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Courses

Title

Public Art and Social Justice: Mapping Mural Art and Narratives | Summer 2021
Studio Course

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PUBLIC ART AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: MAPPING MURAL ART AND NARRATIVES

FUTURE HISTORIES LAB UNDERGRADUATE URBAN HUMANITIES STUDIO CASE STUDY



Mural by Irot and Che, Oakland, California

WHY READ THIS CASE STUDY?

How can new technologies encourage students to observe, research, analyze, and share knowledge about urban environments? Can mapping public protest art and creating augmented reality projects and podcasts inspire students to ask deep questions about power, race, and privilege in urban neighborhoods?

In the wake of protests following the 2020 murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer, thousands of people gathered in overwhelmingly peaceful protests in Oakland, as across the country. Fearing unrest, many building owners in commercial districts covered ground-floor storefront windows with plywood.

Local artists used this plywood as canvases to express their outrage and resistance to racism and state violence. These temporary murals were important records of a historic moment when the Black Lives Matter movement gained new visibility.

However, within a year, many of the murals had been whitewashed or the plywood they were on was removed.

In order to preserve the meaning and memory of this protest art, students in Dr. Pablo Gonzalez' Summer 2021 course *Public Art and Social Justice: Mapping Mural Art and Narratives* used photographs of these ephemeral murals to create a virtual public gallery of this important art. The students in this class, which was supported by Future Histories Lab (part of the Global Urban Humanities Initiative) mapped the art and created augmented reality projects that allowed people visiting the storefronts to use their smartphones to see images of the murals that had been removed.

The students also tracked down and interviewed a number of the artists and created podcasts and audio clips for the augmented reality project that convey the artists' intentions to future generations.

The gallery, augmented reality projects, and podcasts can be accessed through links in this case study.

Keywords:
Public art, protest, activism, race, George Floyd, Black Lives Matter, murals, technology, augmented reality, podcasts, Oakland.

This case study is part of an archive of the UC Berkeley Global Urban Humanities Initiative and its Future Histories Lab, supported by the Mellon Foundation. The entire archive, including course case studies, faculty and student reflections, digital projects, symposia, exhibitions, and publications, is available at https://escholarship.org/uc/ucb_guh_fhl.

CONTENTS

4 COURSE DESCRIPTION

5 INSTRUCTOR

6 VIDEO LECTURE

7 STUDENT WORK: AUGMENTED REALITY

11 STUDENT WORK: PODCASTS

14 STUDENT WORK: MURAL MAPS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

PUBLIC ART AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: MAPPING MURAL ART AND NARRATIVES



INTERDISCIPLINARY UNDERGRADUATE URBAN HUMANITIES STUDIO

Humanities 131, Environmental Design 132, Ethnic Studies 190

Summer 2021, 4 Units

Instructor:

Dr. Pablo Gonzalez (Chicanx/Latinx Studies)

This interdisciplinary undergraduate urban humanities studio course focused on one important part of social movements: public cultural production. The recent movements for Black lives, struggles against gentrification and police violence has led to a growth of public art/muralism in urban locations other than public/business walls.

This urban humanities studio documented and mapped ephemeral murals and other forms of public art in Oakland, Berkeley, and Richmond, California that were produced to protest the murder of George Floyd. Students conducted interviews and ethnographic fieldwork with art crews, muralists, and artists who are producing public art across the Bay Area. In collaboration with artists, students produced public web galleries that used augmented reality technology to embed sound bites of interviews or information on the murals. Additionally, students documented these artists and their art through the production of a series of podcasts dedicated to centering the voices of artists and community partners furthering public cultural production.

THE INSTRUCTOR



Dr. Pablo Gonzalez

I am a first-generation Chicano scholar-activist/anthropologist who studies the political and cultural resonance of social movements. In particular, the resonance of indigenous social movements on Chicanas/os and “people of color” in the United States.

I teach courses on Chicana history, culture, ethnography, migration, and criminality. I am the recipient of the Distinguished Teaching Award at UC Berkeley 2022. I am also the director of the Ethnic Studies Changemaker project. (ssbc.berkeley.edu)

My teaching experience is extensive. I have taught introductory classes in Anthropology and Chicano Studies, as well as undergraduate/graduate topic seminars. I facilitate talks and workshops on decolonial thought in the United States, Mexico, and Spain.



FEATURED LECTURE

BERKELEY ARTS & DESIGN LECTURE:

DR. PABLO GONZALEZ- SOLIDARITY ART & MEMORY

“The students really tried to think about the message [of the murals] and how to respond, then also pay respect to the artist but also to the movement itself.”



Watch Dr. Pablo Gonzalez’ presentation on a year-long collaborative project that included the course Public Art & Social Justice, which documented the plywood protest murals created in downtown Oakland in response to the murder of George Floyd.

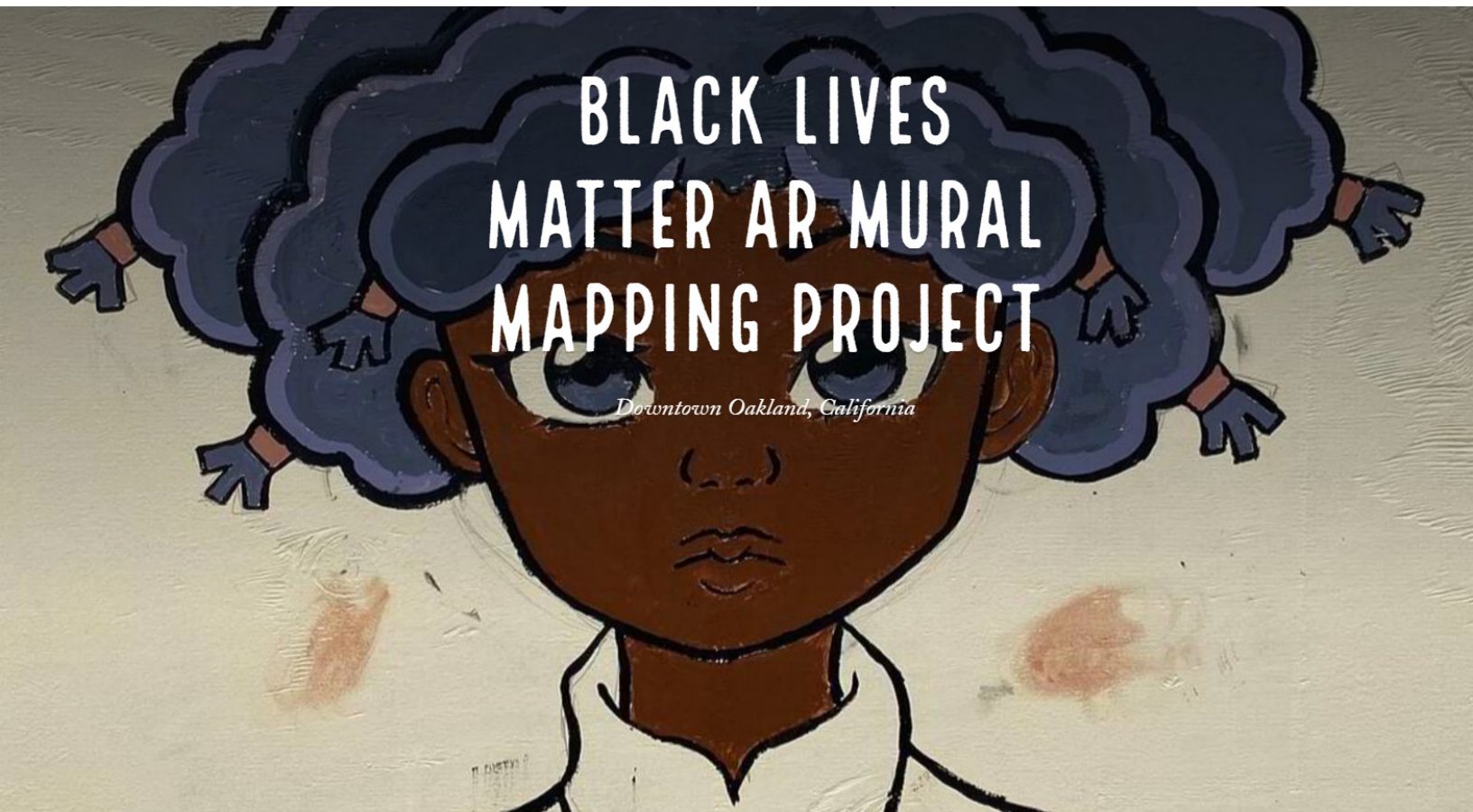
Arts + Design Thursdays: Creativity in Practice

Thursday, September 30, 2021

Recent social mobilization against systemic racism and violence has reshaped the contours of everyday life in cities across the United States and the world. These forms of protest are accompanied by acts of solidarity by artists and other cultural workers who extend the calls for justice by creating new methods of dialogue between distinctly different communities. Using mural-making and performance art, these artists are building on longer historical markers of solidarity and reigniting conversations about liberation and justice. Yet they are not permanent and are subject to erasure from urban landscapes. Watch Dr. Pablo Gonzalez as he presents on the year long collaborative project to document the recent plywood murals in downtown Oakland. What does it mean to produce public art in an era of permanent protest? What role do art collectives and activists see their murals playing in the broader struggles with which they aim to dialogue? What techniques and approaches to public art do they take? How can we respond creatively to the whitewashing of protest street art?

STUDENT WORK

BLACK LIVES MATTER AUGMENTED REALITY MURAL MAPPING PROJECT



Project statement by the students of the undergraduate interdisciplinary urban humanities studio course

Public Art & Social Justice: Mapping Mural Art and Narratives

The Summer 2020 George Floyd/Black Lives Matter protests in Minneapolis and throughout the United States continued the long struggle for Black lives. In Oakland, California, the protests led to further community mobilization against police violence. For instance, Black organizers won victories to end Police occupations of Oakland schools. Like many of the social movements that paved the way for the current moment, the circulation of struggles ushers in a splash of cultural production centered on amplifying the call for justice and the building of solidarity across communities. Oakland, California in particular is the location for a resurgence of political

mural art.

This mural art during the 2020 George Floyd/Breonna Taylor summer protests emerged from art collectives that for a long time have been of service to the many trans-local and transnational communities that they come from. In most cases, these displays of solidarity art, similar to the protests, are temporary. They are taken down and whitewashed, forgotten from the collective memory of a city, or erode over time. The use of plywood for the murals became a significant trait of the George Floyd/BLM murals in 2020.

The spontaneous painting of murals on plywood placed along walls, windows, and storefronts in Downtown Oakland represents these new temporary cartographies of struggle. For close to a year, the plywood murals brightened the gray of the city with a multiplicity of colors, reminding people of the continuous and important struggle for Black lives. During the early period of the protests, we saw plywood placed across building entrances and storefronts in cities across the country. Fearing looting and property destruction, business owners covered their storefronts with panels of plywood. This became a perfect canvas for artists in solidarity to walk alongside the dignified rage of Black people marching in streets across the country.

Recently, these plywood murals were taken down, some donated to local non-profits and museums, and others lost as businesses opened up after a year of protests and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We ask: what happens to this collective show of solidarity, of dignified rage, once the plywood is removed? How can we continue the insurgent practices of communities in resistance, protesters, and artists fighting for dignity and justice, fighting for Black lives?



Artist: @KiliMunoz (Photograph by Cynthia Ledesma)



There have been several mapping projects dedicated to locating the various plywood murals across the United States and abroad. The George Floyd and Anti-Racist Street Art Collective have started this important task, archiving murals in Minneapolis, MN. They also have an important list of articles and references to the plywood murals. Similarly, the Mapping Street Art Inspired by George Floyd website created by the University of Saint Thomas in Minnesota also has started mapping the murals using GIS tools.

Our contribution is to amplify the solidarity and community work produced by artists and community members over the last year through their plywood murals. In a city that is historically one of the arteries of the Black radical tradition, whitewashing Black insurgency and solidarity art on walls is a common occurrence. Our multimedia image gallery is a response to these recent developments in Downtown Oakland. We attempt to accomplish this through the storytelling of some of the artists who painted plywood murals in Downtown Oakland and through the use of augmented reality. The gallery attempts to do three things:

Remember the powerful tapestry of creativity and art that are the Downtown Oakland George Floyd/Black Lives Matter murals through an incomplete mapping of the murals across Downtown Oakland, California. Amplify the work of several mural artists who contributed to the plywood murals in 2020 through a podcast series called, "Plywood Stories: A Podcast Series Dedicated to the George Floyd/Black Lives Matter Murals in Oakland, California."

Respond to the removal of the murals through the use of Augmented Reality embedded in many of the images taken by us over the last year.

We hope this gallery can be a place of encounter for our collective liberation!

Special Thanks

A special thanks to the artists who agreed to be interviewed and be included in our podcast series: “Plywood Stories: A Podcast Series Dedicated to the George Floyd/Black Lives Matter Murals in Oakland, California.” We hope to interview more artists. If you painted any of the murals in Downtown Oakland and would be open to a short interview, we would love to hear from you. Our email is: ssbc@berkeley.edu.

We would also like to thank the students of Future Histories Lab’s summer 2021 course, who produced the AR effects and conducted the interviews.

Finally, we would like to thank the Ethnic Studies Changemaker Project “Scaffolding Stories/Building Communities” at UC Berkeley and in particular, the photographers who took pictures of the murals during summer 2020. Thank you to Cynthia Ledesma, Pablo Gonzalez, Abraham Ramirez, and Diana Negrin.

Mural in Oakland California, artist @Art_Blane



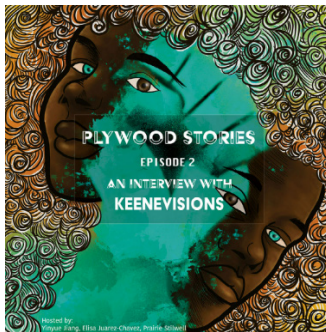
COURSE PODCAST: RADIO CARACOL DE BERKELEY: PLYWOOD STORIES

A Podcast Series Dedicated to the George Floyd/Black Lives Matter Murals in Oakland, California.



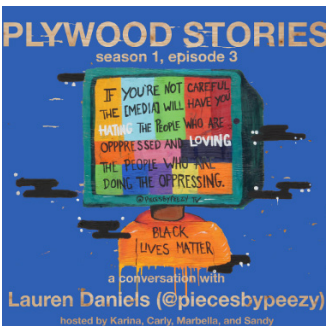
Episode 1: A Conversation with Artist Blaze

We spoke with Justin, AKA Blaze, an East Bay artist born and raised. He is one of many artists that contributed to the multiple murals that took over downtown Oakland after the death of George Floyd in May 2020. He shared his journey as an artist and his thoughts on what it means to be in solidarity with a movement.



Episode 2: A Conversation with @keenvisions

Co-hosts Elisa, Clare, and Prairie interviewed muralist KeeneVisions on his journey to become an artist from Seattle to creating portrait-like murals in Los Angeles and the Bay Area. We discussed how he chooses which public figures to be the central point of his murals and his process on organizing with the local communities where his murals will be displayed.



Episode 3: A Conversation with @piecesbypeezy

On this episode of Plywood Stories, we talked with artist Lauren Daniels, a.k.a. Peezy, or @piecesbypeezy on Instagram. She painted a mural in Oakland in summer 2020 amid the Black Lives Matter protests and the murder of George Floyd, which grabbed attention through its bold colors and a bold quote from Malcom X, putting the young artist on a path full of potential.



Episode 4: A Conversation with Artists Keena and El Maldito

In this fourth episode of the Plywood Stories project, we interviewed two artists: Keena and El Maldito. They talked about the intersections between art, spirituality, activism. You can find them on Instagram @lamakina510 and @elmalditoarte.



Students in a recording studio installed in a former faculty office, recording the podcast *Plywood Stories*. Students recorded interviews with the artists who created the ephemeral protest art and edited them into integral parts of the augmented reality art mapping project. They also created publicly accessible podcasts featuring the interviews.



THE USE OF AUGMENTED REALITY



Our mural gallery is not only an archive of many of the murals painted in Downtown Oakland over the course of several months during the summer 2020. It also includes links to a podcast series called Plywood Stories, dedicated to the stories of many of the artists who painted the murals.

Upon attempting to map the plywood murals across Downtown Oakland this summer, we witnessed the taking down of the murals. As businesses and buildings reopened due to an end to COVID-19 public restrictions, the plywood was removed in an attempt to bring back a sense of normalcy to the city. Due to this dynamic, we pivoted towards the use of augmented reality to show the murals as they would have been experienced had they not been taken down. Artivive and Adobe Aero are platforms used in this gallery. We hope that these augmented reality storytelling apps invite you to think, act, and dialogue about the messages embedded in the murals.

ARTIVIVE

Augmented Reality Art Exhibition

Some of the artworks in this exhibition are digitally extended. To experience them, install the **Artivive app** on your phone. Open the app and point your phone at the marked artworks to make them come to life.

How it works in three easy steps:



1. **Install** the Artivive app



2. **Find** artworks marked with the Artivive icon

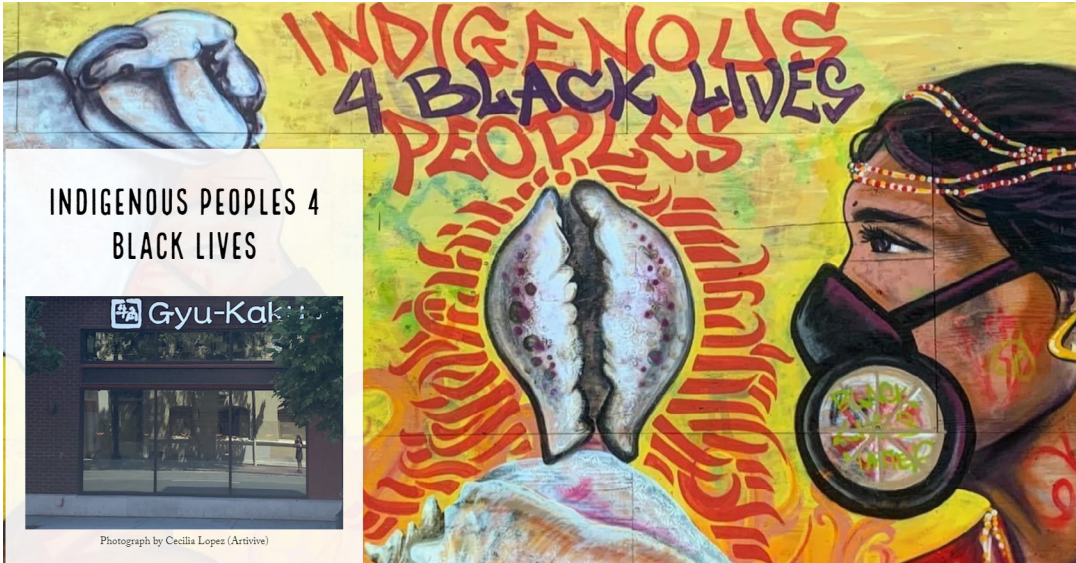


3. **View** the artwork through your smartphone



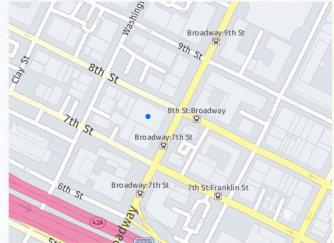
Scan the QR code to download Artivive on your smartphone.

FEATURED MURALS



Artist: @cececarpio

459 8th St. and Broadway Oakland, CA



Use Artivive on the image above.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES 4
BLACK LIVES



Photograph by Cecilia Lopez (Artivive)



JUSTICE FOR ERIC SALGADO



Mural by El Maldito

Artist: El Maldito

Plywood Stories S1 E4



Use Artivive on Image Above.

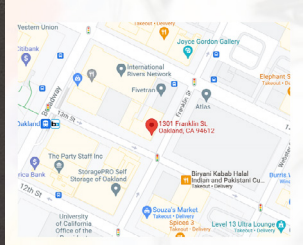
GEORGE FLOYD MURAL



Photo taken by:



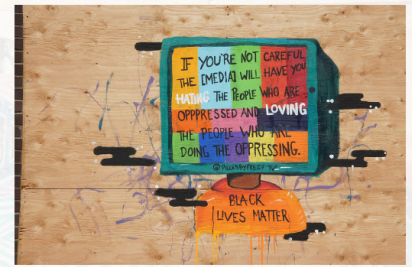
1301 Franklin St. Oakland, CA 94612



Use Artivive on this image



BLACK LIVES MATTER TV



Mural by: @piecesbypeezzy

Artist: @piecesbypeezzy



Use Artivive for Image Above.

MALCOLM X MURAL



Photo taken by:



2000 Broadway Oakland, CA 94612



Use Artivive on this image

HUMANITIES 131 / ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN 132 /
ETHNIC STUDIES 190