

An aerial photograph showing a winding river cutting through vibrant green rice terraces. The terraces are arranged in a series of curved, stepped patterns that follow the contours of the land. The river is a dark, narrow channel that meanders through the landscape. In the background, there are some palm trees and a few small structures, possibly farmhouses or storage buildings. The overall scene is a lush, agricultural landscape.

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FEATURE

ON *MADWEYAASHKAA: WAVES CAN BE HEARD* WITH MOIRA VILLIARD

By Moira Villiard and Laurie Moberg

In February 2021, artist Moira Villiard debuted her installation, *Madweyaashkaa: Waves Can Be Heard* as the fourth installment of the *Illuminate the Lock* series at the closed Upper St. Anthony Lock and Dam in Minneapolis, Minnesota. On three chilly February evenings, 2,500 people walked through the snow on top

of Upper St. Anthony Lock and Dam to watch what Villiard calls an “animated video collage” projected on the 49-by-400-foot concrete walls of the no-longer-functioning lock.

Part of the *All My Relations Arts Bring Her Home: Sacred Womxn of Resistance* exhibition,

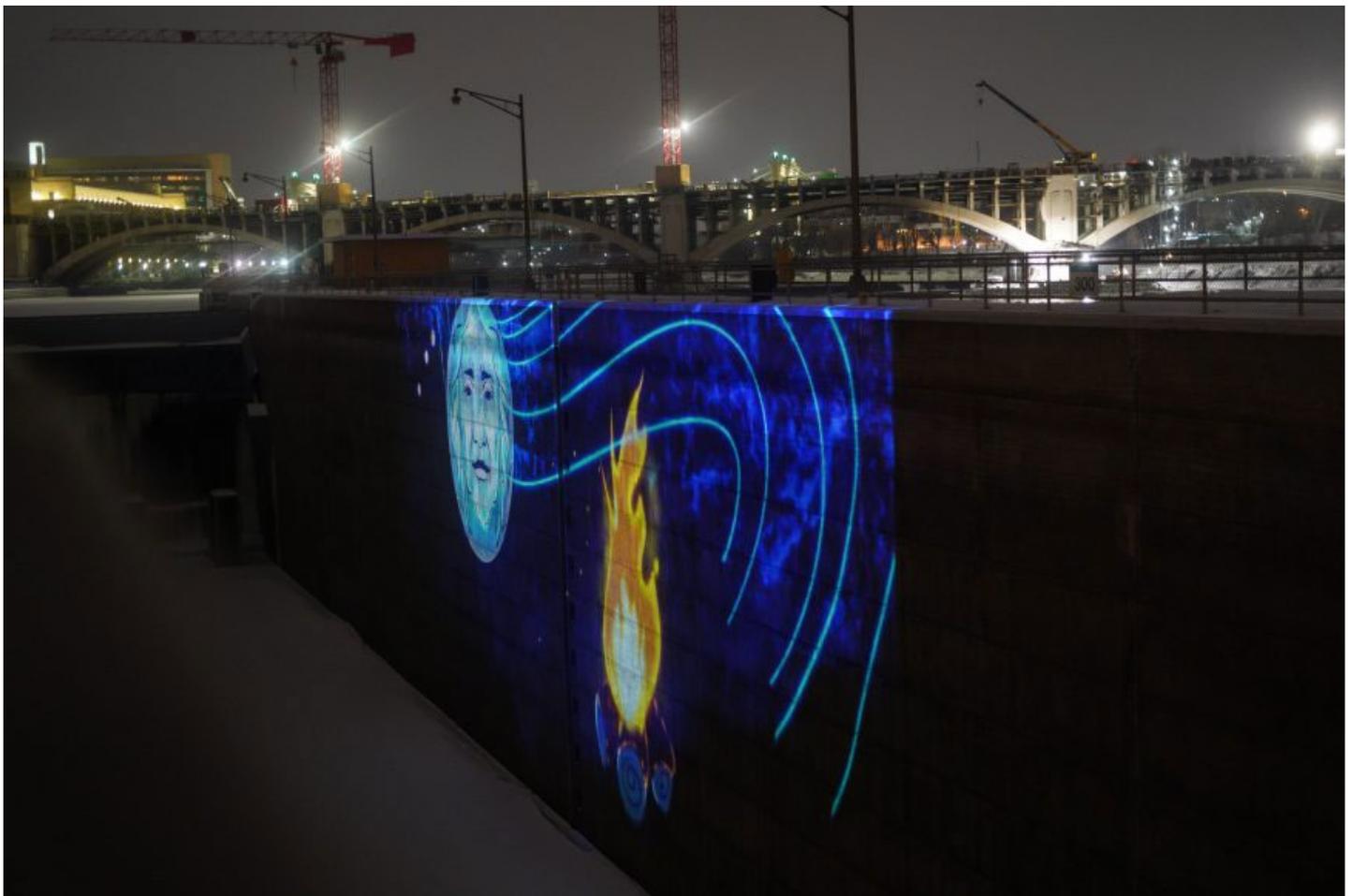


Illustration of Nokomis (Grandmother) appearing over a fire. Image courtesy of Nedahness Greene.

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the installation includes images of the Grandmother moon (Nokomis) and the jingle dress dance created by Moira Villiard (Fond du Lac Band of Ojibwe direct descendant), a soundscape composed by Lyz Jaakola (Fond du Lac Band of Ojibwe), and narrative by Dakota/Ojibway First Nation elder Millie Richard. Together, the provocative and breathtaking 10-minute looping projection speaks to the experiences of isolation in the midst of a global pandemic, the resilience of Indigenous women, and reconnecting to ourselves, culture, ancestors, and nature.

After the installation closed, Laurie Moberg of *Open Rivers* [OR] spoke with artist Moira Villiard [MV] about her work and about the experience and meaning of *Madeweyaashkaa*:

Waves Can Be Heard. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

[OR] Thank you for joining me today, Moira. I was moved by your installation *Madeweyaashkaa: Waves Can Be Heard* as part of the *Illuminate the Lock* series and I'm pleased to be able to talk with you today. To start our conversation, would you be willing to tell me a little bit about yourself and what brought you to public art?

[MV] Yeah. I always like to say that my life is a series of intentional accidents. As a kid I didn't really have a lot of plans for my future; I didn't grow up in a family that would say "go to college and make a life for yourself." Pretty much every decision I made after high school was thinking "I'm just going to put myself in a space and see what happens." I put myself in spaces where I



Spectators line up at the edge of the lock to watch the animated projection at sunset. Image courtesy of Nedahness Greene.

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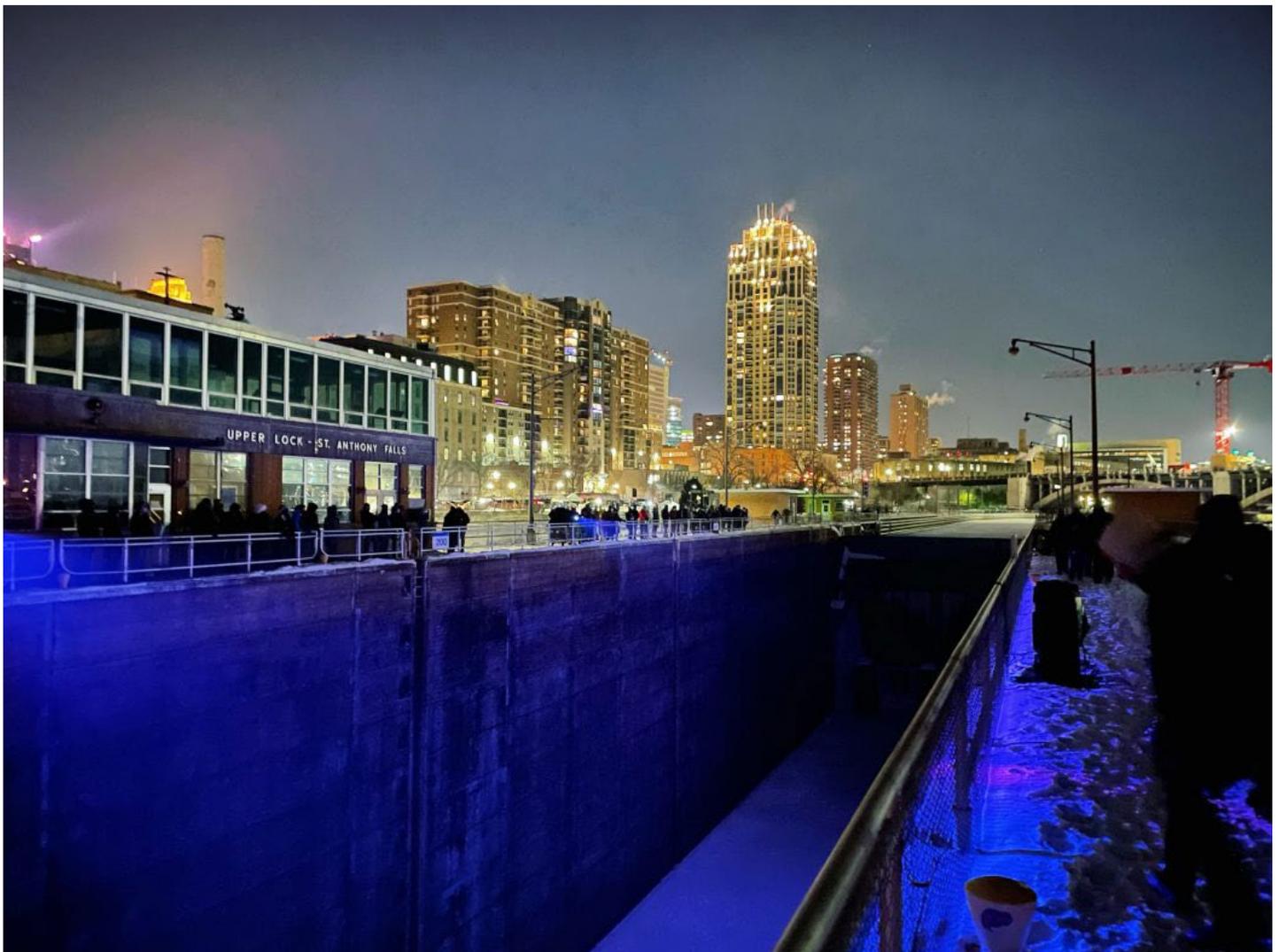
felt like opportunity was going to present itself in some way if I just hung around long enough.

I went to college and that was really where I started connecting with all sorts of different people and then getting inspired to do more artwork. Initially what inspired my art was people—being around people and doing portraiture. I just love human beings. I had a very isolated upbringing (for many reasons—social, geographic, financial, etc.), so that’s where the people obsession comes from—because I didn’t have a lot of people growing up. As soon as I got into environments where

there were people, I decided I was going to make art about people.

I had my first art show when I was 18 or 19. That was another chance happening. There was another artist in my science class, and we used to sit in the back of the classroom and doodle. Eventually, he asked if I wanted to do an art show with him at the American Indian Center that had just opened in Duluth.

For that show, I dropped off all the artwork that I’d done in my solitary life, unframed. I literally



A view from the top of the wall where Madweyaashkaa was projected, opposite the audience who looks onward at the animation. The deep blue color of the projection radiates throughout the whole lock. Image courtesy of Moira Villiard.



In a photo taken on the night of testing the projectors, Minneapolis glows in the distance as the Mishomis (Grandfather) animation appears on one of the lock site's smaller walls. Image courtesy of Moira Villiard.

brought about 100 pieces of art to the gallery the day before the show. I didn't know what went into an art show or anything like that. Being a new program, they covered the costs of framing a lot of that work. From there, I had a body of framed, ready-to-hang work, and I started to go to other gallery spaces.

I made a goal back then that I was going to do at least one art show or arts-related public thing every month for the rest of my life. And I stuck by that. On my resumé there's over 150 things, like exhibitions I either curated or I was a part of with my art, my private painting practice.

Then I started doing live painting at shows. That was just a fun idea I had: I like being around people, so I thought I'd invite people to start adding to my paintings as I set up at events or set up at coffee shops. People would come and put their stuff on mine.

I started doing public art with an organization called *Zeitgeist*. They reached out saying, "We've got a street that's going to be blocked off during the summer. Do you want to facilitate some sort of large-scale mural on the street? We can pay you and pay for the paint." I turned to Facebook and asked people what they wanted to see in the art world around [Duluth]. We're an artsy city, but we don't have a lot of people or stories that are really well represented in public art. People wanted a mural around water because it's important to everybody here in Duluth. We're a port city and water is also culturally significant. Over 100 people came to help me paint a temporary mural on the street. It was a big fish with all these different vignettes of how water is important.

I used that as my one public art example for a *Forecast Public Art* grant which led to doing crosswalk murals with [Zeitgeist]. I think people were sad that the crosswalk murals and the street art were temporary, so people asked me to paint their walls so it would be permanent. I'd learned to paint murals kind of on the fly, getting a paid

gig and learning as I went. I've learned to do everything I do just by having a paid opportunity and people who are willing to let me figure it out. I was also doing freelance graphic design in between large-scale public art work as well.

Then fast forward to this past year: *All My Relations Arts* reached out and said, "Do you want to try to do animation on this big wall?" And I said, "Okay, why not?"

[OR] And your installation for *Illuminate the Lock—Madweyaashkaa: Waves Can Be Heard*—is part of the *Bring Her Home: Sacred Womxn of Resistance* exhibition put together by All My Relations Arts, right?

[MV] Yeah. I'd been working in digital art for the *Bring Her Home* exhibit series since it started, but I didn't do digital art for this year. Instead, they asked me to be part of the collection of events and have my own, different opportunity.

The *Bring Her Home* set of exhibits has been recurring for three or four years. Originally it was drawing attention to the issue of murdered and missing Indigenous women (MMIW); it has been sort of building since then, adding additional themes. The exhibit narrative continues to revolve around murdered and missing Indigenous women, and has grown to include other components of Indigenous women's representation. This year the theme was Sacred Womxn of Resilience. They're trying to have more of a resiliency theme because it's important to draw attention to the issues but then you don't want the narrative of the community to be only this sad representation. It has opened up a bit, uplifting Indigenous women's voices.

[OR] MMIW is an important set of issues, but I also see the point All My Relations Arts' is making—of wanting to be sure to share more than just a single narrative.

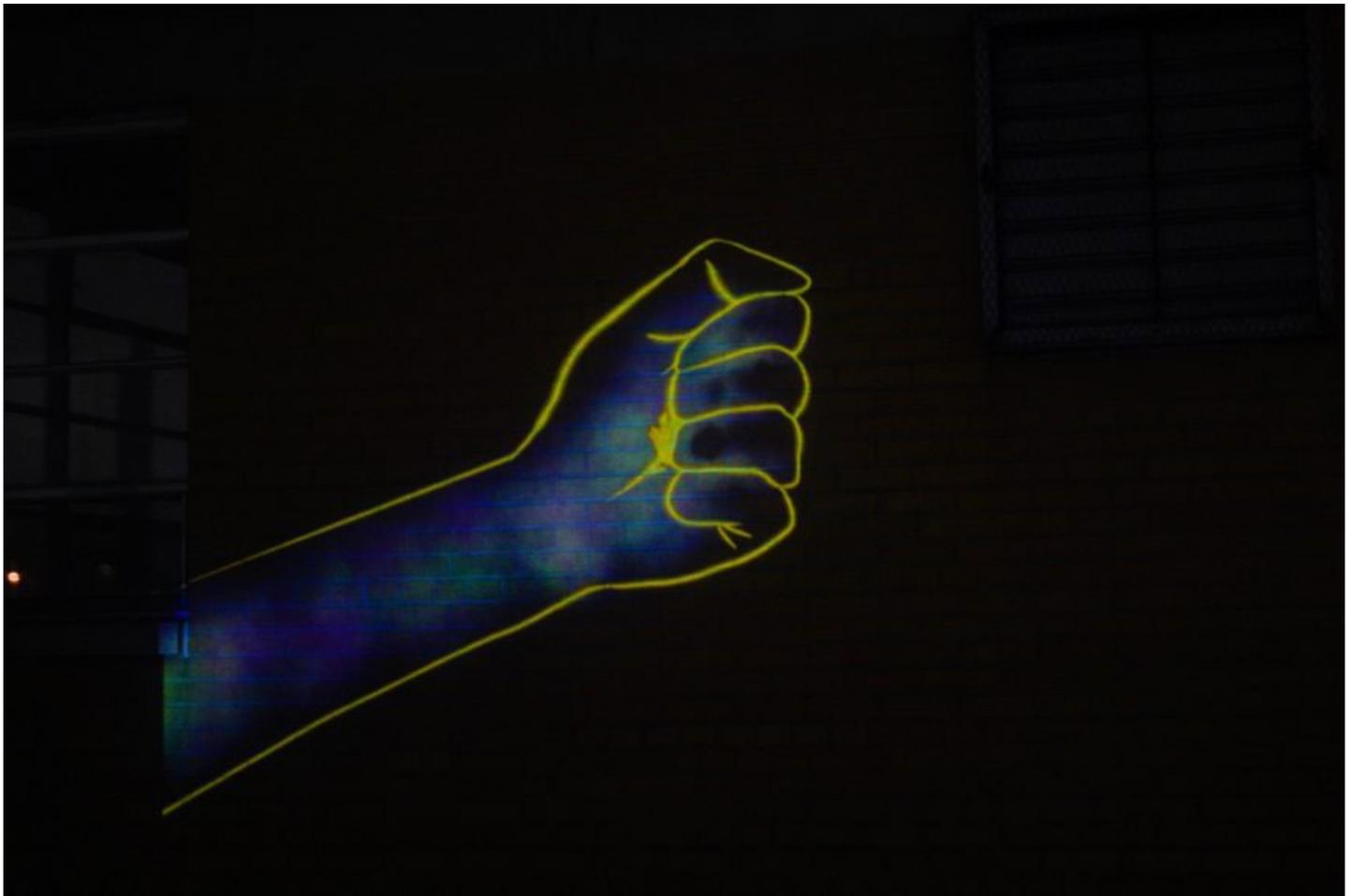
[MV] Yeah. We had a conversation about this after *Illuminate the Lock* because there's a lot of pressure, especially for artists of Indigenous

heritage when they do get these public platforms, to wrap a lot of things into it because there's not a lot of representation in the art world of Native artists, of their stories. I had this big platform, but I can't do everything; I can't wrap up everything that the community wants in this one opportunity, but hopefully it opens the doors for more stories to take place.

There's always that danger—because there's not a lot of representation—that anything you do, is going to be taken as the overall narrative. That is always the biggest challenge for me in doing anything that's very public, understanding that there

are expectations, and even extra expectations when you're dealing with Indigenous content.

I always have to remind myself in these processes that I'm just one facet of Indigenous identity. I am not a voice for all people and all experiences, and I try to be really clear in my work about that. With *Illuminate the Lock*, there was a balance of personal and public. I have my own personal inspiration, but it's in a public space, and dealing with a very public subject. Bringing that to light and then putting it in a space that's public, that is not necessarily a Native-specific space. There was a need for balance, too, to consider what



*A scene from the first mini projection loop in which a hand offers asemaa (tobacco) in prayer.
Image courtesy of Nedahness Greene.*

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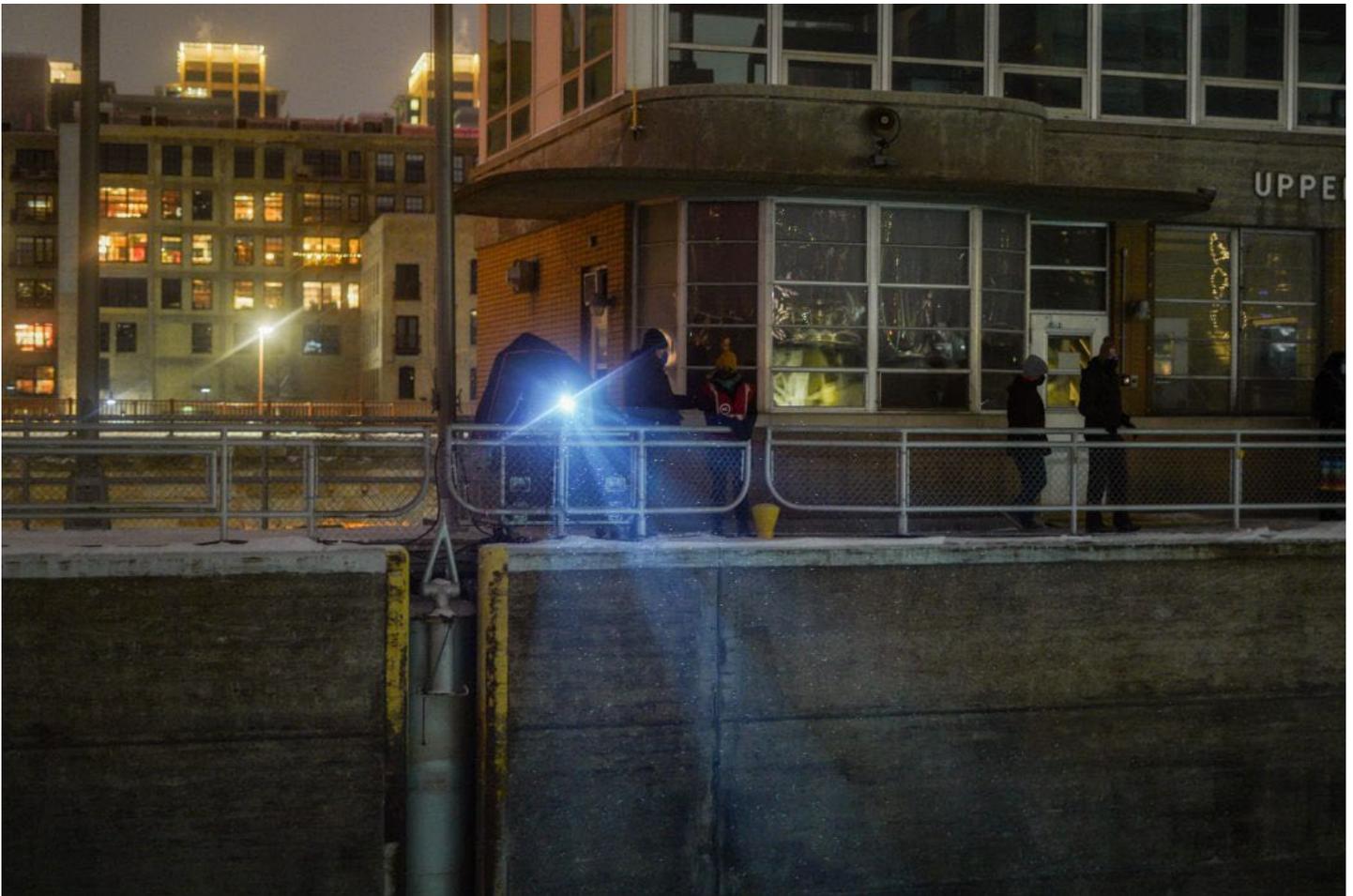
non-native viewers are going to get out of it, as well as Native viewers.

I questioned, “how do I work with this content in a way that’s not putting culture on display?” That was my main goal. If there’s material that non-native viewers are not going to understand, I don’t need to explain it; those parts are for the Native viewers. There are also overall themes that worked well, like connection to the water, respecting nature, and the overall experience of the pandemic. Everybody’s feeling disconnected right now, not just Native people. With this installation, there is this constant tug and pull; I want to say one thing to this group, and another thing to this group, and then they overlap as well. And I have my own stuff to throw in and that is

going to be just for me and people who know me well. Public art is such a balance of audience.

[OR] You can’t be expected to anticipate every audience response; you can anticipate parts of it, but it is a lot of pressure to be able to think through how the installation might create ripples in ways that encourage curiosity or in ways that might be not as welcome. Tell me a little about your process overall for this exhibit and how you put this all together.

[MV] Dealing with that balance of audience is where I think collaboration comes into play. It’s not just my voice out there. Whenever I get a bigger opportunity like this or like my murals, I try to pull in as many people as budgets will allow. It’s not just a personal work. My philosophy is



Using two large, high-luminosity projectors, the animation was projected over the edge of the lock and monitored from a makeshift tech room. Image courtesy of Nedahness Greene.

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that this is a public space and this is for whoever's living there and whoever calls that space home in different ways. I'm kind of a guest offering a little bit of perspective. It's always more helpful when I can include more than just my perspective.

For my process, everything is spur of the moment. I think people sometimes are a little bit surprised by that. There's a lot that's intentional in the philosophy of what I do, but then it's intentional accidents; I have intentions in the big picture, but the details happen the way they want to.

For this project, I knew I wanted narration by Millie Richard. I've been to different ceremonies that she's led and I've seen her work with urban Native women specifically. She's able as an elder to still have this contemporary lens on issues that

women are facing, and a lot of people come to her ceremonies, sometimes as their first return to ceremony after a long time. I've been really inspired by how she works with people and I thought it would be really cool for urban Native women out in the Twin Cities, in this bigger urban space, to have access to her voice and her teachings. So I asked her to speak for that specific audience.

I offered Millie tobacco because she's an elder and I wanted to make sure I did this process in a good way. She did her meditations on the prompt of resilience and disconnection tied to the project. I didn't really give her much more of a prompt than that. I just asked her to do what she does naturally and so she spoke. She sent me about 40 minutes of audio. I had the tough job of cutting everything she said down to 10 minutes.



An animated illustration of Nokomis. Image courtesy of Nedahness Greene.

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Then I reached out to Lyz Jaakola for the music. I know she's done a lot of hand drum music and MMIW events. She's a very prominent female voice for Native women. I used the same process with her: I gave her the prompt, my ideas, and I sent her Millie's audio as the content that we were going to have and asked her to make a song about it.

Lyz went around and talked to people in the community and asked, "What's a respectful way to make music around this? Is it okay to compose something?" There are songs that exist, but she didn't want to take a song and have it be culture on display. So she composed a song.

Once I had the song and Millie's audio and my loose sense of how I felt the work coming

together, I reached out to my friend JayGee. I went to college with him. There were times where we would hear something clicking in the distance, and he would make a beat, start hitting the table. He heard music and melody and everything. I hired him to do the sound effects and make it flow, to make things sound like they're meant to be.

The whole process was those three components of collaboration.

For the artwork I made, I had a very rough four-panel storyboard of images that came to mind. At the beginning I also reached out on Facebook and asked people what they would like to see. From that, I had a list of things that people suggested for the animations.



Guests in attendance interacted with the smaller, shape-shifting animations on smaller walls at both edges of the lock. Image courtesy of Nedahness Greene.



Artist Moira Villiard stands in front of the mini projections. Image courtesy of Nedahness Greene.

Then, in response to Millie, in response to the music, and in response to all the material that we put together soundwise, I did the rest of the animations and filled in between those four storyboard points. Then I did a lot of looping and repetition because animation frame-by-frame is really hard. I experiment; I'm not a professional animator. I know that the methods that I used were not industry standard; I was just drawing on my iPad on a \$10 program. I could animate five- to ten-second loops frame-by-frame on Procreate [a digital drawing app], and I can loop those pieces together using a video editor. I put the pieces together in a video editor like a collage, basically. I know basic video editing to make stuff move across the screen, so I just worked with keyframes and transitions doing basic editing. I treated the video editor itself as a canvas, meaning my traditional painting and artist's background influenced this work. It isn't industry standard, but that is the fun part; it is an illusion.

[OR] You're demonstrating that there isn't one right way to do it. To my untrained eye, I saw it as an intentional style. I thought it was remarkable; I could tell that there were moments of looping, of bringing back previous themes, and I liked that. I thought that sort of repetition was cyclical and tied into the message of the piece. I also really like the way you frame this as an animated video collage.

What about the content in particular speaks to you? What drew you to this message? What does it mean to you?

[MV] There are so many full circle components in the messaging in it. In all the mediums that I work in, I find the most meaning in my work after it's finished, which is why I trust the process to be what it's supposed to be. I was telling everyone I worked with that this is going to be what it's supposed to be; whoever is going to see it, it's going to be meant for them in that moment and they'll take away what they needed to take away in that moment. I try not to control those things too much throughout but then I always find a

lot of meaning, at the end, almost like I am an audience member myself.

Some of the messaging that was significant to me; I've been dealing with situations in my life that peripherally or directly tie into some of the MMIW issues. One of the influences for this piece was a conversation I had during the first year of participating in the *Bring Her Home* exhibition. I was learning more about the issues of MMIW and thinking about the nuance of the word missing, and how people go missing in more than just the physical sense. There is missing through disconnection of culture, and displacement from homeland, and also going missing in terms of addiction that takes people away even though they're physically still here. People disappear through trafficking, too. There are all these different ways that you can look at murdered and missing Indigenous women beyond just the physical sense of it.

That was a huge influence, applying that definition to the personal experiences with people in my life.

But I also didn't want the narrative to make people really sad. The ceremonies with Millie are about connecting.

For me personally, a full moon ceremony has been kind of a full circle thing. Growing up I was always obsessed and fascinated with the moon. I didn't particularly have any reason that I knew of at the time, but I used to draw the moon all the time. Then in adulthood, I attended a full moon ceremony and I've learned that there's all these connections between Indigenous women ancestrally and with the moon. It answered the question of why I had this inherent feeling that there was something there. I had this realization recently that if you were to tell little Moira that one of her moon doodles would go up on this 50-foot wall, at this giant scale, I would have been as excited then as I was this year. That one of those illustrations would transition into this scale



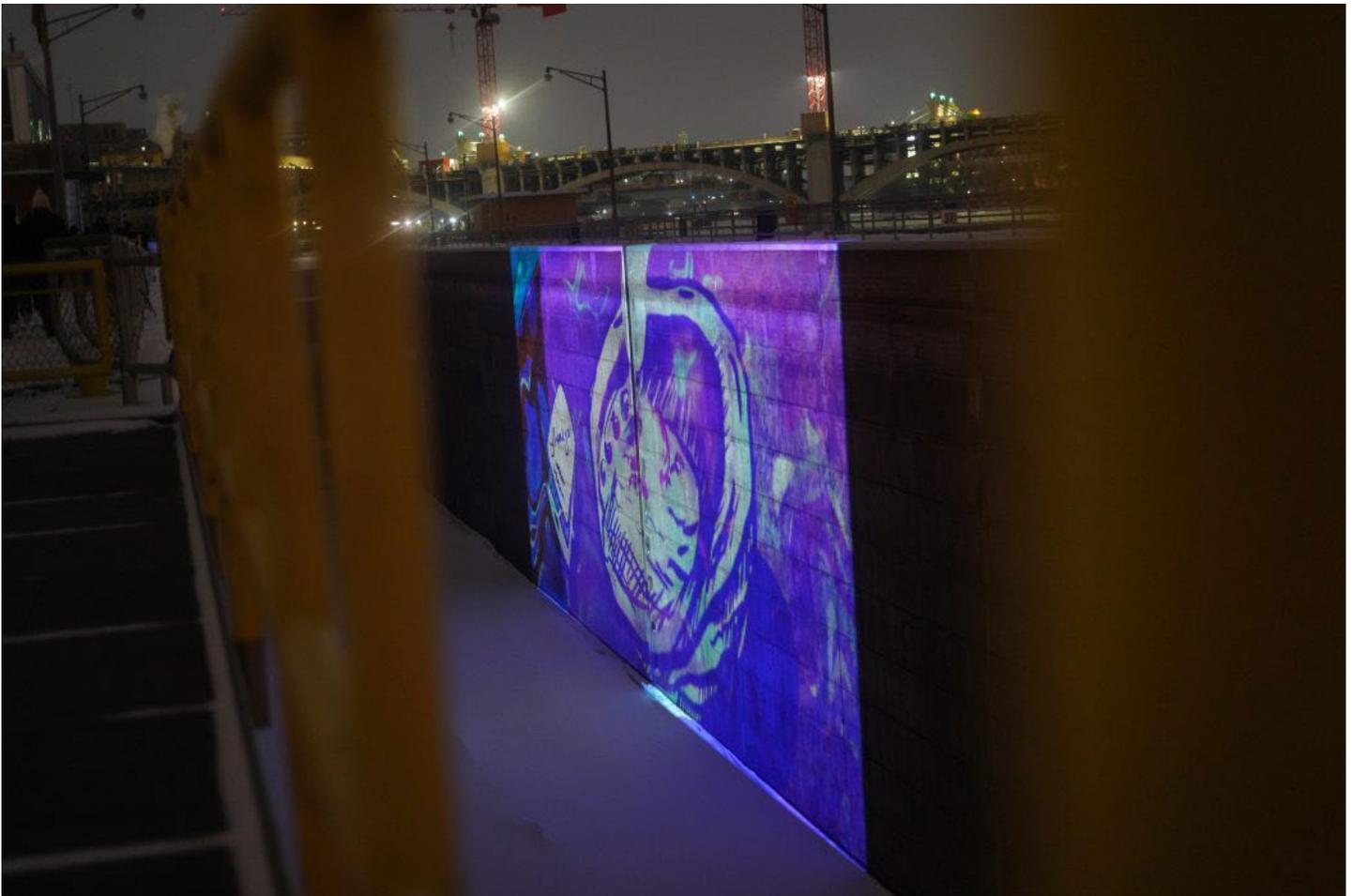
Grandmother Moon and Grandfather Sun make an appearance in the animation, paired with narration by Millie Richard urging the audience to connect with their ancestors and their roots. Image courtesy of Nedahness Greene.

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was really cool for me. So connecting with culture through the moon was a meaningful piece of this work for me.

There were also little things. When we went to do the site visit at the lock, there was a loon that was swimming in the lock. The park rangers are super excited and everyone was taking pictures because there is never wildlife in the lock itself. For me it was kind of synchronistic. I'd been thinking about basically the first time I'd been to the Twin Cities for something other than a school field trip. It was with Jonathan Thunder and another artist. We got hired to do this art project down there together. I was super excited because being a small-town kid having an art show in Duluth was like the big city for me, so thinking I'd be doing anything in the Twin Cities was also kind of crazy.

I remember going to Jonathan, full of excitement. I didn't know where I wanted to go, but I wanted to see the city. He grew up around there. He took me down to the lock and dam area and we walked across the bridge. I remember we watched the water in the lock rise and I asked Jonathan what happened with the fish when the lock does its thing. He said he didn't know, and I said I thought they became little ghost fish; they just turned into little spirits then and there. My brain likes to make up stories like that sometimes. The idea of these fish became part of my work. In a lot of my artwork I draw these little fish and they were inspired by that day by the river with Jonathan and thinking about little ghost fish and what they could represent in my art as the spirits of living things that are impacted by human intervention and human quest for energy. That's



The closing scene brings viewers full circle back to the first scene in the animation—a shell lit with sage used for smudging rests on a wooden table. Image courtesy of Nedahness Greene.

what those little fish represent for me. Then fast forward and I get this gig at the lock and dam and Jonathan Thunder is my mentor. And it's all right at the site where my signature fish were born.

Then we see this loon fishing in the spot where I had wondered what happened to the fish. Obviously, the fish are there because there's a loon miraculously fishing. That day I decided to put a loon in my art as a tribute; it all fit together so perfectly with Millie's narrative of life, of finding life in the middle of a concrete jungle. That loon became the embodiment of the project for me as this life that you'd expect to find way out in the wilderness where there's lots of plant life and an environment it can flourish in, but somehow it's finding a way to flourish right here in the middle of these two concrete walls. It was the epitome of the project, like a symbol of the audience that I was hoping to reach with this, deep down: people who are just getting by and maybe they're not feeling as connected to this place the way it is, but they're making their lives here and they're doing what they can during a pandemic.

[OR] It is really powerful to hear about your reflections on your first visit to the lock, to this watery place. The title of the piece, *Madweyaashkaa: Waves Can Be Heard*, relates to water, too. How did you decide on this title?

[MV] Madweyaashkaa, the waves can be heard, or the waves are making sounds, or water is making sound. Those are different interpretations for it. I don't speak Anishinaabemowin fluently but there's so much you can say in the language that you can't in English. English is a language of things—it's categories and things—whereas Anishinaabe is different. I'm reading *Braiding Sweetgrass*, which is great, and [Robin Wall Kimmerer] has a stat in there that in the Potawatami language—and I think this is true probably for most Indigenous languages—that

something like 70 percent of the words are verbs, and the other 30 percent are nouns. In English it's the opposite: almost everything is a noun and then we have fewer verbs and they aren't very helpful sometimes. So, I knew I wanted to find a phrase or word in Anishinaabe. I don't usually title stuff until the very end of the project because I don't find the meaning so much until the very end, but with this project I had to title a little bit sooner because we had to promote it. Usually, I write a list of words or influences, things that are inspiring me. They might be connected to the imagery, or they might be very distant threads of thought. I started plugging some of the words into the Anishinaabe language dictionary online. I came across madweyaashkaa in looking for things that related to tides or waves because I think it's interesting that the moon is also connected to tides. Western science has proven that, but there's always been an understanding in Indigenous cultures of that connection between the moon and the water and womanhood in general. I wanted to find a word that said something about tides, basically.

I saw that phrase—madweyaashkaa—and I wanted to make sure I was understanding it in the correct way. So I reached out on Facebook and asked Ojibwe language speakers, and people confirmed that I was understanding the word correctly. People said it was a really cool word and mentioned that it's all about that sound of water nearby. I thought that was really appropriate for the context of the space and the sound component that was there. I just let whatever divine intervention needs to happen to make my art happen. I couldn't have set up the sound that was going to be there at night or the lighting or anything like that. For the three hours every night [of the installation] the sky was always different because it was sunset so there was a background happening. And the waves can be heard in that space and so they added this component on top of the sound effects that was just the environment making the sound.



A child eagerly played with the animated maang (loon) swimming up and down the wall in one of two mini projector sites. Image courtesy of Moira Villiard.

I was thinking that if the moon is guiding these tides and the moon is connected to women and our bodies are made of water, then the moon is kind of this figure that pulls us, too. If there are tides and water inside of us, then this is about listening not only to those external waves but to the internal waves creating our life decisions and guiding our connection to our surroundings and everything.

[OR] Given the layers to this title and the work as a whole, what kind of impact did you hope that the installation would have on people?

[MV] For Native folks, not everybody has access to elders and their wisdom. I think it's really good in this digital age for elders who are willing to reach out and share wisdom through new mediums to reach young people. I think that was a really positive part of it, just having Millie who is so excited to get to urban Native folks; so many Native people are in cities. Making that connection, creating access was important. It was also important not doing it in a way that puts culture on display, at the same time not putting disclaimers. So there's symbolism in there like with the moon and the fire that I felt like if you know, you know, and if you don't, maybe you will eventually or maybe you'll find your own meaning in it. Then you'll think back and maybe make that connection.

My hope is that for whoever went to see the installation, it provided them whatever they needed in that time, and that it keeps providing, keeps making people think long past the moment of seeing it. Maybe it will be one of those funny little intentional accidents or synchronistic moments like those that were part of making it, carrying a theme through other people's lives.

[OR] That's a very generous framing. What kinds of responses did you get for the installation?

[MV] I heard one murmuring of critique indirectly, and I hope maybe I'm addressing it a little

bit in this interview. I am one form of personal experience and I can't put everybody's experience into this one thing. I also have mixed heritage; I can't pretend I'm not white and I can't pretend I'm not Native, I'm both. Navigating this can sometimes be awkward, but I'm also not alone in it; none of us are alone in our identities.

Other than that, I got really good responses from both Native and non-native folks that it spoke to people in the ways that I'd hoped, which is always really nice to hear.

I have a very strong inner toddler. I think especially for folks who've been through a lot of trauma, there's a very prominent inner child that's always there, and that I always feel like I have to take care of. So I like for my work to be very accessible to kids; I want to make sure that kids watching it can get the sense that they can do it, too. I was really happy at the kids' responses. I had side projections [near where people were walking] and a little kid was chasing the loon on the wall and that literally brought me to tears. It was all I needed. I just needed to see kids feeling that magic. Imagery is so strong when you're a kid and the light and colors are so strong. There's just so much visual stimulation and to be a part of a kid's visual memory was really meaningful to me. To see that kids at the installation were laughing and having fun, being a part of that moment, just being able to witness it, is all I needed for response. It was so magical.

[OR] I appreciate your sense that art should be accessible to kids. There were a lot of kids there when I attended.

[MV] The cool part for me was that I didn't see any kids running around; they were watching. If you can get a kid's attention and hold it through a whole piece of art? That is awesome.

[OR] *Madweyaashkaa* was up for three nights on the lock wall. What do you plan on doing next with the installation? Is it feasible to show it elsewhere?

[MV] We're working on it. I want to bring it to Duluth. I've been talking with the city because they have a projection initiative that they're working on. They reached out to me so I'm hoping to get it in Duluth for sure. There are other cities, like Granite Falls and Sandstone and a lot of different cities, that are interested and have a wall that would work. My hope, though, is to really make sure it's accessible to tribal folks first and foremost. I think it will travel. No matter where you go in Minnesota, there's always some form of

water, and there's always that same narrative of human presence that could be juxtaposed to the natural environment. It fits in a lot of places.

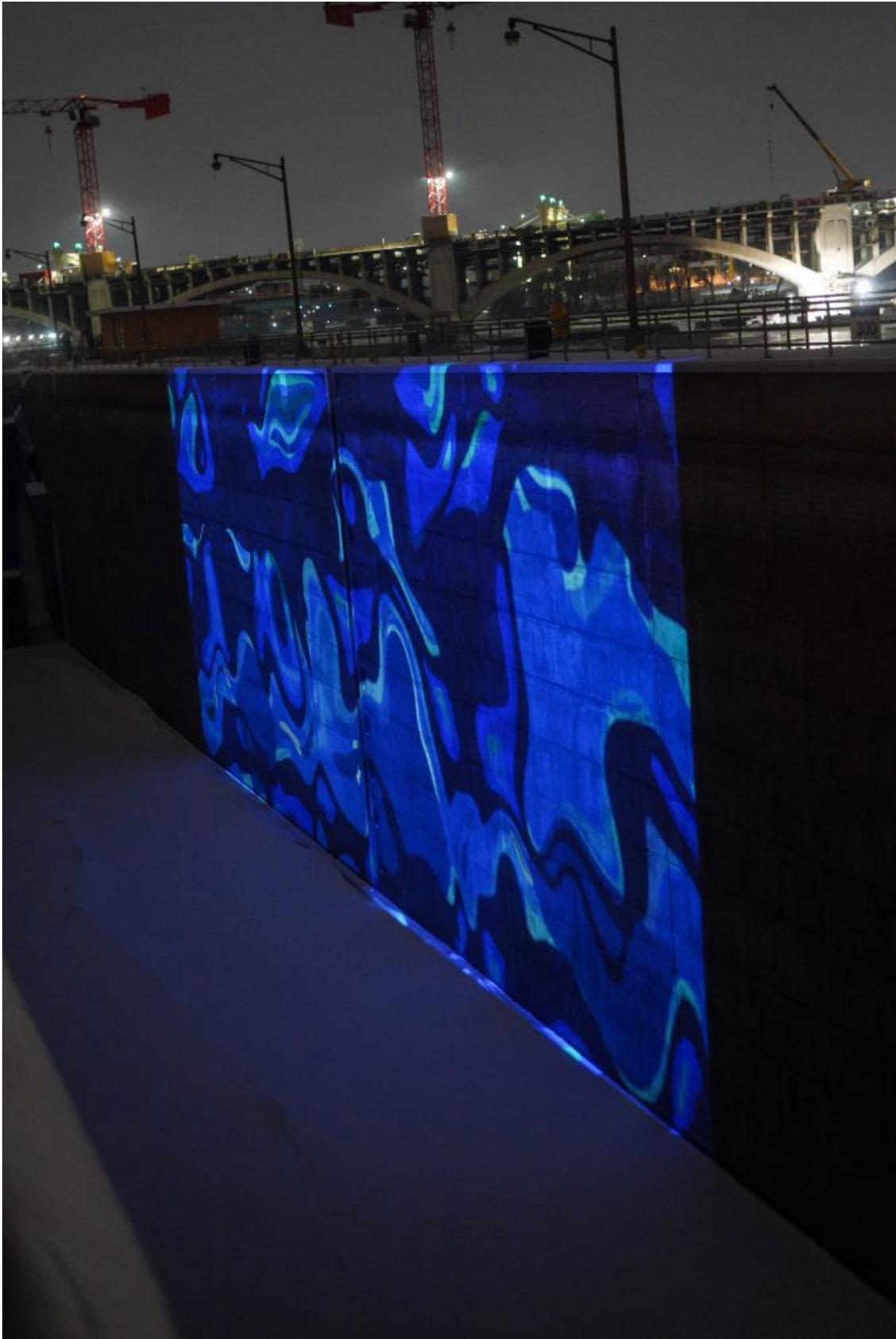
I'm excited to have it travel because a lot of people couldn't come down to the Twin Cities or didn't register in time. Registration filled. I couldn't have predicted that.

[OR] I'm glad to hear that the installation will travel! What's next for you? Will you do an animated video collage again?

[MV] Oh yeah. I've had so many people reaching out about this kind of thing. We've gotta work on getting the youth more interested in doing digital



Child watching the animation through fence holes at the edge of the lock. Image courtesy of Nedahness Greene.



Music composed by JayGee builds in intensity during the undulating water animation before the opening scene. Image courtesy of Nedahness Greene.

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art stuff because there's so many people looking for Native animators and Native digital artists, and there are so few of us here in Minnesota. I'm trying to do a lot more mentorship work. I'm not the best at it but I'm hopefully accessible for Native kids, getting them interested and getting them to know that there are a lot of jobs that I'm turning down. It would be great if I had a list longer than the two other busiest Native American designers.

Right now, I'm waiting on grant approval for a couple other projects in a similar vein. I think this is the start of something. But the other issue I have is I have some nerve issues in my arm, so I can't really do long drawing sessions. I used to be able to work like crazy, doing so much physical

creation of artwork. And then I really messed up my hand doing that seven years ago. I've had surgeries and all sorts of stuff to fix my hand, but I still can't do long sessions.

It would be really nice to have a team of folks to help draw, to give them opportunities and creative rein and have some assistance and apprentices.

I got into public art, actually, because of my arm. I started doing these community painted murals, having other people be my paintbrush. I can design this stuff and I can sketch it out really quickly with chalk, and then everybody becomes my paintbrush.



Families enter the site of the projection to find a good place to view it. Image courtesy of Nedahness Greene.

[OR] Your work often seems to be speaking toward questions of equity and justice. *Madweyaashkaa*, of course, because it was part of the *Bring Her Home* set of exhibits that in part speak to issues of MMIW, but also you were a part of mural work in Duluth around remembrances for George Floyd and Breonna Taylor last summer. What inspires you to want to be doing work that is oriented toward social justice?

[MV] The more I get into my practice, the more I realize that my medium is people and space and creating spaces for people to engage in arts experiences. There's a difference between instructing people at a site, on the one hand, and genuinely opening up the space for people to have their voices out on a platform on the other. With the George Floyd murals, I was really hesitant. I'm not a Black artist; I have a lot of connections to Black artists because in Duluth a lot of them were really a part of my early art career. I was hesitant to step up and do too much, but I felt a connection through the youth.

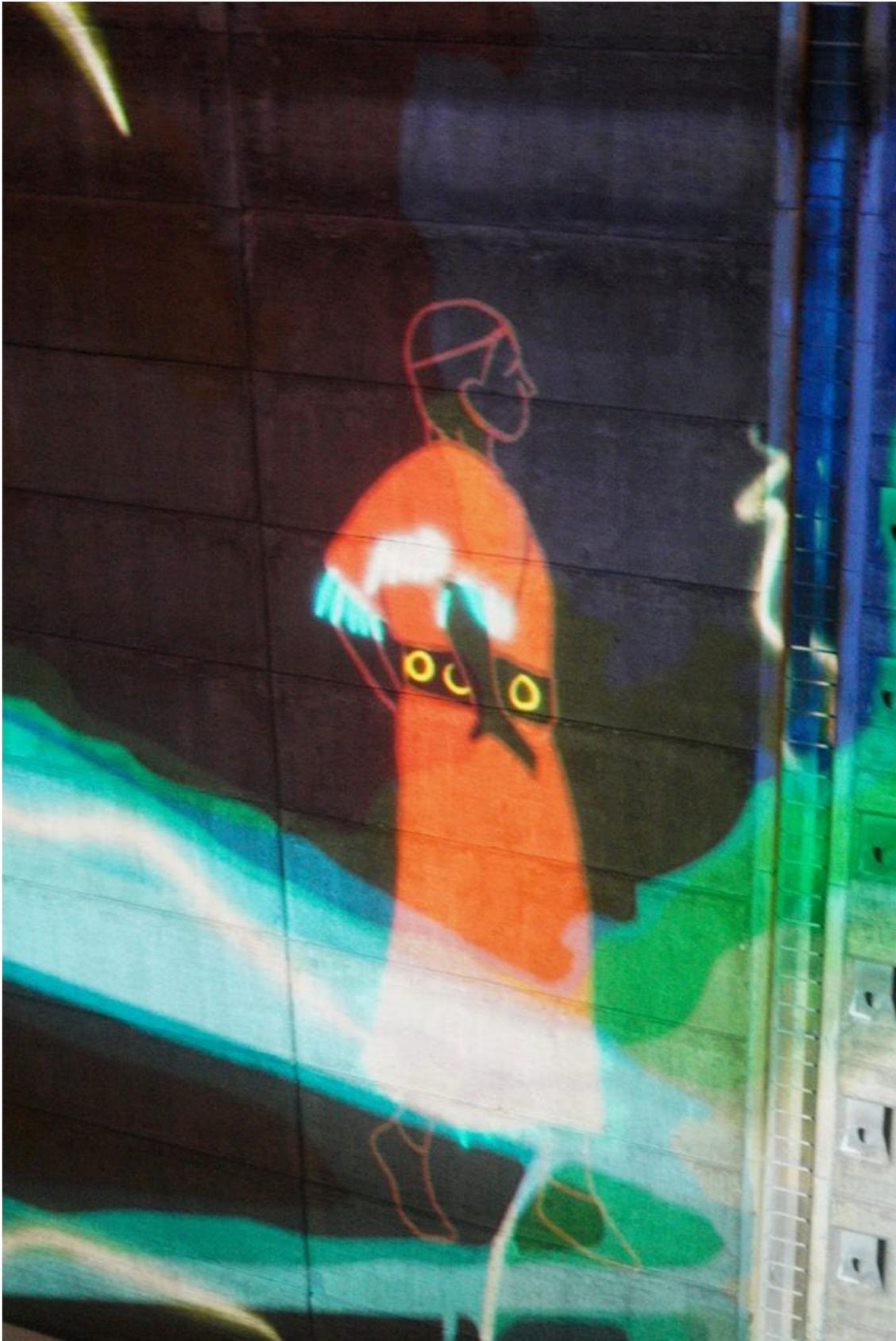
There was a day when people were at the Clayton Jackson McGhie Plaza, and at the time it was one of the only pieces of public art reflecting a story in the Black community in Duluth. I think back to my own experience not seeing Native representation anywhere, and how it might feel for today's Black youth in Duluth seeing the only visible artistic representation of Black people in the story of a lynching. That's not to say the story shouldn't be told and articulated through art, but how is Duluth honoring the Black children of today? The Native children? How does community use art to bring to light the injustices that community has perpetuated, as well as honor the life that exists today so that children can see themselves as somehow important in the fabric of community itself? That, in and of itself, is a much bigger conversation we need to have as artists around "what's missing?"—one that I don't think I have time to fully articulate gracefully in this interview. But ultimately, there was a youth who spray-painted that memorial during the protests. I can't speak on behalf of that youth specifically;

I just know that after it happened, I was thinking about what our role as adult activists and artists in the community was in showing up and opening space for youth to feel connected, to feel their anger, to mourn, and to mobilize?

As all of this was happening, I decided to reach out to the activists I know, and Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial folks, and offer plywood and paint from other projects. I didn't need to lead or have my art out there; I just offered to facilitate a community painting session. They agreed and set up the filming of the "I Can't Breathe" documentary with the DanSan Creatives. We set up a tent and we blocked off the whole street. We worked with the city to make this space that was specifically for BIPOC people to have a platform. We didn't censor anyone, just made that space. It was for the community and that's sort of the magic of doing public art like that; there's this silent sort of communication that happens, there's a vibe that happens when you're painting with other people about something you care about. We had 100 people of color who painted those murals and nobody wrote stuff that might be deemed super extra controversial. I didn't tell anyone not to; they just chose not to because they recognized this as a healing space for all of us. It was so beautiful. Everybody took ownership of those pieces of art without "owning" them in the physical sense.

After those pieces of art went up at the Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial, people kept adding to the murals, and suddenly people were bringing flowers, and then there was this big altar that was set up around those pieces of work.

For me, the social justice component is really just making sure people have that space to try different forms of activism. It just takes the capacity to break down those resource barriers and to open up space and not tell people what to do, and for the youth to get that sort of experience and see what works for them.



An animated jingle dress dancer moves gracefully across the wall and fades into the glow of a Minneapolis streetlight. Image courtesy of Nedahness Greene.

It's back to that philosophy of whatever it's supposed to be, it'll be, it'll have a home somewhere. The public art world is really opening my eyes. It's so much about people and what they need. I guess it's cheesy to say it has been an honor, but it has been an honor to be able to open up the floor for folks to be public. All my murals have so far had that component of other people adding to it, even during the pandemic.

A big dragonfly mural—the largest permanent mural I've done—was done during the pandemic. Originally we were going to have a bunch of kids' painting sessions. We ended up having one socially distant kids' painting session and then I made a coloring page. I posted it online and sent it to all the parents I knew and asked them to have their kids color it in exchange for a gift card. Their designs were put up on this mural, so every dragonfly on the mural was designed by a little kid somewhere. The kids are the ones that have to grow up with it. I look at these cities and they are the youths' cities at the end of the day.

[OR] Thank you, Moira, for sharing so much about your practice, your values, and your commitments in public art. It was great to talk with you and to hear more

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About the Authors

Moira Villiard is a dynamic visual artist proficient in a variety of artistic genres including portraiture, illustration, graphic and digital design and as a muralist. She is also a community organizer, curator, and passionate arts educator concentrating her efforts round issues of equity and justice including: arts access, creative placemaking, environmental sustainability, collaboration with youth, and acknowledgement of Indigenous land, culture, and history.

Moira (pronounced "Mee-Ree") grew up on the Fond du Lac Reservation in Cloquet, MN and

about *Madweyaashkaa: Waves Can Be Heard*. I look forward to hearing about where the installation goes next and I hope some of our readers might have a chance to see it live at some point in the future.

To learn more about Moira Villiard and her work, please visit her website: <https://www.artbymoira.com/>.

You can also learn more about *Madweyaashkaa: Waves Can Be Heard* at <http://northern.lights.mn/projects/madweyaashkaa-waves-can-be-heard/>.

Read Suenary Philavanh's full essay on the project at <http://northern.lights.mn/2021/02/resilient-searching-for-connections-through-waves/>.

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identifies as a Fond du Lac direct descendant of both settler and Indigenous heritage—Anishinaabe paternally and Delaware Lenape maternally. For three years she worked as the Arts & Cultural Programming Coordinator for the American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO). She currently works as a freelance consultant, designer, speaker, and grant writer. She was broadly recognized in 2019 when she received the 2019 Duluth NAACP “Take a Stand for the Revolution” award, 2019 Emerging City Champions fellowship, Forecast Public Art 2019 Early-Career Project Grant, 2019 YWCA Women of Distinction award, and The Duluth News Tribune 20 under 40 award.

Her work has been featured in numerous shows in Duluth and around Minnesota, including her recent solo show, “Rights of the Child” at Zeitgeist, and group shows “Beyond Borders” at MacRostie Arts Center and “We the People” at the Minnesota Museum of American Art. She received her Bachelor’s Degree in Communicating Arts (Global Studies Minor) from the University of Wisconsin-Superior in 2016.

Laurie Moberg is the managing editor for *Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community* and the project manager for the Environmental Stewardship, Place, and Community Initiative at the University of Minnesota. She earned her Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Minnesota in 2018. Her doctoral research investigates recurrent episodes of flooding on rivers in Thailand and queries how the ecological, social, and cosmological entanglements between people and the material world are reimagined and reconfigured in the aftermath of disasters. In her work at the University of Minnesota, Laurie brings her ethnographic sensibilities, attention to story, and interest in human-nonhuman relations to questions of water and absented narratives closer to home.