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A Note from the Art Collective of Tapestries

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Bury the Empire: Cultivating Resistance

A Note from the Art Collective of *Tapestries*

Ikran Noor, Oli Palmera Tierney, Sofia Cook, and Vivian S. Tran

The cover art of this edition of tapestries was created to capture the theme of our overall work which critiques the American empire and the status quo it upholds. We recognize that the dismantling of Empire and other systems of oppression is not the end all be all in the extensive of our collective liberation. Prison abolitionist and geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore reminds us that “abolition is about presence, not absence,”¹ thus we must imagine a world that is not simply the absence of oppressive systems but a world in which the conditions of our existence are transformed. In tandem with the work of dismantling punitive systems which do not value life, we must simultaneously “build life affirming institutions” by which the existence of prisons becomes obsolete, even unthinkable.²

In short, the abolition of systems which do not serve life on Earth (the burying of Empire) is a fundamentally creative process that requires that we imagine ways of being, relating, and remediating that do not exist at the expense of any being’s right to life and freedom from harm. The creation of this world, which does not currently exist, is not only possible but a necessity—the continuation of life for people and planet, interconnected, depends on it. We are already experiencing the disastrous effects of living under systems which devalue life for the purpose of extraction and domination, thus the building of “life affirming institutions” begins here and now. Our medium for the artwork is rooted in the histories of artwork made in social movements before us. The use of collage, printmaking, spray paint, and many more share the message of resistance. The affordability of these methods was core to the dissemination of the artwork. We designed and carved our piece out of linoleum, printed it with block printing ink, and scanned it for the digital publication. In addition to the journal cover, the print allows us to make our own copy on clothing to take with us after we leave Macalester, a reminder of our edition of *Tapestries* and how we want to “build life affirming institutions.”³

In imagining and building just futures, we must ground ourselves in the places we inhabit and the temporalities we are situated within. If we plant on top of the soil without first acknowledging and unearthing the roots that lay underneath, we doom our new seedlings to fail.

¹ Tippett, “Ruth Wilson Gilmore — ‘Where Life Is Precious, Life Is Precious.’”

² Tippett.

³ Tippett.

Tangible, systemic change begins with the entangled root systems beneath our feet– the unseen historical memory foundational to the realm of the present and visible. We cannot make sense of the current conditions that shape our existence, nor can we imagine beyond these conditions without first addressing and interacting with what is here *now* and what has persisted against all odds as the basis from which we transform ourselves and the world we inhabit. We have resided in *Imnížaska Othúŋwe, Mni Sóta Makoce*,⁴ throughout our time at Macalester. In the artwork, *Ĥaĥáwakpa*, is in the background.⁵ There are four bur oak trees that frame the print, based off the Four Oaks Spiritual Encampment. The four oaks were a sacred site and faced the cardinal directions. For the Dakota, it was used as a burial scaffold for the hundreds of Dakota elders, women, and children who had died imprisoned on Pike Island after the US-Dakota War in 1862.⁶ The oak trees were cut down in December 1999 for the construction of the Highway 55 reroute after 18 months of non-violent resistance by activists and protesters at the Four Oaks Spiritual Encampment and the Minnehaha Free State.⁷ The Four Oaks Spiritual Encampment as the site in the art suggests the resilience of the natural world and a restoration of relationships to land disrupted by racist, colonial infrastructure. It is assumed within the image that, through the passage of time, the Empire will be consumed by the Earth and regenerated back into the soil to kick-start new cycles of life. Although the sacred site of the four oak trees are now long gone, the work of organizers, activists, and community members in the Minnehaha Free State are not forgotten. Their resistance saved another sacred site for indigenous communities, *Mne Owe Sni*, a space of healing, meeting, and ceremony for many nations.⁸ Off

⁴ In Dakota, *Imnížaska Othúŋwe, Mni Sóta Makoce* means “Little White Rock City” in “the land of clear water” or “the land where water reflects the skies,” known as St. Paul, Minnesota. See Neerdaels, Lippert, and Engel, “Minneapolis–St. Paul in Dakota and Ojibwe”; Olson, “How to Pronounce ‘Mni Sóta Makoce,’ the Dakota Phrase That Will Be on the New State Seal.”

⁵ In Dakota, *Ĥaĥáwakpa* translates to “River of the Falls.” Neerdaels, Lippert, and Engel, “Minneapolis–St. Paul in Dakota and Ojibwe.”

⁶ Losure, “The Camp,” 2; University of Minnesota Holocaust and Genocide Studies, “US-Dakota War of 1862.”

⁷ In the 1950s, highways were built destroying and dividing neighborhoods. Because of the strong opposition for decades to the reroute of Highway 55, it was a low-priority project until the 1990s. The construction for the reroute began in the late 1990s. “The reroute would cut through the oak savannas of Minnehaha Park and would crush one of the last remaining cold-water springs in Minneapolis; a spring and four bur oaks were held sacred by the Mendota Mdewakanton Dakota.” The Minnehaha Free State consisted of activists and protesters who occupied peacefully in Minnehaha Park non-stop for 18 months surviving numerous violent raids by the police. On December 11, 1999, that morning all occupants of the encampment could leave or be arrested. By the afternoon, the four oak trees were cut down. Coldwater Springs was protected in 2001 by the passing of the law “Protection of natural flow” and construction paused for a year so a new design could be approved that would not “diminish the flow of water to or from Camp Coldwater Spring.” See Egan, Tlingit Nation, *The Commemorative History of The Minnehaha Free State and Four Oaks Spiritual Encampment*; 2023 Minnesota Statutes State History Chapter 138 Section 138.665.

⁸ “Memory Map | Bdote Memory Map.”

to the side, a pond with a small bed of *Manoomin* (wild rice), a sacred food, plant, and medicine to Native peoples in the Great Lakes Region.⁹ Historically, it has grown along *Háńáwakpa* and around lakes throughout the Twin Cities, but due to industrialization most of the cultivation sites have been destroyed.

We use “cultivating” as the metaphorical tending of seeds which have already been planted for us: the legacies of social justice and liberatory work we strive to continue, the theoretical frameworks which we build upon in our capstones, the honoring of those who came before us, the assurance that the wisdom and life-giving work of our ancestors, relatives, friends, teachers, mentors, activists, freedom fighters is fundamental to our envisioning of the world we want to live in. The footprints left behind on the dirt get us to consider the role of humans in these natural cycles—if we understand that humans have lived in a sustainable connection with the natural world for millennia, we know that cultivation is not without human interaction with land. For as long as structures of domination have reigned, so too has resistance to these structures. In many of our projects, we draw upon and cultivate living histories of resistance, carrying them into the present as we endeavor to “bury the Empire.”

If we choose to not perpetuate cycles of harm in death, our destruction does not intend to replace but to transform—destruction is a means of creation, a contribution to larger cycles of life, death, decay, and regeneration. The Empire will not be thrown away to lay stagnant in the landfills, rather, these systems which do not serve, or respect life will be composted and transformed into those that fit many worlds into one, where all beings are respected as worthy bearers of life. This is reflected through our artistic rendering of the Empire as a gravesite wherein its physical manifestation (the American flag) is buried underneath the soil to decay with new plant growth budding out of and around the grave itself. Weeds surround the gravesite, symbolic of resilience against all the odds. The wisdom of everyone before us has led to the growth of these weeds, surviving, and taking root. Our responsibility is to be good stewards of the land and the knowledge passed to us, to take care of what exists, and engage with the continuous struggle for liberation.

⁹ First We Must Consider Manoomin/Psin, “Our Work – Kawe Gidaa-Naanaagadawendaamin Manoomin.”

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