



// **CITY AS LIVING LABORATORY**
Sustainability Made Tangible Through the Arts
2019 PROGRAM REPORT



artists + scientists + communities creating a sustainable future

CALL// City as Living Laboratory works with artists, scientists, and residents of urban communities to create sustainable solutions for urgent environmental issues including climate, equity and health.

We help people connect environmental challenges to personal experience and take action in response. Our programs are always artist-led: we see artists as profound coalition leaders who can help their neighbors engage with the most complex crises we face as communities. CALL's initiatives go beyond information transfer and invite a constellation of collaborators to innovate.

2019 might go down in history as the year global citizens decided that enough was enough, and inaction on climate change was no longer a viable option. We're excited to be a part of a growing international community working towards solutions to the environmental challenges that threaten our cities. This is why we're mobilizing people to get out on the streets, look closely at the specific issues their community needs to address, and become co-creators of the solutions to those challenges. Now is not the time to panic, it is the time to plan; the time to be generative in our approaches to community development and generous in our inclusivity.

We're excited to update you on the projects that are driving us forward in Milwaukee and New York City, and to invite you to join our vision for a national network of change-makers growing collaborations that upend the status quo with beautiful and progressive projects that help communities crystallize a vision for their future.

"It is essential that we begin to imagine and construct a new narrative around climate change, one that respectfully, democratically, patiently, and collaboratively engages everyone in an ongoing basis, in their own communities, not only coming to attention when another catastrophic event occurs."

-Mary Miss
Founder & Artistic Director



2019 was a big growth year for WaterMarks, CALL's flagship artist-led initiative in Milwaukee to create an atlas of water for the city.

At the close of 2018, after years of planning, public programs, and community development, CALL installed the first WaterMarker at Acosta Middle School, setting the stage for the year to come. 2019 saw significant energy generated, as partnerships that had been in development for years began to coalesce. In June, CALL was joined by RiverKeeper, the Water Commons, and Milwaukee Harbor District among others, as well as city agencies and academic institutions across greater Milwaukee, to form the WaterMarks Partnership Group. This group, that will meet on an ongoing basis, will make WaterMarks an initiative that is *of the City*, not just for it. As a group, we will plan future artist-led programming, content development, and the expansion of the WaterMarkers. The formation of this formal partnership is an essential component of CALL's ambition for our projects: that the cities they are situated in take ownership of their development and stewardship of their future.

Group members have already shown their commitment to the project: Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) financially sponsored much of WaterMark's 2019 programming and Milwaukee's Department of City Development (DCD) has underwritten the installation of four more WaterMarkers as a part of the redevelopment in the Harbor District. In addition to funding the WaterMarkers, the DCD will also be sponsoring the numerous public programs and artist projects that are at the heart of CALL's FRAMEWORK.

Over the last year CALL continued to deliver our signature CALL/WALKS and WORKSHOPS programming. Walks explored the Garden Homes Neighborhood and nearby Green Tech Station, both within the 30th Street Industrial Corridor. These two under-served communities are potential locations for WaterMarkers and have key stakes in the health of Milwaukee's waterways. A workshop at Pulaski Park in April focused on issues surrounding the naturalization of the Kinnickinnic River, and community members discussed which letter to choose as the glowing icon that will top the next WaterMarker, which will be installed nearby. Participants chose Ñ, as in la señal (signal) reflecting los sueños (dreams) for a more sustainable future for their community, and how they might teach (enseñar) and join together (acompañar) with others to do it.

As a continuation of our plan to have local artists connected to each WaterMarker, CALL also commissioned three new artist projects by Melanie Ariens, Gabriela Riveros, and Mollie Oblinger. In keeping with our framework, these projects were all spurred by walks and workshops CALL conducted in the previous year.



River Gods by **Gabriela Riveros** is a set of panels depicting water gods from around the world. Installed along a footpath next to the Kinnickinnic River, walkers can discover their stories, mixed and remixed—just like the neighborhood.



Melanie Ariens worked with Acosta students to design and paint murals at Walkers Point across the street from the 'A' Marker. Each mural depicts students and images that reflect Milwaukee's water history, with speech bubbles sharing local water facts.



Mollie Oblinger constructed a series of bird houses alongside the Kinnickinnic River walking path. Each birdhouse has an interpretive medallion describing things people can observe about the local wildlife as they walk along the river.

moving forward in milwaukee

A concept illustration showing how the WaterMarkers will illuminate the streets of Milwaukee. Each Marker will have unique content that residents and visitors can connect to via an app. The markers will be sites for activities and stopping points for public walks.

Read More: www.cityaslivinglab.org/watermarks



new initiatives in new york

A concept illustration showing how Mary Miss proposes to highlight the bridges and call attention to daylighting. Signage on the bridges will call out aspects of the ecosystem and viewing points will give passersby perspective on how the new stream bed might look.

Read More: www.cityaslivinglab.org/rescuing-tibbetts

Our framework for engagement started in NYC and has been fleshed out on a larger scale in Indianapolis and Milwaukee. We're bringing it home.

City as Living Laboratory was founded in New York City and has been focusing on the corridor of Broadway. Since the early days of our organization, we've been walking her streets and looking closely at the environmental challenges facing the United States' most densely populated metropolitan area.

Since 2012, CALL has conducted over 70 walks in NYC, co-led by teams of artists and scientists. Out of these walks, coalitions have grown in Chinatown, the Northwest Bronx, and West Harlem; we've held workshops, tested artist proposals, and carried out small scale projects. 2019 was a year that many of these programs began to coalesce into concrete proposals for larger initiatives in the Bronx and in Chinatown. CALL's founder and artistic director Mary Miss launched *Rescuing Tibbetts Brooks: One Stitch at a Time*, a conceptual framework for deep investment in community development around proposals to daylight Tibbetts Brook, which envisions artists having a leading role in connecting the nearby communities to this project. *Rescuing Tibbetts Brook* re-imagines the bridges crossing the Major Deegan Expressway, and the adjacent abandoned rail bed that will carry the resurrected brook from Van Cortlandt Park to the Harlem River, as infrastructure-scale stitches reconnecting a fractured neighborhood. The artist projects that make up this initiative will create countless touch-points for community involvement in advocating for green infrastructure to rejuvenate the local ecosystem and address concerns of health, environmental justice, and climate change.

In Manhattan, CALL helped secure a research grant from Binghamton University for economic botanist Valerie Imbruce to continue her research into the unique food system that supplies Chinatown's markets and, therefore, much of the Chinese cuisine in the northeast United States. Dr. Imbruce's research is informing a larger initiative to map the food system of Chinatown, co-led by designer/urbanist Stephen Fan. Area artists are being invited to delve into the many aspects that comprise Chinatown's markets, from the farmers that supply them, the vendors that staff them, and the shoppers who use them. These projects will amplify the voices of local residents and engage them in proposals to preserve the markets, promote the sustainable agricultural methods used by farmers and suppliers, and share cultural knowledge, while improving local infrastructure and introducing new methods of greening. A CALL/WALK in May with Imbruce and Fan kicked off the project with great success; the walk was so oversubscribed that it had to be conducted twice back to back! The public interest in this project is encouraging.



A *Rescuing Tibbetts* workshop in November introduced Miss's conceptual framework to community stakeholders. The workshop solicited input into how the project might be implemented, and mapped the important infrastructure and ecological features of the neighborhood, and examined community concerns.



In May, artist **Nicolas Dumit Estevez** and park expert **John Butler** led a WALK focused on connecting with the trees in Van Cortlandt park, and the impact of daylighting Tibbetts Brook will have on the riparian forest in the Bronx. This walk is being edited into a self-guided audio tour which will be publicly available in April 2020.



Our CALL/WALK in Chinatown introduced the larger mapping food systems project. It engaged participants in an interactive conversation about the market system in Chinatown, its cultural, ecological, and economic benefits, along with the threats it faces, and design proposals that can help to protect it.

When you're doing something good in the community, share it.

Over ten years, CALL has refined a flexible engagement FRAMEWORK for our iterative community development process. The WALKS, WORKSHOPS, and other exploratory activities integrate artistic vision with informal learning, grass roots activism, and scientific knowledge. This framework provides a deep understanding of complex local structures and continually informs larger initiatives through ongoing research and feedback.

CALL/WALKS are the launchpad for our process, bringing together artists, residents, and scientists for "traveling dialogues" that decode local ecosystems, spark imagination, and seed ideas for creative interventions. As we have built our programs over the years, we have seen how CALL/WALKS strengthen communities and demonstrate the power of meaningful collaboration between artists and scientists to provoke fresh thinking about complex issues. Facilitating the spread of these walks to other communities was a natural place to start sharing our framework.

In 2019, CALL produced a toolkit to help other groups plan effective public programs that would engage artists, scientists, and communities in deciphering environmental challenges local to them. In May, the national network we convened used this toolkit to launch a pilot National CALL/WALKS program, to great success. From examining the impact of atomic energy, to grieving land loss from sea level rise, to re-imagining dystopian post-industrial landscapes remediated as public parks, these walks truly helped to educate and involve the public in the most pressing issues their communities face, and all of our partners were excited by the response and energy that followed.

We're continuing to expand this network, and invite you to become a part of it. Our toolkit is available free for you to download on the CALL/WALKS page of our website. We also offer a variety of options to cities or community groups that would like support in using CALL/WALKS to engage with their constituents. Get in touch, and get walking!



In Baltimore, MICA hosted a CALL/WALK led by artist **Jann Rosen-Queralt** and biologist **Lea Johnson**. *Nest + Flow* covered the Jones Falls area, exploring its history, the wildlife that populate it, and the city's future plans for development. Rosen-Queralt employed different types of framing devices to help participants view the urban landscape from a new perspective.

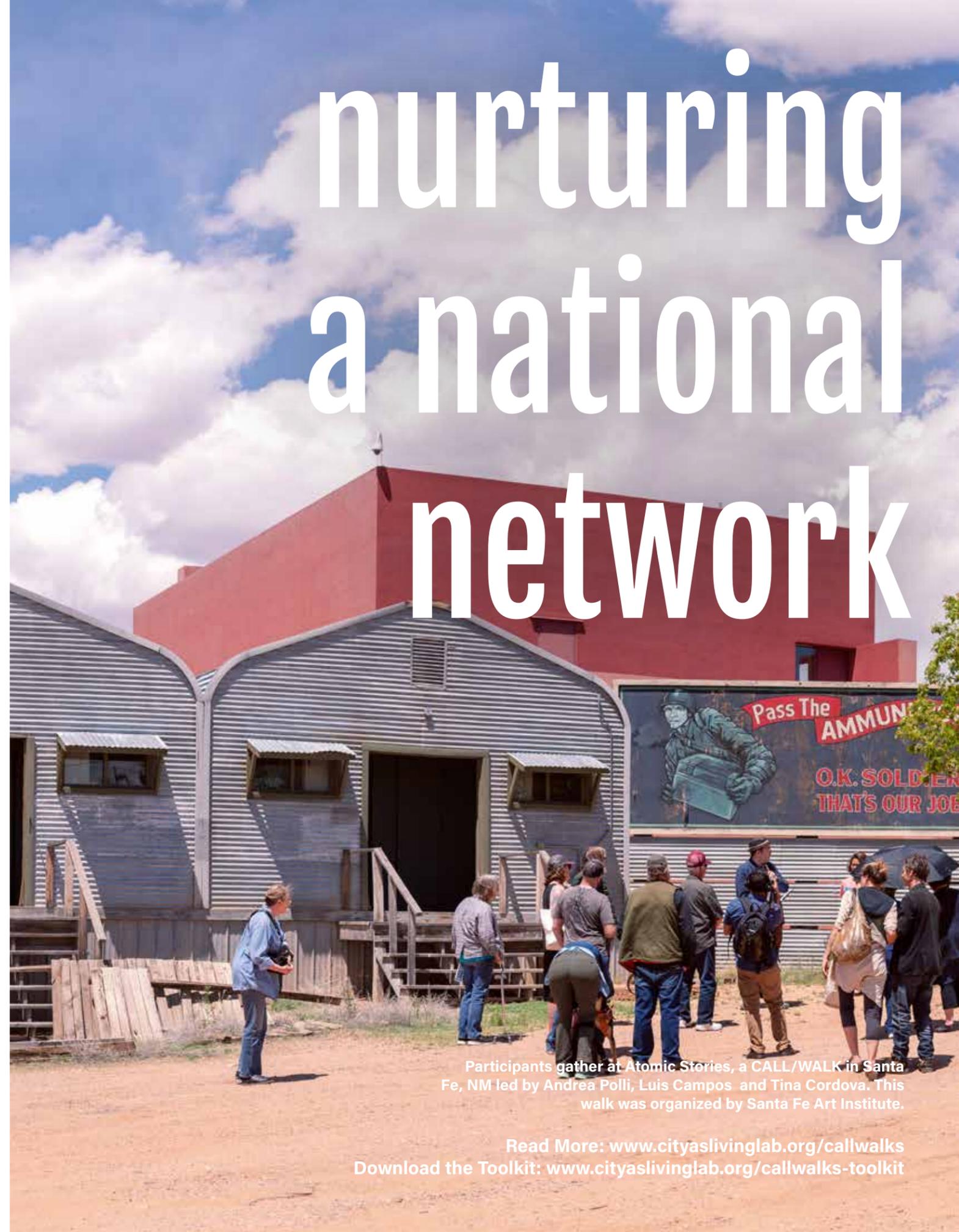


In Washington DC, artist **Katie Kehoe** and climatologist **Jagadish Shukla** led a walk along the Anacostia River over terrain that will disappear due to sea level rise. Artist **Heloisa Escuerda** led the group in a mourning ritual, and scientist **Barry Klinger** provided additional climatology context. This walk was sponsored by the Provisions Library for Social Research at George Mason University.



In Pittsburgh, city principal environmental planner **Kara Smith**, artist **Natalie Settles**, and biologist **Charles Bier** took city residents on a CALL/WALK through Hays Wood, a former industrial site which has been reclaimed by nature, and will soon be a public park. The walk sparked conversation on soil remediation and the relationship between art, science, and the natural world.

nurturing a national network



Participants gather at *Atomic Stories*, a CALL/WALK in Santa Fe, NM led by Andrea Polli, Luis Campos and Tina Cordova. This walk was organized by Santa Fe Art Institute.

Read More: www.cityaslivinglab.org/callwalks
Download the Toolkit: www.cityaslivinglab.org/callwalks-toolkit

cultivating a critical conversation

Participants gather at a CALL/Conversation in May 2019. The intimate settings of these dinners allow participants to engage directly with the speakers, facilitating unique opportunities for cross-disciplinary discourse.

Read More: www.cityaslivinglab.org/conversations

ARTISTS + SCIENTISTS + CONVERSATIONS

Dialogue makes a difference. Our throughline is conversation that leads to action.

CALL values prompting provocative conversations about our most critical challenges. We consider our CALL/WALKS as walking dialogues, but from time to time we do take a seat. Through hosting panels, forums, workshops, dinners, and a variety of other events, we love to bring brilliant minds together. We also value opportunities to participate on panels at external events and highlight the transformative power of artist-led cross-disciplinary collaborations.

This year, we started a series of informal dinner conversations with luminaries in our fields of interest. These small-scale events of 20-35 participants and 2-3 panelists enable an interactive dialogue to develop, and the ideas they spur genuinely influence CALL's thinking and approach. While these events are ticketed, we've found the conversations so important that we are making them publicly available to listen to on our website. Moving forward, we aim to turn future CALL/Conversations into a regular podcast.

In addition to events we have directly organized, CALL has led or participated in countless meetings, panels, forums, and conferences this year alone. We believe in networks, the sharing of ideas, and open conversation. If this is something you're also passionate about, reach out. We want to know what you are up to!



Landscape Architect **Kate Orff** and Climatologist **Cynthia Rosenzweig** discussed the impact of collaborative partnerships between artists, designers and scientists in addressing urban challenges.



Urban Planner **Justin Garrett Moore**, and Environmental Scientist **William Solecki** spoke on useful community-engaged design processes, issues of environmental justice, and building urban spaces that will accommodate rising sea levels.



Artist **Alexis Rockman** and Environmental Scientist **John Waldman** discussed the powerful role artists, in partnerships with scientists, have in helping people understand nature in the urban environment.



Mary Miss, CALL Chairman **Charles McKinney**, and Environmental Engineer **Upmanu Lall** presented on CALL's vision for engaging the community in designing a new course for Tibbetts Brook at A/D/D in Brooklyn as a part of WaterFutures.



At the Nature of Cities Conference in Paris, **Mary Miss** presented on CALL's work and designer **Elliott Maltby**, shared our joint proposal for +Space Community Hub in Harlem, a collaboration with WeAct for Environmental Justice.



Musicologist **George Lewis** and Sociologist **Richard Sennett** led a discussion on improvisation, co-creation, and how those tools build a foundation for the sustainable future of our planet.



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City of Pittsburgh Department of City Planning
Maryland Institute College of Art
North West Side Community Development Corporation
Provisions Library for Social Change, George Mason University
Santa Fe Art Institute

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN JOINING THE CALL/WALKS NETWORK?

Contact us today for more information at walkwithus@cityaslivinglab.org

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Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewer District
Milwaukee Department of City Development
North West Side Community Development Corporation

This year's work was made possible through the generous support of:



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