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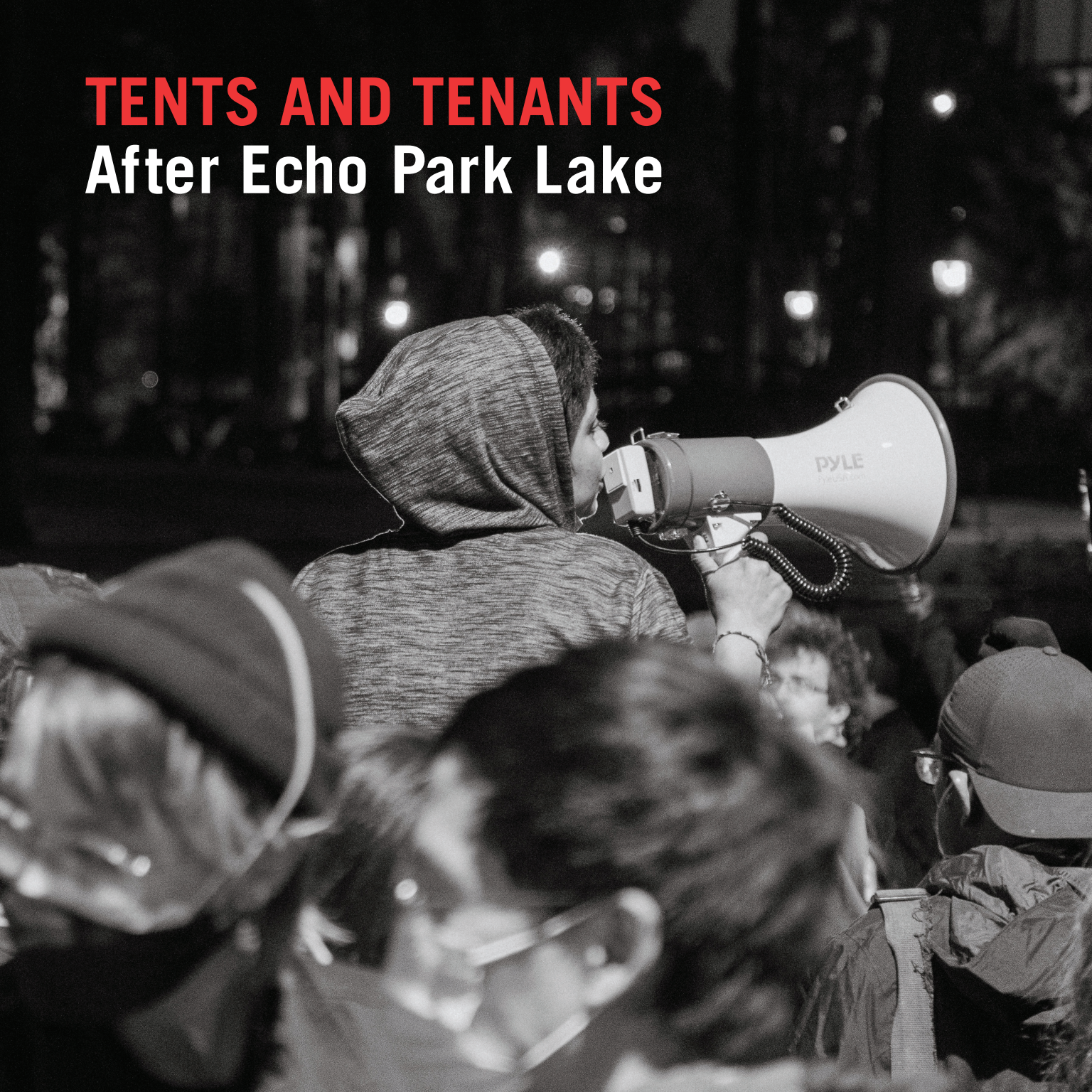
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# TENTS AND TENANTS After Echo Park Lake



## MARKINGS IN THE GRASS

Little scars that hold  
impressions  
of a recently vanished  
past  
On a lawn rolled out long  
ago  
to cover forest beds were  
felled for cash  
Recall that life once  
flourished here  
In a time beyond these  
wilted blades of grass  
Before our band faced  
dissolution  
When we laid this place  
for us to crash  
Any need was answered  
kindly  
& it was done only for the  
ask  
We grew our power and  
blossomed upward

In spite of the pesky  
Covid masks  
We made a choice to  
“Reside and raise  
solutions”  
To live life well while the  
living lasts  
So don’t disregard the  
markings left there in the  
grass  
Every blemish holds a  
deeper story  
Stories that sadly, were  
dismantled and swept  
away so fast  
What was left were  
lingering allegories  
Yellow markings  
imprinted timelines  
Intersecting our present  
experience with the  
unseen hidden vast

William Sens, Jr.

# TENTS AND TENANTS After Echo Park Lake



## THE ECHO PARK LAKE UPRISING

The Echo Park Lake encampment was an uprising. A settlement of tents in an iconic public park in the gentrified heart of Los Angeles, it challenged familiar protocols of public space. Subjected to racist police violence, encampment residents persisted in imagining and building an infrastructure of collective living. In one of the world's wealthiest cities, where poor people have been systematically criminalized and effectively banned, they practiced self-determination. Abandoned by the city during a global pandemic, the encampment became a community and even a commons, connecting unhoused and housed neighbors in a liberatory living room.

The Echo Park Lake encampment was a threat to the policed-propriety order of Los Angeles. In March 2021, the city's political class executed a police invasion, evicting residents at gunpoint and enclosing the park. The mass arrests, many of them of racial and housing justice advocates who stood with the encampment, were a stark reminder that the police state was unmoved by the Black Lives Matter protests demanding divestment from policing.

The Echo Park Lake displacement was a crucial moment in Los Angeles. Reminiscent of urban struggles in other cities, such as that over Tompkins Square Park in New York and People's Park in Berkeley, it revealed the state's blueprint for the spatial governance of poverty in an era of mass homelessness. In particular, it exposed a set of liberal lies whereby shelter and housing placements serve as the ruse for encampment sweeps. The very demands for "going inside" or for "hotels as housing" articulated by encampment residents are quickly weaponized to evict, scatter, and cage them.

*After Echo Park Lake*, as research, analysis, and archive, is a form of remembering which contests such disappearance. Constituted as a research collective at the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy, it brought together encampment, movement and university scholars to create a public history of the displacement and its afterlives. And now as an archive collective in partnership with the Skid Row History Museum & Archive it seeks to shift attention from displacement to encampment, foregrounding contestation and resistance that insist on poor people belonging and remaining in the city as home. In keeping with the political vocabulary of those who organized at and beyond the encampment, we invite you to consider how a community of tents allows us to reimagine a city of tenants, from unhoused tenants organizing against state programs of carceral housing to precariously housed tenants organizing against landlord power and real estate empires. *After Echo Park Lake* is the practice of a collective future.

Ananya Roy



SERVICES NOT SWEEPS

WHERE DO WE GO??

WHERE DO WE GO??

WHERE DO WE GO??

WHERE DO WE GO??

NOW LEASING  
1. BEHIND  
\$2,500 PER MONTH

WHERE DO WE GO??

RENTS = TENTS

Dodgers

## IT IS ONLY POSSIBLE TO FAIL IF WE FORGET

If, as Cuban militant Che Guevara put it, “the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love,” then the *After Echo Park Lake* Archive is a love letter to the future.

Convened by the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy, the *After Echo Park Lake* Archive began with a collective of housed and unhoused scholar-organizers who participated in the encampment uprising—myself included. Organizing through, and bearing witness to, the afterlives of the Echo Park Lake eviction, the collective’s members experienced the ways in which the encampment was remembered—and, crucially, *misremembered*. There were flashy news stories depicting the infrastructure built by encampment residents, the support of the homeless community by the housed community, and the mass eviction by militarized riot police. Marches, rallies, direct actions, and eviction defenses at Echo Park Lake all made their way into print—itself an achievement. But beneath and preceding these public accounts, we knew it was the much longer, quieter work required to build the power to fight and the power to stay. What about the months of weekly strategy meetings and outreach walks? Discussions during pick up basketball games? Planning schematics for building the showers? Neither spontaneously formed nor perfect by any stretch of the imagination, the organizing between housed and unhoused tenants at Echo Park Lake offers key lessons, ideas, and histories to homeless people’s movements of the present and future.

This became the principle of the archive: collecting records of the Echo Park Lake experience that might help housed and unhoused organizers of the future take up the fight in their own times and places. Specifically, this meant prioritizing materials not otherwise publicly available—those produced by encampment members and organizers themselves in the process of collective struggle. Crucially, we include memories in this collection process, and so the archive contains oral histories with key participants in the Echo Park Lake encampment uprising. We opted to collect materials that would otherwise disappear, materials that tell stories not heard in the press, materials that offer a blueprint for the struggle at Echo Park Lake—not to copy-paste into new contexts, but so that organizers of the future can understand the conditions in which we operated and the paths we chose to take. We also make clear that the eviction from Echo Park Lake was not the end of the story: the people involved kept fighting back.

For members of the *After Echo Park Lake* Archive Collective, the archive attempts to historicize the future. When we began to organize, there were few examples to which we could look. We now understand that this is not because homeless people did not organize in the past, but because there is no historical consciousness

of such movements in the United States. The *After Echo Park Lake* Archive attempts to cut against such forgetting. We hope to pass on these lessons of love and life—and conflict, confusion, and repression, too—to our descendants in struggle. Together, unhoused and housed people, organizing in solidarity, cracked open a window into a different world—one whose undergirding logic was not banishment but loving solidarity. Despite the mass eviction and the death and suffering it yielded, the archive suggests that we must not see Echo Park Lake as a failure—but part of a long arc of organized homeless people’s struggle in Los Angeles, the United States, and the world. It is only possible to fail if we forget.

To this end, we invite you to think with us about four eras of uprising at Echo Park Lake.

*Making and Defending Community* (2019-2020) documents the early organizational efforts and practices of the Echo Park Lake encampment and the Echo Park local of Street Watch LA, which organized housed tenants in solidarity with the unhoused community at the park. Ranging from potlucks to ambitious (and successful) eviction defenses, this era asks: what organizational practices build muscle for homeless communities to successfully fight back against sweeps?

*Comrades in Action* (March 2020-Fall 2020) charts the growth of the Echo Park Lake organizing in the context of the city’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The cession of homeless sweeps mandated by shelter-in-place deepened and built the Echo Park Lake community without constant state duress. What types of housing might be produced collectively by unhoused people without the interminable pressure of constant displacement?

*Mass Eviction* (Fall 2020-March 2021) emphasizes the long durée of the displacement: not just two nights in March 2021, but rather, an extended process of counterinsurgency that unfolded over months. It interrogates the conditions, forms, and timelines of state repression of homeless people’s organizations.

*Afterlives* (March 2021-present) offers a genealogy of the post-Echo Park Lake organizing, especially the formation of Unhoused Tenants Against Carceral Housing (UTACH) and the militant lives of comrades who died in the wake of the mass displacement and forced disappearance. It pushes us to consider what it takes to live and remember in the face of banishment.

Annie Powers



**WHAT IS THE  
BETTER WAY?**

## ARCHIVE AS OFRENDA

*"I am still here, and I will still be here,  
as long as there are people around who see me."*

—Jessica "Queen" Mendez, June 18, 1988 - May 10, 2024

In the creation of the historical record, forgetting is never a passive phenomenon, but a purposeful act which sustains a system of state organized violence, serving the ultimate goal of fatal dispossession. And it is in the gravity of this truth that we understand the practice of deliberate remembering as a requisite act of liberatory resistance.

Forgetting is not a shapeless phantom. It takes on an undeniable materiality in presence and practice. For the uprising at Echo Park Lake, the form of forgetting employed by the state assumed the shape of a vast and intentional dismemberment: *routinized sweeps and the destruction of personal belongings, dismantled collective life, severed family relationships* by scattering community members into carceral housing, unsheltered homelessness, and death. It is in contrast to such forgetting that *Tents and Tenants*, constituted from the archival collections of those closest to the uprising, takes up the task of deliberate remembering.

Cutting against the violence of forgetting, we assert that remembering must take on the shape of connection, a *radical joining together*, and a declaration of sacred ground, evoking the movement between worlds only made possible through the ofrenda or altar—and in

this case—the *archive*. Connectivity embodies the elemental design principles that became the material formation of the Echo Park Lake community. Created through collective process, the social and material infrastructure of this community thrived because of



its provisional, spontaneous, and modular nature, transforming sites of DIY public utility into time-spaces of deep engagement around shared conditions and the formation of a culture of solidarity.

Our pursuit of these principles through the design of this exhibition, like the ethos of the uprising itself, is reliant on the “visitor’s” continuation of the story through their own transformation from spectator to participant. In turn, the environment is

arranged carefully to provide the kind of accessibility characteristic of the community at Echo Park Lake, framing your movement through the space as it might have been had you gravitated to the park yourself. You

are invited to spend time with each other and with the narratives of the Echo Park Lake uprising as told by those that experienced it, *see yourself* in the images of militant resistance, understand your own power and vulnerability in the relationships held together through the complexities of love and conflict. *You will be asked to make things, respond, to take some risks.*

This exhibition sutures together the edges of our experiences and ambitions toward justice thus creating a threshold – a doorway between worlds. And like an ofrenda, this archive, alive with the revolutionary spirit of the collective body at Echo Park Lake, is a fugitive space that provides an urgency of memory, tasking us all with the work of taking the next step from the foundation the encampment community bravely built.

At the center of this radical memory work, stands the legacy of those comrades—*stolen from us too soon*, that defiantly chose to organize, claim a space within the territory of liberatory struggle. We center these leaders as the expert architects and now ancestors of this endeavor and we do them justice by choosing to see, radically remembering, and then taking up the task of militantly defending the people’s right to remain.

**Echo Park Rise Up—¡Presente!**

Kristy Lovich





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This project was made possible by the vision, struggle, and dedication of so many...

- Residents, organizers, leaders, and caretakers of the Echo Park Lake encampment who took it upon themselves to fiercely defend their community and its life-sustaining infrastructure
- *After Echo Park Lake* Research Collective  
Ashley Bennett, Jennifer Blake, Jonny Coleman, Hannah Cornfield, La Donna Harrell, Terrie Klein, Samuel Lutzker, Hilary Malson, Jessica “Queen” Mendez, Carla Orendorff, Gustavo Otzoy, Annie Powers, Chloe Rosenstock, Ananya Roy, Rayne Laborde Ruiz, William Sens, Jr., Pamela Stephens
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a project of Los Angeles Poverty Department  
Henry Michael Apodaca, Henriëtte Brouwers, John Malpede
- UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy  
Marisa Lemorande, Kristy Lovich, Ananya Roy

We share this project with you from atop unceded land of which the Tongva people are the original stewards. We recognize that the eviction of the Echo Park Lake encampment is a recent iteration of the long and persistent history of racial colonial terror and stolen land. “Banishment is about lack of justice,” Gustavo Otzoy reminds us. We are committed to advancing racial justice by dismantling systems of banishment.

Cover: *Queen Gives a Speech*, March 31, 2021, Digital Photograph, 11”x8.5”. Joey Scott. Queen gives a speech to the crowd on night one’s sweep defense of Echo Park. Photo courtesy of the artist. Page 1: *Unhoused Residents Speak with Capt. Alfonso*, January 24, 2020, Digital Photo, dimensions variable. Lexis-Olivier Ray. Photo courtesy of the artist. Pages 3-4: *Dawn Blockade at Echo Park Lake, January 24, 2020*, Work in Progress, Acrylic on Canvas, 10’x6’. Jed Parriott. Photo courtesy of the artist. Page 7: *There Must Be a Better Way*. Annie Powers. Digital photo taken post-eviction depicting altar installed after fence enclosure was erected by the city around the perimeter of Echo Park. 2021. Folder 03 Mass Eviction (Fall 2020–March 2021). Skid Row History Museum & Archive, Los Angeles, CA. Accessed November 1, 2024. Page 9: *Couch as Commons*, July 18, 2024, Digital Photograph, 11”x17”. Anthony Orendorff. Photo Courtesy of UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy. Page 11: *Altar to Echo Park Lake Movement Leaders*, July 18, 2024, Digital Photograph, dimensions variable. Kristy Lovich. Photo Courtesy of the artist. No image may be used or reproduced without written permission from the artist, except in the sharing of this project on social media or in the context of reviews.

*Tents and Tenants: After Echo Park Lake* is organized by the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy with support provided by the Mellon Foundation. It is on display February 1 – March 30, 2025 at the Skid Row History Museum & Archive, a project of Los Angeles Poverty Department. The *After Echo Park Lake* Archive can be accessed at the Skid Row History Museum & Archive.

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