

health. Yes, climate change is here, but our future is, too. It's getting created by the people who vote, volunteer, advocate, implement, argue, protest, and artmake. NL gave us the opportunity to make this visible, in three dimensions, for thousands of people we'd never met before. >CC ↪ SEE ALSO: AGENCY, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, CLIMATE CHAOS, NORTHERN SPARK, PARTNERSHIP, POSSIBILITY

performance Although we often checked “visual arts” in the discipline drop-down menu on arts grants, Northern Lights.mn presented a significant amount of performance over our history.

Art(ists) On the Verge attracted performance-oriented artists from its first year, with projects that investigated mobile projection theater (AOV1, Andrea Steudel), a bicycle ballet (AOV2, Janaki Ranpura), and dance presentations via telephone (AOV4, Mad King Thomas), among others.

The wild multidisciplinary of Northern Spark was our largest container for performative exploration, as artists proposed and produced projects that centered sound, music, dance, theater, and live storytelling. And singing, all night singing.

The outdoor, place-based, theater game *Aquanesia* and its predecessors involved a scriptwriter, dramaturg, and performance director who conducted casting calls much like a stage-based show.

The commonality of all these performance works was their location in or revolving around the public sphere. Or their interest in pushing the boundaries of performance, largely in site-specific or participatory ways. Is a massive multiplayer game at an all-night festival a performance?

Maybe the final resting place of our organizational history says it all. Our materials will be housed in the Performing Arts Archives at the University of Minnesota. An honorable final curtain. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: AQUANESIA, ART(ISTS) ON THE VERGE, ARTWORK, AURORA BOREALIS, COMMUNICATIONS, EXPERIMENT/AL, NORTHERN SPARK, PARTICIPATORY, PUBLIC SPHERE, SINGING, UNCONVENTION



Left: Anna Marie Shogren, FALLS, Minneapolis Central Library, NS 2018. Presented by Weisman Art Museum.
 Right: BodyCartography Project, CLOSER, NS 2015.
 Photos: Sean Smuda.

permit Things you may need a permit for:

- making noise
- lighting things on fire
- feeding people (for free or for money)
- putting physical art anywhere
- using any so-called public space for artistic purposes
- inviting people to gather in the name of art
- a lot of other fun things

PERMIT PEP TALK

I am an artist and producer. I don't love rules and I question authority often.

So I view permits as agreements. Sure, getting a permit can keep you out of trouble and make you feel very official, but more importantly it ensures that other people who use and care for public (or private) space are respected, and it ensures you have the space reserved for your project without too much interruption.

Art doesn't clearly or cleanly fit within existing permit parameters—city or parks departments are absolutely not making requirements and checky-boxes with art in mind! Try to understand why the rules exist and evaluate if your project is subject to them.

Permits can cost a lot of money! If you can't afford it, find a way around it while still achieving your artistic vision. Example: replace your "gigantic" fire with a "modest" one. Yay! No permit necessary.

Consider the risk of not having a permit. Are you willing to accept that risk? Is there liability associated with it for you or your collaborators and partners? Are there neighbors who may be affected? Do you plan on building a solid reputation so you can get permits in the future? If so, GET THAT PERMIT.

I cannot stress this one enough: permits are issued by PEOPLE. Become friends through phone calls or show up in person. Ask a lot of questions, respond with creativity. Advocate for your art! Make your case!

Be reasonable with yourself and others. Make informed choices that everyone is comfortable with.

Don't let permits be obstacles that prevent you from making art in public spaces. ➤EL ↪ SEE ALSO: BUREAUCRACY, NORTHERN SPARK, POWER, PRODUCTION, SITE VISIT

place We often referred to Northern Lights.mn as a "floating organization," meaning that while our work happened in public space, often in long-term partnerships with a neighborhood or other place-based organizations, we ourselves did not have a place of our own. Our mission wasn't born from a particular geography, nor were we committed to any one demographic over another.

Yet people who attended our projects often felt a sense-of-place-transformation: "The experience heightened our awareness of our surroundings; we were always looking for what was different, and sometimes couldn't remember what was new and what we simply hadn't seen before. . . . Everything became an installation. That sensation continued the next day, and for a while nothing was ordinary." —NS 2011 AUDIENCE MEMBER

Initially, we thought of ourselves as place-agnostic: we produced projects wherever artists were interested in working. Our concept was to be a floating connector that would follow an invitation to a place, bring resources to share, develop reciprocal partnerships around ideas for temporary public art envisioned by artists and people in that place, and then collaborate to make it happen. A network would slowly grow and the work would float on from there.

As our practice shifted to focus on specific communities and neighborhoods, particularly with Northern Spark, our outsider status cast us as unworthy of trust for some folks. I don't blame those who doubted NL's presence in certain places. These are the realities of race, privilege, and power, and we were a white-led organization with some resources, looking to partner with BIPOC-led groups or individual artists to whom the same resources were not flowing.

Reversely, sometimes our floating status enabled us to convene partners who shared geography but usually did not have the opportunity to work together. The wide platform of NS and its public popularity helped bring in a large audience, if that was desired.

Where our vision often fell short was the element of time. It is so basic, but repeatedly hard to operationalize: reciprocal relationships are slow to build, and we were often trying to move from kick-off meeting to full-scale event too quickly. For NS we eventually slowed that timeline, but even with an eighteen-month planning process for NS 2019 (at three neighborhood sites) we could only scratch the surface of community engagement.

This is the primary reason that, prior to our sunset decision, we committed to rooting NS in one set of locations—in St. Paul along University Avenue—for the then-foreseeable future. We could build on the relationships we started in 2016, the same ones that formed a direct lineage to the geography of the final festival in 2022. Six years is not very long in relationship-place-time.

NL's relationship to place was continually challenging and changing, and I was often envious of organizations whose mission and physical space was shared with a place, like Victoria Theater Art Center's dogged dedication to Frogtown or West Bank Business Association's clear focus on the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood.

As of 2023 a woman named Barb works for the City of Saint Paul. She's got you. Get her number and call her. This is the key to unlocking secret free permits that avoid City Council presentations and time-consuming procedures.

As I engaged with the discourse that aims to shift work like ours from “placemaking” to “place-keeping,” I was often troubled with a question: Who were we to be there at all? What motivated us to keep in the mess were our partners and commissioned artists. In the words of St. Paul drummer and community organizer Jesse Buckner: “Northern Spark is probably the best opportunity to share our collective art forms to an expansive & diverse audience. Usually we perform in venues of separated ethnicities but NS gives us the great opportunity to share collectively in one space, so to speak. . . . This two-night event transforms & transcends us as a people.” >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST COUNCIL, COMMUNITY, COMPLICATED, CREATIVE PLACEMAKING, DECOLONIZE, EQUITY, NEIGHBORHOOD, NIMBLE, PARTNERSHIP, POWER, PUBLIC SPHERE, RESPONSE, SUNSET, TEMPORARY, TIME

platform At Northern Lights.mn, we structured our programming primarily by platforms: Northern Spark, Art(ists) On the Verge, and Illuminate the Lock are three examples. This required complex interplay between replicability and flexibility. We wanted to create an event that could be repeated but was not the same every time. Think of the Minnesota State Fair: much of its appeal is precisely all the things that recur year after year. There are changes, but they are small relative to the whole.

For Northern Spark, we wanted to create a structure that everyone could recognize as Northern Spark year after year. But the “content”—the artist projects and the theme—changed 100 percent every year, and so might the location. This did lead to complications (in communications, for example) but allowed us to focus our work on different topics with different places, communities, and artists.

The most important aspect of a platform for us was its mutability by users, not only by its organizers. This goal was informed by our interest in interactive media and play, something game theorist Katie Salen calls transformative play, where the bending of the rules of the game alters the game itself or, even more broadly, the context of the game. Ideally, our platforms would coevolve as artists and audiences and partners interacted with them.

After a couple of years, artists and performers would show up on a street corner during NS and enact an art project that was not sanctioned by the festival. Rather than treating these efforts as counterfeit and taking them out of circulation, we began to understand them as a “fringe” NS—a consequence of our creating a successful platform. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: ART(ISTS) ON THE VERGE, ARTIST-CENTRIC, COEVOLUTION, COMMUNICATIONS, COMMUNITY, GIANT SING ALONG, JURATE, NEIGHBORHOOD, NORTHERN SPARK, OPEN CALL, PARTNERSHIP, PLAY, PLAYBOOK

play Perhaps I was invited to write about play because I have chosen, in a very public sense, to devote my life to it. I call myself a “playwright,” meaning that I do more than simply write plays, I *wright* them. I shape them, like a shipwright shapes a boat. But actually, I find that comparison quite apt when it comes to the question of play. I asked my partner, who has also devoted their life to play as an early childhood educator, “What would *you* call play?”

They said something very surprising. They said, “Play is a context.” Which sounds very academic, doesn’t it, especially for something so commonly associated with children. Can’t we just let play be play?

But I think there is something to this whole context thing. A play, whether it’s an acted-out story or a game between friends, has its own logic, its own mutually agreed-on set of rules, which does—what? It grants us at least some sense of safety, of expectation. It gives us specific options for how to engage with one another. It creates a set of knowns that can make holding *the unknown* a little bit lighter, more pleasurable, even fun. Will our team win or lose? Will that character drink the poison or not? Will we be able to hit all the notes during the *Giant Sing Along* or will our voices fizzle out? Regardless of the outcome, we take comfort in the fact that this special, shared context is not *real life*, but some kind of third space where we, too, can be different from how we normally are. Life teaches us who we are; play teaches us who we may become. It’s an invitation to a different way of being in the world. Like a ship, it’s the vessel that carries us soundly from one place to the next.

We agree to play’s rules so that together we can experiment to find the exceptions. And we so desperately need the exceptions. To be reminded that there is meaning beyond work, that we were born to be more than just adults. We may be children first, but play is a sign that we are children always. That there is something about living that can be renewed anytime through the simple act of saying yes, of agreeing to participate in something larger than yourself. >ET ↪ SEE ALSO: AQUANESIA, DRAMATURG, EXPERIMENT/AL, GIANT SING ALONG, PARTICIPATORY, PLATFORM, TOGETHER

playbook The work of Northern Lights.mn was focused on the present and the future, but it was also rooted in what had come before. This required institutional knowledge and a keen understanding of both the big picture and small details. NL staff paid attention. We documented. We remembered.

As we honed our processes, we recorded our actions and observations each year in a humongous, 29-tab spreadsheet: our “playbook.” In essence the playbook was a step-by-step guide for creating our platforms and an attempted record of institutional knowledge.

Ultimately, documenting our work in this way allowed us to refine our processes to create a well-tested template that could be adapted to different locations, curatorial focuses, and other variables. With revolving staffing and iterative platforms, the playbook carried our learnings and helped inform decisions from a structural and historical perspective.

No template, however, could ever come close to replicating the aspiration and commitment of our artists, partners, and staff. That part was magic. >AM ↪ SEE ALSO: ARCHIVE, BUREAUCRACY, EXPERIMENT/AL, ITERATION, MAGICAL, PLATFORM, PROCESS, PRODUCTION, STAFFING

possibility *Northern Lights.mn strives to transform our sense of what's possible in public space.*

NL created platforms for artists, partners, and audiences to alchemize possibility. We sought to provide space for questioning, in hopes that reality could emerge from possibility, that we could imagine—wonder—something good into existence.

We barely scratched the surface. But though NL exits the stage as a formal entity, energy and possibility remain. >AM ↪ SEE ALSO: AGENCY, ARCHIVE, ARTIST, EXPERIMENT/AL, MAGICAL, OMISSION, PARTNERSHIP, PLATFORM, PUBLIC ART ALCHEMY, VISION, WONDER

power We engaged in a lot of conversations about power. Who had it; where to get it. How to use it / distribute it / share it / mitigate it. This can be said of both electricity and influence.

How to source electricity was key to almost all of our projects, even the indoor ones. Our events were often at night, making lighting tricky. The large-scale projections we commissioned required the rental of generators. Other projects such as an intimate sewing circle or puppet show needed a simple 110-volt plug in.

These issues are not unrelated to that other kind of power—authority. Sometimes we had authority and influence, such as when our privilege or connections got us a meeting with the mayor of a city or we had the inevitable position of accepting or rejecting artist proposals for funding and presentation. At other times we were subject to powers beyond our reach: certain funders or city officials, weather.

We dedicated a lot of time and energy (ha) to changing how we did things to share power. Likely our most important accomplishment in the world of arts gatekeeping was to open the Northern Spark jury process, and eventually the major festival planning decisions, to include community members as well as site partners.

It might have been more theoretical than actual in practice among our collaborators, but the very idea of a platform was designed with power-sharing as part of the deal. We make some of the decisions, but not all of them. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST COUNCIL, COMPLICATED, DECOLONIZE, GATEKEEPER, NIMBLE, PRIVILEGE, PRODUCTION, WEATHER

privilege The leadership of Northern Lights.mn benefited from many privileges. Whiteness, middle-class social norms, able bodies, proximity to “art world” institutions, and the connections that came from these positions, to name a few. We tried to bring this awareness into our work, but we could not always fully fathom our privilege. To address this, we consistently tried to develop systems that could be permeated by others, through open calls, jurating, the Artist Council, partnerships. Those efforts had an impact toward greater inclusivity at NL, but we could have done more.

It is a privilege to make this book; to have time to write and think and edit; to have a twenty-year relationship with a funder and for them to fund this project. We are thankful for the opportunity to commemorate NL. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: BOARD, SUNRISE; BOARD, SUNSET; HARM; POWER; RECIPROCITY

process Boy, howdy, did we NL staff love a process. With so many moving parts, dozens of artists and partners all at once, and limited resources, we just had to introduce some standardization to our platforms in order to pull the whole thing off. (Cue Ecclesiastes by way of The Byrds: “To every thing, turn, turn, turn, there is a *process*, turn, turn, turn.”)

We were admittedly overzealous at times. But the thing is: process was an attempt to streamline the logistics so we could give artists space and support to do what they do best. We became bureaucrats in service of the expansiveness and possibility and growth and change that artists could alchemize. We put intentional structure and effort into our process in hopes of creating conditions for artists to be able to push boundaries.

Perhaps a testament to our sunseting, rarely did we choose a path because it was easy or efficient. We went the interesting way instead. The way of curiosity and what ifs. And wowie, can the interesting way be difficult to navigate. But NL was not a machine. We were a collection of critical, curious, ambitious people. We fumbled and we plugged on, trying to keep up with our values for the sake of art. >AM ↪ SEE ALSO: BUREAUCRACY, PRODUCTION, VALUES

Art(ists) On the Verge 7

Artists

Eric F. Avery, *67 simple operations*
Torre Edahl, *Dance the Internet*
Jessica Henderson, *here i am am i here*
Joshua McGarvey, *Soap Antenna for the Sun*
Liza Sylvestre, *_ommu_ni_a_ion*

Codirectors

Steve Dietz
Piotr Szyhalski

Mentors

Lara Avery (writing mentor)
Paul Bernhardt
Greg Fitz
Mike Hoyt
John Keston
Marcus Young

Essayist

Sarah Peters, "game + book + body + speech + sound: Art(ists) On the Verge, 2015-16"

ARTathlon

Alyssa Baguss, *Text Me*
Jess Hirsch and Emily Stover, *Cultural Healing Exercise V1, V2*
Niko Kubota, *Tree Taiko Challenge*
Meena Mangalvedhekar, *KhaChinga*
Robin Schwartzman, *Arctic Golf*
Monica Sheets, *Free Speech Machine*
Moheb Soliman, *Littering with Nature*
Peter Haakon Thompson, *WinTTer ARTathlon*

Creative City Challenge

Christopher Lutter, Heid E. Erdrich, Coal Dorius, Kim Ford, Paul Tinetti, Karl Stoerzinger, and Ian Knodel, *Wolf and Moose*

IN Light IN

Anila Quayyum Agha, *Alhambra Nights*
Aphidoidea, *Droplet's Formation II*
Big Tent, *Aeonian*
Amanda Browder, *At Night We Light Up*
Tiffany Carbonneau and Susanna Crum, *A Place In Time*
Daily tous les jours, *McLarena*
Alexis Gideon, *The Crumbling*
Ryan Patrick Griffin, *Projected Visions*
Brian McCutcheon and MANA2, *Water Mining*
Owens + Crawley, *2058: the first September without ice*
Jamie Pawlus, *HAPPINESS*

PROJECTiONE, PRISMAtique

Luke Savisky, *ST/x*
Robin Schwartzman and RADAR Collective, *Barter Boat*
Piotr Szyhalski, *Geophone*
The Illuminated Reef Collective, *The Illuminated Reef*
YesYesNo, *Night Lights / Funky Forms*
Lauren Zoll, *Kitsch'n Lights*

Northern Spark

All projects presented by NL (unless otherwise indicated).

<ja:↓>, *Afterglow Garden* (NL, Make It. MSP.)
Aniccha Arts, *Census*
Azure Sky and Beauteous Earth: Hymns from the Sacred Harp (Minnesota Sacred Harp Singers)
Christine Baeumler, *Backyard Phenology: Tracking Nature's Cycles in a Changing Climate* (NL, Make It. MSP.)
Beehive (Art Institutes International Minnesota)
Hicham Berrada, Cao Fei, Diego Lamar, Rebeca Mendez, Michael Najjar, and Adam Sébire, *Latitudes: Artists from Six Continents Reflect on Earth's Changing Environments*
Rachel Breen and Koby Jeschkeit-Hagen, *Seed-Saving Bingo*
Cedarside 2016 Artists with Muna Ahmed, *Blessing the Boats*
Doks Robotiks, Northern Spark Launch Party performance
Gregory Fitz, *A Bend in the River* (NL, Make It. MSP.)
Futures North, *Phase Change*
Robin Garwood, *Wishing Well* (NL, Make It. MSP.)
Monica Haller, Sebastian Muellauer, and Nic Jelinski, *Soil Lab* (NL, Make It. MSP.)
Helado Negro with Minneapolis Music Company and dancers Alberta Mirais and Erin Smith, Northern Spark Opening Ceremony performance
Hennepin County Library staff with Jon Mac Cole, Olli Johnson, David Pisa, Nico Swenson, Michael Torsch, and Rhiana Yazzie, *The Night Library* (Hennepin County Library)
Interfaith Iftar and Warm Conversations (Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light, NL, Make It. MSP.)

Emily Johnson/Catalyst with Maggie

Thompson, *Then a Cunning Voice and a Night We Spend Gazing at Stars* (Emily Johnson/Catalyst Dance)
Riley Kane and Mike Haeg, *The Change Booth*

Evva Kraikul and Tyler Stefanich, curators, *Game Bar* (NL, GLITCH)

Janet Lobberecht, *Future Drawing Near: Future Drawing Here* (NL, Make It. MSP.)

Pare Lorentz, *At What a Cost: The Films of Pare Lorentz* (Mill City Museum)

Shawn McCann, *Reeling in Change* (NL, Make It. MSP.)

Joshua McGarvey and Heckadecimal, *Ice Fall—Feel the Change*

Maythum Mehdi, *Adhan (Call to Prayer)* (Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light)

Nerd vs. Nerd (IAS, U of M)

Roger Nieboer, *Energeia* (NL, Make It. MSP.)

Keri Pickett, Jason Takahashi, and Charlie Thayer, *Against the Grain*

Platform, *Water Quality Sing-Along* (NL, Mississippi Park Connection)

Myra K. Rucker, *Sunrise Yoga: Dem Bones / Being the Butterfly*

Robin Schwartzman and Desiree Moore, *Minnesota Ice*

Joko Sutrisno, Tri Sutrisno, Midiyanto, I. M. Harjito, Heni Savitri, and Wisnu Aji Settyo Wicaksonowith, *Bimo Gugah / Bimo Prevails* (Sumunar Gamelan and Dance Ensembles)

The Drawing Project, *Sketching Climate: Leave Your Trace* (NL, Make It. MSP.)

The Illuminated Reef Collective, *The Illuminated Reef*

U of M students from Making Sense of Climate Change: Art, Science, and Agency class, *Surrender: What Are We Willing to Lose?* (Grand Challenges Curriculum, U of M)

Virtual Reality: The New Frontier, various artists (Walker Art Center, Sundance Institute, NL)

Geoffrey Warner and U of M design students, *lightHouse* (Alchemy Architects)

Weather Report (MINN_LAB)

Yes, Let's! *Climate Carnival*

Marcus Young, Grace Minnesota, and many others, *Don't You Feel It Too?*

Marina Zurkow with Valentine Cadieux, Aaron Marx, and Sarah Petersen, *Making the Best of It: Dandelion*



Robin Schwartzman, *Arctic Golf*, ARTathlon at Bdote Fort Snelling State Park. Photo: Bethany Bernie.

Tiffany Carbonneau and Susanna Crum,
A Place In Time, IN Light IN, Indianapolis, 2016.
Photo: Tony Vasquez, Vasquez Photography.



YesYesNo, *Night Lights / Funky Forms*, IN Light IN, Indianapolis, 2016.
 Photo: Tony Vasquez, Vasquez Photography.



Aphidoidea, *Droplet's Formation II*, IN Light IN, Indianapolis, 2016.
 Photo: Tony Vasquez, Vasquez Photography.



Art(ists) On the Verge 7: (clockwise from upper left) Eric F. Avery, *67 simple operations*; Torre Edahl, *Dance the Internet*; Liza Sylvestre, *_ommi_a_ion*; Joshua McGarvey, *Soap Antenna for the Sun*; Jessica Henderson, *here i am i here*. The Soap Factory. Photos: Rik Sferra.



Maythum Mehdi, *Adhan (Call to Prayer)*, *Interfaith Iftar and Warm Conversations*, Mill City Museum, Northern Spark 2016. Presented by Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light. Photo: Max Haynes.



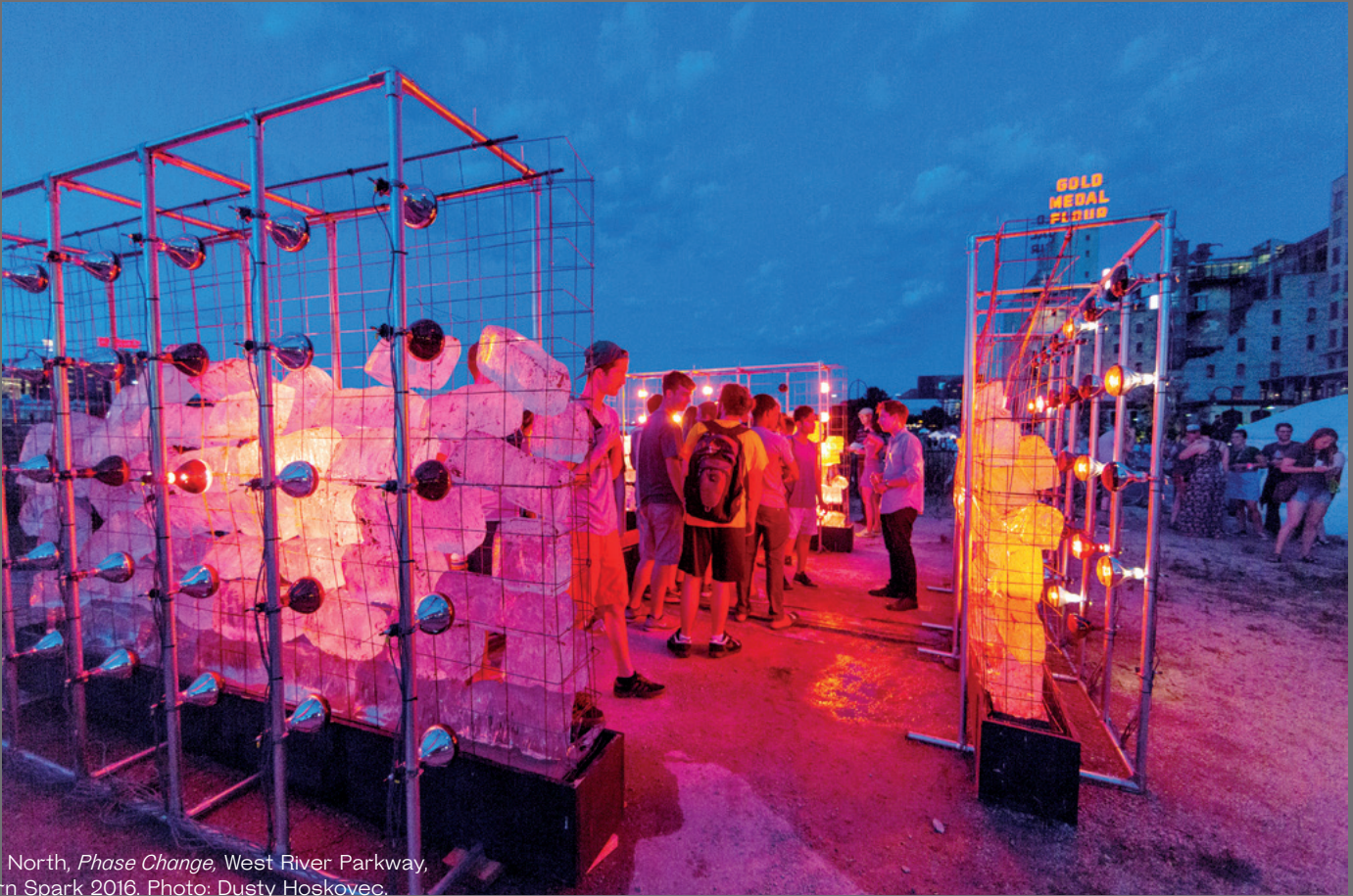
Aniccha Arts, *Census*, West River Parkway, Northern Spark 2016. Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.

Cedarside 2016 Artists with Muna Ahmed, *Blessing the Boats*, Mill Ruins Park, Northern Spark 2016. Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.



Christopher Lutter, Heid E. Erdrich, Coal Dorius, Kim Ford, Paul Tinetti, Karl Stoerzinger, and Ian Knodel, *Wolf and Moose*, Creative City Challenge winner, Minneapolis Convention Center Plaza, Northern Spark 2016. Photo: Jayme Halbritter.





Futures North, *Phase Change*, West River Parkway, Northern Spark 2016. Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.



Joshua McGarvey and Heckadecimal, *Ice Fall—Feel The Change*, Mill Ruins Park and Gold Medal silos, and MINN_LAB, *Weather Report*, Mill Ruins Park, Northern Spark 2016. Photo: Max Haynes.



Marina Zurkow with Valentine Cadieux, Aaron Marx, and Sarah Petersen, *Making the Best of It: Dandelion*, West River Parkway, Northern Spark 2016. Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.



Robin Schwartzman and Desiree Moore, *Minnesotan Ice*, West River Parkway, Northern Spark 2016. Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.



Emily Johnson/Catalyst with Maggie Thompson, *Then a Cunning Voice and a Night We Spend Gazing at Stars*, Mill Ruins Park, Northern Spark 2016. Presented by Emily Johnson/Catalyst Dance. Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.



Platform, *Water Quality Sing-Along*, Mill Ruins Park, Northern Spark 2016. Presented by NL and Mississippi Park Connection. Photo: Max Haynes.

Art(ists) On the Verge 8

Artists

Kelsey Bosch, *Hyperbolic Soundscape*
Jess Hirsch, *Prescription Gardens*
Dylan Redford, *Run, Hide, Fight*
Fue Yang, *Synchronous*
Sarita Zaleha, *under/currents*

Codirectors

Steve Dietz
Piotr Szyhalski

Mentors

Lara Avery (writing mentor)
Christine Baeumler
Pao Houa Her
Noah Keesecker
John Kim
Sarah Rara

Essayist

Sheila Dickinson, "Whispering Questions
into the Dark: Art(ists) On the Verge,
2016–17"

B-Lectric

Graci Horne, curator, *No Dakota Access
Pipeline, No Pipelines Period*
Nikila Badua, *Untitled*
Myron Dewey, *Untitled*
Ben-Alex Dupris, *Untitled*
Graci Horne, *Black Elk's Vision*
Michelle Latimer, *Nimmikaage*
Joshua McGarvey, *Ice Fall—Feel the
Change*
NASA, *Climate Change Data
Visualizations*
Miko Simmons, *Atavism II*
Wapikoni Mobile, various artists
Marina Zurkow
Hydrocarbons
Slurb
The Poster Children
The Thirsty Bird

Creative City Challenge

MINN_LAB, ORBACLES

Illuminate the Lock

Andrea Carlson, *The Uncompromising Hand*
Aaron Dysart, *Surface*

Jamestown ArtSpark

Molly Balcom Raleigh and Emily Stover,
Dumpling House
Rachel Breen and Nickey Robare,
Behind the Seams
Preston Drum, *Traffic Jam Scene*

Michael Murnane with Evan Murnane
and Kevin Kling, *Under Ice*

Living Banners and Words for Winter on Nicollet Mall

Piotr Szyhalski, *Living Banners*
Tesla Works, *Peavey Plaza Sound and
Light Show*
Words for Winter poets
Brave Crow
Heid E. Erdrich
Sarah Fox
Hassan Hussein
LianiRey
Lara Mimosa Montes
Miss Brit
Sarah Myers
Lula Saleh
Sagirah Shahid
Sun Yung Shin
Moheb Soliman
Mary Austin Speaker
Elle Thoni
Joel Turnipseed
Elisabeth Workman
Ahmed Ismail Yusuf

Northern Spark

All projects presented by NL
(unless otherwise indicated).

3600 cuts (Aniccha Arts)
Monira Al Qadiri, *Alien Technology II*
(Mizna)
*Background Stories, String Survey:
Drawing the Line on Climate* (MCAD)
Backyard Phenology Team, *Listening to
Climate Change: Stories from the Field*
(WAM)
Julie Reneé Benda, *Land Raft* (Forecast
Public Art)
Rachel Breen and Nickey Robare,
Behind the Seams
Valentine Cadieux and Marina Zurkow,
Making the Best of It: Dandelion
Andrea Carlson, *WATER IS LIFE*
(NL, Metro Transit)
Cedarside Coalition, *BUILD-NO-BORDERS
Chaos on the Green Line* (Motionpoems)
Craig David with Roger Nieboer and
lesser mortals, *Arboreous* (Climate
Generation, NL)
Debate the Denier (Altered Esthetics)
Desplazados/Displaced (Deborah Elias
Danza Española)
Preston Drum, *Traffic Jam Scene*

Field Practice, Green Market Movers
Sara Fowler, Ben Moren, and Tyler
Stefanich, *Collective Action!*
gifts of light, gifts from the earth (WBBA)
GoodSpace Murals, *I Am a Water
Protector* (MN350, NL)
Grand Challengers, *Tunnel Vision* (WAM)
*Guriga Reer Guuraaga / The Nomadic
Home* (The Somali Museum of
Minnesota)
*Haakimun Min Khalkullah—Environmental
Ancestry Story Circles Interfaith Iftar*
(Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light)
David Hamlow, *Mirror Stage* (The M)
Karen Haselmann and Willis Bowman,
Human Hamster Wheel (WAM)
Alison Hiltner and Lisa Aston Philander,
*Ecological Futures: Speculative Biomes
of the Past, Present, and Future*
(MN Original and Twin Cities PBS)
Hope Risers and Company, *Hope Risers*
Nooshin Hakim Javadi, *Violet diaspora*
John Keston, *Un:heard Resonance* (WAM)
Lawn-a-Loom: Weaving out of Waste
(Textile Center and Weavers Guild of
Minnesota)
May Lee-Yang, *River Stories*
Little Mekong Night Market (AEDA)
MacPhail Community Youth Choir,
Northern Spark Opening Ceremony
performance
Mademoiselle Miel, *Bees Live Here*
(Public Art Saint Paul)
Meena Mangalvedhekar, *Intercroppers
of Edibilicia*
Mary Jane Mansfield, *The Transparent
Spirit Elevation Chamber* (Forecast
Public Art)
Ifrah Mansour and the My Aqal Team,
My Aqal
Kathy McTavish, *HOLE IN THE SKY*
(Zeitgeist)
Meet and Greet with Owls (The Raptor
Center)
Million Artist Movement, *Relative Water
Liquid Spirit: Healing Art Structure and
Creative Environment*
Mystery Spot Books, *The Slow Down
Neighborhood Climate Change
News Flash Flash Cards* (Printland Press)
Sheronda Orridge, *Poetry Gumbo, Open
Mic, and Conscious Entertainment*
Sami Pfeffer, *Phone Valet*
Rage to Order, *Domination Corporation*
(St. Paul Saints)

*Rivers of Delight: Hymns from the Sacred
Harp* (Minnesota Sacred Harp Singers)
Areca Roe, *Goodbye Biome*
*Roots of Rondo: collaborative artist
projects that showcase the rich stories
of past, present, and future of Rondo*
(ASANDC)
Jessie Buckner, *Heart and Soul*
*Drum Academy: Drum, Sow
Seeds of Change & Grow*
Melvin Giles, *Beacon of Light: The
Illuminating Solar Peace Pole*
Mike Simmons, *From street cars to
light-rail . . . (and not so freeway
in between)*
Michele Spaise and Nicole M. Smith,
*Pollinate with Spoken Art and
Shadow Puppetry*
Run Free Productions, *She doesn't cry
but tears keep falling*
Tou SaiKo Lee with Hmong Tattoo
Crew, *Hmong Tattoo Exhibit* (Hmong
Museum, NL)
Lula Saleh, curator, *Little Africa Film
Festival* (AEDS, NL)
Mohamed Samatar and Ross Hutchens,
Samawada
Sara-Yezih Art Group, *Getting Diverse in
Global Warming*
Aki Shibata, *Dear Earth* (Conservation
Minnesota, NL)
The Night Librarians, *The Night Library*
(Hennepin County Library, Saint Paul
Public Library)
tony the scribe and Ananya Dance
Theatre, *just breathe*
Transition Twin Cities Artists, *Transition
NOW!* (Center for Energy and
Environment, NL)
United Media Brigade, *Operation: Save
the Earth* (St. Cloud State University
Art Department)
University of Wisconsin–Stout Transmedia
Studio, *Mycorrhizae* (UW–Stout School
of Art and Design)
Water Bar & Public Studio, *Anthropocene
Water Stations*
Wavelets Creative, *iNMIGRATION* (Take
Action MN, NL)
Clarence White, *Green Line Poet*
Yes, Let's! *Climate Carnival Sideshow*
ZULUZULUU, Northern Spark Launch
Party performance

NL staff and community members created light-up letter signs at AAA's Creative Protest Workshop and then spread the message from an overpass. Minneapolis, 2017. Photo: Sara Shives.



Million Artist Movement, *Relative Water Liquid Spirit: Healing Art Structure and Creative Environment*, Little Africa, Northern Spark 2017. Photo: Caleb Timmerman.



May Lee-Yang, *River Stories*, Little Mekong, Northern Spark 2017. Photo: Anna Min of Min Enterprises Photography, LLC.



tony the scribe and Ananya Dance Theatre, *just Breathe*, Rondo, Northern Spark 2017. Photo: Caleb Timmerman.



Haakimun Min Khalkullah—Environmental Ancestry Story Circles Interfaith Iftar, Cedar-Riverside, Northern Spark 2017. Presented by Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light. Photo: Bobby Rogers.



Ifrah Mansour and the My Aqal Team, My Aqal, Cedar-Riverside, Northern Spark 2017. Photo: Bobby Rogers.

Preston Drum, *Traffic Jam Scene*, The Commons, Northern Spark 2017. Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.

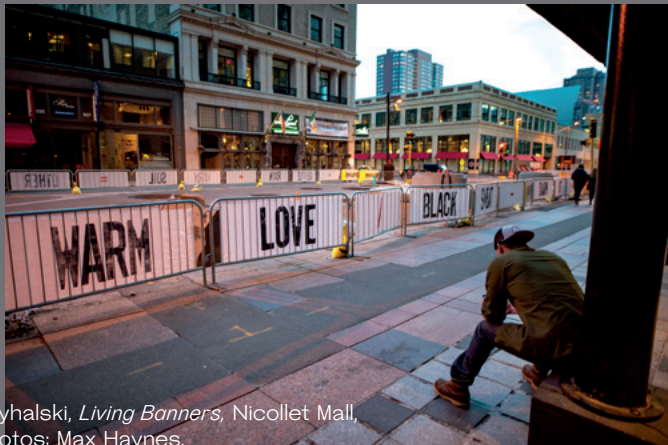


MINN_LAB, *ORBAOLES*, Creative City Challenge winner, The Commons, Northern Spark 2017. Photo: Dusty Hoskovec.

Green Line, Union Depot station,
Northern Spark 2017. Photo: Dan Norman.



Andrea Carlson, *WATER IS LIFE*, Green Line
train during Northern Spark 2017. Presented
by NL and Metro Transit. Photos: NL.



Piotr Szyhalski, *Living Banners*, Nicollet Mall,
2017. Photos: Max Haynes.



LianiRey, untitled, *Words for Winter*, Nicollet Mall, 2017. Photos: NL.



Andrea Carlson, *The Uncompromising Hand*,
Illuminate the Lock, Owámiyomni/St. Anthony
Falls Lock and Dam, 2017. Photo: Rik Sferra.



Art(ists) On the Verge 8: (clockwise from upper left)
 Jess Hirsch, *Prescription Gardens*; Dylan Redford,
Run, Hide, Fight; Sarita Zaleha, *under/currents*; Kelsey
 Bosch, *Hyperbolic Soundscape*; Fue Yang, *Synchronous*.
 Katherine E. Nash Gallery. Photos: Rik Sferra.

Aquanesia

Game designer and production

designer: Kim Loken

Playwright and performance director:

Elle Thoni

Art director:

Donald Thomas

Performers—Grand Rapids, MN

Laura Anderson
Josh Cagle
Samuel Grigsby
Steve Jaeger
Rob Lepak
Kathy LePak
David Martin
Michael McLaughlin
Kendra Osterbur
Shannon Seeba
Jessie Siiter

Performers—Rochester, MN

Zoë Allen-Wickler
Madelyn Celovsky
Solis Danny
Marann Faget
Debbie Fuehrer
Katie Hawley
Dominique Jones
Michele (Shelly) Nyman
Christina Rudlong
Denise Ruemping
Theo St. Mane
Rebecca Sands
Jenn Scuse
John Shaffer
Dylon Starr
Alan Wiltgen

Art(ists) On the Verge 9

Artists

Maxwell Hoagland, *The Shallows*
Meena Mangalvedhekar, *Mind the Harvest*
Areca Roe, *Founder Effect*
Stephanie Lynn Rogers, *Security Blanket*
Ziyang Wu, *Smarter City 2*

Codirectors

Steve Dietz
Piotr Szyhalski

Mentors

Lara Avery (writing mentor)
Monica Haller
Doug Hegley
Kevin Obsatz
Jehra Patrick
Jasmine Tang

Essayist

Russ White, "Virtuous Realities, Art(ists) On the Verge, 2017-18"

Creative City Challenge

Peng Wu, Shun Jie Yong, Aki Shibata,
Preston Drum, and Zoe Cinel, *CarryOn Homes*

Illuminate the Lock

Mike Hoyt, Dameun Strange, and Diver
Van Avery with Ritika Ganguly,
Returning the River

Illuminate South Loop

Alyssa Baguss, *Vitamin D: A Pep Rally for Spring*
Eric William Carroll and Wil Natzel,
Empty Space
Daily tous les jours, *Score!*
Ben Moren, *Watercourse*
Plus/And, *Way Station Warming House*
Robin Schwartzman, *Duck Duck What?*
Pramila Vasudevan, curator
DaNCEBUMS, *Superfaux*
Emily Gastineau, *The Claque (for Astro turf)*
Pedro Lander with Zoe Cinel,
Masc4masc
Words for Winter (Coffee House Press)
Valerie Deus
Heid E. Erdrich
Greg Hewett
Su Hwang
Michael Kleber-Diggs
Lara Mimosa Montes
Bao Phi
Moheb Soliman
Marina Zurkow and Paul Paradiso, *Flight*

Northern Spark

All projects presented by NL
(unless otherwise indicated).

Kashimana Ahua, *The Applause Posse Art Needs People Exhibition* (MALL)
Maddy Bartsch, *Ties That Bind* (Weavers Guild of Minnesota)
Keith BraveHeart, *A Buffalo Nation: Creating Community* (NL, NACDI)
Laura Brown, *The Empathy Economy*
Tiffany Carbonneau, *Something Worth Remembering*
CarryOn Homes, Witt Siasoco, Kashimana Ahua and Filsan Ibrahim, and Clarence White, with DJ Sarah White, *Art on the Rooftop: A Party to Benefit Northern Spark*
Chango Cummings, *Through the Glass Eyes*

Paige Dansinger, *Common Urban Edible Plants*

Digital Fitness Experiences

(Douglas Dayton YMCA at Gaviidae)
Danielle Everine and David Heisserer,
Meme Weaver

Foci Focus Group, *The Common Vessel*
(Foci Minnesota Center for Glass Art)
Adja Gildersleve, *Free Kin* (MN Artists)
Jaden Hansen and Hector Chavarria, *The Art and Culture of Protest* (Museum of Minneapolis)

Bill Lindeke, *Weird Nicollet Walking Tours*
(Mpls DID)

Daniel McCarthy Clifford, *Section of Disapproved Books* (WAM)

MIGIZI Artists, *Our Common Well*
(Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters, MIGIZI Communications)

Never Turn Back: Hymns from The Sacred Harp (Minnesota Sacred Harp Singers)

Night Librarians, *The Night Library*
(Hennepin County Library)

Sami Pfeffer, *The Archive of Apologies and Pardons*

Binyam Raba, *Givings of a Global Immigrant* (NL, AEDS, ACCE)

Radical Experiment: Tolansu Dansu
(Catalyst Arts)

Matthew Ramirez and Breezy Callens,
SPOKE n Word—Cycles Speak
(The Cycling Museum of Minnesota)

Anna Marie Shogren, *FALLS* (WAM)

Miko S. Simmons, *Celestial Amnesia: a Passage to Peace*

STREET SHOWCASE, various artists
(Mpls DID)

Chase Underwood and Zeam Porter,
TRUTH: Trans Youth Zine Workshop
(NL, Hennepin County Library)

Wakemup Productions, *Smart Wars: Mni Wiconi Alliance* (NL, ACCE)



Aquanesia, Grand Rapids, Minnesota, 2018.
 Photo: Teeko Yang.



Aquanesia playtest, Minneapolis, 2018.
 Photo: Kim Loken.



Mike Hoyt, Dameun Strange, and Diver Van Avery with Ritika Ganguly, *Returning the River*, Illuminate the Lock 2018. Presented by NL, Mississippi Park Connection, and the National Park Service. Photo: Dan Marshall.



(clockwise from upper left) Overview of Illuminate South Loop; Daily tous les jours, *SCORE!*; Eric William Carroll and Wil Natzel, *Empty Space*; Pramila Vasudevan, curator, Emily Gastineau, *The Claque (for Astroturf)*. Bloomington, Minnesota, 2018. Photos: Dusty Hoskovec.



Art(ists) On the Verge 9: (clockwise from upper left)
 Areca Roe, *Founder Effect*; Maxwell Hoaglund, *The Shallows*;
 Stephanie Lynn Rogers, *Security Blanket*; Ziyang Wu,
Smarter City 2; Meena Mangalvedhekar, *Mind the Harvest*.
 Rochester Art Center. Photos: Rik Sferra.



CarryOn Homes (Peng Wu, Shun Jie Yong, Aki Shibata, Preston Drum, and Zoe Cinel), Creative City Challenge winner, 2018, with the Somali Museum Dance Troupe. Photo: Shun Jie Yong.



Keith BraveHeart, *A Buffalo Nation: Creating Community*, The Commons, Northern Spark 2018. Presented by Native American Community Development Institute. Photo: Sean Smuda.



Kashimana Ahua and Filsan Ibrahim, *The Applause Posse*, Nicollet Mall, Northern Spark 2018. Photo: Sean Smuda.



Sami Pfeffer, *The Archive of Apologies and Pardons*, Nicollet Mall, Northern Spark 2018. Photo: Sean Smuda.

Art(ists) On the Verge 10

Artists

Lindsay Halleckson, *You Are Sky*
Essma Imady, *Thoughts and Prayers*
Kathy McTavish, *Swarm*
Khadijah Muse, *In Between*
Chris Rackley, *Does Your Shoe Have a Boy Inside?*

Codirectors

Steve Dietz
Michael Hoyt
Piotr Szyhalski

Mentors

Eric William Carroll
Anne Dugan
Jennifer Newsom
Boris Oicherman
Christina Schmid
Jasmine Kar Tang (writing mentor)

Essayist

Sun Yung Shin, "Staying with the Trouble: Art(ists) On the Verge, 2018-19"

Creative City Challenge

Cándida González and Mary Anne Quiroz, *Radical Playground*

Northern Spark

All projects presented by NL (unless otherwise indicated).

Artist Market, various artists

Beatrix*Jar, *Let's Make Some Sounds!*

Natchez Beaulieu, *Hearts of Our People*

Mural Kickoff and Visioning

(Mia, All My Relations Arts)

Chatter: an exhibit of Minnesota artists

(NL, The Traveling Museum)

Communities in the Cloth (Weavers Guild of Minnesota)

Community members, *Xopantla: The*

Flowering of Light (Ketzal Coatlicue,

Minneapolis American Indian Center)

Gita Ghei, Melvin Giles, and Aki Shibata,

Library After Dark: Rondo Community

Library (Saint Paul Public Library,

Rondo Community Library)

Yilma Hailu, *Begena at Night: The*

ceremony of Ethiopian art through

different mediums

Kalpulli Yaocenotxli, *Radical Playground*

opening performance

Kelley Leaf, *Poetry People/People Poetry:*

A Community Conversation

Let All the Nations Know: Hymns from Indian Melodies and the Sacred Harp (Minnesota Sacred Harp Singers)

Joshua McGarvey, *Synchronize*

Marlena Myles, Tamara Aupaumut, Elsa

Hoover, Dawí, James D. Autio, and

Jess Grams, *Hanyétu Wówapi Thipi*

(*The Night Library*) (Hennepin County

Library, Franklin Library)

Neon Garden (Foci Minnesota Center for Glass Art)

Presented by Hallie Q. Brown Community Center and NL

Hallie Q. Brown Archive Project

Baba Jesse and Resounding Rhythms,

Resounding Strength-Resilient Song

Tish Jones, co-curator and MC with DJ

Adrian Perryman, Rondo Stage and

Open Mic

Kashimana, *Soundscape of Stories*

Sherine Onukwuwe, Phillip McGraw,

and Storymobile, *Rondo Film*

Screening (Model Cities, St. Paul

Almanac)

Rondo Bus Tour

Chris Scott, Clarence White, and

Hawona Sullivan Janzen, *Rondo*

Family Reunion: Pictures and Poems

for Our People

Miko S. Simmons, *(Re) Member:*

A Visual Jazz Odyssey

Solar Peace Collective, *Illuminate*

and Regenerate Rondo: Spreading

Peace in Our Streets

Presented by NACDI and NL

Al Gross and Strong Buffalo, *Reusable*

Graffiti

New Native Theatre, *Time Elapsed,*

Time Immemorial (Minnesota

Chippewa Tribe)

Rosy Simas and Heid E. Erdrich, *WEave:*

HERE (Ordway Center for the

Performing Arts)

Jonathan Thunder, *Manifest'o*

Angela Two Stars and Moira Villard,

curators, *Bring Her Home: Stolen*

Daughters of Turtle Island 2019

(All My Relations Arts)

Victor Yeppez, *The Biker*

Jeremy Wong, *Digital Graffiti Wall*

(Walker Art Center)

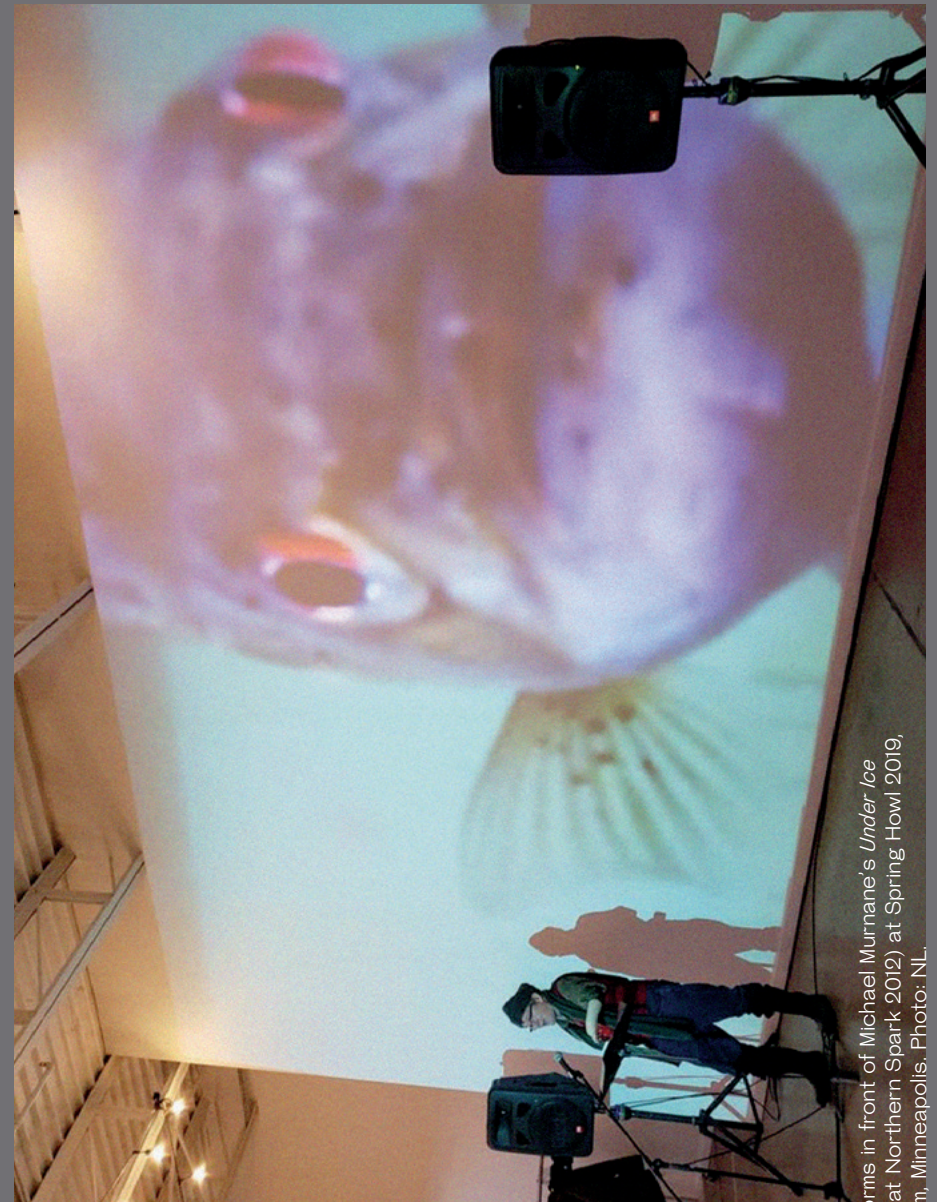
Marcus Young, Laura Levinson, Nancy

Julia Hicks, Masanari Kawahara, and the

Don't You Feel It Too? community, *What*

Will You Dance For?—The Exuberant

Activist Body



Kevin Kling performs in front of Michael Murmane's *Under Ice* (first presented at Northern Spark 2012) at Spring Howl 2019, The Holden Room, Minneapolis. Photo: NL.



Art(ists) On the Verge 10: (clockwise from upper left) Lindsay Halleckson, *You Are Sky*; Essma Imady, *Thoughts and Prayers*; Chris Rackley, *Does Your Shoe Have a Boy Inside?*; Khadijah Muse, *In Between*; Kathy McTavish, *Swarm*. Rochester Art Center. Photos: Rik Sferra.

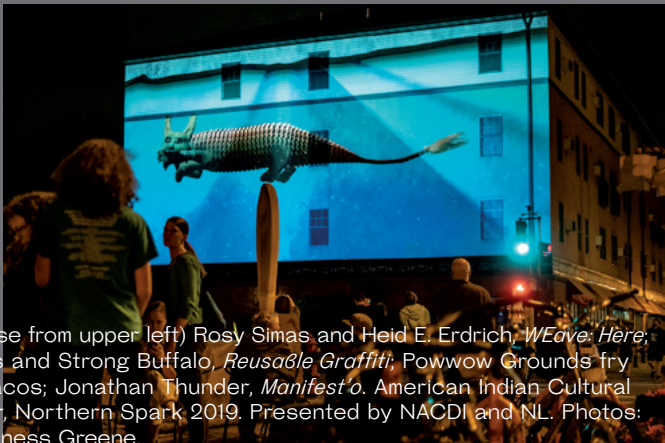


Cándida González and Mary Anne Quiroz, *Radical Playground*, Creative City Challenge winner, 2019. Opening ceremony at The Commons, Northern Spark 2019. Photo: Jayme Halbritter.



MMYYKK plays music at Miko S. Simmons's *(Re) Member: A Visual Jazz Odyssey*, Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, Northern Spark 2019. Photo: Nance Musinguzi.

Marcus Young, Laura Levinson, Nancy Julia Hicks, Masanari Kawahara, and the Don't You Feel It Too? community, *What Will You Dance For?* —*The Exuberant Activist Body*, The Commons, Northern Spark 2019. Photo: Jayme Halbritter.



(clockwise from upper left) Rosy Simas and Heid E. Erdrich, *WEave: Hère*; Al Gross and Strong Buffalo, *Reusable Graffiti*; Powwow Grounds fry bread tacos; Jonathan Thunder, *Manifest'o*. American Indian Cultural Corridor, Northern Spark 2019. Presented by NACDI and NL. Photos: Ne-dah-ness Greene.

production I both love and hate it when members of the public think a festival “just pops up!” Although it means we’re doing our jobs well and it’s running smoothly, there is a certain disappointment in not being recognized for the labor and logistics necessary to pull it off.

As producer, my job involved a variety of tasks to support artists and the public in having the best experience possible, including:

- site visits: what spaces were usable for art?
- matchmaking and mapping: which artists might use which space? Who would make good neighbors?
- artist production plans: what are you doing? What do you need to do it? Will it work?
- project testing: show yourself that your project works. Show us, too!
- permits: make agreements with the authorities.
- staffing: hire the friendliest and most hardworking pals to schlep stuff / make tech work / manage the various artists and sites.
- infrastructure: make sure people can find their way around, lock up their bikes, eat, eliminate waste, and get information.
- safety: be prepared with weather plans, security, emergency protocols.

Accessories include a clipboard, maps, paper, pencils, measuring tape, phone and charger (to test those outlets), tape, Sharpies, backpack, snacks, water bottle.

Through this work I began to see the city through a new lens, as a canvas for artistic interventions. Everywhere I go I am now keenly observant of the practical possibilities and obstacles of things like ambient light and sound, level ground, architectural curiosities (or obstructions), potential projection surfaces, publicly accessible electricity receptacles, water sources, water drains, bicycle infrastructure (or lack thereof), accessibility, and artistic opportunities.

In the beginning of Northern Spark a lack of production knowledge (and capacity) made for a chaotic environment. The festival ran in blissful ignorance of many details. So many surprises! Perhaps there was a fun sense of freedom in that for artists, too, but it wasn’t a sustainable or supportive model.

In 2014 it rained and rained and rained, and there was not a robust rain plan. Many projects never launched. I was an artist that year, one of the few able to carry on all night, engaging with the most dedicated and happily soaked die-hard participants.

The next year I was hired as producer and it became my grand responsibility to figure out the systems to better provide artist care and support, to ensure they were ready for the weather, the public, the duration, the whole dealio.

I was tasked with setting up production forms for artists, collecting pertinent and practical information on power needs, scale, possible permit requirements, and what seemed a billion other tiny details. Upon review with other staff members I sent emails with notes that needed resolution, and eventually approvals. It was a clunky laborious start to an exercise in ensuring artists were supported and their vision could be carried out in harmony with other artists (and that we weren’t breaking any rules, at least not too terribly). It absolutely felt very official. WOW, we made bureaucracy!

Each year I simplified our production forms as I better learned how to ask questions that elicited prompt and meaningful responses about artists’ production plans. Of course there were always surprises. (I remember when I learned the day of the festival that an artist had booked a marching band to play at 2 am . . .)

We eventually replaced these forms with a list of project-specific questions in response to initial proposals. We reviewed them in one-on-one conversations, taking notes on a shared document. Prioritizing this personal engagement could only happen as the festival became smaller and we worked with a limited number of artists. Perhaps still a bit bureaucratic (never moving toward a free-for-all), but intentionally friendlier and more artist-centered. And we had fewer (though still some) fun surprises! ➤EL ↪ SEE ALSO: AMENITIES, ARTIST-CENTRIC, BUREAUCRACY, COMMUNITY, CONFLICT, EXPERIMENT/AL, GIG ECONOMY, INFRASTRUCTURE, NORTHERN SPARK, PERMIT, PROCESS, SITE VISIT, STAFFING, TEST, WEATHER

projection Northern Spark transformed our relationship to certain places, and projection was one of its primary tools. Taking over empty storefronts revived them into banners for democracy. Wing Young Huie inverted the private living room where people gather to watch family vacation slides into a public, temporary movie palace in a parking lot on University Avenue where passersby could enjoy his revealing portraits of everyday life as intimate spectacle. Roman Verostko projected the mundane guts of his solo studio practice, and we could watch a printer make his algorithmic drawings for eight hours at the gigantic scale of his pioneering achievements. Andrea Carlson turned the Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam into a meditation on historic loss and the imagination of Indigenous future recovery.

Psychological projection is usually understood as projecting your (bad) behavior on someone else. Think Donald Trump. But



Wing Young Hui, *Projection Site for University Avenue Project*, Public Art Saint Paul, 2010. Photo: NL.

for the artists of Northern Lights.mn, it was an opportunity to re-vision the transactional nature of a city to its residents. It was a way to inhabit often inhospitable or overlooked places and watch artist-made movies in cardboard cars—without the advertising of the highest bidder.

For the audience, the difference was palpable. No longer just eyeballs, they could participate in the takeover of the city, projecting their own ideas, dreams, and experiences to imagine the possibility of agency to live, work, and love in a new, old place. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: AGENCY, CITY, ILLUMINATE, INFRASTRUCTURE, INTIMATE, MAGICAL, PLACE, POSSIBILITY, POWER, SPECTACLE

Public Address This collaboration between Northern Lights.mn and Forecast Public Art was a continuation of webwalkabout, a program at the Walker Art Center. It took the form of a blog on NL's website and offered a wide-ranging discussion of innovative artists, projects, and practices in the public realm, as well as information about the arts ecosystem. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: COMMUNICATIONS, PARTNERSHIP

Public Art Alchemy *annotations to a map tracing this concept through four themes (see pages 254–55).*

1. The interplay of mental models becomes one of the texts we work from as we create public art interventions. The materiality of both place and public-ness—situational, relational, playful, risky—is expressive of the condition of a known space made unknown again, available in new ways to new actions and interactions—an alchemical space.

In these actions and reactions of place and public—is a disruption of expectation—oh! wut—look again—you and I are making meaning with your relationship to place or your codex of place archetypes. I'm all up in your maps, so intimate!

2. What is my place? What do I do there? The city as a text, a map I carry around in my head that tells me where I am and where I am not, should be/do/think/feel, or should not.

I live here. I go out here. I work here, get groceries here. I drop off my kids here, pick them up, catch the bus, bike down this side street . . . I ate there one time. I kissed them in that alley, I cursed them on that corner. I used to know somebody who stayed there.

This place is for . . . being in
This place is for . . . moving through
This place is for . . . so many more things than feel possible, sometimes.

3. What are we doing in public space, when we trouble the expectations of what we should be doing? When we introduce new items to the mental list of what we could be doing, and who could be doing it?

A: playing → practicing emergence with the energy and appetite of a child, joy!

A: risking → practicing emergence with the bravery of elders, wise and playful.

4. What do we build together in these encounters over the folds and tears in the mental maps that denizens of a place carry around with them, lay-librarians of myriad city patterns?

When it's good: resilience for sliding over boundaries when we need each other most

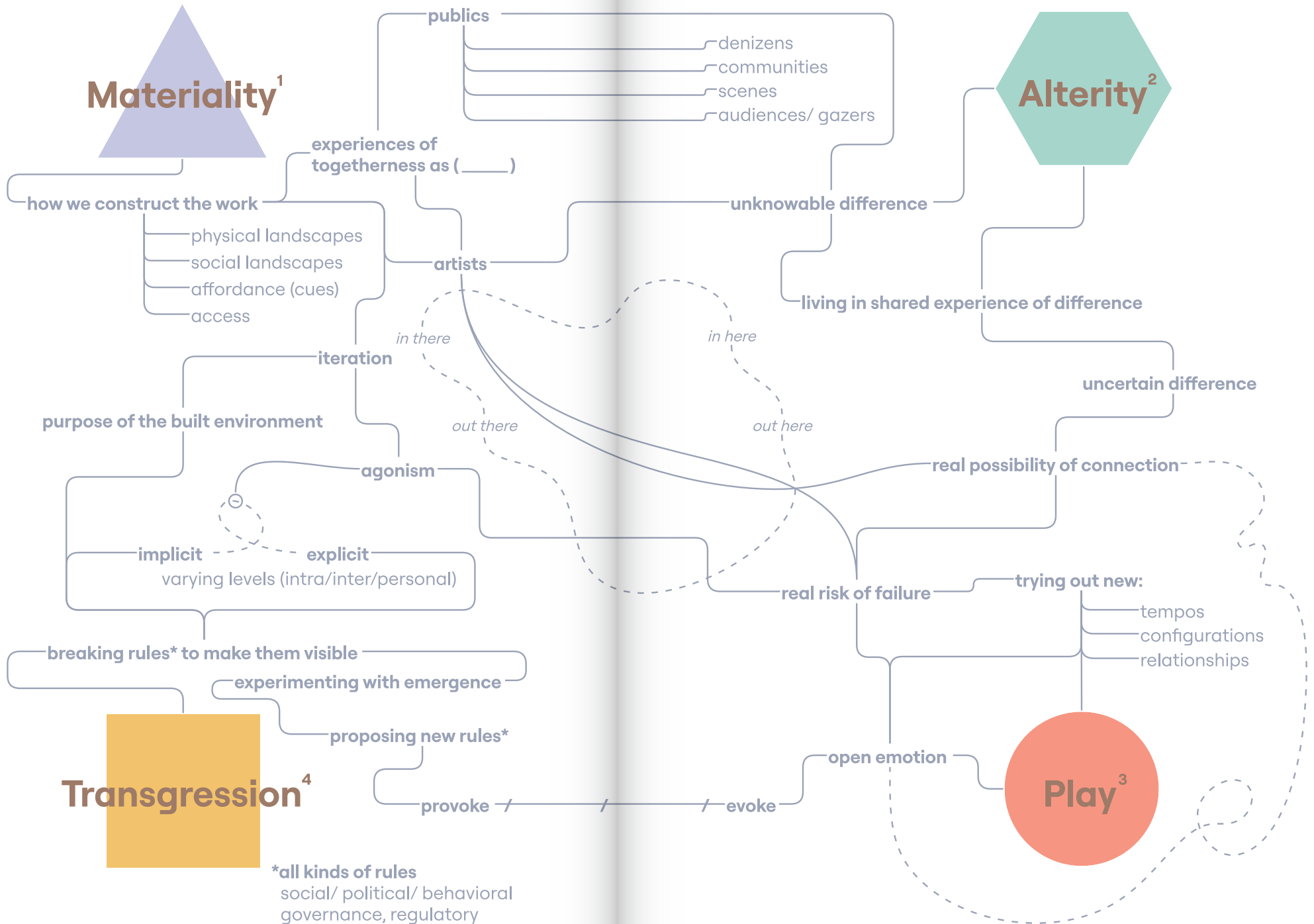
When it's better: facility for remaking boundaries—or tearing them down

When it's best: collective capability to involute boundaries, to be used as new material for supports, portals, embraces

>MBR ↪ SEE ALSO: AGENCY, CITY, INTIMACY, POSSIBILITY, PROJECTION, PUBLIC SPHERE, RELATIONAL

Public Art Alchemy

Mapping the Concept of



public space ↪ **SEE: PUBLIC SPHERE**

public sphere Imagine a layer labeled “public” on a digital map of a city. What would it include? That plaza in front of a prominent building is more often than not private, accessed with the owner’s permission. Streets are ruled by motorized vehicles. Bike lanes are too often theoretical. Even sidewalks can become no go zones if you tarry too long. Electronic billboards cannot display more than a few seconds of video. Projecting on a building will fall under the billboard ordinance, depending on how far the facade is from traffic. You can’t hang signage from a bridge. Parks have rules that govern accessibility, hours, and types of use. Arguably, there is no unregulated public space in the city.

A big part of our work involved negotiating a limited set of freedoms for artists to present their projects in this so-called public space. The response by the actual public was tremendous. People loved riding bikes on major thoroughfares or lying on the sidewalk looking up at a projection-altered facade of a building or playing a colorful game of tag after dark in the park.

The public sphere can also be thought of as a superset of public places and can include virtual space—the putative town square of social media. NL was committed to supporting artists’ use of so-called new media: *Bumps in the Night*, *Collective Action*, *Mystery Phone*. Interestingly, until the pandemic, very few projects, if any, did not have an element of physical space.

In physical space and virtual space, a goal in providing a temporary site for artists and publics to engage was to imagine that nonexistent map layer into being: the public sphere. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: CITY, DECOLONIZE, NEW MEDIA, POSSIBILITY, PUBLIC ART ALCHEMY, TEMPORARY, TRANSFORMATIVE, VIRTUAL

rain ↪ **SEE: WEATHER**

reciprocity Skies clear and air pristine, a long table of high-spirited makers lights up a spot next to the Mississippi River. Grandmothers, parents with babies strapped to their chests, and artists sew quilts together. Laughter and conversation fill the night. By Mill Ruins Park entire worlds are built stitch by stitch.

Then a Cunning Voice and a Night We Spend Gazing at Stars was a multiyear project that produced thousands of quilt squares laid down on the earth for all-night stargazing, performances, and stories. Here I recall one of its early iterations at the 2016 Northern Spark festival in Minneapolis. Maggie Thompson, an Ojibwe textile artist, led the quilting table in relationship with Emily Johnson, a Yup’ik performer, and Catalyst, her collective based in the tenets of Indigenous world-making and Land Back.

As one of hundreds of participants throughout the night, I witnessed the relationships at the core of this project. Artists gave the gift of sewing, the Mississippi gave breath, and the community gave labor and company. Everyone received the gift of connection and a tapestry of sewn-together stories more powerful than the sum of its parts. Later, communities would gather on these earth-backed quilts and give thanks to the cosmos. Community, art objects, and artists in deep relationship with one another and more-than-human beings. To keep and build these relationships is to center reciprocity—the heartbeat of Indigenous art and life.

Reciprocity is less a promise and more a challenge to us all. How can art organizations truly create reciprocal relationships with artists and their communities? To what extent can such relationships function as repair work given the long history of exploitation by powerful institutions? Anishinaabe writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson defines reciprocity through how our lives are related to one another. It is our job, then, to figure out the specificity of our connections. To whom do we gift and receive? We must center the appropriate Indigenous knowledge workers, local communities, lands, and waterways.

In many of our worldviews, all life is interconnected and composed of mutually beneficial relationships. Reciprocity is repeated daily across homelands and the places we steward. For us Anishinaabe, we are in a relationship with manoomin, also known as wild rice. Lakes gift us with this food source and we in turn care for manoomin, its home, and other relatives. All lives are dependent on one another.

Public art should be approached with the same give, receive, and repeat process. In a material sense this means to always pay our artists. Yet to truly embrace the spirit of reciprocity, we must go beyond permission-seeking and coproduce with stakeholders. It is about inviting specific communities to share in resources, imagine otherwise, and build new worlds. Public art is often thought of as a physical monument or large-scale addition to an urban environment. Rather, a reciprocal practice supports the art of process, relationships, and place. >TP ↪ SEE ALSO: COEVOLUTION, CONNECTIONS, INTERCONNECTION, NORTHERN SPARK, PARTNERSHIP, PLACE

relational A practice that centers mutuality, care, awareness, trust, and reflective inquiry in nourishing generative engagement and enduring connections.

A cultivation of kinship between humans, and widening the circle to include more-than-human beings. Entering the dance of reciprocity and consciously shifting away from acts of extraction.

Creating possibilities and platforms for genuine encounters through deep listening and a willingness to gain knowledge while being respectful of boundaries.

Recognizing power dynamics, acknowledging past harms, and being attentive to responsibility to allow space for those involved to feel supported, to fail, and to grow. >CB ↪ SEE **ALSO: PARTICIPATORY, PLATFORM, POSSIBILITY, RECIPROCITY, TOGETHER**

response Art doesn't exist in a bubble surrounded by the larger world but rather lives in context and response to what's happening in our community. Art can turn the tide and the tone.

In 2017, the Northern Spark festival occurred during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Northern Lights.mn partnered with Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light (MNIPL) to host a community iftar, the meal eaten by Muslims after breaking the fast during Ramadan, in the Cedar-Riverside/West Bank neighborhood of Minneapolis.

While the West Bank is known for its diversity, thanks to its density and high profile, this community occasionally was the target of hate. In 2017 a group organized an anti-Muslim event at the Capitol building in St. Paul on the same day as Northern Spark. The unwelcoming sentiment was loud and clear. There were racial and religious underpinnings to the anti-Muslim event, and even worse—it, too, was held during Ramadan.

The West Bank is full of love, and never is that more evident than in times of crisis. Floods, fires, and emergencies can be heart-breaking, but for the West Bank/Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, these bring out the best. That was evident at this moment also.

The imams, along with community members, decided to combat the hate from the event at the Capitol with a gesture of loving-kindness. Expanding on the event MNIPL was already planning for NS, people and organizations joined together to host a welcoming reception and community iftar. The street was closed to vehicle traffic to accommodate everyone. The crowd was calm and full of love as the sun set on Cedar Avenue. Hundreds of people from outside the neighborhood stood in solidarity alongside thousands of residents. Local restaurants supplied thousands of sambusa, dates, and other easy-to-hold foods. After a poetic Adhan (call to prayer) from the roof above the Cedar Community Plaza, the nearby locally-owned restaurant Gandhi Mahal offered a full meal.

We broke the fast together, celebrated, then rolled into the planned festivities for Northern Spark. In response to hate, the West Bank did what it does best: it mobilized love. >JK-M ↪ SEE **ALSO: IFTAR, NORTHERN SPARK, PUBLIC SPHERE, RELATIONAL**

river

A flow of water
(characterized by not being straight)
but also of sediment
nutrients
animals
people
ideas.

They say River of Thought
River of Time
but what about River of Desire?

Rivers are shared movements with their own agendas
that change in composition over time.
Rivers have the power to shape, but also to build
the sand and silt that they carry has the power to erect islands,
rise into floodplains,
and construct villages, towns, cities.

Many of the most biodiverse human and more-than-human
ecosystems exist along rivers
because of ready access to transportation and exchange.

Rivers are a conversation
where they begin is called the Headwaters but where they end
is called the Mouth
So a river is always speaking
Even though what it's saying is all-ways changing.

A truth that transforms itself is called a story
so maybe that's what a river is also.
Playwright Anne Washburn says,
"Every story ends on a dark and raging river."

But do rivers really end?

Even though the makeup of a river is ephemeral,
the legacies they leave can be eons-long.
Legacies of care, of destruction,
of colonialism, and—hopefully—repair.

They leave canyons, valleys, lineages,
"downstream effects."

(CONTINUES ON PAGE 260)

Which rivers are your ancestors?
And which rivers will you become the ancestor of?

Some rivers exist only at certain times of year
Like one midsummer evening
during a thunderous downpour
when even the streets become rivers
and we, part of the flow.

Some rivers are subterranean
diverted for development
until communities come together to have them
“daylighted.”

Does that mean that a river is also a long night
full of bends and eddies
where a multitude of worlds are allowed to coexist?
Where we can hold complexity and contradiction
as imaginatively as a dream
Wherein we don’t know what will happen next
because we are so awake to the possibilities?

A river is what we become when we allow ourselves to be a
work-in-progress
Vessels of lineage
Mouths of change
A channel for movement(s)

How do you love a river knowing it will never stand
completely still?
The same way you love everything
with your best surrender.

>ET ↪ SEE ALSO: AQUANESIA, ARCHIVE, COEVOLUTION, DURATION, ECOSYSTEM, ILLUMINATE THE LOCK, POSSIBILITY, TEMPORARY, TIME

Ruination: City of Dust ↪ SEE: AQUANESIA

safety *“It gave me hope and made me feel good that we were there to be a conduit for something positive. On Northern Spark weekend, nothing bad happened in Rondo. People from all different places went home with a different view of people from other backgrounds. I guarantee it.”*

This quotation is from a festival artist from NS 2019, although the sentiment it expresses was not new. Declarations of “feeling safe” were frequent in audience surveys from year one. Being together, in a crowd, in the streets, at night, playing drums or glow tag or bicycling, gave festival goers a liberatory feeling of safety.

We did what we could to support this, from hiring community security instead of police (where our permits allowed) and arranging detailed safety plans and communication channels.

We learned through difficult experiences. Occasionally festival artists did not feel safe, especially in the late hours of night when some audience members were unruly. One year artists asked directly for more safety support.

It would be naive to ignore the racial dimensions of this issue. While the majority-white audiences of the early festivals claimed a novel feeling of safety outside in the streets at night, some BIPOC artists performing in those streets described feeling unsafe in the presence of some of the festival goers. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: AUDIENCE, COLLABORATIVE ENTANGLEMENTS (PAGES 20–27), COMMUNITY, NEIGHBORHOOD, NORTHERN SPARK, PRIVILEGE, PRODUCTION, RESPONSE

shared ↪ SEE: TOGETHER

singing The collective noun for a gathering of Sacred Harp singers is a “convention.” This is particularly fitting in that we convene to sing for each other (not for an audience) and the convention is all who attend. A Sacred Harp convention usually starts at 9:30 am and continues until everyone has finished singing.

It seemed logical to join our Sacred Harp community with the Northern Spark community. We had to adjust our body clocks (to start at 9:30 pm) but we did what we would do for any singing: follow our conventions of inclusiveness, care for one another, and keep it simple. It was beautiful to share our love for singing with a vibrant, progressive community of artists.

My favorite memory is from our first year at the festival, in a stairwell at Union Depot in St. Paul. We called our sister convention in Sydney, Australia, during their regular Sunday night singing (2:30 am on Sunday for us!) and traded songs about death while the replica Marcel Breuer house burned nearby in the train yard. Old, new, tradition, art—all at once. >MCW ↪ SEE ALSO: COMMUNITY, NORTHERN SPARK, PERFORMANCE, UNION DEPOT, WONDER

site visit The first one-on-one relationship-building activity between Northern Lights.mn staff and artists in Northern Spark’s production process was the site visit, followed by production plans and testings. After nightfall, we would meander the planned festival location(s) to scope out placement for each project. As artists described their project details, I scrawled notes in pencil on my clipboard: newly revealed logistical details juggled with artists’ enthusiasm, distaste, needs, preferences, unresolved issues, inspiration, and excitement.

One obvious purpose of the visit was to glean enough material from all festival artists to complete our annual game of Tetris: matchmaking projects to sites in both practical and aesthetically interesting ways. Site visits were equally focused on building rapport and trust and being humans (not bureaucrats!) who together had the pleasure of dreaming up art experiences in the public sphere. >EL ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST, BUREAUCRACY, NORTHERN SPARK, PRODUCTION, PUBLIC SPHERE, TEST, TOGETHER

snacks We had an affinity for snacks at Northern Lights.mn, yet, unlike the treats at other workplaces, ours were often the leftovers of a frustrating sponsor relationship (candy instead of cash) or artists changing their minds (fifty cases of off-brand cheese puffs no longer needed for an AOV installation). We ate them anyway.

Snacks were also an important part of staying awake during Northern Spark. We even had a tradition at a staff meeting before the festival each year of sharing snack tips for making it through the night. Although largely for the benefit of new staff, this was a reminder to everyone that protein and hydration are critical to durational work. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: DURATION, FOOD, HOSPITALITY, NORTHERN SPARK, OFFICE, STAFFING

social practice ↪ SEE: PARTICIPATORY

Soap Factory A contemporary art gallery in an abandoned nineteenth-century soap factory across the Mississippi from downtown Minneapolis. Northern Lights.mn was joyfully entangled with “the Soap” in several ways. It was our exhibition partner for the annual Art(ists) On the Verge culminating show; a venue and programming partner for several years of Northern Spark; and a place where we had storage space and an office, heated and unheated (depending on the era). We shared the values of artist-centric programming, and the rough-hewn space with all its nooks and crannies was a perfect incubator for ideas that could be taken into public space. A dynamic community of artists always surrounded the Soap; the openings were raucous and alive. As the story goes here, all good things don’t last. The Soap Factory closed in 2019. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: ART(ISTS) ON THE VERGE, ARTIST-CENTRIC, COMMUNITY, COMPLICATED, ECOSYSTEM, EXPERIMENT/AL, OFFICE, PARTNERSHIP

sound A constant issue at Northern Spark. Both Minneapolis and St. Paul had sound ordinances that kicked in at 10 pm, about twenty minutes after it got dark and only one hour into our eight-hour event. We followed the rules as best we could; we didn’t want to jeopardize the next year’s event with a sound permit violation. Our operating philosophy was that if an artwork wasn’t any



1 Beatrix*JAR, *Let's Make Sounds!*, NS 2019. Photo: Jayme Halbritter.



2 Monica Haller, *Can you listen to the same river twice?*, NS 2013. Photo: Adriana Knouf.



3 Piotr Szyhalski, *Permanent Labor*, NS 2013. Photo: Jayme Halbritter.



4 Dameun Strange, *AquaSonos, A night with the river*, 2023. Photo: Drew Arrieta.

louder than nearby traffic, we let the volume play. Regardless of the bureaucracy, sound was ever present in the artistic creativity at Northern Spark.

1 Impromptu electronic community bands made joyful and at times discordant sounds together at Beatrix*JAR’s installation of vintage sound-making toys. 2 Sometimes the solution to sound ordinances was just headphones. Listening to the live, gurgling sounds of the Mississippi mixed with distant, recorded foghorns at Monica Haller’s *Can you listen to the same river twice?* is perhaps as intimate an experience as you can safely have in public. 3 Piotr Szyhalski created several projects at NS with nine-hour scores. The constant beat of the drum outside St. Paul’s Union Depot with intermittent choruses and a Sisyphean movement of sand in *Permanent Labor* at NS 2013 felt like the agony and the ecstasy of years of Northern Lights.mn programming. 4 Near the end of the (early) night of NL’s final program, the conclusion of Dameun Strange’s four-hour soundscape of mesmerizing synth, voice, and gong merged with the soft horn of a river barge—the perfect final instrument in the ensemble. 5 Minnesota Sacred Harp Singers invited the public to commune through shape note singing at several NS festivals. The thundering wall of sound produced from the lobby of the Guthrie Theater



5 MN Sacred Harp Singers, Guthrie Theater, NS 2016. Photo: Jayme Halbritter.



6 Baba Jesse and Resounding Rhythms, NS 2019. Photo: Nance Musinguzi.



7 Rondo Performance Stage, NS 2019. Photo: Nance Musinguzi.



8 Kathy McTavish, *mill city requiem: for solo instrument & distance*, NS 2015. Photo: Ian Plant.

9 John Keston, *Instant Cinema: Teleportation Platform X*, NS 2013. Photo: Jayme Halbritter.

at NS 2016 may be the most memorable. 6 Baba Jesse and many audience members outside Hallie Q. Brown Community Center made endlessly danceable drumbeats at NS 2019 for two nights, one in the rain. 7 Rondo artists lit up the stage at Hallie Q. Brown Community Center for two dynamic nights of song, poetry, and beats—a tribute to the incredible talent of the neighborhood. 8 The sound of a solo cello drifted over the crowds and out to the river at Kathy McTavish's all-night performance and projection. 9 Live jazz floated through the Union Depot as John Keston and trio partners John Davis and Graham O'Brien played a real

time musical response to images and sounds from the surrounding festival sent to their location by the roving audiovisual artist David T. Steinman.

And the ever-present ambient noise: the cacophony of everything at once, a constant intermingling of voices of the crowd, the rise and fall of exclamations from nearby projects, transitions between crowded bustle and spacious quiet. The stillness of dawn: the murmur from the lingering all-nighters, birds chirping as the sky grew lighter. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: BUREAUCRACY, INTIMATE, JOY, MAGICAL, PERMIT, SINGING

sparkers ↪ SEE: MERCH

spectacle Building-sized projections, bridge-length installations, city-wide multiplayer games. Inevitably many Northern Lights.mn projects were spectacles. The goal was not merely to dazzle but to ask people to wonder and think, to participate in the creation, to learn something new, to see the city in a new light. >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: COMMUNITY, FESTIVAL, INTIMATE, PARTICIPATORY, PROJECTION

sponsorship After the rave reviews of the first Northern Spark, we thought, naively, that companies would line up to support this new event for the Twin Cities. We started down a years-long road of meetings and pitches, consultants and business development managers. Despite these efforts, and huge attendance numbers at the festivals, significant sponsorship dollars remained a mythic concept. It was as if potential sponsors couldn't see NS—perhaps because it took place in so many locations, in the dark, without a central focal point on which to display a logo? Festival fans appreciated the lack of corporate presence, and we were partially happy that we never had to weigh our artistic-centric values against a large sponsorship deal. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST-CENTRIC, BUDGET, COSTS, FAILURE, FUNDRAISING, VALUES

Spring Howl During the lifespan of the Northern Spark Launch Party, our annual fundraiser, we dreamed of separating this detail-intensive event from the night-of (or nights-of) the festival. Organizing an all-night event, without attaching a fiscally essential fundraiser to it, was certainly enough work and stress.

We reconceptualized the party as Spring Howl and set the timing for late winter, an unpopular time for nonprofit fundraisers in Minnesota, probably because March is often our dreariest month. We hoped to benefit from the lack of competition in people's schedules.

a coming together

This poem was commissioned by Northern Lights.mn for the Spring Howl fundraiser in March 2020.

>Hawona Sullivan Janzen

you are but one part of this
what is it?
it was nothing at first
we had seen it before
the frustration
degradation
instigation
separation
we had seen it before
an emergence
a loop
a bitmapped process, perhaps
a solitary thing
a sound a sound a sound
then
a formless form
urging the other forms
to get into formation
convergence
we had seen it before
you are but one part
of this weather system
uncommon in its commonness
a reminder of what happens when nothing else is happening
but we still can't sleep
on the brink of this convergence
there was a granular component
a technicolored tidal wave
a growing
a shifted mass
of us
at first static
then growling
and pawing
and feeding
then tipping dipping flipping
then dancing
we were lost
but never fearful
we always saw the after
there was a respite
then
a coming together
a coming together
a coming together
. . . something like a howl

The first Howl took place on the Spring Equinox in 2019 in an event space connected to our office-at-the-time. We were fully staffed in the run-up to NS that year, so many hands were available to help with the absolutely home-grown nature of the gathering. We installed five artist projects in the space, sold cheap tickets, got donated beer, went to Costco for NA beverages, sent someone to get ice, and assigned our best volunteers to bar duty. It was a convivial evening of NL friends and fans, punctuated by a riveting Spring Howl poem performed by Artist Council member SEE MORE PERSPECTIVE at 7:25 pm, the meteorological sundown for that day.

In 2020, the second annual Howl would also commemorate the retirement of NL's founder Steve Dietz, but it was canceled because of the Covid-19 outbreak. The two artists originally commissioned for the event—Hawona Sullivan Janzen for the annual Spring Howl poem and Kathy McTavish, who created a site-specific projection and sound installation—came up with the idea to make an online piece that joined their practices. The result was *a coming together: a performance for our time*, a web-based, algorithmic visual soundscape featuring Janzen's poem and McTavish's sound and code. It lived online for 638 hours during April 2020. An incredible pivot (the word of that year) but also the end of Spring Howl. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: FUNDRAISING, OFFICE, PLATFORM, TELETHON

staffing Project-based, decentralized, amorphous, expanding and contracting to (almost) meet the needs of a particular platform.

From the beginning, the Northern Lights.mn staffing model was set up to be artist-centric, providing robust, meaningful employment for artists who didn't want full-time office jobs. At any given time a platform might have anywhere between one and eighteen people working on it. This was one of the ways in which we were nimble. In the midyears, when we had the most funding, we added stability to the rotating cast by solidifying a core of three somewhat-full-time staff in addition to the project-based teams.

Structurally, NL was almost always led by a team of codirectors, and we tried to include as much of the staff as was reasonable when making major decisions. This sometimes led to too-much-information, and we were always trying to balance efficiency with inclusion, whether with staff or partners or the Artist Council or artists.

Steve and Sarah had a knack for finding and hiring talented people with expansive minds, beautiful personalities, and a commitment to collaborative experimentation. Some staff joined for one project and then moved on, but many people hung around the NL sphere playing different roles from year to year, such as the NS

Artist → *Ruination* Art Director → NS Producer → Telethon Writer/Producer, in one instance; or the NS Volunteer Coordinator → NL Associate Curator → *Aquanesia* artist, in another. Some people were even around for essentially the entire existence of NL. A ripple effect of its artist-centricity, NL surfaced and tended people's broad skills and interests over time.

Being on the NL staff was an *experience*. I imagine that many former staff, smiling but truly earnest, would admit that their stint at NL was something they *went through*. Much was shared among these permutations of people: camaraderie, frustrations, bewilderment, delight. An affinity for the weird and unpredictable. You see, we embraced the vision and the hope of what artists can bring into existence. We offered our ambition and skill and—for better and for worse—gave of ourselves to realize that vision.

It was grueling at times. And wonderful and exasperating. And is there anything more rewarding than going through it with people with whom you feel you belong? >AM ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST-CENTRIC, BELONGING, BUDGET, BURNOUT, COLLABORATION, CREW, GIG ECONOMY, GRATITUDE, MISSION, NIMBLE, OFFICE, PLATFORM, TOGETHER, VALUES



Northern Spark staff 2013 as drawn by Alice Barriuso

Staff 2008–2023

Northern Lights.mn Staff, 2008–2024

- Molly Balcom Raleigh
- Leslie Barlow
- Amy Danielson
- Steve Dietz
- Anthonia Eboeime
- Marlina Gonzalez
- Erin Lavelle
- Ady Olson McNair
- Michael Murnane
- Valerie Oliveiro
- Tyra Payer
- Sarah Peters
- Matthew Rezac
- Tyler Stefanich
- Elle Thoni
- Teeko Yang

Northern Spark Staff, 2011–2022

- Isabel Antreasian
- Shannon Brunette
- Zoe Cinel
- Tatiana Freeman
- Birdie Freitag
- Julie Gaynon
- Will Gobeli
- Kristy Haupt
- Winston Heckt
- Kerri Jamison
- Emily Janisch
- Ana Laura Juarez
- Michelle Klein
- Megan Leafblad Gottschalk
- Emma Lloyd
- Tom Loftus
- Michael Mouw
- Kim Peterson
- Nickey Robare
- Stacy Schultz
- Robin Schwartzman
- Monica Sheets
- Sara Shives

- Alyson Sinclair
- Andrea Steudel
- Daniel Tran
- Pamela Vázquez-Torres
- Cheryl Wilgren Clyne
- Nathan Young
- Jeremiah Zortman

Northern Spark Additional Support, 2011–2022

- Maya Aguayo Schmidt-Feng
- Dawn Bentley
- Sara Collins
- Jay Corliss
- Robin Dowden
- Stacy Duke
- Andrea Fulkerson
- Andy Goldman-Gray
- Ashley Hanson
- Megan Hemmilla
- Abby Kallas
- Lucas Koski
- Abby Rakun
- Amy Shaunette
- Moheb Soliman
- Sarah Weimar

Interns, 2011–2021

- Phoebe Alley
- Alice Barriuso
- Elizabeth (Biz) Dalkey
- Brianna Heu
- Dan Higgs
- Barbara Jarvis
- Michael Karadsheh
- Tiolora Lumbantoruan
- Camille O'Leary
- Anna Ruhland
- Tricia Towey
- Crystal Yam

succession 1. I left Northern Lights.mn at the beginning of 2020. It was not a sudden departure; Sarah and I had been discussing this for at least two years. Of course, many factors went into the decision. Primarily, if one of our institutional truisms was that NL was not in the business of staying in business, I was equally not interested in staying just because I could. It was time to move on, move away; to make space and allow others' voices and ideas and vision to fully engage. I'm so glad I did. I was

not capable of fomenting what Sarah and her colleagues accomplished in the past three years. I am so grateful for what they did, steering NL toward what they believed it could be. I am excited to see what will happen next for them. >SD

2. When Steve asked me casually over beers if I'd like to take over Northern Lights.mn some day I answered, without hesitation, "Hell no." I immediately felt bad about my reaction and probably apologized. It's just that I witnessed firsthand how difficult it was to keep things running at NL. For years I watched Steve repeatedly pull magic rabbits out of hats. I was sure I didn't have any rabbits, magic or otherwise, and certainly not that kind of stamina. But as many artists experienced, Steve's quiet persistence and dogged belief in someone can be hard to ignore. Eventually he convinced me I could do it, and in parallel I recognized I still felt motivated about what Northern Spark, in particular, could be for the Twin Cities. I agreed to take the lead at a time when a new era felt possible. One of my first tasks as NL's first nonfounder executive director in March 2020 was to cancel our annual fundraiser (and Steve's goodbye party!) due to Covid. The journey changed.

In retrospect it would have been reasonable for us to have thrown in the towel in 2019. Steve's decision to move on was not only personal; it was practical. NL's budget could no longer accommodate two director-level staff members. Our three-legged stool of programmatic stability had been recently hobbled by the loss of Jerome funding for Art(ists) On the Verge, and we had already planned a break from NS in 2020 to strategize. Re-vision or off ramp were the options. I'm glad I chose re-vision and that the board voted yes. I'm proud of the work that Tyra, Anthonia, Erin, Ady, Val, the Artist Council, and I were able to achieve in the final years of NL. Including our decision to sunset with grace. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: AGENCY, ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSITIONS, POSSIBILITY, SUNRISE, SUNSET, TRUISM

sustainable What does it mean to be sustainable? Zero waste? Steady cash flow? Healthy sleep habits of staff? Not sure we got fully there, but in 2011 we printed six vinyl banners that read "Northern Spark Info" and reused them for eleven years. This is a small thing, but up against a concept of unreachable proportions, real efforts count. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: BUDGET, BURNOUT, CROWD-FUNDING, FUNDRAISING, PRODUCTION, VALUES, WASTE

team ↪ SEE: STAFFING

technology New media, innovation, technology—these were all part of the profile of Northern Lights.mn. When we were talking to the fellows of Art(ists) On the Verge, we always emphasized that the pencil could be a technology and challenged them to use any medium to work "experimentally at the intersection of art, technology, and digital culture with a focus on network-based practices that are interactive and/or participatory." >SD ↪ SEE ALSO: ART(ISTS) ON THE VERGE, BEGINNINGS, FUTURE, INNOVATIVE, MISSION, NEW MEDIA

Telethon When the Covid-19 pandemic ruptured in-person events in 2020 and 2021, Northern Lights.mn went looking for alternatives to our annual fundraiser. The idea for a Telethon emerged from our love for durational events and our secret desires to once again be television producers, after getting a taste of the craft on "TV Takeover," a live episode we co-created with Twin Cities Public Television in 2014. We wrote a show, booked a musical act and host, revived the famed Northern Spark Kazoo Band, had artists record video testimonials, solicited prizes, and presented the show live once on local cable TV and once on YouTube.

It was a fantastic and fun concept, with brilliant comedic talent, but the challenges of pandemic complexities limited its financial success. In 2021, the show didn't air until late May, when Minnesotans were finally able to gather outdoors—a social necessity before the vaccine. In 2022 a case of Covid within the cast postponed the Telethon, and by the time we rescheduled Zoom fatigue was at an all-time high and our online audience was slim. We broke even, which in some ways broke us. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: FAILURE, FUNDRAISING, NIMBLE

temporary A moment in time. Fleeting. Here one day, gone the next. Much of what we created at Northern Lights.mn was temporary. One night, three nights, twelve days, six weeks: these were the time spans of much of our programming and also of the constellation of staff who would come together to produce a project six or twelve or eighteen months in advance. The people who took part in our projects, either as artists or audiences, experienced them ephemerally, too.

There are many advantages of temporary work. It allows for experimentation, as artists could take bolder chances on a project that was active for only one night. We found that temporariness heightens awareness of details. Knowing that an art experience expires at dawn makes it all that more special, for both the individual and the collective.

A sense of shared encounter developed among the friendly strangers of a Northern Lights.mn audience, something that

happens when an experience is uncommon and time-limited. And wonder-filled. As it turns out, NL was temporary, too. What isn't? >SP ↪ **SEE ALSO:** COMMUNITY, DURATION, ECOSYSTEM, EPISODIC, MAGICAL, SUNSET, TEST, TIME, TOGETHER

test When presenting dynamic, participatory projects in public space, you learn to expect the unexpected. The only way to anticipate the things you haven't planned for is to dive in, try it out, and let the surprises happen—but ideally not for the first time on opening night. If there was one thing that remained static throughout our work, it was the insistence that *testing your project is absolutely essential*. There is no substitute for experience. >AM ↪ **SEE ALSO:** ARTWORK, EXPERIMENT/AL, ITERATION, POWER, PROCESS, PRODUCTION

theme Each year Northern Spark had a theme that tied the projects together as a conceptual whole, even as each stood on its own. The themes created a common frame for both artists and audience to lay over their experience.

After the Climate Chaos theme in 2016, we received complaints from the audience: *Why can't it just be fun? Why do you have to bring climate into it? For us, the power and magic of art lie in interacting with big ideas (sometimes in a fun way) and letting artists introduce new approaches to those ideas. The theme of the festival was an invitation to see and think and experience anew, together.* >AM

Northern Spark themes

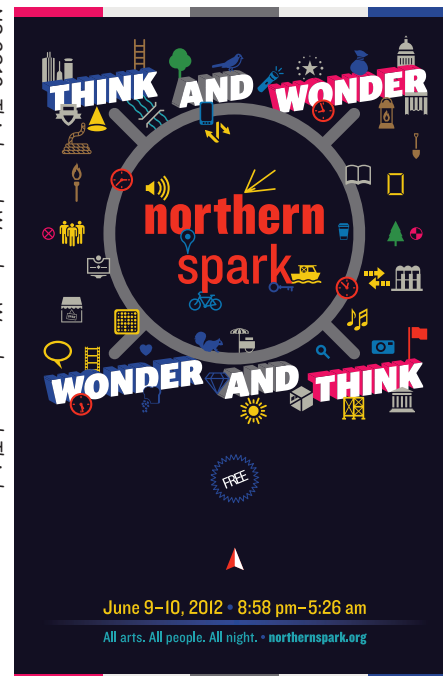
- 2011: *No theme. First year!*
- 2012: Think and Wonder, Wonder and Think
- 2013: Art All Night, Community All Year
- 2014: Projecting the City
- 2015: All Night, Wonder, Wander, Illuminate, Together
- 2016: Climate Chaos | Climate Rising
- 2017: Climate Chaos | People Rising
- 2018: Commonality
- 2019: We Are Here: Resilience, Renewal & Regeneration
- 2021: Alchemy
- 2022: What the World Needs Now

↪ **SEE ALSO:** ARTIST COUNCIL, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, CLIMATE CHAOS, CONNECTIONS, EXPERIMENT/AL, ILLUMINATE, ITERATION, NORTHERN SPARK, PLATFORM, POSSIBILITY, PROJECTION, TOGETHER, WANDER, WONDER

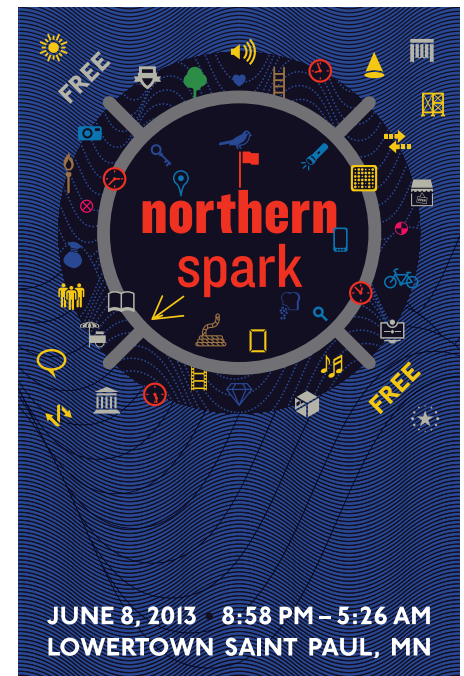


NS 2011, *Imagining Northern Spark*. Maquette and photography by Rasun Mehringer with art direction by Matthew Rezac.

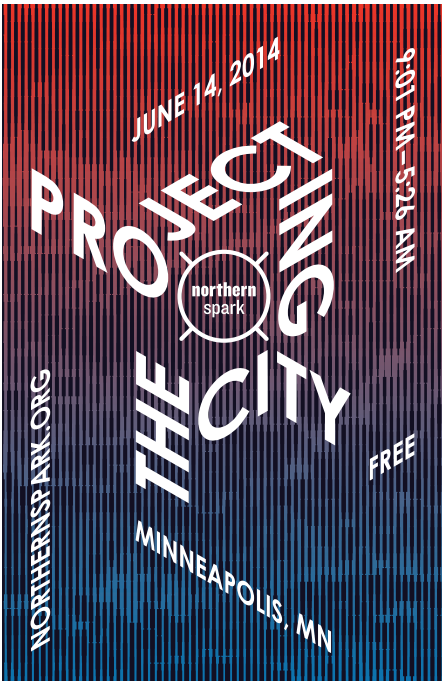
NS 2012: Think and Wonder, Wonder and Think.
Design: Matthew Rezac.



NS 2013: Art All Night, Community All Year. Design: Matthew Rezac.



NS 2014: Projecting the City. Design: Matthew Rozac.



NS 2015: All Night, Wonder, Wander, Illuminate, Together. Design: Matthew Rozac.

NS 2016: Climate Chaos | Climate Rising. Design: Matthew Rozac. Photo: Jayne Hall-tittor.

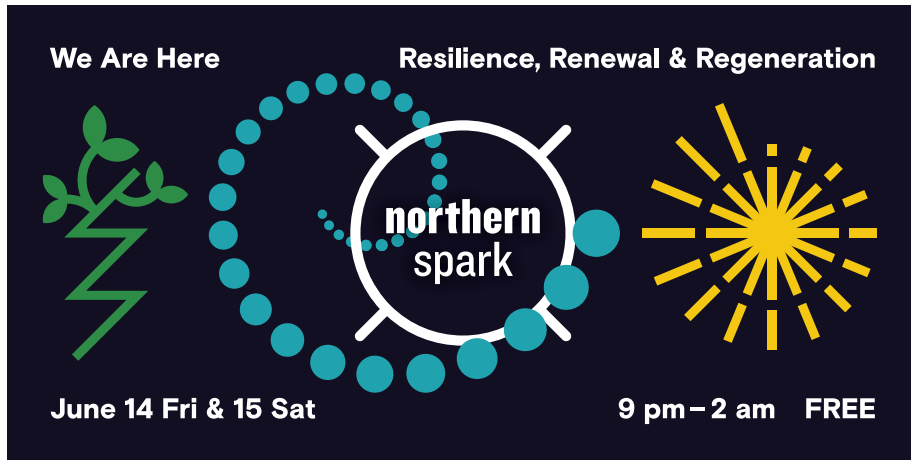


NS 2017: Climate Chaos | People Rising. Design: Matthew Rozac.



NS 2018: Commonality. Design: Matthew Rozac.





ticketing If we had \$100 for every time someone suggested we sell tickets for Northern Spark, well, suffice it to say we might not be sunsetting. To ticket or not to ticket was a persistent question for many of our programs, but for NS most prominently. On one hand, the festival was designed around a core value of free access: to art, to the city. On the other hand, tens of thousands of people showed up and it was tempting to think about turning that volume into cash to fund our work. One year we tried a ticketed pancake breakfast at dawn, but with minor monetary success.

Ultimately, the complexity of logistics sank the idea of festival-wide tickets. Outdoor spaces don't have doors. We would have had to encircle places like parks and street corners with temporary fencing to create gateways where tickets could be taken or sold and admission to the event monitored. We mapped it out, and the costs incurred in staffing alone wiped any hope of profit, let alone profit sharing with our partners.

It was a relief to confirm that ticketing wasn't feasible, because in our hearts we knew that fencing off public space and staffing entrances with ticket takers would have killed the wandering and accessible spirit of NS. Part of our decision to sunset the festival was due to an allegiance to that experience of free, exploratory wonder. Better that live on in memory than become a less liberatory night. >SP ↪ **SEE ALSO: BUDGET, COSTS, FESTIVAL, FREE, FUNDRAISING, NORTHERN SPARK, PRODUCTION, SPONSORSHIP, SUNSET, VALUES, WANDER**

time There's something peculiar about the way time warped and folded in on itself inside the Northern Lights.mn vortex. Looking back, it is astounding that we managed to pull off such a densely packed, deeply meaningful seventeen years of artistic programming. Our ambition helped us overcome the constraints of time: we often chose to take on an endeavor without letting our perception of limits hold us back, for better or for worse. Somehow we managed to stuff our vision into the container of temporal reality, often at great cost and also with great reward: ease and spaciousness and time opened up through the world of the artwork.

In 2014, inspired by Christian Marclay's *The Clock*, which was showing at the Walker Art Center during Northern Spark that year, staff began compiling a bibliography for a reading group focused on time. We abandoned the document after listing nine titles, and the group never convened. It was a good idea, but we just didn't have enough time. >AM ↪ **SEE ALSO: ALL NIGHT, BURNOUT, COSTS, DURATION, POSSIBILITY, PROCESS, STAFFING, TEMPORARY**

together “It was great to be a part of something that felt like more than a sum of its parts. The fact that all of these projects, all addressing and responding to climate chaos in a creative way, were together at the same time added up to so much more. Ideas, concerns, hopes expressed through each project felt magnified, louder, bigger since we were all making this together.”

—NORTHERN SPARK AUDIENCE MEMBER, 2017

Whether among friendly strangers at Northern Spark or cohort artists in an intensive year-long learning journey, a common refrain of Northern Lights.mn project participants is an appreciation for an uncommon shared experience. >SP ↪ **SEE ALSO:**

ART(ISTS) ON THE VERGE, COMMUNITY, CONNECTIONS, CRITIQUE, JOY, MAGICAL, NORTHERN SPARK, TEMPORARY

transformative When I filled out an application for an Art(ists) On the Verge fellowship in 2015, I was in the midst of a major shift in my studio practice. I had been making paintings and drawings for several years and was, in all honesty, feeling bored and uninspired in my studio. Each painting, while enjoyable to create, felt too similar to the ones that came before it. I felt stagnant and a bit trapped.

Though I was excited by ideas for conceptually driven videos and installations, my background and education in Minnesota craft-based and “traditional” art hindered this exploration. I yearned to reorient and expand what I understood and imagined art to be. I am thankful I was selected to be an AOV7 fellow and quickly found myself surrounded by a new world of experimental art and critical/conceptual conversations. This significant turning point in my art career was perfectly timed to support the development of a new approach to my art making.

Sometimes I am still asked about my painting practice; people wonder how or why I made the shift. Though the method of my work might look different, my years of painting are present in my current practice. Through painting, I explored my interior—my relationship with myself formed and solidified by my deafness (the hours I spent in solitude creating in my studio felt akin to my hours of solitude out in the world as a deaf person). My conceptual new media practice, supported by my AOV fellowship, felt engaged with exteriors, more probing, questioning how I fit in the world. I still draw on the tension between inner and outer, private and public, in my work.

When I decided to stop painting, I moved away from conservative material exploration. Now, after almost a decade, I’ve begun to revisit some of those traditional materials in my studio practice. While I know I won’t make paintings again any time soon, I see the depth and beauty in material exploration and

language that I felt resistant to before. I am grateful that AOV came into my life when it did and that I had the support and time to go through these periods within one large, sprawling, transformation that is still unfolding. >LS ↪ **SEE ALSO: ART(ISTS) ON THE VERGE, CRITIQUE, NEW MEDIA, POSSIBILITY**

transportation Bike. Boat. Bus. Car. Foot. Light rail. Riverboat. Roller blade. Roller skate. Scooter. Skateboard. Wheelchair. >AM ↪ **SEE ALSO: CITY, FESTIVAL, TRANSFORMATIVE, WANDER**

truism *Time. Quality. Money. Pick any two.* ✨ *If it’s June 1, it’s September 1.* ✨ *If you want to change the world, change the culture.* ✨ *We are not in the business of staying in business.*

We had many handy phrases we would tell ourselves and the people we worked with. These were basically shorthand for a much larger conversation we had over many years until we were more or less in *beated agreement*, which should not be mistaken for truth.

The hardest part was to recognize when a truism was not only inadequate shorthand but may have been upended entirely. For a long time, we each had our own favorite truisms. I talked about the importance of introducing “outside genes” into the gene pool of our local ecosystem. This was initially a way to support the rationale for curating “national” and “international” artists for Northern Spark. I still believe there is some truth in this truism, but the rub was that these artists often received more resources for their work. Why? Over time, we came to understand that casting a wider net meant so much more than geography. >SD ↪ **SEE ALSO: ARTIST COUNCIL, COEVOLUTION, COMMUNITY, COMPLICATED, EQUITY, PARTNERSHIP, PROCESS, STAFFING**

UnConvention This nonpartisan collaboration of local and national cultural organizations and citizens, initiated by Northern Lights.mn, explored the creative intersection of participatory media and participatory democracy. It was birthed as a counterpoint to the highly scripted and predetermined format of the contemporary presidential nomination process and conventions, especially the Republican National Convention, which took place concurrently in St. Paul in 2008.

Without our intentionally planning it this way, the UnConvention became a template for much of the future work of NL: many artists presented in collaboration with many partners; all night; all media; open call for participatory projects in public spaces . . . >SD ↪ **SEE ALSO: AGENCY, ARTIST-CENTRIC, ART-WORK, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, DURATION, OPEN CALL, PARTICIPATORY, PARTNERSHIP, PLATFORM, PUBLIC SPHERE**

Union Depot The Union Depot is a large, historic building in downtown St. Paul, built in 1923, shuttered from 1971 until 2012, and now an event space and transit hub connecting the Twin Cities and beyond by bus, light rail, and train lines. It also exemplifies the intimate relationship that developed between a place and Northern Lights.mn.

NL won a commission to develop a semi-permanent interactive artwork platform to celebrate the reopening of Union Depot in 2012 after a major renovation. NL curated and produced two installations: a dynamic LED artwork by Jim Campbell and *Amateur Intelligence Radio (AIR)* by Daily tous les jours (DTLJ). Fascinated by the history of the WCCO radio station broadcasts from the depot in the 1920s, DTLJ designed an interactive project to “give voice back” to the building. *AIR* consists of an online custom interface and webstream, through which anyone could add stories and listen to others’. Special furniture designed by the artists was added to the Great Hall, contributing more places to sit, stand, and listen while in the building.

Neither of these projects became the platforms they were envisioned to be. Campbell’s LED work has not functioned as a screen for subsequent media projects, nor was the story bank of *AIR* continually fed with the community-written remembrances it was built to hold. Put simply, ongoing engagement with these projects wasn’t part of our contract. Someone, if not us, needed to be the activator, to keep up with the continual work of outreach and event planning to actively welcome participation in the platforms. This fell through the cracks.

Nevertheless, the multiyear timeline of those projects and the relationships we built with the staff at the depot ultimately led to Union Depot being the central site for Northern Spark in 2013. NL staff had spent so much time in the building, wandering all the to-be-opened spaces, and we were excited to tuck participatory art projects in and around the building and among the rail platforms (train service had not yet begun). This was a once in a lifetime opportunity, and NS 2013 truly took over the building and grounds. Center

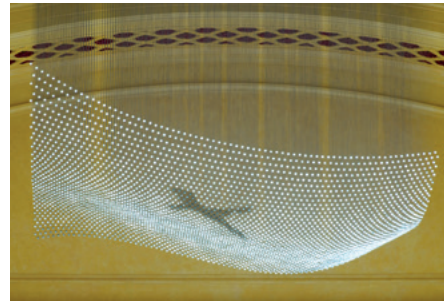
for Hmong Arts and Talent turned the train platform into a fashion show runway; theater artist Roger Nieboer installed an existential travel agency at the Amtrak ticket counter; and projections lit the exterior facade, to name three of the seventy-six art-spatial interventions of the festival. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST, COMMISSION, FAILURE, NIMBLE, NORTHERN SPARK, PARTNERSHIP, PLATFORM

values Everything we do relies on values, whether we consciously recognize it or not. At Northern Lights.mn, our values remained fairly consistent throughout our existence. What began as “artist-centric, public-based, technology-appropriate, collaborative, fomenting agency” was officially joined by “equitable and reciprocal” in a 2019 refresh. We went back to these principles each time a major decision was before us. Notice that no form of “stable” is listed. We wished for it, and tried, but it wasn’t a primary value, for better or worse. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: AGENCY, ARTIST-CENTRIC, ARTIST COUNCIL, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, COLLABORATION, COMMUNITY, COMPLICATED, EQUITY, EXPERIMENT/AL, GENEROSITY, INTERCONNECTION, MENTORSHIP, MISSION, NIMBLE, PARTICIPATORY, PARTNERSHIP, POSSIBILITY, RECIPROCITY, RELATIONAL

virtual Even though Northern Lights.mn was founded to support innovative artwork primarily in the physical public sphere, in 2020 this changed drastically . . . as it did for nearly everyone with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. That year, Minnesota Governor Walz announced “stay at home” orders to begin one day after our Spring Howl fundraiser was to take place, and most events had already been canceled by then. We rapidly converted to a virtual experience thanks to the creativity of commissioned artists Hawona Sullivan Janzen and Kathy McTavish. Originally tapped to create a poem and a site-specific installation for the night, respectively, they transformed their commissions to a polyvocal, kaleidoscopic animation and sound project that was available online for one month. It disappeared into the din of that chaotic time, but our experiments in virtual programming continued.

We skipped Northern Spark in 2020—a fortuitous decision made prior to the pandemic because of our leadership transition of 2019–20. Planning for NS 2021 started in the summer of 2020 when information about the virus was minimal and constantly changing. In order to release an Open Call, we decided to try a new concept: three weeks of mostly virtual events. We commissioned a short film, a durational four-night performance, a twelve-part video that showed on Zoom, and a place-based VR piece. NS 2021 ended with a live, online, dusk-to-dawn vigil that managed to convey shared wonder similar to our in-person festival, albeit for a much smaller audience.

Left: Daily tous les jours, *Amateur Intelligence Radio (AIR)*, River and Social Stations, Union Depot, 2014.
Right: Jim Campbell, 8 1/2 x 11, Union Depot, 2014.
Photos: Rik Sjerma.



Those virtual projects were valuable for that moment in time, one of ongoing concern and grief as the Twin Cities acknowledged the one-year anniversary of the police murder of George Floyd and uprisings that burned areas of both cities. In June 2022, NS returned to physical public space and was declared by many as an “important reunion” for the arts community, claiming the streets again for creativity and togetherness. >SP ↪ SEE ALSO: COMMUNITY, DURATION, FWD://, INNOVATIVE, NEW MEDIA, NIMBLE, NORTHERN SPARK, PUBLIC SPHERE, RESPONSE, TECHNOLOGY, TELETHON, TOGETHER

vision *Northern Lights.mn is a collaborative, interactive, media-oriented arts organization from the Twin Cities for the world. We create platforms with and for artists, audiences, and partners to experiment with and experience innovative art in the public sphere.*

Funders frequently required that mission and vision statements be included in grant proposals. We complied, though we’re still not quite sure what the difference is. >AM ↪ SEE ALSO: ARTIST, AUDIENCE, COEVOLUTION, COLLABORATION, EXPERIMENT/AL, FUNDRAISING, INNOVATIVE, MISSION, NEW MEDIA, PARTICIPATORY, PARTNERSHIP, PLATFORM, POSSIBILITY, PUBLIC SPHERE

volunteers It’s hard to say what kept them coming back because the migratory patterns of volunteers are not fully understood. Nevertheless, each year, many stalwart volunteers returned to help create the Northern Spark festival.

5:00 pm on festival night: Where an empty field was, there are now tents, sculptures, and various contraptions. It’s still daylight, but volunteers are putting up lights in the Info Tent, guiding a food truck into position, and setting up clotheslines for the Night Market.

Volunteers are ambassadors, helping people engage with their imaginations and suspend their disbelief. Just as the blanket forts of our youth allowed us to imagine other worlds, this festival is equally transformative. This is not a skyway, it’s a swing set. These are not grain silos, they’re interactive sculptures. You are not strangers, you are co-conspirators.

Each year, for one night only (well, sometimes two), volunteers invite the public to build a community with them. The festival begins as the sun is dipping below the horizon, leaving us briefly in half-light before thrusting us into darkness. “What is this thing?” someone asks. “It’s kind of like a carnival, and it’s kind of like an art museum, but it’s also a bit like an improv show,” a volunteer answers.

People arrive initially in massive groups, too many to count, though we do try with our clickers. We act as sort-of existential

cruise directors, guiding guests through the night. We see patrons approach with curiosity as they take in the projects, and we watch intently to gauge their reaction. “This is so cool!” “What is it?” “Somebody on a bike handed me this postcard.” Midnight approaches. Crowds are still arriving, but now in fits and spurts. “Have they burned the house down?” “Not until 2:00 am.”

At the end of the night, we point toward the sunrise slowly ascending above Mill City, or Lowertown, and we are washed in the golden light of the morning. The fever pitch of the festival is long past and only the most dedicated festival-goers remain. “I rode my bike to every location.” “So did we!” Volunteers, simultaneously elated and exhausted, take in this moment of fellowship with everybody around us. These are the fruits of our labor, this community we spent the night fostering. “When’s the next one?” someone asks. “The second Saturday in June, next year.” We’ll think and wonder with you again. >RM ↪ SEE ALSO: BELONGING, COMMUNITY, NORTHERN SPARK, POSSIBILITY, TOGETHER, WONDER

wander *I loved the reclamation of public spaces at night. . . . Many of the installations were in places that I’ve previously ignored, spaces that suddenly became meaningful. The experience heightened our awareness to our surroundings; we were always looking for what was different, and sometimes couldn’t remember what was new and what we simply hadn’t seen before. . . . Everything became an installation. That sensation continued the next day, and for a while nothing was ordinary.* —NS 2011 AUDIENCE MEMBER



An inclusive, come-as-you-are, expressive, emotional, passionate community of all ages and backgrounds coming together for an experience. There is a ton of anticipation for what you are going to encounter, who you are going to see, what you are going to be able to feel, smell, touch, witness. That is what made this so special, so unique.

—NS 2013 AUDIENCE MEMBER

The thing that made this a singular event was the fluid borders and the idea that the whole city was awake and harboring secret enchantments, big and small. Our task was to uncover them, as in a treasure hunt. Making it a dusk to dawn event made sense, because how else could you see all there was to see and experience unless you had all night to wander and wonder? —NS AUDIENCE MEMBER

↪ SEE ALSO: CITY, MAGICAL, SUNRISE, TOGETHER

waste Here are some trash tips we learned when making a large festival—such knowledge belongs in the commons!

Eureka Recycling taught us how to work toward zero waste: tape bin lids shut to avoid contamination (for both empties and full bins), invest in MOOP sticks (“Mess out of Place” grabbers), and pay people to manage waste if you can afford it.

With this wisdom we invested in creating our own enthusiastic Zero Waste Crew. Each year the same young couple worked the waste crew to earn vacation money and brought their own fancy MOOP sticks. A visual artist collected every example of food truck packaging and made sorting charts as an easy reference for organics / recycling / trash. A performer entertained visitors with musical theater–style numbers about trash-sorted utopias to inspire trash activism. None of this was planned. It is likely unreplicable but worth striving for!

HOW TO DO ZERO WASTE IN MINNEAPOLIS: affordably rent rolling waste bins (just like the ones at home), which get delivered and picked up. YAY! Most of our event waste was from food trucks, which meant we ordered mostly organics bins, some for recycling, and very few for trash.

HOW TO DO ZERO WASTE IN ST. PAUL: load up your Prius (we hope you have one!) with free metal wire waste receptacle contraptions and supplies. Hidden cost: dealing with the soggy bags of waste. Our funny logistics involved locking the full bags into a box truck over the weekend until we could drop them off at designated facilities (yes, *multiple* stops) on Monday morning after the Saturday night festival. *Just kidding*—that’s what we told the permit people on the forms. In reality, when we had festival sites in both cities, we drove the truck to one of our Minneapolis sites and deposited the (mostly compostable) waste into the rented carts. We were profoundly proud of this trash hack and grateful that we didn’t have to open a steaming hot box truck of rotting food waste on Monday morning. Even without a simultaneous event site in Minneapolis, it may be worth it to rent some bins there. >EL

↪ SEE ALSO: BUREAUCRACY, CREW, FESTIVAL, NORTHERN SPARK, PLAYBOOK, POSSIBILITY, PROCESS, PRODUCTION, VALUES

water Although water was never a specific theme of Northern Spark, the Mississippi River was a constant backdrop and frequent protagonist in artist projects, along with the fate of water in a chaotic climate regime. From a dumpster hot tub to ice fishing, as both site and topic, water ran through much of what we did and presented.

① Sparkling performances, illustrated presentations, and other works of artistic and scientific expression aboard the Jonathan Padelford sternwheeler as it makes its way down the Mississippi River during the first Northern Spark. ② Poetic prompts asked people to consider their relationships to water. “What are your wishes for water? Share them with the River.” ③ In the frozen night, viewers watched a large-scale multi-screen sculptural projection that depicted a section of a river endlessly looping back into itself. As debris flowed down the river, it continually looped around, locked in a constant state of motion. ④ Ananya Dance Theater created a sculptural and movement ritual to honor water at NS 2023. *Dance of a Thousand Water Dreams* included an altar for messages to the Mississippi, music, poetry, drumming, Water Protector words, and a dance procession to the river at dawn—appropriately, after a rain. ⑤ Created for NS 2017 on the Green



① *Works Progress with Andy Sturdevant, Mississippi Megalops – A Floating Chautauqua*, NS 2011. Photo: Sean Smuda.



② *Bayou Bay, Watershed Whisperers, A night with the river, Upper Landing Park*, 2023. Photo: Drew Arrieta.



③ Ben Moren, *Watercourse, Illuminate South Loop*, 2018. Photo: NL.



④ Douglas Ewart with Ananya Dance Theater, *Union Depot*, NS 2013. Photo: Erin Smith.



5 May Lee-Yang, *River Stories*, NS 2017. Photo: Anna Min.



6 Reused water bottles at NS 2017. Photo: Bothany Bernie.



7 *Illuminate the Lock, Returning the River*, 2018. Photo: Dan Marshall.



8 *Aquanesia*, Grand Rapids, MN, 2018. Photo: Teeko Yang.

Line, *River Stories* by May Lee-Yang was a storytelling / listening / sharing / installation about Southeast Asians, our relationship to water, and each other. Comedy and commentary collided as the artists explored subversive folktales, mandatory migrations, and invasive Asian carps that threaten American waters. 6 Due to the focus on climate resilience for NS 2016 and NS 2017, we did not allow our food vendors to sell water in plastic bottles at the festival. Instead, we washed, sanitized, and labeled 800 used “sustainable” water bottles donated by Goodwill Industries. They were distributed within the first twenty minutes of the event. Good idea; impossible to execute. 7 *Illuminate the Lock’s Returning the River* (2018) spun a mythic tale about a future river and people freed from walls. This operatic work included hand-drawn animation by Mike Hoyt projected on the water, a live soundscape composed and performed by Dameun Strange, and a story written and narrated by Diver Van Avery from a boat in the Lock chamber and sung by Ritika Ganguly from above. 8 *Aquanesia* and its predecessors *Ruination* and *Big Watershed Game* were iterations of a project very directly tied to the science of water quality and hydrological mechanics of watersheds. Through this years-long effort we were in relationship with Minnehaha Creek and Lake Nokomis in Minneapolis; the Mississippi River in Grand Rapids, Minnesota;



9 Sequoia Hauck, *ingiw mekwendamowaad zibbi: the ones who remember the river*, Raspberry Island, NS 2022. Photo: Gisell Calderón.



and the Zumbro River in Rochester. 9 NS 2022 ended with a lavender sunrise, singing, and drum beats at *ingiw mekwendamowaad zibbi: the ones who remember the river* from Raspberry Island in Imnĭzaska Othŭnjwe/Ashkibagi-zĭibiing (St. Paul). From 2 am until dawn, participants painted on two cloth “rivers” and sat, listened, and watched. Sequoia Hauck (Anishinaabe/Hupa) and collaborators created an experience that embodied the Indigenous understanding of water as ancestor, as teacher, as guide, as life. >NL
↪ SEE ALSO: AQUANESIA, DAWN, DECOLONIZE, ILLUMINATE THE LOCK, NORTHERN SPARK, RECIPROCITY, RIVER

weather 1. June 14, 2014, 8:50 pm I was rolling through my start-up to-do list in my mind when I felt Emily tugging on my arm, saying “We need to go back to the river.” She was right. We had a lot of projectors to turn on. On our way Kurt, the lead projectionist, called and shared his pessimism concerning the weather. I told him to stay positive. It was all I could think to say. I thought about all the work that my team had done, and still had to do, to make the most ambitious Northern Spark yet happen. I simply couldn’t let in the thought of the weather stopping us. Then it poured. All night. >MM

2. When I worked for the National Park Service and partnered with Northern Lights.mn on *Illuminate the Lock* (ITL), we spent a lot of time talking through weather contingency plans. What kind of weather would cause us to cancel? How would we find a team of people to shovel snow from the lock wall? Are single-digit temperatures too cold for staff?

My most memorable weather event was in 2018 with ITL artist Mike Hoyt. *Returning the River* was scheduled to begin at 7 pm, but right around 5 an epic downpour began. Storms were predicted to continue throughout the evening, so it was an easy decision to cancel that night’s performance. Mike and I went to the lock anyway, to check on the equipment. The performance

used a canoe, which was already in the water at the bottom of the lock chamber. When we arrived, we saw that the deluge had mostly filled the canoe and it needed to be bailed out. But getting to the canoe in the storm required walking across the completely exposed lock wall, then descending metal stairs for 50 feet before climbing down a ten-foot ladder. We had to wait for the lightning to pass. We waited and waited, but the lightning persisted. We had been there for hours, so when the lightning slowed we impatiently decided it was safe to go down and bail the canoe. We walked along the lock wall enjoying the view across St. Anthony Falls. Suddenly, a bolt of lightning erupted above the Pillsbury Mill and jumped from cloud, to cloud, to cloud, and then struck the ground. While the deafening thunder echoed over Minneapolis, Mike and I turned to each other. We were both crouched as low to the ground as we could get. We locked eyes for a moment and then wordlessly scurried back to the safety of the building. Any day you can go home safe from public art is a great day! >DD

3. There is a character in *The Phantom Tollbooth*, by Norton Juster, called the Whether Man. He's a frenetic fellow who explains: "I'm the Whether Man, not the Weather Man, for after all it's more important to know whether there will be weather than what the weather will be." I imagine the Whether Man would have been astounded, and perhaps aghast, at the fervor with which we attempted to forecast the weather for the night of Northern Spark.

Many aspects of the festival were up in the air for months during our planning process: project locations were shuffled; agreements from property owners were revoked and renegotiated; artists' plans morphed and evolved. Our goal was to know everything that was knowable by April before the June festival so we could move forward with logistics. One thing that was stomach-flutteringly unknowable year after year was the weather.

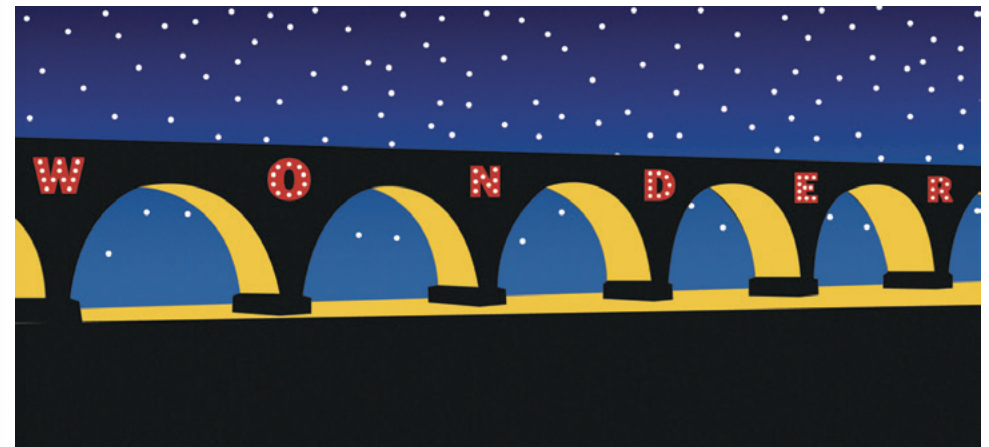
Northern Spark happened rain or (moon)shine: artists and crew had to plan for a host of weather situations, from drizzle to wind to thunderstorms. The large scale of the festival prevented us from being able to plan alternate dates in the case of unfavorable weather. We held our breath for weeks before, trading screenshots of weather apps, desperate to predict the future. We discussed chances and possibilities and made detailed if-then plans for each hypothetical. When the day of the festival arrived, we were as prepared as we could possibly be. We scurried about, enacting rain plans or reveling in beautiful weather, or, sometimes, sheltering from a storm.

Such were the necessities of creating a massive outdoor festival. As NL begins its journey into the sunset, we look forward to simply being Whether People again. >AM ↪ SEE ALSO: CLIMATE CHAOS, COMPLICATED, FESTIVAL, NORTHERN SPARK, PARTNERSHIP, POSSIBILITY, PRODUCTION, PUBLIC SPHERE, RIVER, STAFFING, WATER, WINTER

winter The defining season of Minnesota. Fingers numb, yet still typing at a laptop keyboard. Shivering through the biting cold of location scouting on winter nights (even projects presented in June required dead-of-winter site visits in our months-long production process). A surprising proportion of our work took place while we were bundled in parkas, blankets, hats, and mittens. Even sheltered inside, AOV all-day crits took place in the unheated Soap Factory. In January. As did weekly NS staff meetings.

It was -4°F during Illuminate South Loop. -10°F at the ARTathlon. Winter simplified some things, with dark happening by 6 pm so we didn't have to wait until 9:30 pm for projections to be visible, but the cold was brutal, especially after sunset. By the time Northern Spark arrived, it was hard to remember the chill that had been with us for so long. But even in the heat we were sketching plans for the darker days: new iterations of platforms, new projects, new ways to make light in winter. >AM ↪ SEE ALSO: ART(ISTS) ON THE VERGE, ARTATHLON, CITY, ILLUMINATE SOUTH LOOP, ILLUMINATE THE LOCK, OFFICE, POSSIBILITY, PRODUCTION, SITE VISIT, SOAP FACTORY, TRANSFORMATIVE, WEATHER

wonder



Artist Council

Relationships & Reciprocity: A Guide to Making Northern Spark, coauthored by Northern Lights.mn staff and the 2020 Artist Council

Spring Howl: A Virtual Art Experience

Hawona Sullivan Janzen and Kathy McTavish, *a coming together: a performance for our time*

2020

The title page of *Relationships & Reciprocity* when it was first available online in 2020, superimposed over a Zoom meeting of the 2020 Artist Council. Courtesy of NL.



relationships & reciprocity

A Guide to Making Northern Spark

Northern Spark is a late-night public arts festival in the Twin Cities that began in 2011. It is produced by Northern Lights.mn, a non profit organization that supports artists in the creation and presentation of art in the public sphere.

The following framework is the result of a 10 month collaborative process between Northern Lights staff and the 2020 Artist Council that outlines our values and processes for making Northern Spark in ways that are equitable, community-engaged and reciprocal. This is a living document that we will fine tune over time.

Art(ists) On the Verge 11

Artists

Candice Davis, *Slave Schedule*

Peripherals

A.P. Looze, *Heart Strings: A Beading Ritual*

Kelley Meister, *HOTZONE*

Sarah Nassif, *Leaf Trace / Land Trace*

Codirectors

Michael Hoyt

Sarah Peters

Piotr Szyhalski

Mentors

Mica Anders

Rachel Breen

Maija Brown (writing mentor)

Ellen Hinchcliffe

Anna Metcalfe

Diane Willow

Essayist

Mara Duvra, "Embodied Practice: offerings towards an evolution. Art(ists) On the Verge, 2019–21"

Illuminate the Lock

Moira (Miri) Villiard, *Madweyaashkaa:*

Waves Can Be Heard

Projection mentor: Jonathan Thunder

Northern Spark

All projects presented by NL
(unless otherwise indicated).

Altars of Our Sacred Geometry

(Ananya Dance Theater)

Lelis K. Brito, *You Change Me*

Gabrielle Civil, *Vigil*

Confluence:: Flow (Ananya Dance Theater)

International Indigenous Youth Council,

Braiding Our Stories (NL, Indigenous
Roots)

Lightning Rod, *sur la tableau avec*

Lightning Rod

Milkweed Collective (Kallie Melvin and

Eva Adderley), *Seed Paper of Hope*

Yeej Moua, *The Wind Always Strikes the*

Highest Mountain

Dameun Strange, *Sol Soundgarden*

Support Local Hustle, *Postcard Friends*

Corinne Teed, *Collaborative Blocking:*

A Community Map

Telethon

26Bats

John Gebretatose

Ifrah Mansour

Sami Pfeffer

Scotty Reynolds and the Northern Spark

Kazoo Band



Moira Villiard, *Madweyaashkaa: Waves Can Be Heard*,
Illuminate the Lock 2021. Photo: Ne-Dah-Ness Greene.



Lelis K. Brito and collaborators, *You Change Me*, a walk/dance through the Rondo/Frogtown neighborhood, opened the three-week Northern Spark 2021 on June 12. A dance video component was posted online during the festival. Central Village Park, St. Paul. Photo: Bruce Silcox.



Lightning Rod performed *sur la table* avec *Lightning Rod*, a multiscene, four-hour live performance on Zoom, June 17–20, for Northern Spark 2021. Photo: Ryan Stopera.



Dameun Strange, *Sol Soundgarden*, a geo-located virtual reality project with soundscore and visual "sound blooms" found in Frogtown, St. Paul, Northern Spark 2021. Photos: NL.



Milkweed Collective (Eva Adderley and Kallie Melvin), *Seed Paper of Hope*, mail art sent to 300 households in St. Paul for Northern Spark 2021. Photo: Bruce Silcox.



Gabrielle Civil performs *Vigil*, an eight-hour Zoom gathering and ritual, June 28, 9 pm–5:30 am, Northern Spark 2021. Photo: Alea Adigweme.



Art(ists) On the Verge 11: (clockwise from upper left) Candice Davis, *Slave Schedule Peripherals*; A.P. Looze, *Heart Strings: A Beading Ritual*; Sarah Nassif, *Leaf Trace / Land Trace*; Kelley Meister, *HOTZONE*. Photos: Ryan Stopera, Bruce Silcox, Kyra Nygard, Brooke Ross.

Northern Spark

All projects presented by NL
(unless otherwise indicated).

Eva Adderley, *Drive-In Movie Extravaganza*

Felicia Cooper, Kallie Melvin, and Alex Young, *The Official Bureau of Lost Things*

Pang Foua Xiong, Mai Vang, Suzanne Thao, and Sandy Lo, *Community | Joy & Friendship* (NL, Hmong Museum)

Grupo Soap del Corazón, *Posters and Patches Pop-Up* (The M)

Sequoia Hauck and collaborators, *ingiw mekwendamowaad ziibi: the ones who remember the river*

Alia Jeraj, *Mangoes Are Memories*

Riley Kleve and Ever Woodward, *Community Cloth*

Nick Knutson, *From Dusk till Dark: Waves in the Night*

Library After Dark (Saint Paul Public Library)

Cecilia Mazumdar Stanger, *Feast of Imagination*

Bob Pollard, *Bookmark Making*

Xiaolu Wang and Peng Wu, *Jin Paper Ceremony*

Amanda Lovelee and Collin Harris, *Really Big Table* (NL, Springboard for the Arts)

Mino Oski Ain Dah Yung and Native Youth Arts Collective, *Start at Home*

Mnisota 2055: Postcards from an (im)Possible Future (The 100% Campaign)

Tyler Olsen-Highness and Sydney Latimer, *Post Office to the Ancestors* (VTAC)

Bianca Rhodes and Katharine DeCelle, *Rooted in Rondo* (St. Paul Almanac)

Stephanie Lynn Rogers, *Sewing Circle* (NL, Springboard for the Arts)

Telethon

John Gebretatose

Mayda

Northern Spark Kazoo Band

Morgen Chang

Jason Kornelis

Scotty Reynolds

Alex Yang

Sami Pfeffer



Eva Adderley, *Drive-In Movie Extravaganza*,
Victoria Theater Arts Center, Northern Spark 2022.
Photo: Bruce Silcox

Felicia Cooper, Kallie Melvin, and Alex Young, *The Official Bureau of Lost Things*, Springboard for the Arts, Northern Spark 2022. Photo: Drew Arrieta.



Tyler Olsen-Highness and Sydney Latimer, *Post Office to the Ancestors*, Victoria Theater Arts Center, Northern Spark 2022. Presented by VTAC. Photo: Bruce Silcox.



Xiaolu Wang and Peng Wu, *Jin Paper Ceremony*, in *Library After Dark*, Rondo Community Library, Northern Spark 2022. Presented by Saint Paul Public Library. Photo: Bruce Silcox.



Mnisota 2055: Postcards from an (im)Possible Future, at Springboard for the Arts, Northern Spark 2022. Presented by The 100% Campaign. Photo: Drew Arrieta.

Sequoia Hauck and collaborators at dawn in *ingiw mekwendamowaad ziiǵi: the ones who remember the river*, Raspberry Island, Northern Spark 2022. Photo: Gisell Calderón.

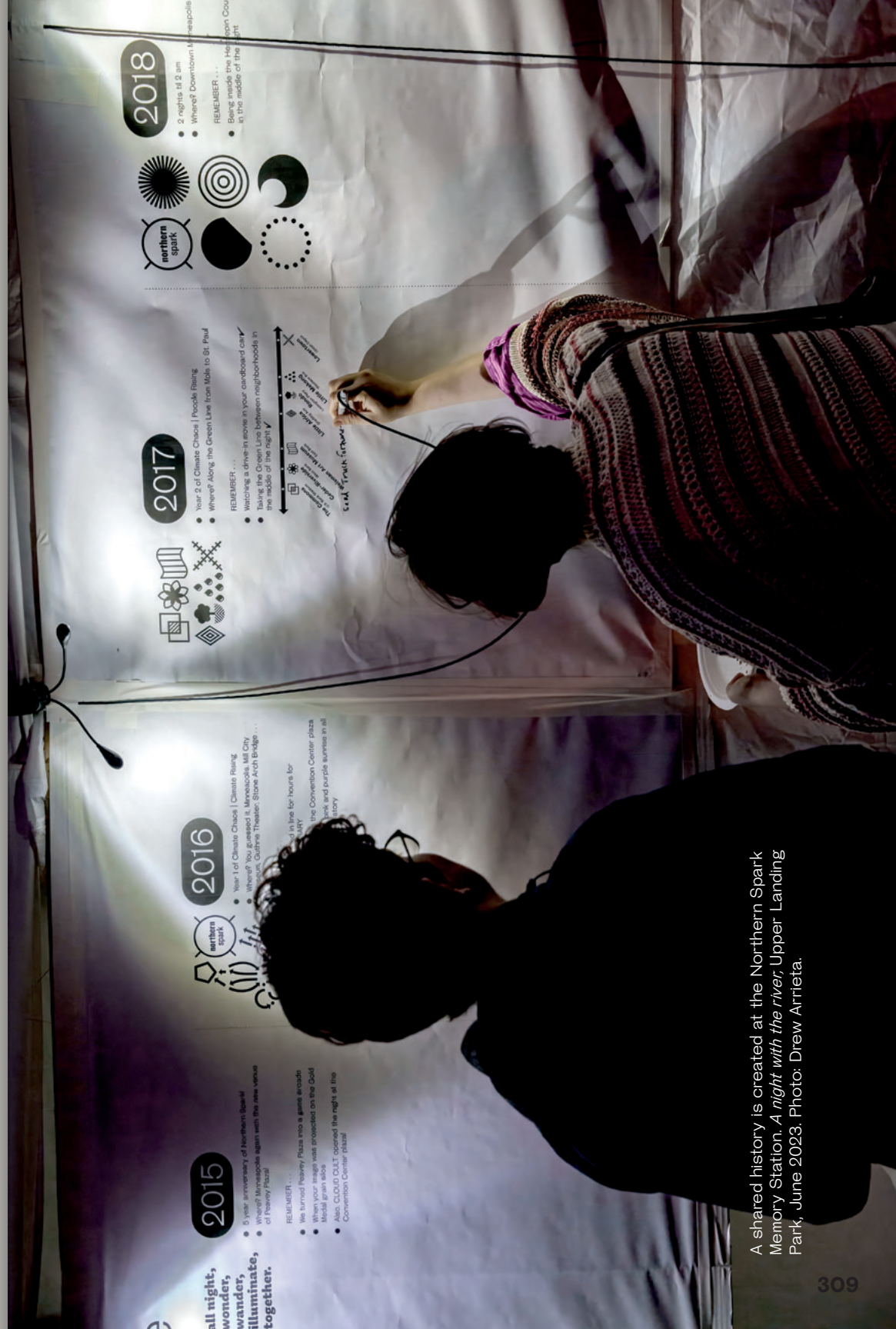


Panorama of NanoTako Studios during live broadcast of the Telethon, October 2022. Photo: NL.

A night with the river

Bayou Bay, *Watershed Whisperers*
 Studio Strange, *AquaSonos: River*
*Sequences for voice, electronics, bells,
 and gong chorus*
 Accompanied by: Witt Siasoco and Diver
 Van Avery, *Common Ground*

2023



**all night,
 wonder,
 illuminate,
 together.**

2015

- 5 year anniversary of Northern Spark!
- Where? Minneapolis again with the new venue of Heavy Plaza!
- REMEMBER ...
- We turned Heavy Plaza into a game arcade!
- When your image was projected on the Quad!
- Medial grain silos!
- Also, CLOUD CULT opened the night at the Convention Center plaza!

2016

- Year 1 of Climate Chaos | Climate Rising
- Where? You guessed it, Minneapolis, US City of the Future!
- You, Culture Theater, Stone Arch Bridge...
- ... and in line for hours for
- ARMY
- the Convention Center plaza
- pink and purple surprise in all
- story

2017

- Year 2 of Climate Chaos | People Rising
- Where? Along the Green Line from Igle to St. Paul
- REMEMBER ...
- watching a drive-in arrive in your carboard cave!
- Taking the Green Line between neighborhoods in the middle of the night!

2018

- 2 nights in 2 am
- Where? Downtown Minneapolis
- REMEMBER ...
- Being inside the Heiligman Courthouse in the middle of the night!

A shared history is created at the Northern Spark Memory Station. *A night with the river*, Upper Landing Park, June 2023. Photo: Drew Arrieta.



Studio Strange's *AquaSonos: River Sequences* for voice, electronics, bells, and gong chorus glows blue in the background; poetry blankets by Witt Siasoco and Diver Van Avery provide spaces for respite and listening. *A night with the river*, Upper Landing Park, June 2023. Photo: Drew Arrieta.



Bayou Bay, *Watershed Whisperers*. *A night with the river*, Upper Landing Park, June 2023. Photo: Drew Arrieta.

Contributor Biographies

Renee Alexander (RA) is CEO of the Minnesota State Fair, one of the largest and best-attended expositions in the world. (146–47)

Christine Baeumler's (CB) environmental art practice engages with issues around water quality, pollinators, phenology, and climate change through collaborative projects and in her position as a professor in the Department of Art at the University of Minnesota. Christine served on the Climate Chaos | People Rising artist advisory committee and was a Northern Spark artist in 2014, 2016, and 2017. (57, 257–58)

Molly Balcom Raleigh (MBR) is a designer and artist whose work aims to create opportunities for new forms of participation in the public sphere. She was an Art(ists) On the Verge fellow in 2015 and an artist in Discourse and Discord (2012), Northern Spark (2012), *Ruination: City of Dust* (2014), CCC/ Maker Day (2014), and Jamestown ArtSpark (2017). Behind the scenes she was NL's development director (2013–14) and a consultant (2015–18). (252–55)

Lana Salah Barkawi (LSB) is the executive + artistic director of Mizna, publisher of *Mizna: SWANA Literature and Art*, and producer of Mizna's Twin Cities Arab Film Festival. (77–78)

Leslie Barlow (LB) is a Minneapolis-based visual artist creating life-size oil paintings that serve as monuments to community members and explorations into how race entangles the intimate sphere of love, family, and friendship. Leslie worked as NL's administrative assistant and social media maven from 2016 to 2018. (56–57)

Kate Barr (KB) was president and CEO of Propel Nonprofits and mentored NL through Arts Midwest's ArtsLab program. (46)

Elizabeth Cole (EC), a patron experience supervisor at the Minneapolis Central Library, performed, directed, produced, and co-led *The Night Library* for five years. (166–67)

Chris Conry (CC) is the director of The 100% Campaign, a cross-sector, statewide, multiracial, intersectional effort to build an equitable clean energy future for everyone in Minnesota. (188–89)

Neal Cuthbert (NC) was the founding board chair of NL. He worked at the McKnight Foundation for twenty-five years, first as art program director, then as VP of all programs. (43–44, 45, 141–42, 168, 182)

Steve Dietz (SD) is the founder emeritus of Northern Lights.mn.

Dan Dressler (DD) was the public programs manager with the National Park Service at Mississippi National River and Recreation Area through 2022. He is now the Minneapolis/St. Paul urban connections coordinator for USDA Forest Service. (48, 287–88)

Katie Hargrave (KH) and **Meredith Laura Lynn (MLL)** are artists and educators who work collaboratively to explore the historic, cultural, and environmental impacts of so-called public land. Katie is associate professor of art at University of Tennessee Chattanooga, and Meredith is assistant professor of art at Florida State University. They were Art(ists) On the Verge fellows in 2014 and 2015, respectively. (61–62)

Jess Hirsch (JH) is the founder of Fireweed Community Woodshop, a sculptor of experience, and a proud mama of a two-year-old. Jess was an Art(ists) On the Verge fellow in 2017 and an artist in Northern Spark (2013, 2014, and 2017), Alma Lights (2015), and ARTathlon (2016). (149)

Mike Hoyt's (MH) creative practice includes drawing, painting, graphic medicine, public participation, and community land stewardship. Mike was an Art(ists) On the Verge fellow in 2012 and codirector of the program from 2019 to 2021. (169, 170–71)

Kerri Jamison (KJ) is an art producer, fundraiser, supporter, and photographer who seeks wonder and awe in the everyday. She worked as content manager and crowdfunding campaign coordinator for Northern Spark 2014, 2015, and 2016. (62)

Emily Janisch (EJ) sends mail, grows dahlias, and practices curiosity in Minneapolis. She worked with NL as launch party coordinator and as a volunteer for many years. (31)

Hawona Sullivan Janzen is a St. Paul–based multidisciplinary artist and curator who believes that art is the only thing that can save us from ourselves. Hawona was a Northern Spark artist in 2019 and a member of the Artist Council from 2020 to 2022. (266)

Muhammad Jiwa (MJ) is a facilitator to your connection and understanding that we are the natural world, not just a part of it, and encompasses this passion with sustainable real estate, animal training and interactions, and justice work. Muhammad partnered with NL on Northern Spark 2016 and 2017. (153)

Jamie Kalakaru-Mava (JK-M) is an author, artist, and organizer working to support community access to art and culture. In her prior role as executive director of West Bank Business Association, Jamie partnered with NL on several years of Northern Spark. (258)

Gülgün Kayim (GK) is the director of the Department of Arts and Culture in the City of Seattle. From 2011 to 2023 she was the founding director of Minneapolis’s Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy. (58–59)

Erin Lavelle (EL) is a public artist working in interdisciplinary media: fiber arts, performance, and social practice. As a facilitator and maker she explores impermanence, interconnectedness, and change. Erin produced Northern Spark for seven years, was an artist in Northern Spark in 2014, and was art director for *Ruination: City of Dust*. (44–45, 48–49, 190, 250–51, 261–62, 284)

Kim Loken (KL), AIA, LEED AP, is associate professor at University of Wisconsin–Stout School of Art and Design and program director of its BFA game design and development major. Kim directed a UW–Stout student project for Northern Spark 2017 and was game and production designer for *Aquanesia*. (144–45)

Meredith Laura Lynn. (MLL) ↪ SEE: KATIE HARGRAVE AND MEREDITH LAURA LYNN

Ryan McGoff (RM) is an art enthusiast, night owl, and occasional weather prognosticator who worked or volunteered for every Northern Spark from 2011 to 2022. (31, 44, 282–83)

Ady Olson McNair (AM) was NL’s projects manager and de facto librarian from 2013 through 2017. She returned in 2022 to co-lead NL through its sunset.

Amy McNally (ALM) is deputy director for public services at Hennepin County Library. Amy co-led and sponsored *The Night Library* at Northern Spark for five years. (166–67)

Michael Murnane (MM) is an Emmy Award–winning lighting designer and was technical director of Northern Spark. He was commissioned by NL for seven large-scale projection works in four cities over eleven years. (287)

Roger Nieboer was trained as a playwright and celebrates collaboration and experimentation in the arts. He created four immersive theater projects for Northern Spark between 2013 and 2017. (42)

Northern Lights.mn (NL). ↪ SEE: SD, AM, SP

Katie Nyberg (KN) was the founding executive director of Mississippi Park Connection and held that position until January 2023. She is now executive director of the Great River Passage Conservancy. (41, 43)

Valerie Oliveiro (VO) is a queer artist and activist in performance based in Mni Sota Makoce and born in Singapore. Val performed at Northern Spark in 2014 and 2016 and worked as Artist Council coordinator from 2020 to 2023. (53, 138, 145–46)

Tyler Olsen-Highness (TO-H) is a theater artist, producer, director, administrator, teacher, dad, artistic director of Dangerous Productions, and executive director of 825 Arts (formerly Victoria Theater Arts Center). (168, 173)

Taylor Rose Payer (TP) is Anishinaabe, a citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, and a PhD candidate in art history at the University of Minnesota. (256–57)

Alejandra Pelinka (AP) is director of creative placemaking for the City of Bloomington, Minnesota. (154)

Sarah Peters (SP) worked with NL for thirteen years in roles ranging from food truck coordinator to sunset codirector.

Matthew Rezac (MR) is an independent graphic designer and the recipient of numerous honors, including the AIGA 50 Books/50 Covers and AIGA 365 Awards. Matthew worked as graphic designer and art director on most NL projects throughout its seventeen years. (64–71, 150–51, 273–76)

Rebecca Ryan (RR) is deputy director of public services at Saint Paul Public Library. (53)

Aki Shibata produces work that examines her body and mind in public and gallery spaces. Aki was a Northern Spark artist in 2011 and 2017; a member of the Creative City Challenge winning team, CarryOn Homes, in 2018; and a member of the Artist Council from 2016 to 2020. (38)

Sara Shives (SS) is a Minneapolis-based producer now working for Minnesota Public Radio. She has produced events throughout the world, including for Olympic Ceremonies, the Sundance Film Festival, and Blue Man Group. She produced the largest Northern Spark in 2017. (30)

Moheb Soliman (MS) is an interdisciplinary poet from Egypt and the Midwest. His debut collection *HOMES* dwells in nature, modernity, and identity in the Great Lakes bioregion/ borderland. Moheb was an artist for Northern Spark (2014) and ARTathlon (2016) and a *Words for Winter* poet (2017 and 2018). He worked as production assistant for Northern Spark 2022 and coproduced artist projects for Mizna at Northern Spark (2013, 2015, and 2017). (31, 75–76)

Tyler Stefanich (TS), an artist and designer, is manager of the UCLA Game Lab, a creative research center that fosters the production of experimental games. He was an Art(ists) On the Verge fellow in 2010 and the web developer and systems administrator for NL. (72–73, 144)

Liza Sylvestre (LS) is a transdisciplinary artist and research assistant professor in the College of Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Illinois Urbana–Champaign, where she cofounded the initiative *Crip*: Cripistemology and the Arts*. Liza was an Art(ists) On the Verge fellow in 2016. (278–79)

Piotr Szyhalski (PS) is a Polish-born and trained multimedia artist who has worked in the United States since 1990. He teaches at Minneapolis College of Art and Design and founded Labor Camp in 1998. He created and performed in major projects for Northern Spark in 2011, 2012 (with Aniccha Arts), 2013, and 2014; IN Light IN in Indianapolis in 2016; and *Living Banners* on Nicollet Mall in 2017. He was a codirector of Art(ists) On the Verge. (20–27, 165)

Elle Thoni (ET) is a queer playwright and public artist who investigates how our senses of belonging, identity, and loss change with our climate. Elle worked as volunteer coordinator and assistant curator for Northern Spark and as playwright and performance director of *Aquanesia*. (63, 75, 193, 259–60)

Sara Van Norman (SVN) is an attorney, arbitrator, and mediator who works for and with Indian tribes through her firm Van Norman Law. She is also a soapmaker and a writer, and she is extremely proud (and sad) to have been the final chair of the NL board. (30–31, 45–46)

Pramila Vasudevan is a movement-centered artist, cultural worker, maker of community-rooted/routed transdisciplinary work, and founder and artistic director of Aniccha Arts, an experimental collaborative producing site-specific performances, including works at Northern Spark in 2014 and 2016. Aniccha Arts was an inaugural fellow of Art(ists) On the Verge. (20–27, 183)

Matt Wells (MCW) has sung with the Minnesota State Sacred Harp Singing Convention since 1996. (261)

Margit Wilson (MW) is a librarian with Hennepin County Library at the Hosmer Library in Minneapolis and helped host Northern Spark at Minneapolis Central Library in 2018. (166–67)

Peng Wu (PW), born and raised in China, is an interdisciplinary artist and designer dedicated to creating socially engaged art in public space. Peng presented projects at Northern Spark (2012 and 2022) and was on the winning team of the Creative City Challenge in 2018. (54–55)

Marina Zurkow (MZ) is a media artist focused on near-impossible nature and culture intersections, researching “wicked problems” like invasive species, superfund sites, and petroleum interdependence. Marina served on the Climate Chaos | People Rising artist advisory committee; was a Northern Spark artist in 2016 and 2017; and presented a project for Illuminate South Loop in 2018. (52–53)

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- Stephen R. Miller, “Egg Gone Sperm”
- AOV 3: Patricia Briggs, “Art(ists) On the Verge, 2011–12”
- AOV 4: Christina Schmid, “Out of the Box: Art(ists) On the Verge, 2012–13”
- AOV 5: Susannah Schouweiler, “Art(ists) On the Verge, 2013–14”
- AOV 6: Kirsten Valentine Cadieux, “Methodologies On the Verge: Art(ists) On the Verge, 2014–15”
- AOV 7: Sarah Peters, “game + book + body + speech + sound: Art(ists) On the Verge, 2015–16”
- AOV 8: Sheila Dickinson, “Whispering Questions into the Dark: Art(ists) On the Verge, 2016–17”
- AOV 9: Russ White, “Virtuous Realities: Art(ists) On the Verge, 2017–18”
- AOV 10: Sun Yung Shin, “Staying with the Trouble: Art(ists) On the Verge, 2018–19”
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Pat Harrigan, "Monkey with a Mustache, *Mystery Phone: Art of Darkness*," Northern Spark guidebook, 2014.

Ben Heywood, "Benjamin Entner: *Ego Sum*," Northern Spark guidebook, 2014.

Perry Price, "HOTTEA: *La Maroma*," Northern Spark guidebook, 2014.

Michèle Steinwald, "Jefferson Pinder: *Relay*," Northern Spark guidebook, 2014.

Artist Council Publication

Relationships & Reciprocity: A Guide to Making Northern Spark, Northern Lights.mn, 2020.

Acknowledgments

Creating this book was an important process of closure. It allowed us to reflect, remember, and consider the years of Northern Lights.mn with a concentration of attention not often afforded to an organization's staff when facing an operational sunset. Every page brought a swirl of emotions and unlocked a memory—or three—and very often a sense of pride for what we were able to support and bring into being.

From the beginning, our goal was to create a "multi-vocal" publication. Since NL was collaborative at its heart and worked with so many incredible artists, we simply could not have made a book without their voices. Thank you to the many contributors who took the time and energy to reflect on your experiences. We are honored to publish your words and images.

We hope that this collective effort honors those who took part in NL programs, whether as artists, staff, partners, or audiences. We also offer this collection to the field of arts organizing and public engagement. We hope our "thinking out loud" is helpful for our peers.

We extend a sincere thank you to the McKnight Foundation, whose funding allowed us to research, write, and produce this book. Thank you to DeAnna Cummings for championing our sunset grant, and to Arleta Little and Neal Cuthbert for your preceding support of our work.

Thank you to the NL board, for unwavering support of the decision to sunset with grace.

Thank you to Matthew Rezac for creating a stunning work of design and for making NL look so good for all of our years.

Thank you to Laura Westlund, our long-time copy editor, for bringing out the best in each voice you read here. >SP, AM, SD

To my beloveds, for whom being in relationship with me was also to be entangled with NL. Thank you for your patience, humor, and love. >SP

Gratitude all the way through. To everyone who has made me possible, whether you know it or not. To my friends, for becoming with me. And to my family, forever and always, world without end, amen. >AM

It is impossible, of course, to think of NL without artists. It is also impossible to overstate how you affected my life. And love to Janet and Keel and Birch for having my back. >SD

↪ SEE ALSO: GRATITUDE

Sunset

Sarah Peters

Sunset: when the sun sinks below the horizon, as visible from a particular place and time, heralding the last light of a day. Elsewhere in physical space, the sun is not setting. It may be high in the sky, or rising. Wherever you are on Earth, a sunset eventually takes place. It is an age-old, daily cycle.

I am tasked with writing on the sunset of Northern Lights, mn, an organization around which my life has formed for thirteen of NL's seventeen years. It is not a simple story to tell, nor is it complete, or perhaps even thoroughly knowable. These things can be hard to parse from the inside. But from here, now, this is how I have come to see it. As with many complex tales, to say how it ends requires backing up and starting somewhere in the middle.

NL as Furniture: The Three-Legged Stools

Circa 2013, once NL had been in existence for a few years and the Northern Spark festival had transformed many aspects of our operations, we searched for a way to easily communicate our identity. We conjured the image of a three-legged stool—a trio of legs to form a sturdy foundation. This helped us understand our internal workings as well as our programmatic outputs. And because we were maximalists, we decided we had three three-legged stools: programmatic, community, operational. Here is how the tripod metaphors worked.

1. Programmatic. In grants and fundraising pitches we described our work as including three “core” programs: Art(ists) On the Verge (AOV), Creative City Challenge (CCC), and Northern Spark (NS). The funding for each supported core staff positions, and they created opportunities for artists to weave between platforms and build meaningful relationships with NL and other artists.

These three programmatic legs worked brilliantly as interconnected artistic platforms but were financially rickety. Only AOV felt stable, due to renewable support and a two-year grant cycle from the Jerome Foundation. CCC was the next most reliable, as we were approved to receive a recurring annual contract as that project's producer, despite the unpredictability of the City of Minneapolis's funding process. Northern Spark was the most inconsistent, as we chased funding and struggled with scope.

Still, we managed to keep these platforms up and running, creating regular calls for artists and engagements with partner organizations and the public.

2. Community. We often struggled to answer the questions “Who is your community?” or “What community do you serve?” on grant applications. We wanted to simply say “artists” but knew that would be inadequate, as even self-identified arts funders told us frankly that they did not consider artists a community. Without a specific geographic or demographic constituency to name, we devised an answer that described a fluid three-part public: artists, partners, audiences. This is who we worked with and for, proudly.

3. Operations/Staffing. In the bell curve of NL's lifespan, there was a period from 2013 to 2019 when we had the capacity to stabilize many functions of our work. At that time, Ady Olson created necessary operational systems; Steve Dietz fundraised and worked magic to help realize artists' visions; I brought partners into the fold to expand participation in our projects; and later Teeko Yang established rigor in the processes of the Artist Council. Of course, it was always all a bit too much work, but we did best with a bare minimum of three full-time staff.

The Furniture Topples Over

Any organization moves through big and small shifts in staffing, programs, and funding during its lifetime. A strong yet flexible foundation prevents any one of those rifts from causing its demise. With a wobbly foundation, three-legged or otherwise, these sorts of changes amount to an eventual falling over.

When hearing about our decision to sunset, people often ask “what happened?” as if there is a succinct answer for these kinds of things. When faced with that query I initially found myself fumbling to respond. I didn't know how to pin down a precise beginning to the end. Sometimes it felt like our sunset started at the dawn of the first Northern Spark in 2011, when we knew, perhaps unconsciously, that we had started something that we couldn't reasonably keep up with. Or did it start when the Minnesota State Arts Board changed its festival grant guidelines? Or when the

There is also the classic three-part model of nonprofit funding: grants, individual donations, earned income. We had that tripod, too, and were always trying to equalize the legs and grow them.

downpours flooded the festival in 2014, or when sponsorships never reliably materialized? Or when Jerome funding ended, or when Steve retired? Or when Covid changed too many things, too quickly?

For us, the answer to the inevitable but dreaded “what happened?” is more like a slow motion standing-up-and-falling-down dance. Here is a subjective and incomplete timeline.

2016. We convened the Artist Council and organized NS around neighborhoods, introducing a wholesale shift in how we worked. This reoriented NL to be more aligned with our values and those of the artists and partners we wanted to engage. This is some of the most important work that we did, but it also introduced several structural and financial challenges. Tending the Artist Council required extra dedicated staff time, but without capacity to scale up our personnel, we squished this commitment into our three-person, already-at-max workflow. The NS budget was increasingly difficult to fund, as the festival ceased to be a shiny, new “downtown” program. We moved from charging all NS partner organizations a fee to sharing our grant funds with neighborhood partners, in recognition that community-based organizations did not have capabilities to source funding for arts projects like larger institutional arts partners did. (SEE: ARTIST COUNCIL, GREEN LINE, PARTNERSHIP.)

2018. After a decade of support, we lost funding for Art(ists) On the Verge. An exit grant extended the program through 2019, which became 2021 when Covid interrupted AOV11. First program leg down.

2019. The annual NL budget projects a significant reduction of income. This was the end of an era of large yet unrepeatable contracts, including IN Light IN and Illuminate South Loop, two civically funded projects that celebrated major, one-time city events. Our reduced budget meant we could no longer carry two full-time director-level salaries, moderate as they were (SEE: SUCCESSION). We decided to move forward on a change we had been talking about for several years. We named 2019–20 an intentional slow down year and put NS on hiatus to strategize and plan for the leadership succession of my assuming executive directorship as Steve Dietz stepped down, bringing NL’s staff to 1.25 positions. The staffing tripod fractures.

2020. Everyone slows down, unforeseeably. The pandemic hit NL differently from other organizations, due to our fortuitous timing of precanceling NS 2020.

Summer 2020. The Minneapolis City Council eliminates funding for the Creative City Challenge. Second program leg down.

Approximately 2021–22 (time was mushy). With the Artist Council, we regrouped, we revisioned, we pivoted. We made a plan to go smaller but deeper with NS: to root and re-grow along the University Avenue Corridor, small but steady while the economy “recovered.”

Fall 2022. We received only two of the six grants we needed for our revised NS. Third leg, kicked out. Suddenly, clarity began to dawn.

The Gift of Clarity

A set of questions circulated at NL since the (dusk-to-)dawn of NS. For years we wondered if we should focus all of our efforts on the festival, as it hit every single point of our mission and was our largest and most visible program, or if we should ditch it and its roller coaster of impossible funding and free-isn’t-free troubles. As we went around with this conundrum, we usually came back to the metaphor of the three-legged stool of programmatic stability: we believed we needed NS as much as all of our other programs. Probably exhausted by the seemingly unresolvable puzzle, we never decided one way or the other. We also, I also, loved it. It is very difficult to knowingly dismantle something you love.

The permission to seriously rethink ways of doing and being that the pandemic era made possible opened a space to radically reconsider what NL could be. The defunding of AOV, and the loss of CCC, finally showed me a way out of that circular question chase: forge ahead with NS and reconfigure AOV to more explicitly support artists working on site-specific, temporary projects, even aligning the fellowship with the festival. If we could find a new funder for AOV, and if AOV was part of NS, that funding could help provide stability for the festival, too.

Enter: *shifting philanthropic funds*. We’ve seen this phrase even more than usual during the past few years, and I suspect it means something a little different to everyone. From my vantage point, it meant fewer grants dedicated solely to the support of artists growing their practices. In any discipline. It meant steadfast arts funders dropping their arts giving to focus on basic needs such as housing, education, and other social services. It meant reduced awards for those who kept arts grants. It meant decreased individual donations. For us, who were never able to build out a major donor program, 2023 did not seem a good time to start one in order to compensate for the loss of foundation funds.

As the grant rejections arrived in September 2022, part of me responded with a breath of relief. When it comes to big decisions, all

I empathize with the Minneapolis City Council, which had to make difficult choices with the city’s pandemic budget. One of the voiced reasons to cut CCC was that it wasn’t Black-led. Then as now, I deeply respect that reason, yet it is also frustrating, because CCC could have become Black-led had it continued with a different producer.

In our medley of three-legged stool analogies, as the staffing and programmatic legs fell over, the support that never toppled was the one representing our community of creative people. The Twin Cities has an abundance of artists, organizations to collaborate with, and adventurous audiences who come out in the rain, in the middle of the night to participate.

we can ask for in this life is clarity, and those rejections were a clear sign. NL's work, even in its re-envisioned form, couldn't happen.

At the same time, grief and fear took the lead. I was then NL's only employee, but I brought together our small team of contractors (Ady as remote operations support and Val Oliveiro as Artist Council manager) and assigned us the task of magical brainstorming to see what we could collectively save. This was still the era of radical reshaping, right?

We spun up many budget and staffing scenarios. I called around and tried to get Northern Spark adopted by organizations more stable than NL. We talked about merging with a few organizations and inquired whether there was any legal precedent for melding with another arts group for the purpose of transferring or donating our 501(c)(3) number, and thus our budget history, to somehow pay forward our privilege to an organization unable to meet the minimum budget threshold for operating funds from the Minnesota State Arts Board. (Turns out an org's history is not a transferable asset.) Lastly, we budgeted for a possible organizational structure wherein we had no employees, a working instead of governance board, and a severely restricted, ticketed version of Northern Spark run by part-time contract staff.

Looking back, this was an exercise in frantic comprehensiveness—not wanting to give up without considering every single possible shape NL could become. We had been doing this for years, manipulating ourselves to fit within tight budget constraints. It was second nature to try to figure it out.

Choosing Sunset

I have clarity about the sequence of events and the outcomes that unfolded from the entangled decisions—ours and others'—over the years that led to this moment. But I am still befuddled about why it didn't work. How so many positive, life-changing experiences by artists and attendees and collaborators (we've heard so many stories) couldn't resolve our financial problems in the end. *How can something so beloved not succeed?*

The weight of making a decision to close an organization, even in extraordinary times, is heavy. For a long time, it was difficult for me to see that choice as anything other than taking something cherished away from people: a festival that helped people feel connected to each other and the places where they lived; opportunities for artists to realize a dream project or grow their network; the chance for everyone to see their city in a new light.

Through slow conversations with trusted colleagues, I came to understand our situation as one of empowerment. We could choose to close with grace, to build a final year of close-down projects that leave our history and knowledge publicly accessible.

In contrast to failure, choosing sunset is an act of joyful refusal to do less with less, to say no to ways of working that grind arts and culture workers (and others) down to our bones.

I believe that Northern Lights.mn is more than an organization with a 501(c)(3) status. We are a web of relationships and knowledge between individuals and organizations, developed over years of partnership. NL artists and staff have gone on to create new opportunities for themselves and others. This network of learning and making is alive.

What a Sunset Can Look Like

Spacious time to consider a graceful and responsible close.

A final program by the Mississippi River with two commissioned projects by local artists that reflect and inspire a new world for all of us.

An online call for memories to gather the public's stories of our work, and reconnecting with collaborators to collect and document their NL experiences.

Every useful object we owned, from iPads to trash bags, distributed to arts and community organizations we love.

All of our projectors adopted by a newly forming collective of BIPOC projection and media artists.

Our archive living on for years to come as a publicly accessible resource in the University of Minnesota's Performing Arts Archives.

This book.

Surrender, sorrow, sweetness, clarity, release.

For eleven years of Northern Spark festivals, the sunset was the beginning of something magical, collective, wandering, and unknown. May it be so again.

Colophon

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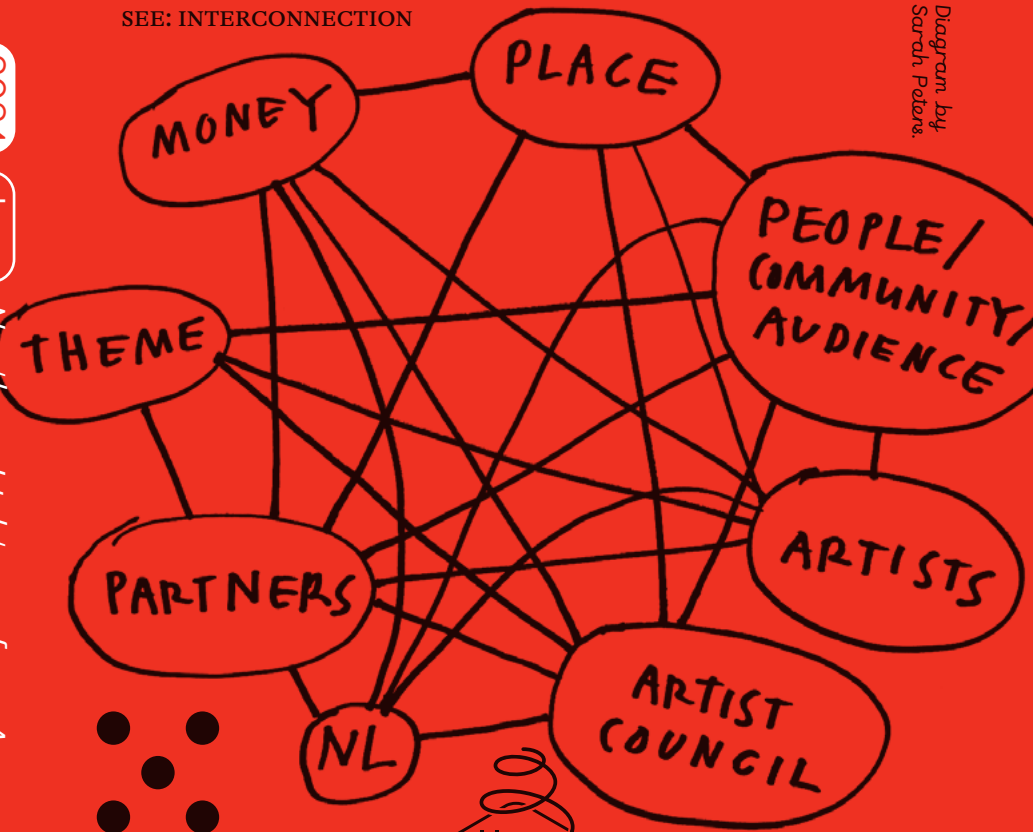
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Census performer watches the sunrise after Northern Spark 2016.
Photo: Max Haynes.



SEE: INTERCONNECTION

Diagram by Sarah Peters.



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