



WaterWalks

Creative Action for Community Justice

Project Overview

2018 - 2021

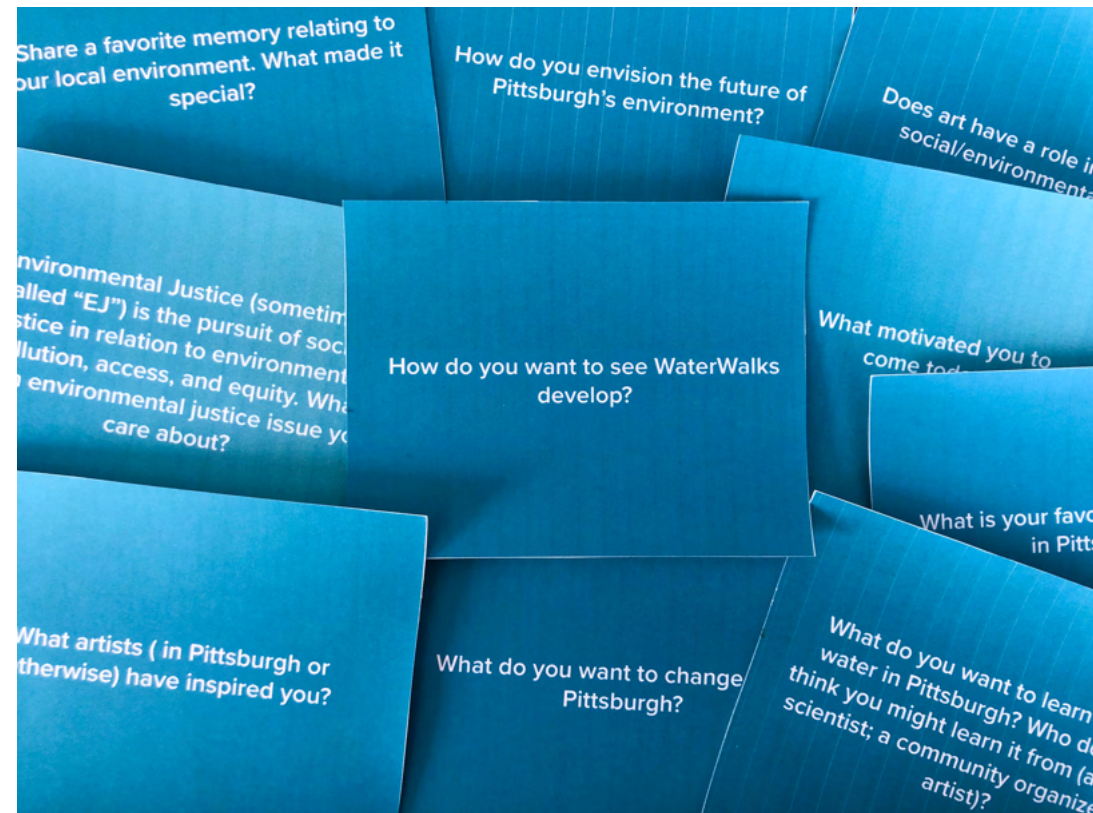
WaterWalks: Creative Action for Community Justice is a collaboration among artists, community-based organizations, scientists, and students to elevate marginalized perspectives in Pittsburgh's water crisis. The project is structured around participatory, place based experiences—what we've termed WaterWalks—that use art and other forms of creative intervention to advocate for water justice.

As an artist and undergraduate student in 2018, I co-initiated the project to bridge the divide between environmental research taking place at my university and issues of inequitable water access, contamination, and flooding experienced by residents of the same city. Responding to this gap, my collaborators and I have organized one community workshop and four WaterWalks, each to encourage knowledge-sharing among diverse stakeholders across Pittsburgh.

As a project that works to amplify overlooked perspectives, our first WaterWalks initiative was a community workshop in March of 2019. Artists, community leaders, students, and researchers partook to discuss water issues and community justice in the context of Pittsburgh. From this gathering, we collectively determined the trajectory of WaterWalks. We also drew upon the recommendations of workshop attendees to center issues impacting local stakeholders, including combined sewer overflow and watershed health. Finally, the gathering reaffirmed our commitment to use art and place based experiences to communicate multilayered issues and create space for discussion.

Zachary Rapaport
Founder & Director

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WaterWalks Kickoff Community Workshop

March 23, 2019

In collaboration with Pittsburgh-based community organizations and advocacy groups, the Kickoff Community Workshop invited local residents, artists, activists, and students to discuss the significance of water justice in Pittsburgh and lay groundwork for future WaterWalks events.

Partner Organizations: Repair the World Pittsburgh, Echoes of the Four Directions, Our Water Campaign, Pittsburgh United, African Healing Garden



WaterWalk: Wahdo:Gwas Wetland

April 6, 2019

In collaboration with Echoes of the Four Directions, WaterWalk: Wahdo:Gwas Wetland centered Indigenous knowledge within discussions of water-related issues impacting Pittsburgh. Lenora "Lee" Dingus, who is Haudenosaunee (Seneca), shared stories of water and Earl Dingus, Aniyunwiyaṣalagi (Cherokee), performed flute in Wahdo:Gwas wetland. The WaterWalk also included a guided wetland walk with Meg Scanlon, naturalist at the Latodami Nature Center.

Collaborators: Lee Dingus (artist and storyteller), Earl Dingus (artist and flutist), Meg Scanlon (naturalist)

Partner Organizations: Echoes of the Four Directions, Latodami Nature Center



WaterWalk: Negley Run Was Here!

May 4, 2019

Negley Run, like most streams in Pittsburgh, is invisible today. WaterWalk: Negley Run Was Here! was an effort to discover the traces of Negley Run and explore ongoing issues of combined sewer overflow (CSO) in the context of environmental racism. Guided by members of the community-based organization Living Waters of Larimer, the WaterWalk centered community-driven green infrastructure as the most just solution to chronic CSO.



Collaborators: Ian Lipsky (hydrologist), John Stephen (attorney and community development professional)
Partner Organization: Living Waters of Larimer



Walkers are guided through Liberty Green Park in Larimer. An ongoing project, the park will include a public art installation, outdoor community space, and serve as the head of the Little Negley Run stream.



WaterWalks Workshop on Wheels (2019)

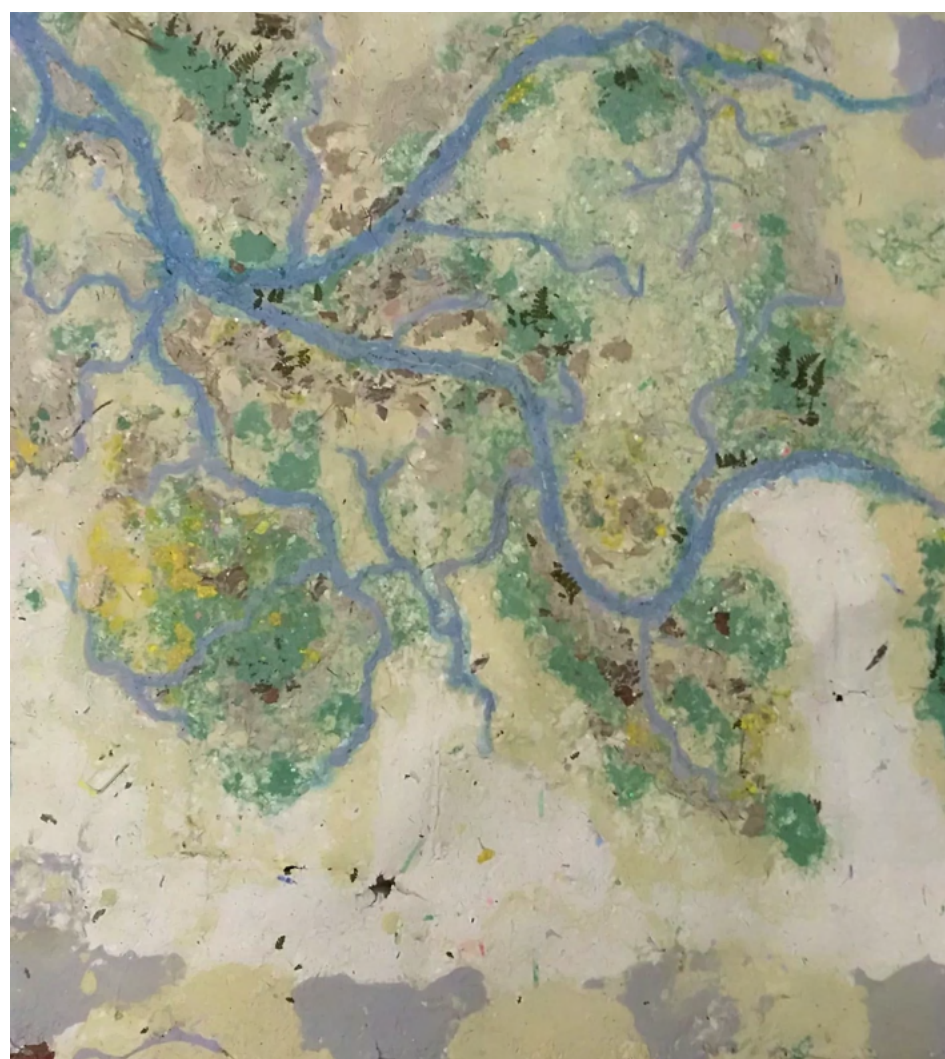
The Workshop on Wheels accompanied WaterWalk: Negley Run Was Here! With multiple interactive surfaces, the portable, bike-powered workshop allowed participants to record thoughts, ideas, and reflections during the walk.



WaterWalk: Mapping Pittsburgh's Watersheds

October 12, 2019

Watersheds are sites of interconnection: they link communities, supply our drinking water, and sustain ecosystems. In collaboration with artist Katy DeMent, we assessed the significance of Pittsburgh's regional watershed system and created a handmade paper watershed map of Pittsburgh. We also engaged with a "Digital Sandbox" created by CivicMapper and 3 Rivers Wet Weather. This interactive augmented reality "sandbox" demonstrated Pittsburgh's unique topography in relation to the regional watershed ecosystem.



Collaborator: Katy DeMent (artist)
Partner Organization: Construction Junction, CivicMapper, 3 Rivers Wet Weather

WaterWalk: Nine Mile Run

November 14, 2020

WaterWalk: Nine Mile Run traced the daylighted portion of Nine Mile Run stream to the Monongahela River. As we walked, our collaborators at the Nine Mile Run Watershed Association discussed their ongoing efforts to restore and protect NMR. Rebecca Forgrave, a PhD Candidate in Geology and Environmental Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, shared her research testing the stream's nitrogen levels and water quality. Once on the bank of the Monongahela River, artist Ginger Brooks Takahashi presented a tea ceremony for the protection of intimacy and immunity. Theresa Abalos presented a performance in conjunction with the tea ceremony, responding to the sounds already present in the NMR delta.

Collaborators: Ginger Brooks Takahashi (artist), Lindsey-Rose Flowers (NMRWA), Rebecca Forgrave (water scientist), Theresa Abalos (flutist)
Partner Organization: Nine Mile Run Watershed Association (NMRWA)





Ginger Brooks Takahashi presents a tea ceremony for the protection of intimacy and immunity at the Nine Mile Run Delta, Duck Hollow.