Upper Harbor Terminal Park
Public art plan

Juxtaposition Arts // August 2021
Project team

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Introduction

Public art tells stories and connects people to their history. Public art makes spaces reflect the experiences and energy of our communities.

Since 2017, Juxtaposition Arts has worked with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board and the Upper Harbor Terminal (UHT) Park Design Team to shape the future park. We’ve organized bike rides and bus tours to bring Northsiders to the Upper Harbor Terminal. We’ve also gathered design ideas through zines and pop-up workshops.

The public art planning process began in 2020. Our team of artists, designers and organizers working alongside youth apprentices identified why the future park will be important to the Northside. From this, we developed five storylines that can be told through public art.

We interviewed people who were experts on the storylines and asked them for specific stories and themes that could be told through public art. The youth apprentices on our team then turned these stories into concepts for public art pieces.

Through consulting with the Upper Harbor Terminal Community Advisory Committee, designers at Perkins & Will, and staff at the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board, we finalized eleven public art concepts that are presented here.

The concepts are described through sketches, quotes from the interviewees, and images of art pieces that inspired us. The concepts offer direction for artists working at the future park. They show how stories can become artwork, and how artwork can reflect our Northside.
Public art storylines
We have identified five storylines for art in the Upper Harbor Terminal Park. These themes act as inspiration for the art, and will connect to what people learn about and experience in the park.

The five storylines are:

• Histories of ecological harm and disconnection from this place

• Environmental justice work and vision

• Appropriation and re-appropriation of this place

• Settlement history of the Northside

• Food sovereignty in Black, Native and POC communities

During 2020, JXTA interviewed ten experts and community leaders about the storylines. We also did additional research, looking at public art in other spaces and going deeper into what we learned in the interviews.

Our interviewees included:

• Louis Alemayehu
• Representative Fue Lee
• Marlin Lewis
• Maggie Lorenz
• Princess Haley
• Naida Medicine Crow
• Roxxanne O’Brien
• Bob Rice
• David Snyder
• Say Yang
• And an anonymous artist

Highlights from the interviews are provided as an appendix.
Ecological harm & disconnection:

Over the last two centuries, the Mississippi River has been altered to benefit settlers, businesses and industry. Before Minneapolis was settled by European-Americans in the 1840s, the Mississippi River flowed swiftly around many islands and over a large waterfall. The Falls, called St. Anthony by settlers and Owamni yomni by Dakota, was destroyed by timber and flour mills. Today, the Falls have been replaced with a concrete spillway.

As milling declined, locks and dams were built to make the River through the Northside accessible to barges. Construction of the lock at St. Anthony Falls/ Owamni yomni destroyed Spirit Island, which was a sacred place for Dakota. The destruction of this and other islands also destroyed valuable habitat for migrating birds and other animals.

Barges were supposed to propel industry along the River and at Upper Harbor Terminal. Instead, industry lagged. In 2015, the lock at St. Anthony Falls/ Owamni yomni was closed to prevent the spread of invasive carp. This led to the closing of Upper Harbor Terminal, but left the River deeply scarred.

Railroads and highways were also built to open the river banks to industry. As a consequence, the Northside was disconnected from the river. To this day, the Northside’s connection to the river is blocked by the I-94 freeway, two blocks of industrial land, and a lack of desirable and safe access points.

The river has the power to heal our communities but first we need connection.

To this day, the Northside’s connection to the River is blocked by the I-94 freeway, two blocks of industrial land, and a lack of desirable and safe access points. (Image from Hennepin County Library)
Environmental justice work & vision:

Industry up and down the river has polluted the water, soil and air. Although businesses that remain on the river continue to pollute, there is a movement by local leaders to shut down these polluters.

One of these fights has been against Northern Metals, a metal shredding company operating in North Minneapolis along the Mississippi River. In 2010, they were caught out of compliance with their air pollution permit. In 2012, the community stepped up and challenged Northern Metals. After a years-long fight, the community ultimately won. Northern Metals was ordered to pay a settlement and shut down their metal shredding operation in North Minneapolis by 2019. $600,000 of this settlement went back into the community.

When 2019 came around, Northern Metals refused to stop and claimed they weren’t ready to move. But the community members intervened in the litigation. Northern Metals agreed to a large monetary settlement and finally stopped shredding metal in their North Minneapolis location.

Within that time, organizers pushed for policies including the Minneapolis Green Zones policy. The policy was created by community members and addresses the disproportionate environmental burdens on neighborhoods with majority Black residents, Native residents and residents of color. The hope of this policy was to address these burdens in ways that won’t displace residents when the environmental burdens are removed.

As community organizing forces the industry and polluters along the North Minneapolis riverfront to change and move out, it’s critical that the Northside community is at the table to envision and drive what is next for this environmental justice community.

An environmental justice rally on the Lowry Avenue bridge.
Appropriation by artists:

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board are not necessarily the first people to think of the Upper Harbor Terminal as a public resource and potential park. Soon after the barge terminal closed in 2014, local graffiti artists began using the domes and other structures as canvases, redesigning the area as an outdoor gallery.

This DIY approach to placemaking lent a more public identity to an area that for many Northsiders was somewhat of a mystery. It even turned Upper Harbor Terminal into a place to visit for out-of-town graffiti artists, and it became a popular site for filming music videos.
Food sovereignty in BIPOC communities:

The Northside has been labeled a food desert. Working against this lack of access to fresh foods is a movement of growers and chefs, gardeners and organizers, entrepreneurs and non-profits. Many of these efforts are led by BIPOC community members who are working to create access to fresh and healthy food and bring wellness, ownership, and autonomy to the community.

Upper Harbor Terminal has the potential to amplify Northside food justice efforts. Upper Harbor Terminal could offer space for community gardens, processing of raw foods into products for sale, and for food vendors and restaurateurs.

For too long, native communities have been denied their rights to gather plants from public lands for medicine, food and other uses. This park, along with all the parks in the Minneapolis Parks system, should be a place where Native community members can harvest.

Food is a central part of family and community gatherings, celebrations, as well as health and sustainability-focused education. Through cooking and eating together, people can learn about the relationships between the land and our wellbeing.

JD Rivers Children’s Garden on the Northside.
Settlement history of the Northside:

The Northside is the most diverse part of Minneapolis. We are defined by our population of resilient people who came together from different historical traumas. We have always been a revolutionary community, and we are defined by our victories as much as our struggle.

From the ground up, a lot of us have had to recreate a vision for our community. We have this history, and now we have a new generation who is creating a new vision and reality. What will this be for the new generation?

Bartenders at the Riverview Supper Club, a beloved Northside gathering spot that stood at 2319 West River Parkway. Photograph by Charles Chamblis, 1984. (Minnesota Historical Society).

Houses along the Mississippi River near Lyndale Avenue North and 50th Avenue North. Photograph from 1936. Houses were demolished soon after. (Minnesota Historical Society).
Public art concepts
We are thinking about art at the Upper Harbor Terminal in a very broad way. We’re not only thinking about murals and sculpture, but art that is integrated into the park’s spaces and infrastructure. Public art can even include events led by or featuring artists.

Here are icons that show how we can categorize and organize the different types of art.
Northside history & resilience

We need to acknowledge the disparities and trauma that have led us to where we are, and also our resilience and successes.

This mural lifts up the resilience of the Northside. It visually tells us the stories of important events and leaders in the Northside’s history. The mural could lead us to deeper connections. We may not know these stories and it could bring us to a better understanding of different cultural perspectives.

• Could connect to an online resource that goes deeper into the stories in the mural.

Right now, I think that we really need to highlight some of the successes that we have around the North Side and not just focus on some of the disparities.

- Rep. Fue Lee

We need to lift up not just those moments when the community was attacked... [but] how they coped and how they organized.

- David Snyder
A stage could be installed before the park is fully constructed to open more space for Northsiders to connect as a community and get familiar with the Upper Harbor Terminal.

The stage could also be a long term part of the park. The stage can present music and other performances that highlight different talents and cultures in the community.

- The addition of a low stage platform and benches by the silos (along with simple lighting and other basic elements) could open the space up for more Northsiders to access and connect to sooner than later.

The wisdom within a poem, planting ideas in people’s heads, so that they begin to see the world in a different way... [Music] can give people access to their highest wisdom.

- Louis Alemayehu
Stories up & down the river

This river has so many stories to tell...

Artwork could tell the story of St. Anthony falls, which is sacred land for Native Americans who live here.

Artwork could tell the story of the lock and dam that enabled barges to go above the falls. This created the industrial corridor at Upper Harbor Terminal.

And, artwork could tell the story of a prominent Black establishment called the Riverview Supper Club which served as a communal gathering space. And art could tell so many more stories.

- An artwork that connects people’s perspective up and down river, from the past to the present.
- Could be along the river wall, on a railing or in the pavement.

Education-wise, … well that’s water that ran through my wild rice so there could be some type of teaching moment there about where this water came on its way to the Gulf and what it provides.

- Bob Rice

River of Iron, Tammy Ringler
Gathering space

This would be an intentional space for teaching and gathering, and for Native communities to connect to culture and tradition.

Creating connection to Dakota language and to honor it on Dakota land is necessary since the land has been exploited for years.

This would be a much needed outdoor space that honors the water, land, and Native & communities.

- Space for gathering and teaching.
- Emphasis on space for Native community to connect to culture, tradition and language.
- Foster cultural interchange among communities on the Northside.

A safe space for ceremonies and healing in nature... We want it to be educational, where people are learning about the history and the culture, that this originally is Dakota homeland.

- Naida Medicine Crow

Upper Harbor Terminal Park // Public Art Plan
Communing with the river

Communing with the river is about creating a calm space, in contrast with the more active areas in the park.

It would be situated near the water with plenty of plantings and shady places to rest.

During our engagements we noticed a theme of water being described as reflective, calming and sacred. We’re thinking about how to use plantings, artist-designed seating or other artistic elements to appreciate those qualities.

- An intentional space for sitting near, touching and connecting with the river.
- Sheltered from the activity of the park to be more contemplative.

The Mississippi is very important to us and it’s a part of us because our community is really big on hunting and fishing. And so I grew up with my grandfather going to Mississippi River every day. This is throughout his lifetime, every day, just fishing.

- Say Yang
Sensory & ecology path

A sensory path would be about holistically heightening the senses, and highlighting the subtle textures, sounds, scents and sights of the park.

It is important to realize how our senses are interconnected and what role they play in the way we enjoy our space. We would integrate artist designed sensory focused infrastructure to deepen peoples connection to the park.

• Sense stimulating path to enhance the connection to the land and sensations of being by the river.

• Opportunities for teaching about river ecology, storm water, soil, plants and animals of this area.

Everything has its own spirit... [With native plants] you would be able to commune with those plants and connect with the spirits of those beings.

- Maggie Lorenz
Self-guided tour

The self guided tour would help people make their way through the park and learn the history of the site and the Northside.

The guideposts could be placed around the site before the park is even finished. Or they could be placed in other locations around the Northside to help people find the park. We could also connect to more information online.

- Prompts will help you navigate your way around the future park like a scavenger hunt or a maze, while asking you about your vision for the river and park.

- Materials like the large concrete blocks that are already at Upper Harbor Terminal could be used as a canvas.

It seems like it would be a beautiful place for people in the neighborhood just to walk down to and get more familiar with.

- Marlin Lewis
People-powered music & light

We want to make clear that the park is about people – not industry, as it is now. It’s about the future.

Art could be lit up by pedaling, or interactive sculptures could light up or play music when you move. Or people’s movement can do other things like generate electricity to charge phones.

This artwork lets people interact with each other and have fun while they move their bodies and get their blood pumping.

- By pedaling, you can control your surroundings.
- Play music, light up lights in an artwork, charge your phone, and more.

I think art that is challenging the narrative that this is the industry’s river, and it’s always been the industry’s, and it’s always going to be... to counter that story with the art would be great.

- Roxxanne O’Brien

Rock the bike, Oakland, CA

Light-up seesaws
Rotating mural & free-wall

Graffiti plays an important role in the re-appropriation of the Upper Harbor Terminal site.

This is due to the artists coming here and seeing an opportunity. That opportunity has raised awareness and now the site is a point of attraction. The fact that we are here now shows that their hard work has paid off and we want to keep that energy going.

- Highlight artists’ talents and graffiti tradition at Upper Harbor Terminal.
- Every couple of years, new murals could respond to a new theme.
- One wall available as a “free wall” for artists to paint on.
- Could use structures that are saved or new surfaces that are a part of the park.

If people are coming to Minneapolis, it’s a place that they want to at least go and see. It’s a street art destination now... a very significant place in the Twin Cities’ graffiti scene.

- Anonymous artist

Current murals at Upper Harbor Terminal
Industrial play structures

When people go to Upper Harbor Terminal, they are amazed by the industrial structures.

Instead of sending everything to the landfill or scrapyard, pieces of the relics could be incorporated into artist-designed play structures, seating, bike racks or other elements.

- Creatively reuse pieces of the industrial relics (metal, stone, structural elements, etc.).
- Incorporate signage with photos and stories of the industrial and labor history of the site.
- Acknowledge the industrial history, while creating a new use for some of these materials and keeping them out of the landfill or scrap yard.

The structures... and all that, I always thought that would be really a lot to get rid of. The potential for that thing to be re-purposed into something cool was just so, it seemed so obvious, you know?

- Anonymous artist

City Museum, St. Louis, MO
Environmental justice eyes

The Northside community has done a huge amount of organizing to reduce the pollution that the community is exposed to, and to open up the riverfront.

Public art at Upper Harbor could acknowledge this organizing, and tell people about the work that’s still underway. It could also be a reminder to nearby industry that the community is paying attention.

- Symbolically saying to the polluters in the area, “We’re watching you.”
- Bringing awareness to the fight against environmental injustice on the Northside.
- An opportunity to make a permanent monument on the land that has and is being fought for.

Right here is where you can start to turn it around. But you got to acknowledge the past. You got to acknowledge those pains, those things that have happened, those injustices in order to know what not to do again.

- Princess Haley

Untitled, J.R.
Phasing artwork

This park will be under development for the foreseeable future. But we shouldn’t wait to start putting up art! Some of these concepts lend themselves to quick or temporary installation. This includes:

- Performance stage
- Murals and free-wall
- Self-guided tour
Conclusion

The story of the Mississippi River and the story of Minnesota are one and the same. The story of the river and the story of our culture is always in flux because like the banks of the Mississippi, our culture moves. By telling stories of the river, we’ll better learn who we are.
Interview highlights
Community organizer, activist, and politician representing District 59A in the Minnesota House of Representatives

“And so right now, my job is to fight for the residents of the Northside over at the state capital, to bring your voice over to the capital and see what can we do to improve the lives of our neighbors here on the north side and also to move Minnesota for everyone.”

“So the river is really important for me as resident on the north side because that’s a source of drinking water for all of us and we need to do more to protect that. And the river also is a source of food for many communities.”

“Unfortunately, for some of us living on the Northside, we don’t really have access to the riverfront because of the big heavy industries and having Interstate 94 cutting across the north side, to separate us from the river. And so it’s so important for me as a state legislature to see what I can do over at the state level to help increase access to the riverfront.”

“But I want the art there to reflect the people living on the north side and to actually tell the history of the north side. And I hope that everybody else working on their project will reach to all of our committee members so that we have something that’s reflective of everyone on the Northside.”
Poet, educator, musician, and multicultural spiritual elder

“I have the strong belief that we have to return to indigenous ways of living, where like our ancestors lived in harmony with the natural world. They didn’t try and control it or dominate it or exploit it.”

“I have this strong belief that if we don’t have a healthy environment, we can’t have healthy people, or a healthy economy. And we’re at a time when we need to have our dramatic change, in our economy. [...] And the solution is really going to be moving toward a green economy and localizing that economy. Like for instance, we need to localize the production and distribution of food.”

“If you get out of the way, nature will repair itself. So we need to think about that truth, that reality, and figure out what can we do here? What can we remove, to allow the river to rejuvenate itself?”

“In terms of poetry, you could put written poetry in places, in strategic places that people would see, and it’s almost like the wisdom within the poem, planting ideas in people’s heads, so that they begin to see the world in a different way. And you don’t see the interconnection between all of life. So messages that help people understand and see how everything in creation is interconnected, it’s a living whole.”

“The highest calling of art connects you to past, present, and future, and gives you a sense of how you need to be, in order to be someone who inherited the best of the past, lives it the present, and passes it on to future generations. So it’s not about being pretty, it’s about being beautiful in the deepest sense, in the most expansive sense, in the most healing sense.

“And if art is not about healing, it’s not serving its highest purpose. And we’re living in a world that needs healing. And the message, unless we get really smart, is that we human beings have related to the world in a harmful way. And the way for the world to be healed, is either for us to correct our behavior, or to be eliminated.”
Marlin Lewis

North Minneapolis community organizer and wellness advocate

“It is so beautiful and it’s even more beautiful with easy access to the river right there, where the bank is, and that right there could lead so many people to appreciate the river more.”

“It seems like it would be a beautiful place for people in the neighborhood just to walk down to and, you know, get more familiar with.”

“It means a lot to me that everyone in the community is actually included in this thing and remembered.”

“It’ll bring us all together. Every time I think about when you say the river, I just think about ports and bringing in merchandise, spices, foods, whatever it is [...]. The river is so valuable it is a passageway for us to all connect from different societies to trade.”

“Once you start to study science, water is the main element that without that vitamin K, C, no food, no form of nutrition works. Not even iron. So without water and air, nothing works. It’s one of the main keys to like life.”

“A lot of people don’t realize water is magic and it will change your life even by living by it, just the energy of it. A lot of people I know they’re like, ‘Well we don’t know too much about energy and all that spooky talk.’ But simple and plain, the river, it’s a whole other dynamic and it’ll help the community. I could see the community becoming a lot closer due to that.”
Maggie Lorenz

Executive Director of the Lower Phalen Creek Project and Wakan Tipi Center Director

“The Dakota people, we never considered ourselves better or worse, that we have dominion over plants or animals or anything. We have a spirit, this cottonwood has a spirit, this dandelion has a spirit. And we all just have a spirit, and we are all related.”

“Everything has its own spirit. So when you’re talking about the plantings and all the native plantings, being able to commune with those plants and connect with the spirits of those beings.”

“We didn’t build monuments to things. Nature is the church.”

“If there was space that would ever be used for ceremony purposes, it would need to be space that has a reasonable expectation that there could be privacy for the people who are participating in the ceremony, and a way that would be enforced.”

“The public art could put Native Americans and Dakota people in the modern context.”
Co-Founder and Senior Engagement Officer at Appetite for Change

“The work I do is environmental justice work. I would finally describe it as that and also teaching. The EJ work that I do around food and policy systems and environment changes, I never saw it as environmental justice work. It is so much stigma behind being a tree hugger or somebody who recycles or compost.

“Having community gardens benefit the community because they give an alternative to structural everything [...]. If you have a community on garden, then you have access to health and wellbeing just from being in the sun. And if you can grow those herbs to keep you healthy, then you have access to that on your own outside, which will help you be less dependent on the medical system.”

“When it comes to thinking and education, there’s so much you can learn from growing your own food. If you’re in a corner in a garden, it’s a safe space you can be in where right now our other corners are covered with littered teddy bears and balloons from street memorials. There’s conversations to be had in those gardens. They’re safe spaces. Like Michael Cheney would call it, a classroom without walls.”

“Space, ground, grow food, land. I do think it should be a part of [the park], but until y’all asked me, I always separated being able to grow food in the parks from the Upper Harbor Terminal park. I never saw it go together. Because I just, in my mind, I feel like in the beginning maybe the plan wasn’t really for us. So how do we make it for us?”

“Right here is where you can start to turn it around. But you got to acknowledge the past. You got to acknowledge those pains, those things that have happened, those injustices in order to know what not to do again, they have to be acknowledged.”
Naida Medicine Crow

Domestic Violence Advocate at the National Indian Women’s Resource Center

“Yeah, it’s all Dakota land. And then we did share it with the Anishinabe people too. So they have land ownership rights to it too. But it’s been mostly Dakota land, and it does suck that people forget.”

“There’s some talk about asking them to designate a spot where we can hold ceremonies or sweats, or stay connected to the river [...]. And it sucks that we have to do that because this is our homelands, and we have to ask permission to do those kinds of things. But it has to be done, so that’s what we’re going to do.”

“I’m just attracted to the lakes around here. And so part of my story is that I grew up in foster care. And kind of not knowing who I was there for a while. And I had to come full circle. And along the way, I was guided [by the] rivers and waters.”

“Being connected to the water is, I don’t know how to explain that, it’s just something that indigenous people have in them, I think. And then I think it’s passed on to our ancestors too.”

“I want to see if we can get something designated, like I said, to do ceremonies there. Because some of our people are so disconnected, and some people need healing. And it’s just all around something that’s really needed for the community.”
Roxxanne O’Brien

Co-founder of Community Members for Environmental Justice and educator at Juxtaposition Arts

“I think that if we built land to be regenerative as opposed to just sustainable, because there is a difference between sustainable and regenerative. Sustainable is like, it sustains itself. Meaning it takes care of itself so that we have enough. But regenerative means things are done and plants are planted in certain ways, and the land is taken care of in a certain way, where all the needs are being met. And it’s not just one focus on just barely making it.”

“One of the companies over here, right across from the Upper Harbor Terminal is called GAF, and they make, I want to say, 50% of the nation’s roofing materials. […] They make 25% of their billion dollar profits off the North Minneapolis location alone.”

“So I just started to find out more and more [about industry along the river]. The more information I found, the more it made me mad, the more it made me understand that our whole nation basically… It’s not just Minneapolis, but… I’m telling you. It just got deeper and deeper in terms of how polluted and how far from nature we’ve gotten.”

“So there’s just a lot of history of dumping and exploitation of this side of the river. So, for me it’s always been in my mind to try to fight for what’s in my best interest on the North side, and what I feel like the earth, and what I feel like us as a people we deserve, being that we’ve been so devalued and so under invested.”

“The water would be drinkable. The air would be breathable. We would have basic fundamental needs met. And we would be economically abundant and have enough for everyone.”
Bob Rice

Owner of Pow Wow Grounds coffee shop

“The wild rice is the reason why the Ojibwe people are here in Minnesota because we followed a prophecy to bring us to where the food grew in the water so we would survive the European invasion. That prophecy was told before the Europeans came here, that there would be a people that would come and, just with one touch, would kill entire tribes.”

“When I was growing up I was always along that river. Before 94 came in the whole area was like our playground. [...] We’d go fishing down there, everything. We didn’t hang out in parks, we wanted to be by the river. We did everything, even all the way up into our teens, I’m talking seven, eight years old we were down there.”

“[When Interstate 94 came through] we stayed here. We didn’t go, we didn’t leave, we’re not dispersed throughout the entire city. There’s a group of us still there. Why are we still there and grouped together? Well, I’m going to say that we feel more comfortable amongst ourselves.”
David Snyder

Organizing Director at Jewish Community Action

“So many of our public spaces are deliberately designed to discourage mass public gathering. And if there’s a spot that is open to mass gathering, a couple of years later you’ll come and you’ll see awkward, clunky sculptures that are not sculptures. It’s the same thing on a park bench with a divider so that nobody can be comfortable sleeping there.”

“We need to lift up not just those moments when the community was attacked and wealth was extracted but also the history of what people did and how they coped and how they organized. Being able to lift that up and commemorate that is so powerful.”

“We’re interested in this community re-investment right now. We’re losing our homes and there are banks and mortgage companies preying on us. And if you want to be an ally and you want to be in solidarity, you have to acknowledge that.”

 “[There are multiple] parts of the story, about relationships between African-American and Jewish white folks. Because, yes, there’s a story of tension. There’s a story of flight. And that’s important. We want to tell that too, but there’s also the story of partnership.”
Say Yang

Program Coordinator at the Center For Earth, Energy & Democracy

“You grow up feeling the injustice, you could grow up pinpointing some of injustices situations. But I think, and I noticed too in a lot of our communities that we don’t necessarily have the context for the deeper systemic injustices.”

“When I think about [public art], I think about a Hmong story cloth. [...] And I think about what kind of art installation can go along the river that really amplifies some of those migration stories that includes us.”

“One of the challenges in our Hmong community in the summertime is [finding space] for the different clans to have their annual picnics or even for Hmong American Day. It’s been a challenge to reserve space with the Minneapolis Parks because you need to have the proper insurance. It’s always been a challenge in our communities to sometimes utilize some of the spaces for our community and cultural gatherings, because we don’t have the proper insurance or proper whatever it is that is needed for reserving.”

“The Mississippi is very important to us and it’s a part of us because our community is really big on hunting and fishing. And so I grew up with my grandfather going to Mississippi River every day. This is throughout his lifetime, every day, just fishing.”

“A lot of our elders are also passing away. And so there’s been efforts that some friends of mine are doing to connect Hmong youth with elders and stories that connects us to the rivers, animals, camping, the woods.”
Anonymous Artist

Prolific Twin Cities graffiti artist

“The river has always been a really important part of Twin Cities’ graffiti culture because so many spots are on the river. Pretty much anywhere there’s a bridge, there’s something to paint underneath it.”

“It’s a really visually inspiring place. It’s this big jungle gym type of thing. Also, the surfaces to paint there, they’re unique and they’re weird. There isn’t just like a normal wall really anywhere. All the things that you paint are like these weird things that are super unique and cool.”

“Once [graffiti] draws people to the space, it lets people know that it’s more or less, I don’t want to say a safe space, but a place that people can be themselves and hang out and feel comfortable. It takes away some of the oppressive edge of a raw, industrial space and replaces it with this accessibility. Graffiti allows it to become a destination that it would never be really for any other reason.”

“The idea was to paint stuff that people would look at and be like, ‘Oh, this is art and we should keep it.’ That sounds super naive, and maybe it was, but that was the goal. It was like this place is amazing. It should be open to the people and this is one way that we could try and get that conversation going. Also, the more people that came there, the more people also could fall in love with the place and build that momentum to turn it into something.”