



Native Engagements

**A project highlighting the Native role in a labor strike,
a union family, and environmental protests**

A Collaboration of

Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds & Keith Christensen





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*Dedicated to Charles and Margaret Heap of Birds
and the collaborative spirit and commitment of the labor strikers
in 1934, union families, and the water protectors movement*

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driven art initiative that provides
space, community, and conceptual
context for creative play and
critical commentary.
<https://open-source-gallery.org>

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Preface

IN UNION is an exhibition and book project that affirms the value of Native roles in social change. It presents the facts of Natives' engagement in a historic labor strike, one Native family's reliance on and participation in a union, and Natives' connection with an ongoing Indigenous-led environmental movement.

The collaborative artwork is tied to family support and political activism. Banners are presented with the expressive letterforms and poetic language of Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds merged with the symbolic portraits and figurative work by Keith Christensen.

The intention for creating the book was to give some context for the artwork and provide connections to the larger meaning of solidarity. It starts with a conversation with Open Source Gallery's Monika Wuhrür and the artists about the project. Edgar provides a reflection on the impact of a union for a family. It contains information and photographs of the Minneapolis Truckers' Strike of 1934 where Ray Rainbolt of the Dakota and Emanuel (Hap) Holstein of the Anishinaabe were part of the struggle for self representation as workers. The two were embraced by fellow strikers as essential to the campaign to form a union in an uphill battle for equity. The tie to the water protectors movement demonstrates that the spirit of solidarity is significant and ascendant. Clearly, climate change is man-made and a result of the grasp for corporate profits. More disasters are coming. Democracy is the means for addressing the problems, however government is not functioning. This political moment shows the need for collective action in order for all of our people to survive. In unity. IN UNION.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the contributors and many supporters of the project.

We are grateful to Monika Wührer from Open Source Gallery who reached out and encouraged the project and exhibition.

Shauna Sorensen wrote the foreword and shared the Open Source Gallery's perspective on the project.

Winona LaDuke is an inspirational force of the environmental movement. She generously contributed her organizational work of Honor the Earth and remarks on Native identity for the book.

Keri Pickett shared her insights and wonderful photography for the book.

John Kim wrote on the water protectors and introduced several of the contributors to this project. He is an inspiring force in this Anthropocene time.

Yates McKee provided his thoughtful analysis as an activist and art historian.

Mike Alewitz has been on the front lines of labor art activism for decades. His historical perspective and passion helped bring the section on labor history alive.

Peter Rachleff is an amazing community leader and labor historian whose support for the project has been highly encouraging.

David Riehle, labor historian, provided background and deep understanding of the labor movement.

Nan Wedlund and staff at Shapco Printing in Minneapolis produced the banners. Their professionalism helped the process move along smoothly.

Patti Jones provided proofreading with her thoughtful professionalism for the book.

Special thanks to Carina Jacobsson who has been a strong supporter of the project during its development and completion.

Inside

Dedications/Credits/Colophon

Preface

Acknowledgments

Foreword By Shauna Sorensen 1

Introduction 3

IN UNION: Banners

By Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds and Keith Christensen 4

IN UNION: In Conversation

A dialogue with Open Source Gallery Director Monika Wührer and the artists 6

PUNCTURE REVISITED/Cancel Christmas

A legacy of tribal survival and a union family life
By Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds 10

Collective Action

Seeing the Minneapolis Truckers' Strike of 1934 Today By Keith Christensen . 12

Teamster Reminiscences By Mike Alewitz 16

The Water Protectors

Messaging Protests By John Kim 18

Witnessing the Movement By Keri Pickett 20

HONOR THE EARTH Mission and Vision 22

We Need to Tell Our Own Stories By Winona LaDuke 23

Red Threads of Revolution Always Underway By Yates McKee 24

Contributors 28

About the Authors 29

Resources 30



Foreword

WE ACKNOWLEDGE that Open Source Gallery is located on the traditional territory of the Lenni Lenape, called “Lenapehoking,” this land’s original people whose relationship continues with this territory.

For over 15 years, Open Source has presented accessible, yet challenging, conceptually-driven art experiences for a wide community. Through art, our artists and audience collectively explore social issues and find ways that we can fill cultural and educational gaps, collaborating to figure out how we can become a more open society. We facilitate projects that center on the interests of artists while ensuring programming is accessible for all. Exhibitions at Open Source are most often site-specific, encouraging artists to embed themselves in and engage with our unique space and community. Artists create and curate their own site-specific projects with Open Source staff offering support and guidance to make their ambitious, and often experimental, ideas come to fruition. In this way, artists have the freedom and funding to explore ideas that will advance their practice, but may not otherwise be possible.

IN UNION is an elegant merging of three topics that are now more important than ever. Placing focus on the environmental protest movement, IN UNION explores Indigenous involvement in a labor strike and in union participation: the protection of both land and people. We are thrilled to work with Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds and Keith Christensen on this project not only because of their stellar work, but also because of the important conversations that it can open in our community through the merging of several themes. As a small organization, this is for us an ambitious project, but it represents an incredible opportunity for our community to engage with a project from a world-renowned artist and join a far-reaching conversation.

Over the past several years, recognition of and action against inequity has reached a zenith. From Standing Rock to Flint to the George Floyd protests, people have been fighting for change in all aspects of American life. While each new issue has sparked new action, each protest has addressed long-standing problems with inequity stemming from capitalism, racism, and colonialism. The pandemic exacerbated awareness of injustice and the movement for worker’s rights joined the fray. Arts workers from institutions such as the Brooklyn Museum and Philadelphia Museum have unionized and continued to use protest to demand higher wages. Even at goliath corporate institutions like Starbucks and Amazon we are seeing the impact of people fighting for their rights. It was in this milieu that we began the discussion about this project with Edgar and Keith.

As an artist-run, non-profit space, we facilitate artists’ site-specific projects that may be difficult to realize elsewhere while ensuring they are compensated for their labor. In a time of extraordinary inequity that is only growing, we relish the chance to facilitate meaningful change through art while supporting the artists themselves. We recognize the importance of not only offering opportunities to artists to experiment, but to support them in a concrete way through compensation in accordance with the guidelines set by W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy). IN UNION brings this conversation to the forefront.

Projects like IN UNION are an incredible opportunity for our organization to bring our behind-the-scenes support of the labor of artists to the forefront, with the additional benefit of an opportunity to learn about the history of Native involvement in unions and protest. We want to ensure that land acknowledgments do not become empty words, but an ongoing dialogue that encourages reflection and engagement with the legacies of colonialism. We continue to reside on unceded land and our recognition cannot end with land acknowledgments, but they can be a genesis for real change.

Shauna Sorensen, Development Director for Open Source Gallery

Introduction

THIS BOOK ACCOMPANIES an exhibition of the collaborative work of Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds and Keith Christensen. The banners in the exhibit show the integration of the artists' distinct styles that were intended to complement each other's work. The whole is more than the sum of parts: 1+1=3.

This project is an attempt to use artistic means to convey the stories of individuals who were more than figures of a dead history. Its purpose is to connect the past to the present, demonstrating, as one point to another, that Natives were engaged in social change then and are doing so now. Indigenous people fought collectively before as they do today.

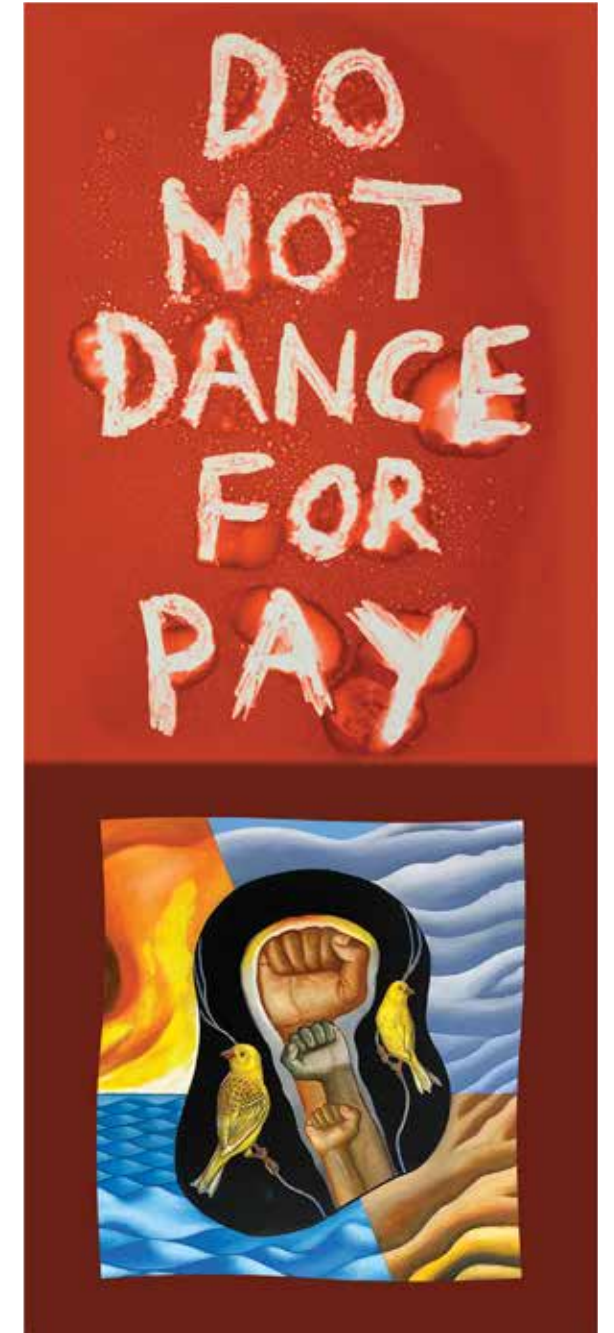
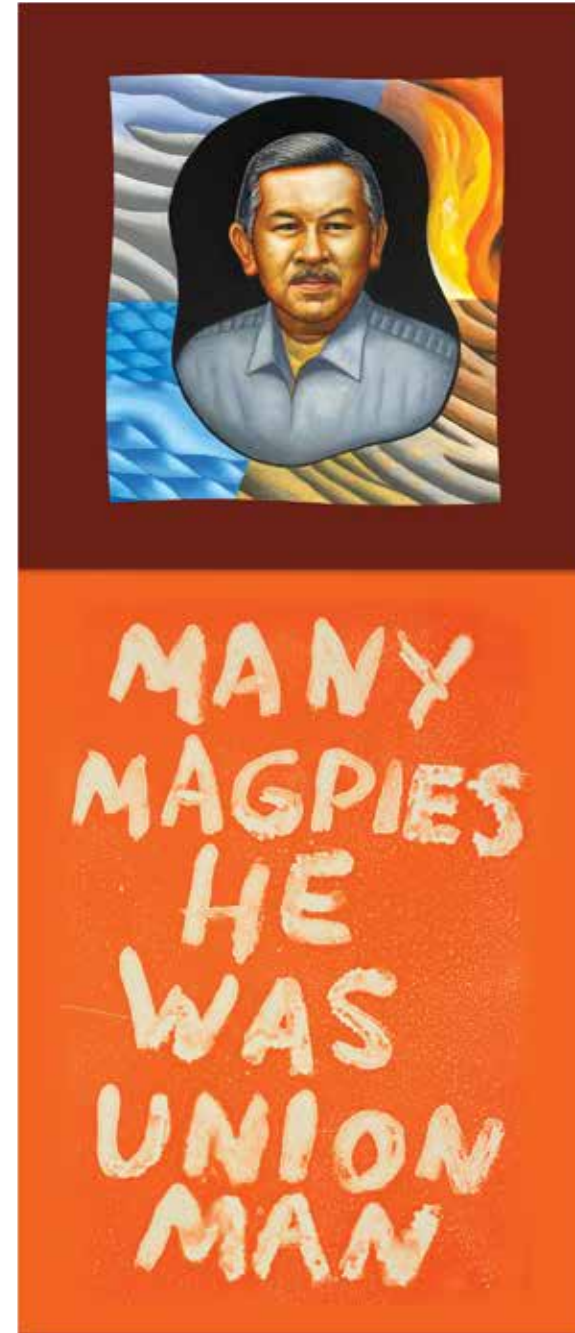
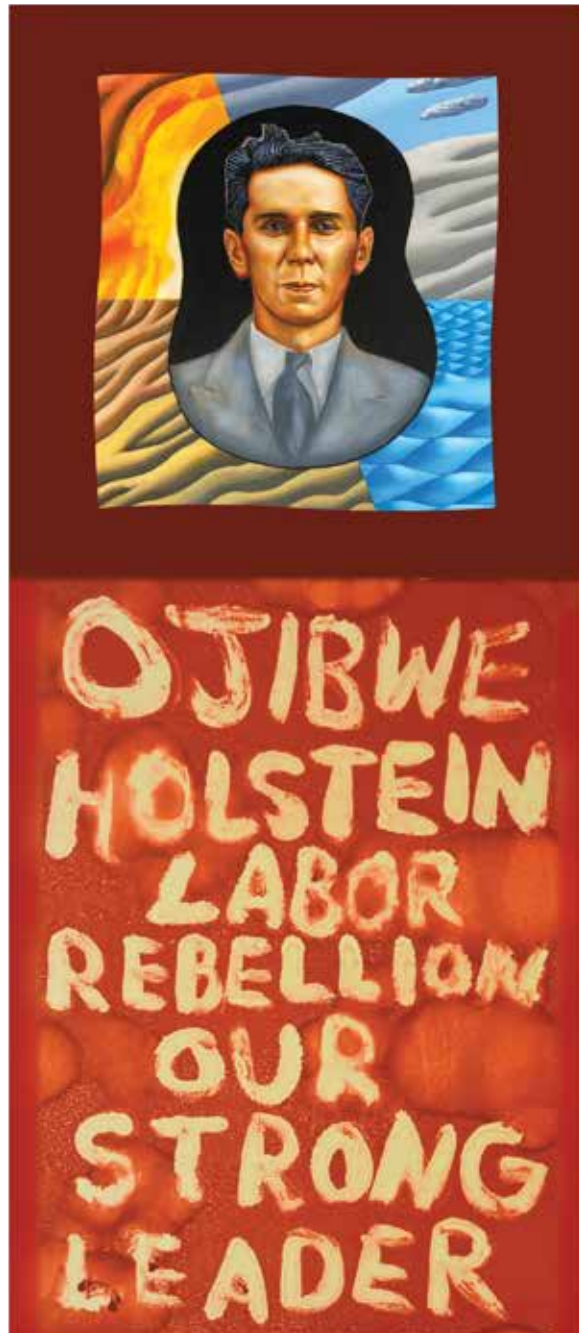
Within the book the artists engage in a conversation about the project. They discuss their backgrounds and relationship as well as the meaning of IN UNION.

The IAM Union in Wichita, Kansas provided some meaningful support for a Cheyenne-Arapaho family in a time of estrangement and stress. It also was the means for connecting with other workers and the way to share power and obtain solidarity. The personal and granular view of a union household is recalled by Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds.

The Minneapolis Truckers' Strike of 1934 was a pitched battle for the right of workers to represent themselves. It was a collective action that involved Native workers Ray Rainbolt and Emanuel (Hap) Holstein. Mike Alewitz knew some of the participants in the 1934 strike and shares his perspective on what the strike means today and going forward.

The water protectors are changing the world. The pipeline protests in tribal lands in Minnesota are a recent manifestation of an intense political, social, and cultural activism. They have been led by Indigenous groups that include the Honor the Earth organization co-founded by Winona LaDuke. She contributes her views asserting that Native values are needed to transform the ecosystem. Keri Pickett shares her understanding of the issues with photographs of the protests. John Kim writes about the participants' messaging and how it relates to international cultural action. And art historian Yates McKee makes connections between the artists' work, the historical context, and the ongoing movement.

IN UNION: Banners



Left: *Rebellion Leader Emanuel (Hap) Holstein*
Right: *Uprising Fighter Ray Rainbolt*
3'x7', inkjet on canvas, 2022

Left: *Many Magpies Union Man*
Right: *Do Not Dance, Nature Calls*
3'x7', inkjet on canvas, 2022

Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds / Keith Christensen

IN UNION: In Conversation

Monika Wührer of Open Source Gallery posed some questions to Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds & Keith Christensen

Monika Wührer: I met Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds at his MoMA PS1 show and we have exchanged ideas since then. The collaboration concept with Keith Christensen came up and he was set that he wanted to equally share space for the artwork at the gallery. This idea for IN UNION really is so important for both artists.

MW: So where is the idea for IN UNION rooted?

Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds: For me the project is rooted in my parents' diligent efforts to support their family via many difficult years of labor working in a Wichita, Kansas aircraft factory. The Beech Aircraft labor union of aerospace workers played a productive role in aiding the six children's survival through urban poverty.

Keith Christensen: I felt it started with a conversation we had together when Edgar visited where I live in Minneapolis in 2021. We went to George Floyd Square, where the infamous police murder happened. It has become a site honoring the man and a place to witness. On that day it was a place where many dynamic, visual voices were crying out. There were sculptures, murals, and portraits of George Floyd. Also many posters, signs, and messages with laments and demands. Edgar said, "This is the place for real art, not in the museums." Yeah, we both connected with the street scene and protests.

As friends and artists we

have shared our lives and ideas for a long time. His first work that I knew of was his assertion that Natives weren't mascots but real people ("WE DON'T WANT INDIANS, JUST THEIR NAMES, MASCOTS..."). It felt strong and loud. It's always been personal to him, and he feels responsible for his people. His practice is formed and inspired by his culture. He has done an immense amount of historical research and has had experiences with Indigenous people all over the world. His work is based on it.

The project developed after we talked about our own work and what we felt was happening. He came around to some of the subject matter of the 1934 strike that I have been working with for a long time. He was intrigued to know that some of the strikers were Indigenous. He told me, "Natives weren't included in anything." So he made the prints about strike participants Holstein and Rainbolt. He knew my figurative work and portraits and suggested we do a collaboration. I happily agreed. I had done portraits of some of the 1934 strikers earlier, so it was appealing for me to do it. I think the treatment of my work's background, what I call the natural elements of fire, land, water, sky, aligned with his view of the world. He has shared often his tribal culture and values that are connected



Keith Christensen, *Game Turn* board game installation at the East Side Freedom Library, St. Paul, MN, 2017.

Monika Wührer is an international artist and educator, originally from Austria. Monika currently serves as the Executive Director of Open Source Gallery.

with nature. I feel that social revolution is a natural act, with all the organic power that it implies. Edgar began to reflect on the strike and the idea grew to include his own experience of coming from a union family. His father and mother were both in IAM, the union for Beech Aircraft Corporation. He suggested the idea of IN UNION. After some discussions I felt we should connect the

project also to current events. Our mutual interest in history is to show its relevance to the present. The 1934 strike has many lessons for today. It's not a template but an affirmation that people who work together can make change happen. Edgar reached out to you and the Open Source Gallery and suggested the project. You graciously invited us to do it.

IN UNION is about solidarity. It is also about this collaboration and connection. We worked together as very distinct individuals with very different artistic vocabularies. We began the work because we want to say something together about history, lived experience, and what we advocate.

The history of the 1934 strike provides unique evidence of Native participation in social change. This is with the understanding that Indigenous people have been long overlooked and marginalized. These strikers, however, demonstrate the inherent potential of all people. Their involvement in solidarity with others made change. These guys shared power and used it to transform their world.

This project also involves the personal side of growing up in a union family. A child grows to be an adult within a family that needs financial support. The union can provide the security an employer can't because it is formed by those who are in a similar situation. I call it empathy and solidarity. The union helped the family gain agency. It became a participation space where all members were able to live and work together.

And finally this project is about what can be. The



Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds, *Standing Rock Awakens the World* (detail), 2019. 24 primary mono prints on paper, 90 x 176 in.

water protectors movement is expressing the solidarity of Natives with supporters in order to defend the environment in which we live. Climate change is man made and happening. It needs to be addressed or we all die. As artists we embrace the spirit of democratic, collective action to make this world work better. We support the Native-led efforts to share control of the world and not be ruled by those motivated only by profit.

MW: I have heard many very personal and powerful stories about union involvement from both of you during the meetings. Can you talk a bit about the significance of the personal stories? What are your personal experiences with unions?

EHoB: Unions gave respect to all members and particularly members of color who carefully treaded within a hostile society. My mother told me stories of how the aircraft plant mandated that African-American employees could only hold positions which were detailed to cleaning restrooms or collecting garbage in the facility. Margaret Heap of Birds, my mother and union shop steward, had to battle to gain fairness for these workers as their representative. We resided in a segregated district of Wichita, and those African-American co-workers became cherished family friends.

KC: I grew up in a union household in Rochester, Minnesota. I was one of six children. My dad was a letter carrier. Mom was a nurse. We weren't poor but money was always tight. We didn't travel or have nice things. The close friends of the family were the Rolstads who

were also union people. They were Catholics, and we were Presbyterians. Neighborhoods and schools separated us by religion. The Rolstads were our comfort zone in the class-conscious, Mayo Clinic-dominated town. I remember my parents' fears during the great Postal Service Strike of 1970. It was the largest walkout ever against the federal government. Nixon vowed to crush it. That didn't happen; they won the strike. That win improved work conditions dramatically and families had more take-home pay. Later I became a union member when I taught at a university. And I collaborated on the St. Paul Labor History Mural commissioned by the local AFL-CIO. Dad came to the opening.

MW: *How much were Native workers involved in the 1934 Truckers' Strike?*

KC: The backgrounds of both of the figures we know, Emanuel (Hap) Holstein and Ray Rainbolt, are obscure. It was a challenge finding photographs and information about them. That made it exciting to creatively, artistically construct and forefront something of their overlooked lives and influence. They both were well known by the strikers, and there are many book references about them. They both represented how the rank and file workers were passionate and committed to the success of the strike. Both showed their bravery and sacrifice. Their involvement was also a testament to the inclusiveness of the strikers. It was a time of a lot of racial prejudice generally and so the acceptance of the Native workers shows that there was a culture that embraced diversity. They needed, respected, and relied on each other. Holstein and Rainbolt were part of the whole and equal to the others.

MW: *A union is in some ways a political community, organized by law and politics. But clearly the community is part of a union. How do you see community and how do you see your involvement?*

EHoB: I find the metaphor of a labor union to be very similar to the tribal template of responsibility towards

youth and elders, community at large must be served first. In a United States contemporary society the individual and one's quest for wealth is the focus of life. In the tribal world that singular American perspective does not carry the day. It is our collective lives and values which are enriching for all. As a leader of the Traditional Cheyenne Elk Warrior Society I live my days with the tenets that honor the collective.

KC: My own art practice and activities are grounded in my community involvement. I have used my design skills to help the East Side Freedom Library in St. Paul. It is a local non-profit organization whose mission is to promote solidarity, social justice, and equity. I organized a get out the vote campaign. I also created personal protest posters on issues including racism, immigration, and climate policies. Many were used in numerous demonstrations and posted in neighborhoods as well as on social media. I continue to be active with the Remember 1934 collective that commemorates the Minneapolis strike.

Can you talk a bit about how you connected with the water protectors?

EHoB: Our Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes supported the Standing Rock camp and its citizens by providing bison meat from our tribal herd. We felt committed to advancing rights for this Earth as evidenced in our own ceremonial practice and the efforts of Standing Rock peoples. Water is at the center of tribal renewal and perseverance, thus water protection is and always will be a main task for the Indigenous.

KC: I was able to tie in with the water protectors in large part from knowing John Kim who is an activist, educator, and artist and deeply involved with the Line 3 protests. I collaborated with John on a project supporting the demonstrations. He encouraged the ideas of IN UNION and has provided reflections on the activities and messaging for the project book. He introduced me to Keri Pickett who is a highly accomplished filmmaker. She has documented the beginnings of the movement in her

moving film *First Daughter and the Black Snake* (2017) about Winona LaDuke's role in the struggle. Keri provided photographs for this book.

We included the water protectors movement as a featured part of this project because it exemplifies the importance of the Native role in addressing problems and making change. It began at the Standing Rock reservation in North Dakota where Native communities protested the Dakota Access Pipeline. The protest stemmed from the fact the pipeline was to be built on the land of Indigenous communities, and was endangering water sources that those communities depend on. The more recent confrontation, in Minnesota, was meant to stop Line 3, another oil pipeline from Canada. The fight continues with a Stop Line 5 campaign in Wisconsin-Michigan. The connection between Natives active in a historic labor strike and today's environmental protests demonstrates how Indigenous people were and will be a presence in social change. The water protectors also show the now-central role of Native leadership in the environmental movement.

MW: *What dialogue do you expect to open with a community organization like Open Source Gallery?*

EHoB: As in all artistic expressions, a creator seeks to launch notions and sentiments for communities and one's self. The breadth of understanding is given by those who care to receive and participate in artistic notions rendered. That unpredictable exchange is the exciting and fruitful sphere sought. Open Source Gallery will enlighten us as artists by the audience and their personal experiences to be shared. I forever accept that which is offered from the viewer; the circle is formed and deepened after an audience responds. My prediction is that themes of family, care, protection, and progression will be noted from the Brooklyn fellowship and environs.

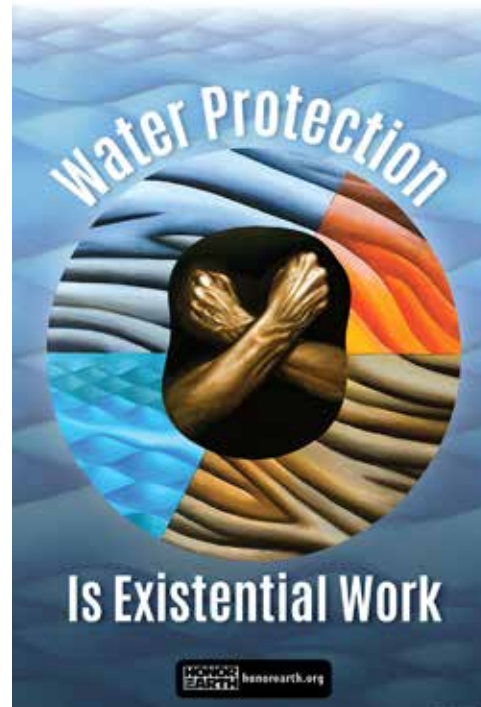
KC: We believe this project has universal relevance because it proposes solidarity as a necessary way to change society. Problems are solved with solutions. People need to know that they matter and must act accordingly. We want to shed a light on an under-recognized yet meaningful history. It demonstrates that there

was inclusion of minority people in a social change. It speaks to the fact that the Native workers were themselves activists and it shows their comrades accepted them. And they won that battle, however briefly. It occurred at the personal and family level also. People survived by connecting with others for mutual benefit. And the Indigenous-led environmental movement is attracting very wide support today. This is promising for everyone.

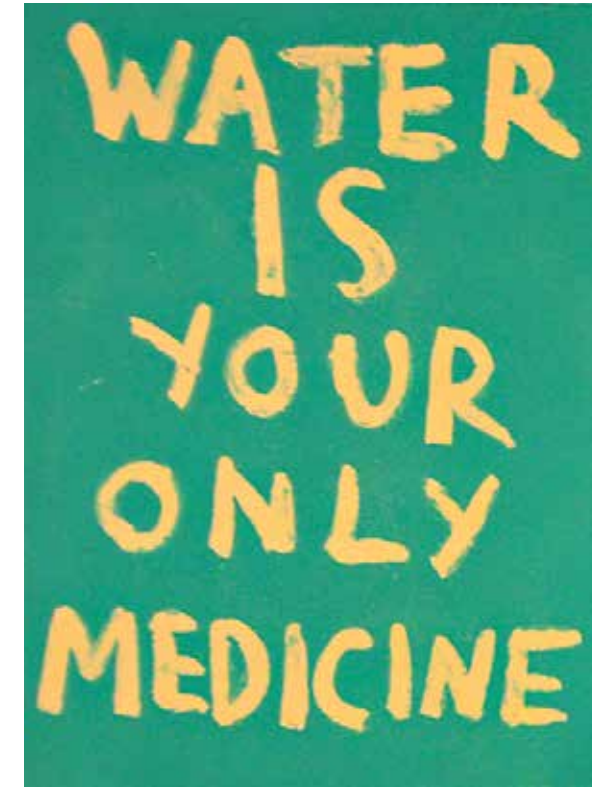
I lived in NYC for many years and was active as an artist. I was the art director for *Upfront* magazine, a publication of PADD (Political Art Documentation and Distribution) in the 1980's. I was also an active muralist

with Artmakers, a community murals group that created work from Harlem to Bed Sty. And I was a part of the Repo History project that installed signs in Manhattan shedding light on social struggles. I felt then as now that NYC is a cultural think tank for the world. People here are often from somewhere else and many, like me, go back to where they came from or on to new stops. It's never been a static place; it's kinetic. Brooklyn is a vital site of reflection and action. It has deep, deep roots. That's why this is a great place for this project. People from Minnesota, Oklahoma, and Brooklyn must do things together to turn things around and make a better way forward.

MW: *We are so excited and we are going to do all we can to communicate this concept, exhibition, and energy to our community and beyond!*



Keith Christensen, *Existential Work*, 2023, digital print, 12 x 18 in.



Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds, *Water Is Your Only Medicine*, 2020, mono-type print, ink on rag paper, 22 x 30 in.

PUNCTURE REVISITED/ Cancel Christmas

Legacy of tribal Oklahoma survival and a Kansas union family life

By Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds

FOLLOWING a most violent act, the 1868 Washita Massacre, at the hands of Colonel Custer and his troops, the Cheyenne and Arapaho Nation struggled to recover. Tribal leaders were shackled as prisoners of war, while Indigenous citizens suffered grave poverty, fear, and dysfunction. This grand disruption was brought to the tribes in Indian Territory, later to become western Oklahoma.

To move beyond grief and economic deficiency, progress towards empowerment was needed. This moment would take nearly 82 years of resilience to arrive. My parents Charles and Margaret Heap of Birds, young Cheyenne and Arapaho citizens, respectively, took the very brave measure to relocate from their reservation lands to Wichita, Kansas during the 1950's U.S. Cold War years and military build up. They would both eventually become factory workers at Beech Aircraft. Beech, a local Wichita company, was known for specializing in the manufacture of small personal airplanes, missile target craft and, later, the Bell UH-1 Iroquois ("Huey") helicopter, used in Viet Nam combat. Boeing, Lear Jet, and Cessna were also headquartered in Wichita. Tribal members from the 39 Indigenous nations left Oklahoma Indian Territory to labor in these factories. A generation later most would return, after some experiences of cultural failure, to Indian Territory.

This puncture into the mainstream American realm was an utmost challenge and led to residing in a segre-



Left: Cheyenne family, Oklahoma Indian Territory, c. 1900. // Right: The Heap of Birds family pictured starting from front left clockwise: Deezbaa, Charlene, Guy, Edgar, Jean, Margaret, Clinton, Oklahoma, 2019.

gated district of south Wichita called Planeview, a site for many impoverished aircraft workers. The experience was that of unfair assimilation by way of racial bigotry in aircraft manufacturing toil. To leave behind the comfort, aid, and safety of an Indigenous community was a heroic action that penetrated the dominance of the U.S. Republic.

The aircraft workers union's unwavering advocacy served as a blessing within a clash of cultures, economies, new vocations, and mainstream schools for the youth. The so-called "Plant" acted as a sanctuary of sorts for my parents since the union was there to protect and support both workers and families. My mother served as union steward in the Beech Plant. I recall many years of life benefited by lakeside fishing sponsored by factory agreements, amusement park holidays, free school clothing, and shopping trips. All secured by union leadership and representation. After



Left: Margaret Heap of Birds c. 1976 // Center: Beech Aircraft factory in Wichita, Kansas c. 1970 // Right: Charles Heap of Birds driving a forklift c. 1975 // Charles and Margaret were members of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers Union (IAM). Center below: IAM logo.

a difficult family crisis of our father being laid off, his six children had no Christmas toys to look forward to. On that cold December morning in Wichita, our father told us to check the tiny front porch. We rushed to open the Planeview door and there were gifts for the family from the union.

I see my parents' courageous deeds of leadership as my impetus to extend this puncture via provocative artistic endeavors, while living back on our former reservation lands. These creative methods utilize aggressive public art tactics, acrylic paintings which seek to proclaim earth beauty and positive movement, and drawings and mono prints that



present complex political ideas in defense of Native Nations. From the spirit of the Washita Massacre site, in current-day Roger Mills County, Oklahoma, we carry on to continue the diligence and defiance from our tribal elders to perforate this republic. The U.S. must take notice to understand its place in the violence and provide remedies for those destructive deeds. Our reality insists this Native world should be described and accepted as independently personal, sovereign, shared, and earth-renewal based. We will survive and flourish as artistic expressions lead the engagement. As in labor-union values, we believe and live for the collective spirits of all.

The Miracle City Blues

PLANEVIEW was the residential area of Wichita built in 1943 for the WWII defense industry that became known as *Air Capital of the World*. The bombers that won the war were made there. The city was not accustomed to labor unions, members of the Democratic Party, or racial and ethnic minorities any more than it was to low-cost housing. Planeview was called the "Miracle City" because it was built so fast.

The Welfare News reported that thirty families of American Indians were "one of the most interesting groups" living in Planeview. For African-Americans, however, segregation was more overt. A section of the city was reserved for Blacks, and the "Souvenir Map" dis-



played a photograph of a bingo game at a "colored" recreational center.

To Wichitans in the 1960's the Planeview residents were still a part of a temporary and substandard community. The slum stepchild image, acquired after war housing was no longer "vital for victory," remained. A 1967 city housing report wrote, "The

only all-encompassing characteristic that can be attributed to Planeview is that the inhabitants are apparently doomed to an existence that most of us would not consider subjecting our household pets to."

Source: *Want to Build a Miracle City? War Housing in Wichita* by Julie Courtwright Kansas State Historical Society, Vol. 23, No. 4, Winter, 2000-2001

Collective Action

Seeing the 1934 Minneapolis Truckers' Strike Today

By Keith Christensen

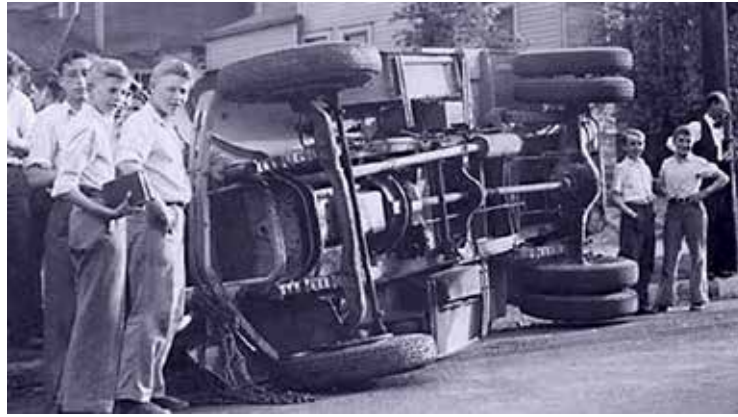
Overview

A HEAVY, DARK cloud enveloped the country during the Great Depression. Poverty, hunger, and fear blanketed the most vulnerable. Many were unemployed and those who did have jobs suffered with very meager wages. The haze created hopelessness, and many felt powerless. There wasn't a path out of the gloom. Tension was in the air. Class resentment was growing.

In 1934 Minneapolis was under the control of the Citizens' Alliance, an employers' group that effectively banned unions. The city was an open-shop system; employers would not recognize unions. Workers were fired on whims and for any effort to organize when they tried to negotiate for better conditions. However, the General Drivers Local 574 of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) organized workers of the trucking industry into an industrial union. This was a trade union that combined all workers, both skilled and unskilled, in the transportation industry.

When employers refused to recognize the union, its leaders called a strike. They strategically began it during the Minnesota winter when coal transports were necessary for heating and so forced the employers to make an early settlement. However, the employers reneged on their agreement when it became warmer, which was no surprise to the strikers who had enlarged their local's membership from 75 to 3,000. The strike was on again.

The details of the strike are complex as well as dramatic. The strikers endured a brutal police force, a hostile press, and resistance from the parent union. They published their own strike newspaper, *The Organizer*, to inform the public of the strike's aims and to keep work-



A produce truck overturned, with school boys, August 1934.

ers informed of developments. They gained the support of other unions and cultivated favorable public opinion. The strike had a contingent called the Women's Auxiliary that helped feed strikers and nurse the injured. After the police violently attacked the strikers the women marched on City

Hall to protest the brutality. Thousands attended the funeral procession of strike martyr Henry Ness.

The police and the National Guard were called in to guard trucks driven by scabs. The Citizens' Alliance activated their local militia. The strikers countered with effective picketing and stoppage of commerce. Conflict escalated daily throughout May and reached a peak late in the month at the city market, where strikers clashed with police, who were trying to break the strike. Hundreds were involved in the battle that raged on violently for two days. Many were injured and several were killed. It was called the "Battle of Deputies Run" because the police and deputies were forced to flee. However, things changed when on July 20, 1934 police staged a revenge ambush, where scores of strikers were shot and two died from their wounds. The day became known as "Bloody Friday." The strike continued even with the leaders arrested and imprisoned by the National Guard. It finally ended because of the strikers' persistence, compelling President Franklin Roosevelt to step in and stop the turmoil. The President's representatives pressured the banks by threatening to call in federal loans and so forced the employers to agree to a settlement. The strike ended on August 21, 1934. Minneapolis became a union town. The Truckers' Strike marked a turning point in state and national labor history, opening the way for enactment of laws acknowledging and protecting workers' rights.



Photographs courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

Above: A scene from the "Battle of Deputies Run," May 1934. // Below: Keith Christensen, a card from the *Game Turn* Project, 2017.

Relevance

The significance of the 1934 strike continues today. We have similar problems of social inequalities. People continue to face inaccessible medical care, insufficient education, and unaffordable housing. Low-wage workers are unable to represent themselves through a union under Amazon, McDonald's, and Walmart. Meanwhile, the impending catastrophe of climate change is endangering everyone. Still, the corporate owners and their followers fiddle while all around is burning.

Participation

I personally was introduced to the strike history by my friend and colleague Mike Alewitz when we both lived in NYC. We worked together there on mural projects. He gave me a copy of the book *Teamster Rebellion* by Farrell Dobbs. As a Minnesota born and raised guy I was intrigued to learn of a local event that had such an impact.

After returning to live in Minneapolis I became involved with the Remember 1934 collective that commemorated the strike. It sponsored street festivals, picnics, and other events that included speakers on current labor actions, theatrical reenactments, and music. Many descendants and union families attended these activities which are documented in an archive. My role



was to work with others to install street art at the sites. I also designed posters and flyers. And I was a part of the group that created a historical plaque describing some of the events. At this time it is the only public artifact in Minneapolis that memorializes the strike.

GAME TURN: Telling a story with play

In 2017 I created the *Game Turn* project that describes the strike's history in cards and a game board (see page 6). The installation includes a map of the strike events and other explanatory elements. An accompanying book provides the historical framework, photos of events, and the game guidelines. It shares the problems the organizers faced as well as their solutions. The game includes information on how the strikers confronted the police and employers. One part of the game focuses on the role of frenemies. For example, Governor Floyd Olson was a liberal supporter of workers, but in the end he called in the National Guard to try and break the strike. President Roosevelt was instrumental in ending the strike after he put pressure on the bankers to repay federal loans; however, later his Attorney General prosecuted many of the strike leaders on illegitimate charges. The *Game Turn* project was installed at the East Side Freedom Library in St. Paul and has been played by students and visitors there.

IN UNION: Two Native Strike Leaders

Ray Rainbolt (1896-1978) and Emanuel (Hap) Holstein (1906-1986) both figure prominently in the history of the Minneapolis Truckers' Strike of 1934. They served in leadership roles and were relied upon as frontline fighters. They both were considered part of the backbone of the strike.

Ray Rainbolt was a senior leader of the strikers. He was an army veteran and truck driver, age 38 in 1934. He identified as Dakota and was a committed Trotskyist. In *Teamster Rebellion*, strike leader and author Farrell Dobbs explained that "Ray was capable of fairness towards the deserving, but deaf to the wheedling of petty chislers." At a critical point in the strike, he was asked to negotiate with Governor Floyd Olson to settle the strike after the union leaders were arrested and imprisoned. He refused to do so, forcing the Governor to release the prisoners and reach a final agreement. Later, in 1938, he was elected as head of the Union Defense Guard (UDG) that confronted the pro-fascist Silver Shirts, who had threatened to attack unions as well as Jews and communists. He and the UDG confronted them and forced their departure from the area. The fascist influence and presence soon subsided. Rainbolt was known as a tough, union man and devoted to the cause. In 1940 he was indicted as a member of the union on charges of sedition and became a victim of the notorious Smith Act Trials,



Ray Rainbolt



Emanuel (Hap) Holstein



Police and striker during the pitched "Battle of Deputies Run" where hundreds of police deputies and workers fought, May 1934.

but was found not guilty. After the strike he served as a union organizer in the region. Rainbolt was 82 when he died in Minneapolis.

Emanuel (Hap) Holstein was an Ojibwe from the White Earth Reservation, who moved to Minneapolis in the early 1930's. Off work he was known to have danced in Native costume as an entertainer at events. At work he was either a truck driver and/or a warehouse worker. He was 28 in 1934 and was a leading figure in the Strike Committee of 100, the representative group overseeing the strike. Known as a fighter during the strike, he is recorded saying, "The police were brutal and sent some 40 strikers to the hospital. They showed us how to use the clubs and so we used them ourselves (the

next day). We beat them back." He was charged with murder of a police deputy, one of two who died. Charges were later dismissed. He joined with the Communist League of America/Socialist Workers Party and was vilified by anti-unionists as a "Red amongst the reds." However, he would no longer be a member of the party by the 1940's. After the strike, he became an organizer for the Teamsters and traveled throughout the region, eventually becoming involved with the Native community development programs in Minneapolis. He was 81 when he died in Minneapolis. —kc

Photograph of Ray Rainbolt courtesy of Dave Riehle

Photographs courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society



Photographs courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

Women's Auxiliary members supporting strikers in the commissary.



Above: The strike newspaper, *The Organizer*, declaring victory on August 22, 1934. Below: Scene from the funeral procession for strike martyr Henry Ness, August 1934.

Red Scare and Race in 1934

The excerpt that follows is from Dining Out in Dinkytown: Remembering the Minneapolis Truckers' Strike of 1934.
By Bryan D. Palmer
www.lawcha.org/2014/11/07/dining-dinkytown-remembering-minneapolis-truckers-strikes-1934-bryan-d-palmer/
From a version of the essay "Red Teamsters" published by *Jacobin Magazine*, 10.14.2014
(www.jacobin.com/author/bryan-d-palmer)

THE AFFRONT of labor effectively standing up against its class adversaries (did not) win the Minneapolis teamsters acclaim locally, at least as far as conventional authority was concerned. The General Drivers Union, known as Local 574, and its Trotskyist leadership were vilified in the mainstream newspapers. Anti-communism blanketed Minneapolis in 1934 like a dense fog; you could cut it with a dull, bourgeois blade. Demanding 42-and-a-half cents an hour for the drivers and insisting on the right of those handling crates of vegetables in the market to join the union were the thin edge of a

wedge ostensibly opening the door to a Soviet Minneapolis. Or so the Citizens' Alliance, the employers' voice in the strikes, claimed.

The Organizer countered, "They accuse us in this local of being un-American but how's this for some real American Members: Happy Holstein, Chippewa; Ray Rainbolt, Sioux; Doc Tollotson, Chippewa; Bill Bolt, Chippewa; Bill Rogers, Chippewa; Joe Belanger, Chippewa." The Red Scare was no doubt driven by the employers and their political and socio-cultural allies, but conservative laborites also contributed. One Native American wrote as "A member of 574, not a Communist, but a Chippewa Indian and a real American." He protested the ways in which the ossified trade union tops occupying the plush office seats at the headquarters of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters red-baited the Minneapolis strike leadership. These underhanded attacks did the bosses' bidding, adding 'fuel to the fire' of the employer association's anti-communism.

Teamster Reminiscences

By Mike Alewitz

I WAS STILL an ultra-left teenager when I hitchhiked through a winter storm from Kent State University to a socialist convention in Minneapolis in 1969. It was an amazing gathering. The backdrop for the convention stage was a giant hammer and sickle from the revolutionary struggle in France, May–June 1968. Around the auditorium were large posters of revolutionary figures, including the angry countenance of the armed Geronimo, feared warrior from the Bedonkohe band of the Ndenahe Apache.

One of the featured highlights of that convention was a special celebration of the 1934 strike, with about a dozen participants on a panel—men and women who played a critical role in one of the most advanced working-class strikes in history.

The panelists included V. R. Dunne, earlier an IWW militant, then a central leader of the strike; Farrell Dobbs, a strike leader who went on to lead the transformation of the Teamsters into a powerful industrial union and whose books remain essential texts for revolutionaries; and Marvel Scholl, who led the militant Women's Auxiliary. It also included Jake Cooper, a truck driver and militant in the strike who later served as one of Leon Trotsky's bodyguards. Our paths last crossed as he championed the militant P-9 Hormel meatpacking strike in 1986, when I painted a mural with the striking workers in Austin, Minnesota.

To my surprise, I was seated at a banquet dinner table with Farrell Dobbs, Marvel Scholl, Tom Kerry, and some other old-timers. Bedraggled and seriously lacking in social skills—I'd never been to anything like a banquet—I wondered why they put me there. But I came to believe that what they saw was a rebellious



At a commemorative event for strike martyr Henry Ness. Emanuel (Hap) Holstein is at the far right, 1935.

kid who was willing to hitchhike through a storm to be part of a revolutionary struggle. And that was worth something.

Reports from the 1969 convention, I realize Farrell might as well be speaking to us today, as he urged the gathering to “refute the lesser-evil swindle, point the way toward mass anti-capitalist political action.” He called on us to “refute the scoundrels who corrupt program in the name of bigness. Sheer force of numbers does not assure attainment of goals. If a movement lacks a class-struggle program and a class-conscious leadership, it will crumble in the test of battle, no matter how big it may be. The pages of history are replete with proof of that fundamental fact.”

The early generation of socialists seemed to have limitless patience in explaining and teaching revolutionary politics. They were thoughtful, fearless, and generous—representing the best qualities of the working class. These remarkable organizers could have enjoyed comfortable lives as labor officials—instead they remained revolutionaries. After the strike they were framed up and sent to prison for their political views and opposition to World War II. They remain largely unknown, but they were a different breed than those presented to us today as leaders: gathering honoraria, headlining events, or appearing in the “progressive” media. But having notoriety, titles, or positions is not the same as leadership.

A few months after the Minneapolis convention, my life changed dramatically as I watched fellow antiwar activists gunned down at Kent State University. Swept up in the national student strike of May 1970 (think, *Four Dead*

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in Ohio by Neil Young).

I eventually wound up with a pioneering band of lively socialists in Texas. We were anxious to learn from and emulate the old timers. We had no money, but we would save up and would fly people in to give classes on labor history, Marxist economics, philosophy, or other topics. Over a weekend, we forced them to give five or six class presentations and then we'd wring out every bit of knowledge we could during informal discussions over meals and beers. And a banquet, of course.

Over the years, in several cities, I had the opportunity to learn from earlier generations of revolutionaries. I had no special relationships, but I was lucky enough to attend classes, organize meetings for, meet, or interview comrades like Farrell Dobbs, Edmond Kovacs, James P. Cannon, Peng Shu-tse, Hugo Blanco, and many others.

How generous they were. They never asked anything for themselves, never tried to advance themselves with a career—they only tried to leave us with the precious insights they had gained in bloody, hard-fought struggles. Whether it was understanding the dynamics of world revolution or how to organize the defense of a picket line or maintain a headquarters, it was treasure that needed to be passed on. It was inconceivable to imagine them chasing after some liberal capitalist candidate in an elusive hunt for crumbs.

In 1997, I worked with striking Teamsters to paint a giant mural in Teamster City Chicago, near Haymarket Square, where the frame up and execution of revolutionaries in the fight for the 8-hour day inspired the beginnings of May Day, the international holiday of the working class.

I painted a small vignette of angels in the heavens—Farrell, Marvel, and the Dunne brothers throwing bolts



Strike leader V.R. Dunne under arrest, August 1934.



Detail: *TEAMSTER POWER! EL PODER DE LOS TEAMSTERS* (now destroyed) by Mike Alewitz, 1997 (www.tinyurl.com/Teamster-Power). Artwork courtesy of the artist.

of red lightning to earth and holding a banner reading “Minneapolis 1934—The Fight Has Just Begun!” Henry Ness was also included. Murdered by the police, Ness's funeral drew 100,000 mourners. A thrilling account of the strike and that event was written by Meridel LeSueur, titled “I Was Marching.” It still gives me chills (www.tinyurl.com/I-Was-Marching).

The dedication of the mural *TEAMSTER POWER! EL PODER DE LOS TEAMSTERS!* was a militant, spirited rally with hundreds of Teamsters and labor activists. I stand by my words to the rally, “This union did not come into being as a gradual process. It was built as a modern industrial union—as a powerful force for working people—through a massive

struggle that shook this country to its foundations. The Minneapolis strike, along with San Francisco and the Toledo Auto-Lite strikes, laid the basis for the formation of the CIO. That's where our industrial unions come from.

“What motivated Farrell Dobbs, Marvel Scholl, and the others was not a buck-an-hour more or a period of relative peace with the boss. What motivated them was the idea of building an organization that could change society from the top to the bottom. And that is what they did. They were ordinary workers like you and I. They were no smarter or talented than us. What characterized them was their tremendous confidence in the ability of working people to change the world. They never doubted that. And so, they were able to make historic changes.”

It remains for us to carry it forward—through our art and organizing—to bring to birth a new world based on human needs, respect for nature, and international solidarity.

Photographs courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

Messaging of the Stop Line 3 Protests

A look at water protectors' visual voices that carry the weight of the world to the world

By John Kim

Stop Line 3 in art and posters

I DON'T RECALL if I was directly involved in painting any of the Stop Line 3 posters, but I was a part of a number of arts activities during the movement. Looking at the signs now, my strongest remembrances aren't the protests

for which they were created, but details I discover in the ephemera of the objects: hurried brushstrokes, imperfectly laid print, the miscellany of materials (duck-taped cardboard, recycled pieces of plywood, donated t-shirts). They tell a story of what happened on the local scale in the sharing of the warmth of community during cold Minnesota winter nights. These activities happened during periods of downtime, the in-between moments in hurried preparation for public actions. Such times are crucial to the life of the movement, for the formation of community and solidarity happen in these quiet, anticipatory moments. In this sense, these posters document for me community-in-formation and solidarity-making that prepare to burst onto a scene as action.

Where is the Planetary?

I write this while attending a conference about the Anthropocene entitled, "Where is the Planetary?" hosted by the House of the World's Cultures* (HKW) in Berlin. HKW has been leading efforts for the adoption of the Anthropocene, the proposed geological epoch that addresses how humans have radically altered Earth systems, warranting a new periodization. In making a



conceptual framework the disparate human impacts on Earth systems from climate change to radioactive fallout, mining to monocultural agriculture. In settings like HKW, it has also centered productive debates about its origins, including colonialism, capitalism, slavery, and technical rationality.

Such debates can be a rallying point for directed action. This is to say that the Anthropocene can also support forms of activism and resistance to the planetary changes we are witnessing and help to contextualize future ones as well. For example, a number of conference attendees from around the world compared notes about the rapid expansion of copper, nickel, lithium, and

*The Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW). The House of the World's Cultures is Germany's national center for the presentation and discussion of international contemporary arts, with a special focus on non-European cultures and societies.

case for the Anthropocene, researchers have collected evidence of a variety of modern human impacts that would survive the geological record of deep time, including mass species extinction, the increasing atmospheric concentration of carbon, the engineering of ecosystems, and more.

In contrast to the local experiences I wrote about, the Anthropocene focuses on geological time-frames and the planetary scale of such changes. It is commonly seen as an intellectual framework for research, and as such, the idea can be a bit of an abstraction to activists who are preoccupied with local action. However, its theorization has aspired to much more. The Anthropocene allows us to connect under a general



other mines to supply raw materials for electric vehicles. This echoes organizing efforts underway against proposed nickel and copper mining in proximity to the same Northern Minnesota Native communities that earlier resisted the Line 3 oil pipeline. The Anthropocene offers a framework for acknowledging the variety of disturbances happening simultaneously on a global scale and threatening the possibility for all life to thrive on the planet.

An Anthropocene for Action

Gatherings, like the one at the House of the World's Cultures, connect transnational actors where the sharing of insights and planning can occur. This is a necessary countervailing force to an intensification of efforts to sever nations from planetary forms of solidarity and action. The United States' wavering commitment to the Paris Climate Accords is a clear example of this. A less obvious one is the expansion of repressive forces in the US battling popular opposition to infrastructure (such as the Line 3 oil pipeline) with laws that escalate the punishment for protest activity. On the local level, such measures are intended to deter activists from participating in protests, but it is also a part of this



The photographs come from the Welcome Water Protectors Center at the Great River, 2022. Permission for use was provided by participants. Individuals are credited when they are known.

nationalist turn that severs the US from its responsibility for planetary action on climate catastrophe.

This situation isn't unique to the United States. As countries around the world increasingly elect populist governments, there is an inward focus on national interests. This portends difficult times ahead for global movements. As suggested here, a corrective to this problem is the strengthening of transnational civil society and action. As a platform for organizing planetarily—the scale at which such activities need to occur—an Anthropocene for action creates opportunities for global community-in-formation and solidarity-making.

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Witnessing the Movement

By Keri Pickett

A CANADIAN CORPORATION has changed the way the waters flow in Minnesota. During Line 3 construction, the Enbridge Energy corporation created multiple aquifer breaches and at least one of them continues to flow more than a year after the completion of the pipeline. The struggle to stop Enbridge Energy from messing up the water in Northern Minnesota goes back to 2013 with the announcement of the Sandpiper pipeline, a fracked-oil pipeline which was defeated in the fall of 2016. The Line 3 pipeline (now called Line 93 following its completion) was announced in 2015, igniting overwhelming tribal and public opposition in the regulatory agency

reviews, in the courts, and on the streets. When the Line 3 construction started in late November of 2020 the Indigenous community opposition was immediate. Native women, water protectors, and their many allies set up camps along the 330 miles of pipe going through traditional Anishinaabe and Dakota territory, making their voices heard. During the year the pipeline was installed, many police and state Department of Natural Resources officers in Minnesota were paid with an escrow account set up by the Enbridge corporation. This incentivized the militarization against



Jingle Dress dancers walk to the Great River Road to protest Line 3 drilling under the Mississippi River, January 9, 2020.

Above: Treaty People Gathering at the headwaters of the Mississippi River, 2021.



Water protectors occupy the Mississippi River on headwaters as Enbridge draws water during a drought, July 29, 2020.

the water protector movement and has criminalized those who believe that water is a precious resource to be protected for future generations. Over a thousand criminal charges later, we in Minnesota are still stuck with Enbridge's mistakes and, considering the corporation's track record of spills and leaks, people are still in opposition to Enbridge and are fighting to drop the charges against water protectors. We can no longer invest in fossil fuel's extreme energy extraction model. The planet needs to use less fossil fuel and transition to a "just economy." Indigenous people are leading the way, standing up for their treaty rights, which are the Supreme Law of the Land, and the



Hundreds gather at an Enbridge crossing site on Hwy 169, January 9, 2020.

land given to the Enbridge corporation for Line 3 falls in the treaty lands set aside to hunt, gather, and practice treaty rights. After witnessing all the destruction by Line 3, I believe it is time to pass the stewardship of the state-held lands to the tribes. Water is

life. For more information about what happened in Line 3 last year, go to www.stopline3.org and please get involved with opposition to Enbridge's Line 5 pipeline.

Keri Pickett photographed the images on these pages. She is an award-winning filmmaker, photographer, author, and artist.

HONOR THE EARTH

Honor the Earth was established by Winona LaDuke and Indigo Girls Amy Ray and Emily Saliers in 1993. In the nearly 30 years of operation, they have re-granted over \$2 million to over 200 Native American communities.

OUR MISSION is to create awareness and support for Native environmental issues and to develop needed financial and political resources for the survival of sustainable Native communities. Honor the Earth develops these resources by using music, the arts, the media, and Indigenous wisdom to ask people to recognize our joint dependency on the Earth and be a voice for those not heard.

As a unique national Native initiative, Honor the Earth works to a) raise public awareness and b) raise and direct funds to grassroots Native environmental groups. We are the only Native organization that provides both financial support and organizing support to Native environmental initiatives. This model is based on strategic analysis of what is needed to forge change in Indian country, and it is based deep in our communities, histories, and long-term struggles to protect the Earth.

Background

We believe a sustainable world is predicated on transforming economic, social, and political relationships that have been based on systems of conquest toward systems based on just relationships with each other and with the natural world. As our mission states, we are committed to restoring a paradigm that recognizes our collective humanity and our joint dependence on the Earth.

We have seen the rise of a highly inefficient American industrial society on our lands. The largest mining companies in the world began in the heart of Anishinaabe territory—the Keweenaw Peninsula and the Mesabi Iron Range—and then traveled the world.

The society which has been created is highly extractive and highly inefficient, where today material resources and water become wasted and toxic, and we waste 60% or more of the energy between the point of origin and point of consumption. This highly destructive economy has reached material limits and is now resorting to extreme extraction. Whether the removal of 500 mountaintops in Appalachia (largely for foreign coal contracts), extreme mining proposals in the Great Lakes region, or fracking and tar sands extraction, we are clearly on a scorched path.

We Need to Tell Our Own Stories

By Winona LaDuke

COLONIALISM MESSES UP things. That's how it goes. In fact, as Shawnee scholar Steven Newcomb once pointed out to me, the word "colonialism" has at its root the same word as "colon." In other words, it means to digest—colonialism is the digestion of one people by another—in military, social, political, economic, and food-system terms.

Welcome to 520 AC. After Colonization. We are now a terribly dependent people, or peoples. By and large, we have ceased to farm our own foods and lands, all a part of a logical consequence of theft, genocide, allotment, boarding schools, land alienation, and the lack of access to basic capital for even small-scale farming—as evidenced in the Keeps Eagle lawsuit. We are net importers of food, and it's costly. And even some of our largest tribal food enterprises—like the Navajo Agricultural Products Industry—produce food, not for Navajos, but for markets elsewhere, as does Gila River. Thousands of acres of our tribal lands are leased out to non-Indian producers who ship across the world. And, in the meantime, we're not looking good. On the White Earth reservation alone, a full third of the population has diabetes.

So what's the solution?

This is the happy part. It turns out that our ancestors had it right, and my father had it right. My father used to say to me, "Winona, I don't want to hear your philosophy, if you can't grow corn..." Now that's an interesting thing to say to your child. Well, I thought about it, and thought about it some more. And then, I decided to grow corn. And, of course, along the way, I became an economist who wanted to look at the systems which support sovereignty and self determination, like our economic systems.

A few important concepts

First, protect your ecosystem. In our case on the White Earth reservation, we protected wild rice from getting genetically engineered by the University of Minnesota. Our tribal chairmen said, "When we signed those treaties, and secured protection for our wild rice, we weren't talking about getting some rice in a bag...We meant a lake. We have a right to the land, water, and air that our food came from and that needs to be protected by sovereign nations."

Then, there's the economics. By producing food, you lose some of the need to purchase it, which reduces the instability of your dollar in a time of climate change and rising oil prices. A small garden plot (I like those raised beds) might put up \$750 worth of food. This is a good thing, if you want to eat.

Then, you get a local economy, if you work it right. One of my favorite Amish families makes around \$10,000 a year on their three acres of gardens. Our organizations and families probably make around \$1,000 for our Farm to School Programs here on the reservation and those big extended family houses. Not bad.

That is why you need a tribal food policy. From soil, or lake, to table, or seed to plate, tribes need to take jurisdiction over production, genetic integrity, processing, purchasing, and composting—if we want to be cyclical about it. Now consider this: If we moved from industrialized agriculture to relocalized organic agriculture, we could sequester about one-quarter of the carbon moving into the air, which is destroying our glaciers, oceans, forests, and lands.



Winona LaDuke

Photograph: Sarah LittleRedFeather

Red Threads of Revolution Always Underway: Stolen Land, General Strike, and the Time of the Seventh Fire

By Yates McKee

It's possible to make a new history. Be the ancestor your descendants would be proud of.

—Winona LaDuke

IN UNION weaves together the career-long engagements by Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds and Keith Christensen with the ethics, politics, and poetics of place-based commemoration. Beyond simply including hitherto unsung Native workers in an updated historical record of the 1934 Minneapolis Truckers' Strike, the project facilitates a counter-memorial remediation of that event, at once radicalizing, expanding, and decentering what we think of as labor history and class struggle in the face of both ever-intensifying contradictions of twenty-first century racial capitalism and the frontline movements fighting to overturn it. IN UNION is especially resonant in the context of so-called Minnesota, which has been the epicenter of two earth-shaking insurgencies in recent years: the Black-led George Floyd uprising against police terror in Minneapolis, and the Indigenous-led direct actions against the Line 3 oil pipeline at numerous sites along the pipeline route in Northern Minnesota. Neither of these events were driven by unions, but they brought thousands of people into collective action to temporarily shut down the infrastructures of the carceral state and fossil capital, cultivating bonds of solidarity and communities of care that have outlived the original events themselves.

IN UNION has three components: a set of handmade banners devoted to the memory of three Native unionists; the present publication, which acts as a mode d'emploi for the banners; and an exhibition at Open Source Gallery in Brooklyn, located on the ancestral territory of the Leni Lenape, and situated just a few miles from what was once known as Little Caughnawaga, a now-gentrified Brooklyn neighborhood that was for much of the twentieth century home to generations of unionized Mohawk migrants who played a crucial role in

constructing the skyline of New York City.

Together, these components make up a prismatic counter-memorial apparatus in which the artistic conveyance of historical knowledge is inseparable from the forming and reorienting of relations in the present. IN UNION thus takes on an "organizing function," as Walter Benjamin called it in "The Author as Producer." Originally presented at the Institute for the Study of Fascism in 1934—the same year as the Minneapolis Truckers' Strike—Benjamin's paper notes the ways in which capitalist-culture industries accommodate themselves to even the most radical of content, set off against the background of growing alliances between the owners of industry and fascism. "Rather than asking, 'What is the attitude of a work to the relations of production of its time,' I would like to ask, 'What is its position in them?'" This question directly concerns the function the work has within the literary relations of production of the time." Operating outside the channels of the mainstream art system and its dependence on climate-destroying oligarchs like Blackrock CEO Larry Fink (a longtime board member at MoMA, for instance), IN UNION exemplifies the development of "literary relations of production" between contemporary art and frontline social movements.

Working with the material qualities, poetic potentials, and historical resonance of the banner as a medium, IN UNION foregrounds the intersection of histories that are not often seen in conjunction, beyond those who have lived it directly or studied it in depth: the history of urban proletarian struggles by wage workers, on the one hand, and the reclaiming of Indigenous sovereignty of colonized lands, waters, and air, on the other. As we learn from IN UNION, these histories of labor struggle and land restoration need to be understood not only as parallel tracks, but as deeply entwined and charged with both contradictions and possibilities.

Yates McKee is an art historian and author of Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition.

The historical remediation undertaken by this project is both unsettling and restorative. It is unsettling insofar as it redresses blind spots that mark hitherto existing histories of the 1934 strike; it is restorative in that, in the process of redressing those blindspots, it proposes new modes of engagement, relations, and solidarity between struggles, places, and people. In the process of weaving these strands together, IN UNION creates a kind of relational geography of memory triangulated between at least three sites in the occupied territories of the so-called United States: Minnesota, Oklahoma/Kansas, and New York City.

Land acknowledgments have become an increasingly familiar genre of communication by settler cultural institutions in recent years. These are often combined with a recognition (as we read in the foreword to this publication) that acknowledgments per se are not only insufficient on their own, but can serve as alibis for delaying change if treated as an end, rather than a beginning of deep transformation on the part of institutions and settler society more broadly, with the imperative of Land Back at its core.

The intensifying pressure flows from both large-scale Indigenous mobilizations against extractivism like Standing Rock and Line 3, as well as the Indigenous generations of scholars, artists, and community advocates using a diversity of tactics to challenge the authority of settler cultural institutions, from protests at massive structures like the American Museum of Natural History to the smaller-scale example of Yale Union in Portland, Oregon which in 2020 transferred its building and land to the Center for Native Arts and Cultures.

For three decades, the work of Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds has been a crucial touchstone for these developments, starting with his now career-spanning *Native Hosts*. The first iteration of the project was the installation of six official-seeming place-signs around the edges of City Hall in Lower Manhattan: on each, the script of the collective toponym "New York" is literally flipped backwards, and paired with an acknowledgment of the ancestral Indigenous territories on which the metropolis is built: "New York [backward]: Today Your Host is Shinnecock," for example. The reverse-signage of

Native Hosts is seismic in its psychic and material implications for settler society, yet oblique in its evocation of localized colonial violence.

More searingly specific in its commemorative intervention was the 1990 project *Building Minnesota*, which consisted of forty identically formatted metal signs installed in a row along the banks of the Mississippi River in the so-called Grain District of downtown Minneapolis. Each sign was dedicated to the singular name and memory of the thirty-eight Lakota warriors executed by order of Abraham Lincoln following the so-called Dakota War of 1862, along with two others executed in 1865 by Andrew Johnson.

In a photograph of the installation, we see the artist himself contemplating a sign that reads: "HONOR/Ma-ka'ta I-na'-zin/One Who Stands on the Earth/DEATH

BY HANGING, DEC 26, 1862, MANKATO, MN."

Looming behind the scene is the monumental Tenth Avenue Bridge, just one element in the dense assemblage of settler-colonial urban infrastructure encrusted along and across the Mississippi River. As Heap of Birds writes in a statement addressing the site-specificity of the installation, "This is a proud 'historical' district of the city of Minneapolis and the state of Minnesota that houses the grain and flour mills, canals, and facilities to ship out the fruits of American progress."

"It was the potential disruption of American commerce that cost the Dakota people their lives," the artist continues, insisting that audiences approach the environments and landscapes of the modern capitalist metropolis as a vast crime-scene, throwing into relief that foundational process of genocide, displacement, and extractivism that have made cities like Minneapolis, territories like Minnesota, and indeed the entirety of the United States' territorial empire possible.

This foundational violence commemorated by *Building Minnesota* was preemptively announced in the Minnesota state flag, officialized five years before the Dakota War in 1857 and continuing to be displayed to this day. It shows a Native warrior riding horseback into the western sunset as a settler ploughs along the banks of the Mississippi. The scene is replete with St. Anthony



Indigenous People's Day/Anti-Columbus Day Tour, American Museum of Natural History, NYC, October 14, 2019. Artwork courtesy of MTL+.

Falls, a name imposed by French missionaries in 1680 on the Mississippi River site known to the Dakota as Owámniyomni (lit. whirlpool). Situated less than a mile from the place where *Building Minnesota* was installed, the water falls in the nineteenth century would be mechanically engineered into a driving power source for what would become corporate behemoths like Pillsbury and General Mills.

Developed in close consultation with Dakota elders, *Building Minnesota* was a profound intervention into the white mythologies of official Minnesota history, while at the same time creating a space of prayer, ancestral reconnection, and healing for local Indigenous communities. But beyond “official” history-from-above, *Building Minnesota* also has unsettling ramifications for left-leaning histories that proffer inspiring histories of working-class agency and political advancement.

The liberal end of the progressive ideological spectrum in Minnesota largely assimilates working-class history into the electoral politics of the Democratic Farm Labor party (DFL), which began as a socialist-adjacent entity in the 1920s and now functions as a slightly left-of-center counterbalance to neoliberal corporate Democrats. The radical pole, on the other hand, looks to working-class history not to bolster a reformist agenda for the present, but rather to recover and rekindle the otherwise forgotten sparks of insurrectionary action and imagination that point beyond themselves into the present and future. This brings us to the crux of the current IN UNION project: the 1934 Minneapolis Truckers’ Strike.

Building on his decades-long engagement with the arts of radical labor history—including his participation in the legendary Pathfinder mural, led by IN UNION contributor Mike Alewitz—Keith Christensen’s recent work has been devoted to both sustaining and reactivating the memories of the 1934 strike, while developing intergenerational conversations and relationships in the process. *Game Turn: Learning from the Minneapolis Truckers’ Strike of 1934* (2017) is multilayered work of archival research and contemporary commemoration. Recalling the



Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds, *Building Minnesota*, installation on the Mississippi River, 1990.

psychogeographic countercartographies of the Situationists, *Game Turn* is a powerful retelling and resource of the strike, and brings it into living history through the format of the game and block-by-block sense of the strike as it unfolded throughout the core of the city. In the book we find a compelling assemblage of historical testimony, archival photographs, historical signage, and a stirring transcript

by a worker-historian enjoining young people of the early 2000’s to remember the dead and honor the martyrs.

Published five years after that book was written, IN UNION could be considered from one angle as a kind of supplemental pendant to *Game Turn*, helping us to both address a blind spot in the original project and to appreciate the stakes of the historical remediation undertaken by IN UNION as a collaboration with Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds. By “supplement,” I do not mean that it simply adds onto or compensates for a lack in the original, leaving the latter more comprehensive or complete in its identity. On the contrary, the supplement here exacerbates the historical questions that go unspoken in the original, opening the entirety of labor history itself to questions informed by contemporary decolonial struggles: As we celebrate the radicalism of the 1934 strike and its ongoing lessons in working-class self organization, what about the land on which the strike unfolded; the people displaced from that land to make way for the factories, streets, and territorial infrastructure that would be so fiercely contested by the strikers; and the ever-expanding reach of the extractivist industries at the core of the Minneapolis economy: agribusiness, mining, and timber? What does it mean for a general strike to unfold on stolen land? When the system is shut down, who or what reclaims the city, and to what ends? Men like Rainbolt and Holstein lived these contradictions, which have taken new forms of expressions in the ninety years separating the 1934 strike and the insurgencies of recent years.

At Amazon warehouses and Starbucks stores, at art museums and college campuses, strike-actions have been on the rise in recent years. Unions obviously

continue to be an essential vehicle of class struggle. But we should remember that organized labor has developed unevenly in the U.S., entangled as it has also been with pro-growth extractivism and empire, from the military contractor employing Heap of Birds’ parents to the unionized workers building the Enbridge pipeline. IN UNION presents the union-form as a two-sided fabric of possibilities and contradictions, in the process honoring the 1934 strikers in their singularity, by name, by portrait, and by biography when possible. While inscribed into the collective imaginary of the strike and the broader world-historical narrative of

proletarian revolution current among Trotskyists at the time, each striker is an irreplaceable archive of stories, connections, and relations, only slivers of which appear in historical documents per se. Heap of Birds’ offering his own singular story in the pages of this book—and threading it through archives of the Minneapolis strikers—enacts a decolonial transformation of materialist history. The artist’s Christmas tale draws forth the resonance between the union’s self-organized communal support-system and Indigenous traditions of mutual aid, highlighting the collective care work of family reproduction beyond the walls of the factory. How, if at all, can *this* union spirit be disarticulated from the engines of capitalist growth to which all workers are hitched in some way or another?

IN UNION honors solidarity as a precious social relation to be found wherever oppressed people rise up in collective defiance of capitalism to defend and care for their friends, families, and communities. Triangulated with the riot and the blockade, this is the true power of the strike as a form of action—a withdrawal of economic compliance from the powers that be, and the re-creation, however incipient or uneven, of alternative structures and spaces of life in common, recovering traditions and prefiguring futures simultaneously.

But we—especially those of us who are settler-descended white people—must be wary of idealizing such movement moments of solidarity, which all too often can involve the suppression of differences and unevenly shared responsibilities for historical and contemporary harms. The restoration of Indigenous land is central to this conversation, with various models and initiatives



Keith Christensen, cards and game tokens from the *Game Turn* project, 2017.

proliferating around the country. A leading example is the Water Protectors Welcome Center in Palisade, Minnesota. Based on a formerly settler-owned property along the Mississippi that was transferred to the Akiing initiative, the center supported actions against the Line 3 Pipeline during the region-wide mobilizations of 2020-2021. With the defeat of the fiercely fought campaign, the protest camp and its attendant physical structures, equipment, and, most important, social relations have been transitioned into an Indigenous-led arts and education center. The center is devoted to sustaining and disseminating the movement culture that

animated the protests, building infrastructure in conjunction with groups like Honor the Earth and teachers like Jim Northrup Jr., who led a series of participatory camps around the harvesting of manoomin (wild rice). Though resonating with numerous visions of post-capitalist solidarity economies the world over from Chiapas, Mexico, to Jackson, Mississippi, the core ethos of this work is the Ojibwe prophecy of the Seventh Fire, and the forms of earth-based technology, art, and survivance developing along with it. As Winona LaDuke puts it, “In our teachings as an Anishinaabe people, where we are now is referred to as the time of the Seventh Fire. It is said that long ago prophets came to our people—the same prophets who instructed us specifically where to go—and they said that at the Time of the Seventh Fire, we as Anishinaabe people would have a choice between two paths. One path, they said, would be well worn, but it would be scorched; the other path, they said, would not be well worn, it would be green.”

“Green” here names a transformation of values and practices deeper than what has been proffered by the Green New Deal, and it militates against the eco-friendly veneer given to Wendigo capitalism by figures like Elon Musk, whose Tesla corporation has heavily invested in a nickel mine just east of Palisade in the town of Tamarack—a likely site of confrontation in the future. Moving forward, let us keep in mind the title of one of Heap of Birds’ monotype-grids, produced in 2019, just as the Red Deal framework was emerging in the aftermath of Standing Rock: “OUR/RED/NATIONS/WERE/ALWAYS/GREEN.”

Contributors

Mike Alewitz is an educator, agitprop artist, mural painter, and political activist, working both in the United States and internationally. He has spoken and written extensively on political and cultural topics and is the co-author (with Paul Buhle) of *Insurgent Images: The Agitprop Murals of Mike Alewitz*.

John Kim is an Associate Professor at Macalester College. A theorist and practitioner of new media, he has published widely and created interactive installations and projects at museums and galleries around the world. He is the author of *Rupture of the Virtual*.

Winona LaDuke is one of the world's most tireless and charismatic leaders on issues related to climate change, Indigenous rights, human rights, green and rural economies, grass-roots organizing, local foods, alternative sources of energy, and the priceless value of clean water over a career spanning decades of activism. She is a co-founder of Honor The Earth. <https://honorearth.org>

Yates McKee is an art historian and an activist with post-Occupy groups such as Strike Debt and Global Ultra Luxury Faction. His writing has appeared in *October*, *The Nation*, and *Artforum*. He is Coeditor of the magazine *Tidal* and *Sensible Politics: The Visual Culture of Nongovernmental Activism*. In addition, he is the author of *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition*.

Keri Pickett is an award-winning filmmaker, photographer, author, and artist. As a producer/director/DP, her films have won a number of awards. *First Daughter and the Black Snake* (2017, 93 minutes) is about Native American activist Winona LaDuke and her efforts to keep sacred wild rice watersheds free of Enbridge's pipelines for fracked oil and tar sands pipelines. www.blacksnakefilm.com. In addition, she directed and co-produced *Ribbon Skirt Warriors* (2023).

Shauna Sorensen is Development Director of Open Source Gallery. For ten years she has worked with both individual artists and organizations to secure funding for art production, exhibitions, and wages.

Monika Wührer is Executive Director of Open Source Gallery. She received her MFA from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, Austria. She has created socially engaged art throughout her career and undertaken large-scale projects including the creation of a museum shop space for garment factory workers at the Pecci Museum in Florence, Italy. In addition, she serves on the advisory board for the Puffin Foundation.

About the Authors

Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds

is a multi-disciplinary artist. His art contributions include public-art messages, large-scale drawings, Neuf Series acrylic paintings, prints, and monumental porcelain enamel on steel outdoor sculpture. The tribal elder serves as an instructor in the traditional Cheyenne Earth Renewal Ceremony at Concho, Oklahoma and is one of the leaders of the Elk Scraper Warrior Society. He lives in Oklahoma City, OK. www.eheapofbirds.com

Keith Christensen

is an artist and designer. His work has been focused on public art and social justice issues. He created *Game Turn, Learning from the Minneapolis Truckers' Strike of 1934*, a board game installation and book project. He continues his painting practice and recently authored the book *See & Say Time* about his process and work. He also provides design services for the East Side Freedom Library in St. Paul. He lives in Minneapolis, MN. www.kc.ampmpls.com

Resources

MPLS TRUCKERS' STRIKE OF 1934 & MORE

BOOKS

Revolutionary Teamsters: The Minneapolis Truckers' Strikes of 1934 by Bryan Palmer
Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014

Teamster Rebellion by Farrell Dobbs
New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972

American City: A Rank-and-File History
by Charles Rumford Walker
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1936/2005

A Union Against Unions: The Minneapolis Citizens Alliance and Its Fight Against Organized Labor
by William Millikan
St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001

Insurgent Images: The Agitprop Murals of Mike Alewitz by Mike Alewitz and Paul Buhle
New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002
see also: www.facebook.com/alewitz/

FILMS

Labor's Turning Point
Video documentation of the strike. 43 m, 1981,
Producer/Writer: John de Graaf
Includes interviews with participants and news footage.
The film shows how the strike was organized and how the union broke the back of the anti-union Citizens' Alliance, making Minneapolis a union town.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfE9Aa1xYXw&t=1031s

The Lessons of the 1934 Minneapolis Teamster Strike (video) by Bryan Palmer, Jul 28, 2014
www.youtube.com/watch?v=DvNbKgZMGyl

WEB SITES

Minnesota Historical Society
<https://libguides.mnhs.org/1934strike>

Remember 1934
An archive on the history and commemoration of the strike.
www.rem34.ampmpls.com

WATER PROTECTORS AND RELATED

WEB SITES

Winona LaDuke
www.winonaladuke.com

Honor the Earth
www.honorearth.org

Stop Line 3 website
www.stopline3.org

The Water Protectors Welcome Center
(Palisade, Minnesota) an arts and cultural education center, focused on traditional ecological knowledge, citizen science, and arts in resistance.
www.facebook.com/welcomewaterprotectors

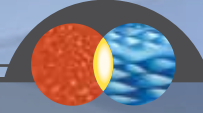
Keri Pickett
First Daughter and the Black Snake
www.keripickett.com/work/first-daughter-and-black-snake/
www.blacksnakefilm.com

John Kim
www.macalester.edu/mcs/facultystaff/johnkim/

Yates McKee
Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition, 2017
www.versobooks.com/books/2471-strike-art

Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds
www.eheapofbirds.com

Keith Christensen
www.kc.ampmpls.com



IN UNION

is an

exhibition and book project that affirms the value of Native roles in social change. The collaborative artwork is connected to family and the fight for rights. Banners are presented with the dynamic letterforms and poetic language of Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds merged with the symbolic portraits and figurative work by Keith Christensen. The book provides the facts of Native engagement in a historic labor strike, a family's participation in a union, and an ongoing Indigenous-led environmental movement. The intention is to give some context for the artwork and to show its relationship to the larger meaning of solidarity. The political moment clearly shows the need for collective action in order for all people to survive. In unity. **IN UNION.**