

PHILADELPHIA FABULIST: Tales of the City



JOHN JAMES PRON

DVAA DA VINCI ART ALLIANCE

704 Catharine St, Bella Vista

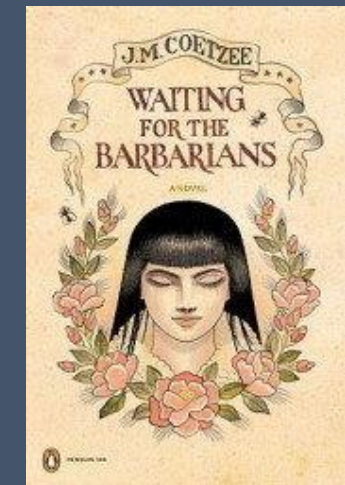
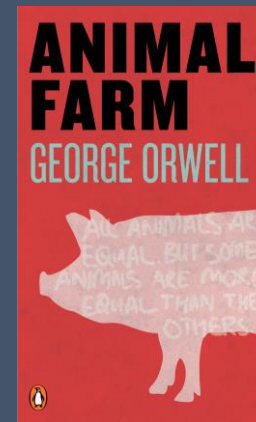
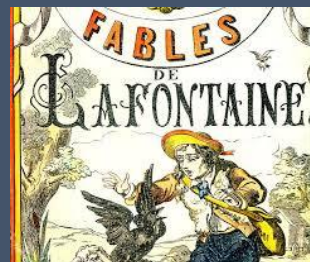
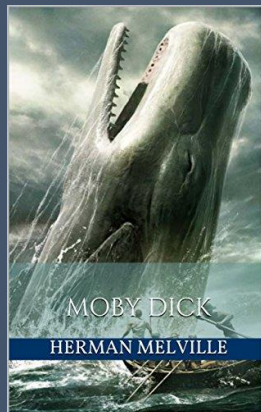
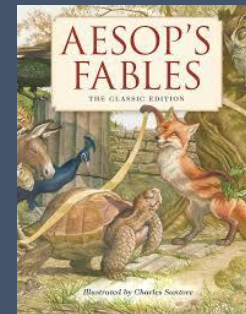
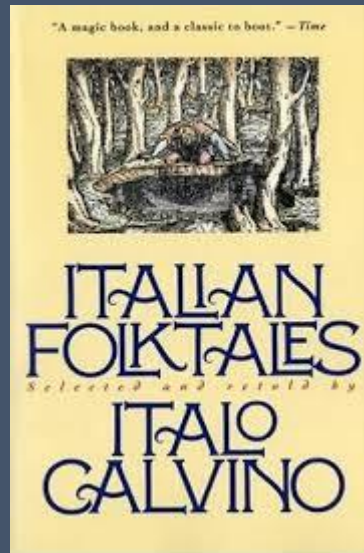
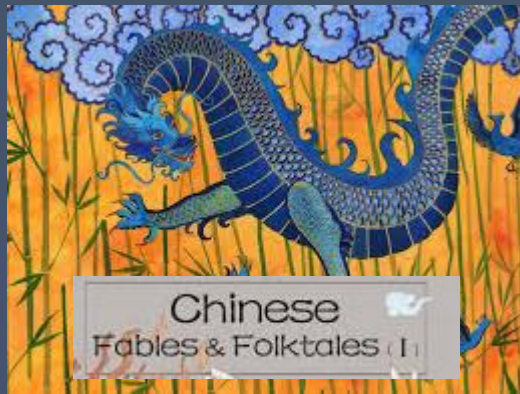
Philadelphia Pa 19147

weds 26 aug -- sun 13 sep 2020

www.davinciartalliance.com

Zoom Opening reception/ lecture weds 26 Aug 6pm

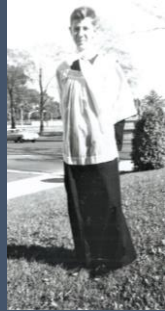
WHAT IS A FABLE? It is typically short story, usually assuming a supernatural tone as it incorporates elements of myth and legend. Those myths and legends may be solidly based on truth, but they also may be entirely imagined as fantasies....or a blending of both. They frequently introduce fantastical elements into familiar everyday settings.



Many are literary, intended for children, teaching a simple moral, but not here.

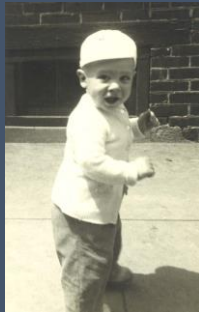
...and who am I to presume to illustrate such a book of fables of Philadelphia?

JOHN JAMES PRON



I KNOW Philadelphia. I was born here, raised here and educated here (from 1st grade thru graduate school). I was married here, raised two children here and worked all my life in its architectural community and taught in its universities.

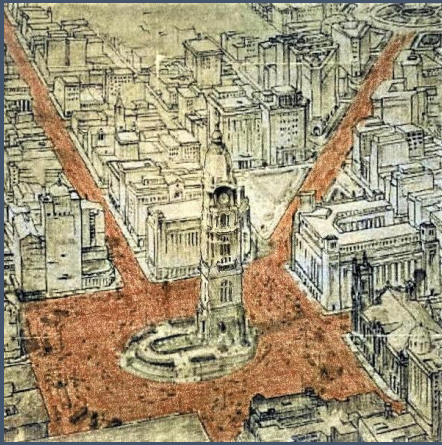
Born in Northern Liberties, raised in Oxford Circle, I lived in West Philadelphia and now the northern suburbs. My large extended family and in-laws are from South Philly, Kensington, Germantown, Fishtown, Juniata Park, Manayunk and the Greater Northeast. We have been residents for over 120 years.



I know this city inwardly and outwardly. I have walked it, photographed it, sketched it, measured it, analyzed it and lectured on it. I was hugged by Jerry Blavat, gave a gallery tour to Sylvester Stallone and was physically lifted and spun around by the Phanatic. So, I feel I have been “anointed” as an elite resident by its high priests. I KNOW Philly.

FABLES OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

I have drawn a graphic fable, a rendered story of a 350-year old city- from its past, within its present, projecting its future. What is fact? What is fantasy? Lessons to be learned? Its for you decide...and be skeptical. Some eggs:



A Did city planners decide to demolish City Hall, just to leave its iconic tower in the middle of a traffic circle?

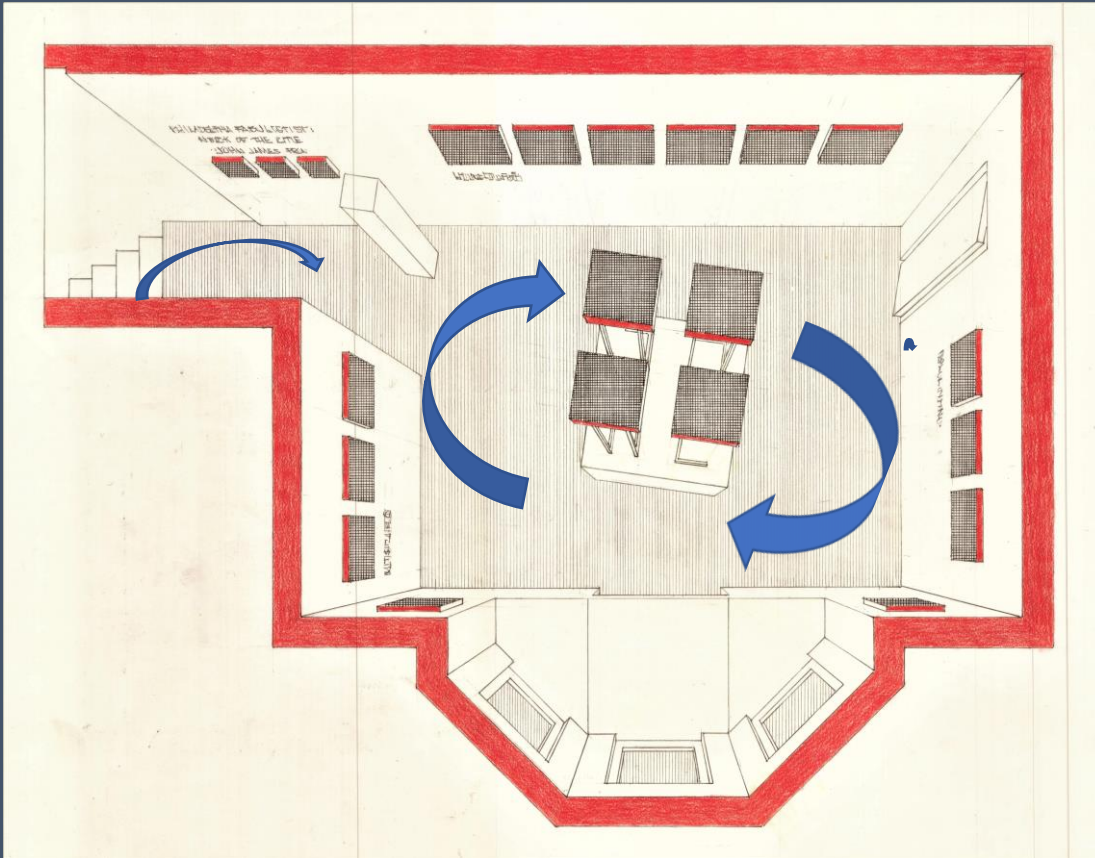
B Did colonial seamstress, upholsterer and tent-maker Betsy Ross actually sew the first Stars and Stripes, following the directions of Washington?



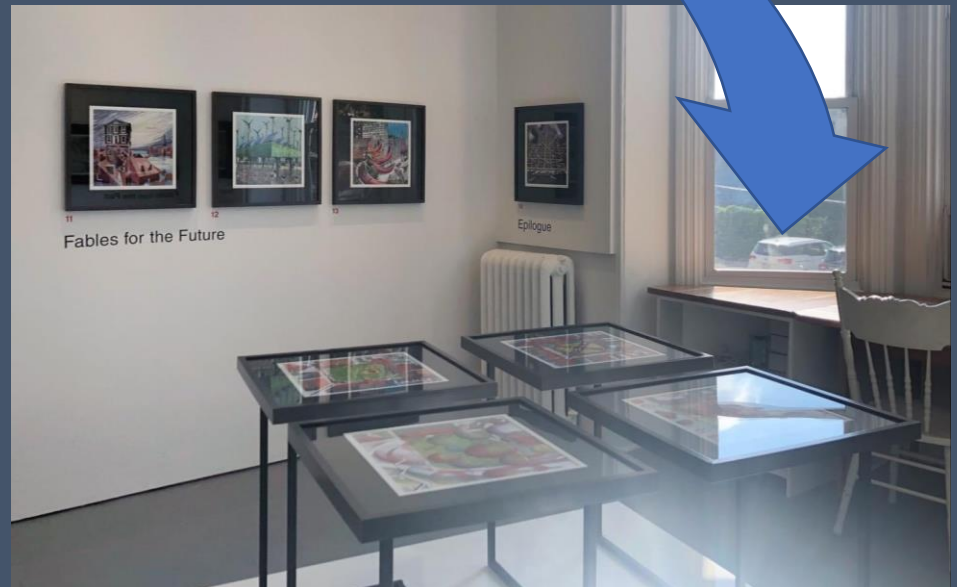
C Did Benjamin Franklin really fly his kite in a lightning storm to show its connection to electricity? And did a bolt of lightning strike his kite?

D Was Rome's notorious Colosseum the prototype of this city's "Roundhouse" -the Police Administration Building?

The (renovated) DaVinci Art Alliance Gallery 2



CIRCULATION: How is one invited to move thru the gallery set up as a “graphic storybook”: it sequentially unfolds: the vestibule is the “book cover”, the centralized plinth tilts one toward the windows. Then one is lead around, from the PROLOGUE, thru the PAST, the PRESENT and the FUTURE, ending up at the EPILOGUE. A spiraling around, thru the gallery space.



Circulating around the perimeter

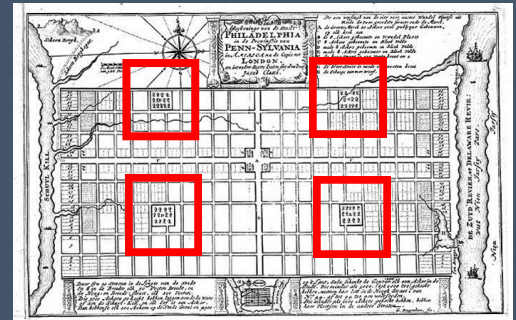
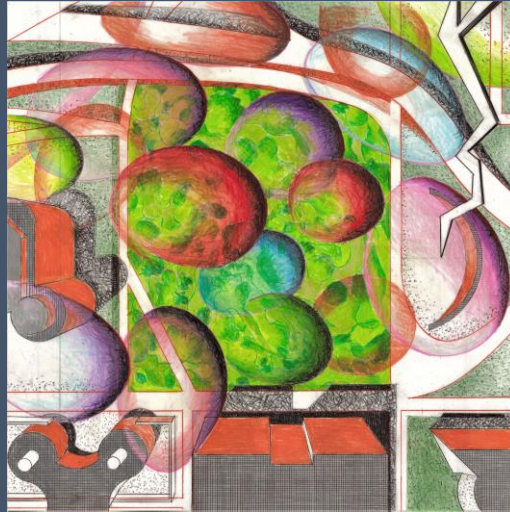
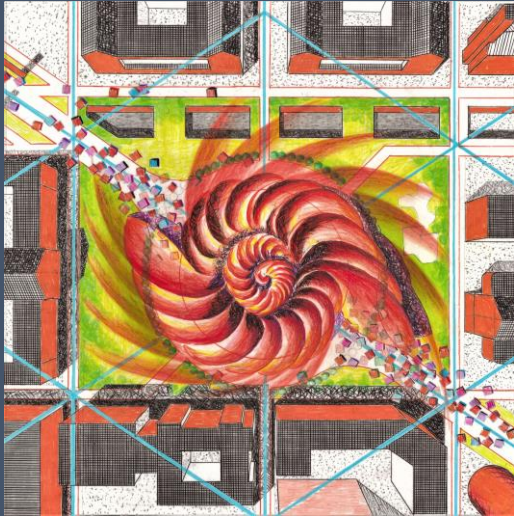
The Plinth

As a focal point and a pivot, it supports four plan drawings of the four public green spaces mandated by William Penn and his surveyor Thomas Holme.

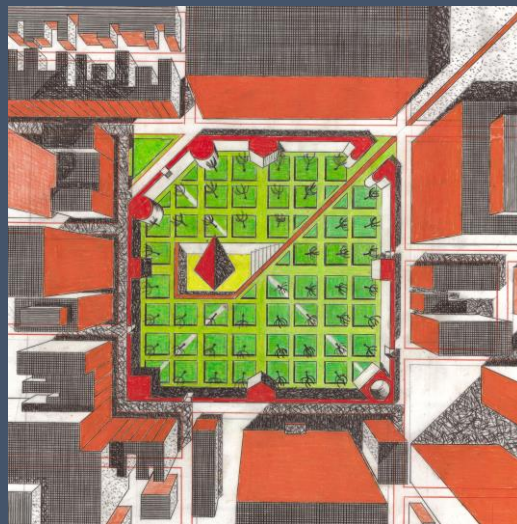
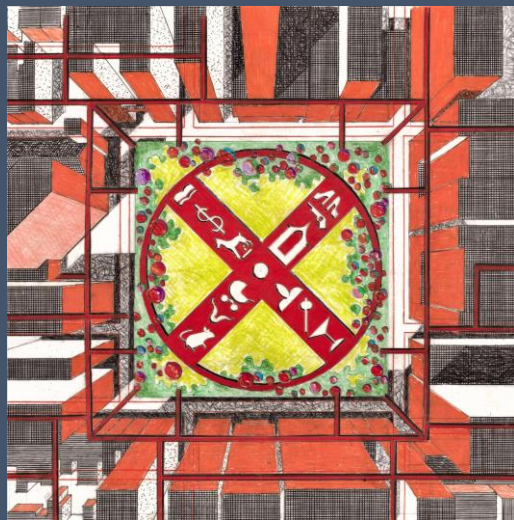


Along with an open space at the main crossing of the two main streets Broad St and Market St (intended for a Quaker Meeting House, school and Town Hall), those five are the only breaks in Penn's uniform urban grid.

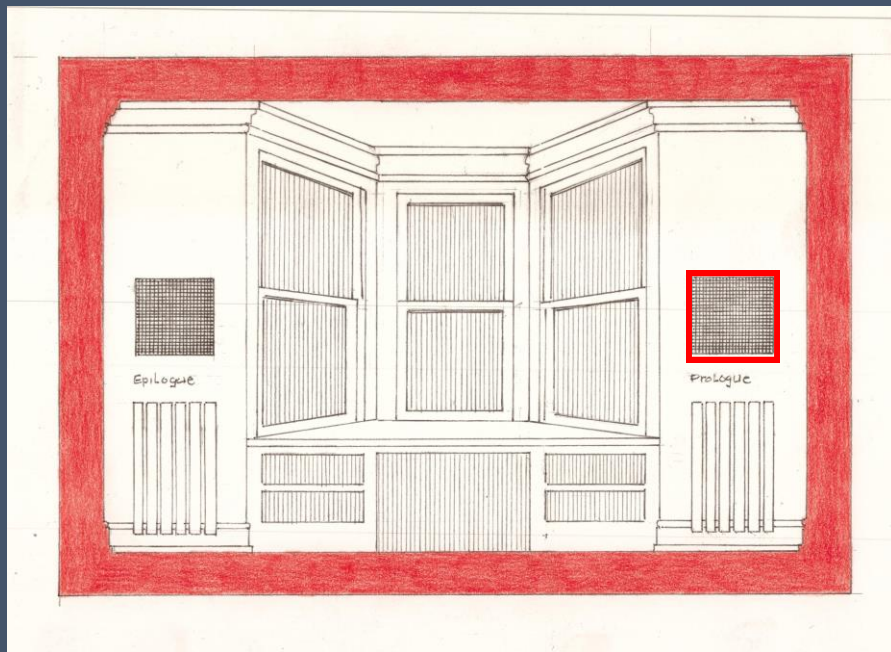
William Penn's four squares- then and now



And while first drawn as identical- each serving its own neighborhood- each square now has different characteristics and functions. The measured plans imaginatively conceptualize their differences.



- E** LOGAN: peaceful meadow now a traffic circle
- F** FRANKLIN: amusement park bordered by highways
- G** WASHINGTON: walled burial ground with colonial monuments
- H** RITTENHOUSE: social center of an upscale neighborhood



PROLOGUE

There are many legends and stories about Philadelphia's beginning: did William Penn actually meet with Native Americans to pledge piece? Did they sign a treaty? Did they both understand what it meant to "share" vs "buy" the land? And while many of Philadelphia's oldest avenues diagonalize out from the waterfront—original Native American paths thru the woods—they were crushed out by the grid he imposed in center city. Did they realize where the Native Americans were now to go...hunting grounds giving way to ubiquitous farms and cultivated fields? It was co-existence...but on white man's terms.

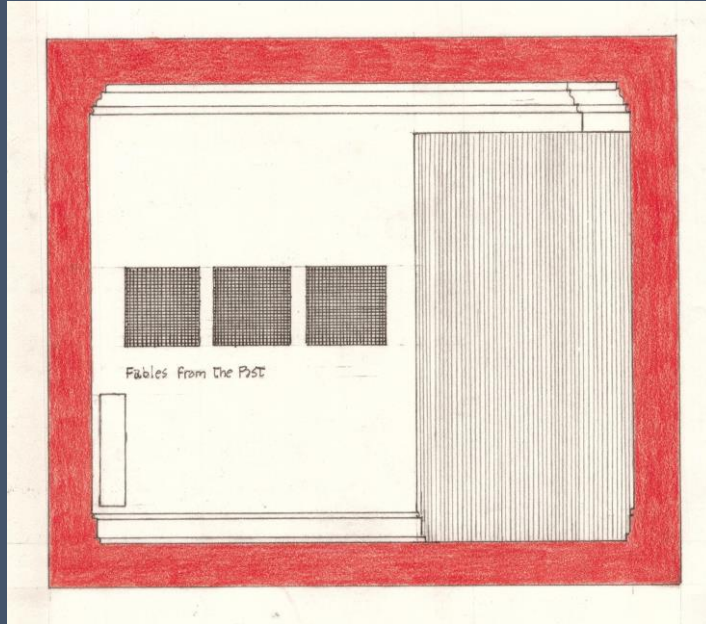
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WILLIAM PENN'S CHECKERED CHECKERBOARD LAYOUT

William Penn introduced the famous grid- a statement of Quaker equality, but **ORIGINALLY** intended that each block of houses intersperse with an open green space- each family and the natural environment in utopian balance. Green space, yes...but it did overlook those peoples already living *within* nature: and so, unwittingly, he helped begin the process of the displacement and ultimate cultural annihilation of all Native American tribes. They were not savages....only different. Their ghosts remain.

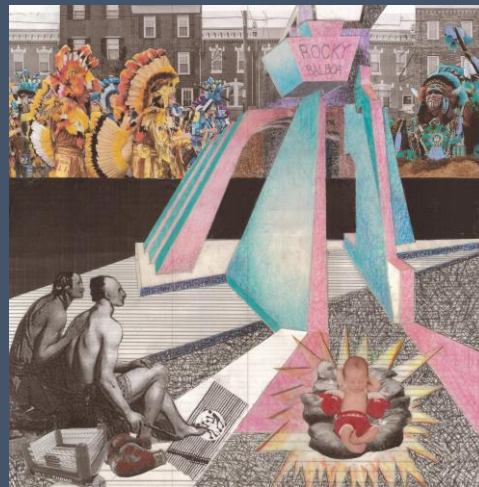
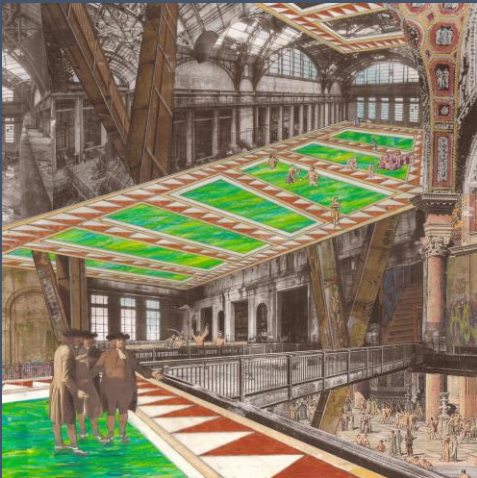


FABLES FROM THE PAST



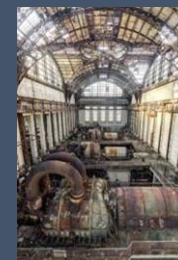
PHILADELPHIA IS 350-YEARS OLD- NOT REALLY OLD ENOUGH FOR TRULY FANTASTICAL TALES LIKE ROMULUS AND REMUS FOUNDING ROME, OR ATHENA AND POSEIDON COMPETING FOR ATHENS. STILL- THERE ARE SURPRISINGLY MANY STORIES BEGINNING WITH WILLIAM PENN AND LEADING UP TO MAYOR JIM KENNEY: OLD WIVES TALES, SUPPRESSED FACTS, WILDLY INFLATED EXPLOITS, SNARKY COMMENTS. OCCASIONALLY A FULL, UNVARNISHED TRUTH. I HAVE CHOSEN JUST THREE.

ARE THEY TRUE OR FALSE? CAN YOU TRUST ME TO TELL YOU? AND WHAT LESSONS CAN BE LEARNED FROM THEM? ...AND FROM WHAT WE BELIEVE TO BE "HISTORY"?



2

HISTORIC QUAKER BATHHOUSES



While early Quaker lifestyles and their houses were modest and understated, their bathing practices were anything but. Constructing a colonial city prior to plumbing and sewers and vowing that “cleanliness is next to godliness”, they followed the example of the ancient Romans to build two great bathing facilities along the river near Port Richmond, for the use of all- irresistible places that also maximized public health. Later, they were converted to powerplants to supply that newfangled electricity.

Long since abandoned, they remain as stunningly powerful, deserted, deteriorating, graffiti-filled ruins with little obvious future.

3

SHRINE OF THE BIRTHPLACE OF ROCKY



The folktale of Rocky Balboa, centered in South Philadelphia and Kensington, vastly predates the Sylvester Stallone film sagas. Were there archetypes?

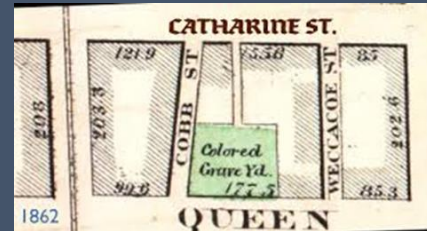
Many believe he was born in a manger, visited by the local Lenni Lenapi tribal chiefs who brought gifts, and was serenaded by native musicians— forerunners of the city’s Mummies.

As in many religious traditions, ancient sites of saints, patriarchs, exemplars and gurus are marked by edifices. In India, Rome & the Holy Land, they are visited by devout pilgrims.

The long-gone rowhouse, replaced by a marble shrine, was also the site of the first Mummies Parade.

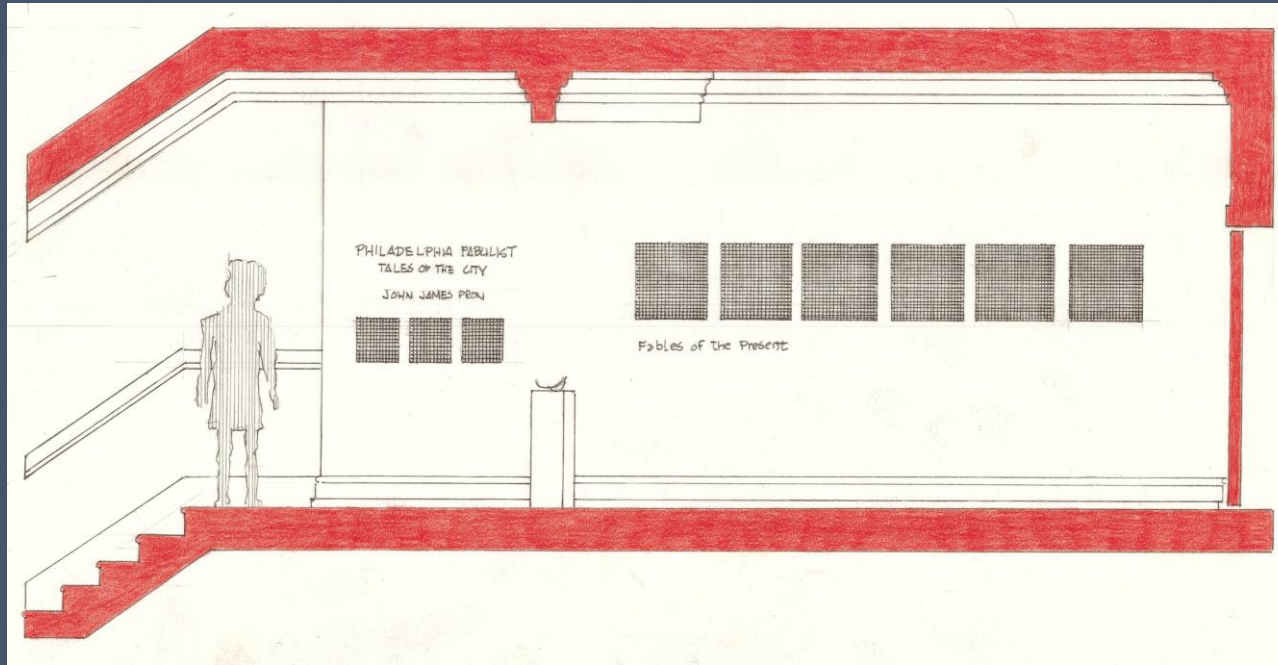
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BETHEL BURYING GROUND/ PLAYGROUND

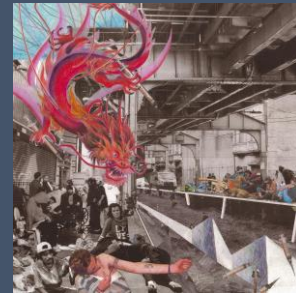
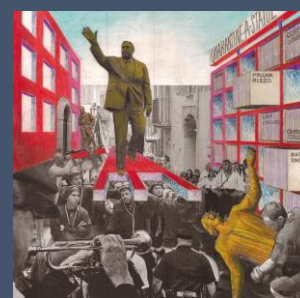
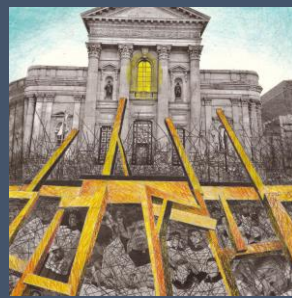
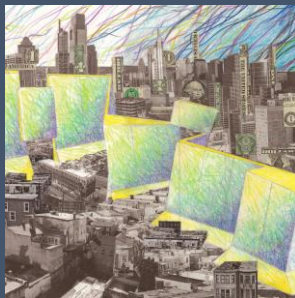
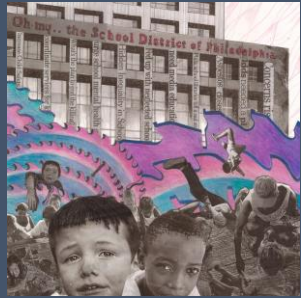


The Mother Bethel Burying Ground was an African-American cemetery from 1810 to 1889. Later abandoned, the graves remained beneath, forgotten, and now it is a playground. But in many cultures, the living and the dead coexist: burials line the aisles of European churches, while 19th century American cemeteries were places for picnics and recreation. Build a canopy- a sunshade for the kids- with apertures that permit the sun to affirm those buried under. Both/and.

FABLES OF THE PRESENT



THE PRESENT IS TODAY. SOME ISSUES HAPPENED SUDDENLY- LAST YEAR OR LAST MONTH, WHILE OTHERS HAVE BEEN AROUND FOR YEARS, EVEN DECADES. SOME WERE GRADUAL AND EXPECTED (AND SO EASILY IGNORED). WHILE OTHERS WERE A SURPRISE. SOME ARE SERENDIPITOUS AND QUITE WONDERFUL, WHILE OTHERS TAKE A TERRIBLE TOLL. BUT IF THEY ARE AT ALL TRUE, THEN THERE IS CLEARLY A CALL TO ACTION. LIVING HISTORY IS RIGHT NOW, AND WE ARE PARTICIPANTS.



5

“...AND NOW, ON TOP OF EVERYTHING, COVID-19!”



REALITY CHECK: **PHILLY SCHOOLS ARE LIKE A SLOW-MOVING ASTEROID**

Philly schools are toxic, underperforming and mismanaged. When, WURD's afternoon host wonders, is someone going to take responsibility?



POVERTY AND SCHOOL FUNDING: WHY LOW-INCOME STUDENTS OFTEN SUFFER

OPINION

Time to declare a state of emergency in Philly schools

Educators protest racism, health hazards in Philly schools

"School conditions are a public health crisis," said McClure Elementary's school nurse.

Neena Hagen

...and read the topics lining the vertical columns of the administration building

6

THE UNSEEN WALL OF ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

While downtown Philadelphia has a glittery success rate, with fine shops, restaurants, condos, entertainment venues and hotels...

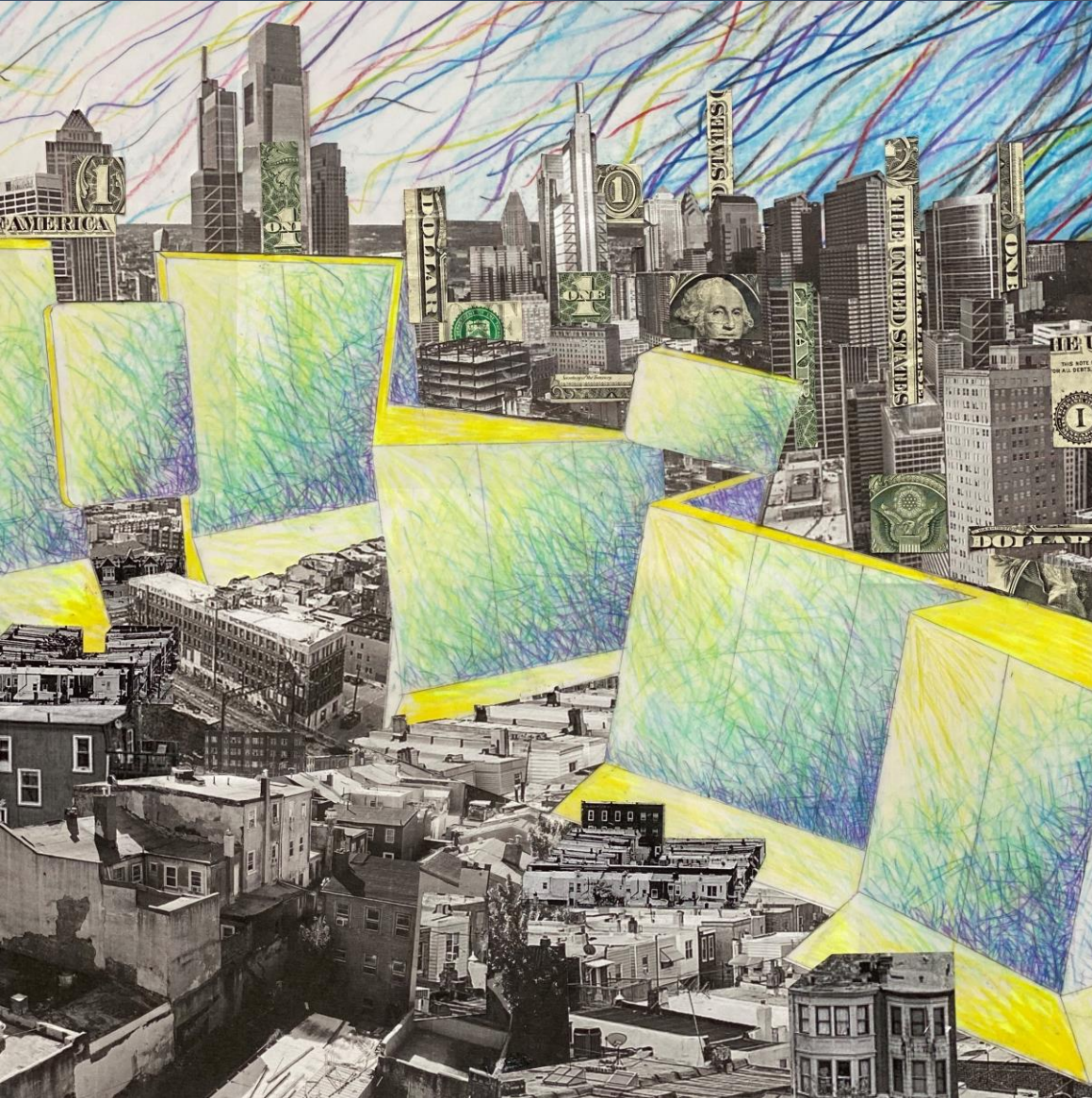
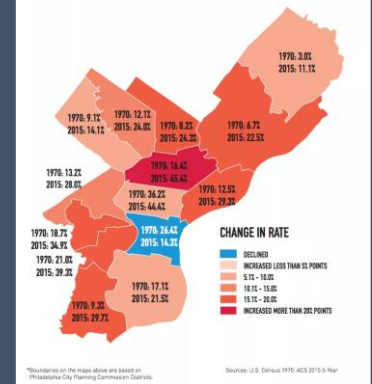


FIGURE 2: CHANGE IN POVERTY RATES, 1970-2015



...in the surrounding inner city, poverty is one of Philadelphia's most enduring problems. At 25.7 percent, the poverty rate is the highest among the nation's 10 largest cities. About 400,000 residents—including roughly 37 percent of the city's children under the age of 18—live below the federal poverty line, which is \$19,337 in annual income for an adult living with two children. And nearly half of all poor residents are in deep poverty, defined as 50 percent below the federal poverty line.

7

PUBLIC STATUARY QUARANTINE STATION

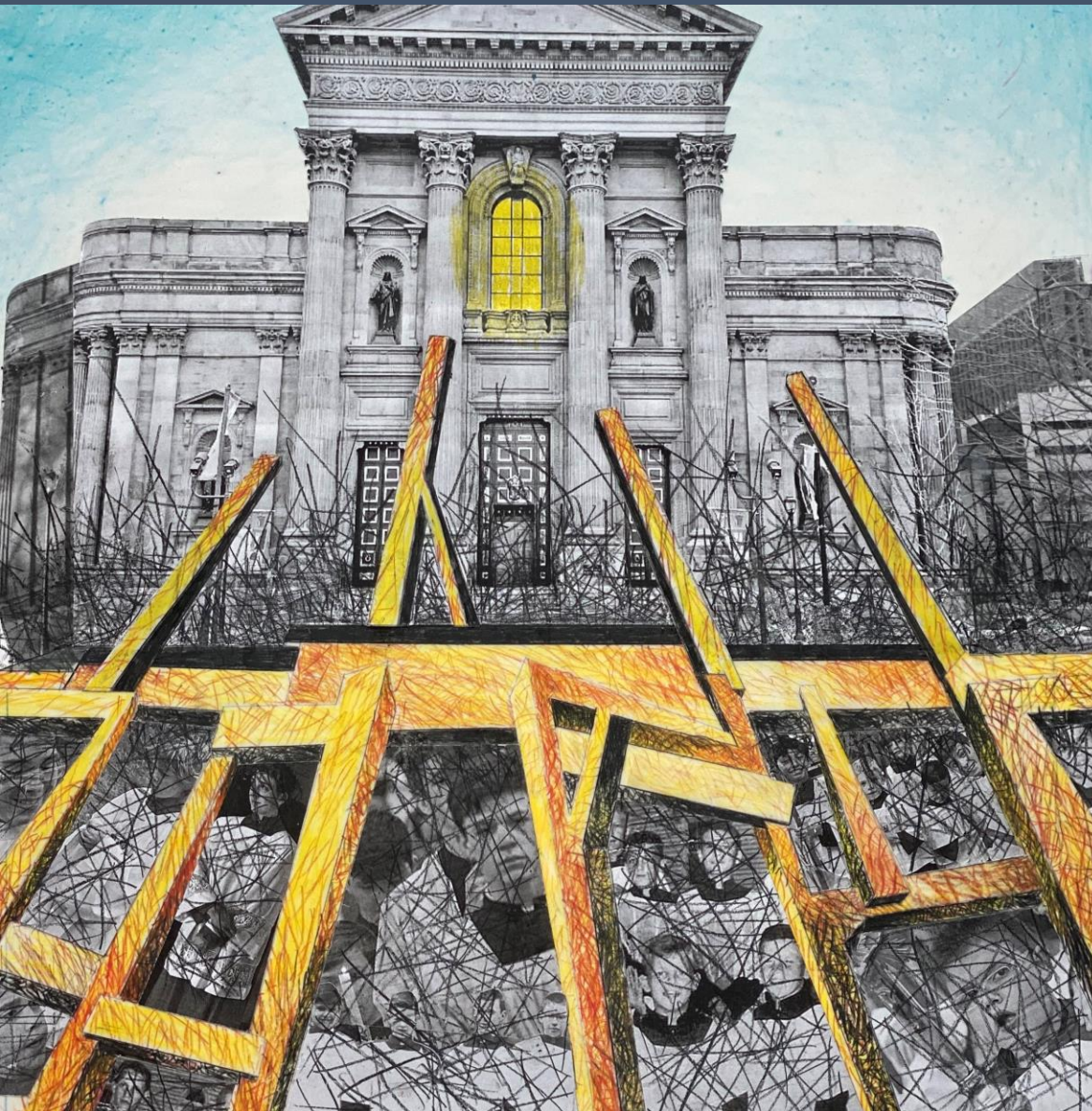
I hate statues. Monumental public statuary is archaic, having lost its ability both to remember the past as well as inspire the future. It all ended with Greek goddesses, Roman emperors and pharaohs. Pick your hero today, it will still offend somebody by its gestures, by its legacy or its public placement. Yes, there is "history", but the facts of history are continually being updated. Quarantine them all! - for a season, a few years or many decades. Let thoughtfully balanced public opinion determine when they can again emerge, and where....if ever. And for the future, best honor your "hero" with a donation to a cause, not a stupid statue.



8

THOU SHALT NOT SEXUALLY ABUSE

In August 2018, Penna Attorney General Josh Shapiro released a report that identified over 1850 victims of sexual abuse by more than 300 “predator-priests” in the state. While bishops apparently no longer transfer problem-priests, the Vatican merely encourages (but does not require) contacting civil authorities. It goes on.



Accused, But Not Listed

Dioceses released the names of 5,300 clergy members believed to be sex abusers. An analysis found hundreds more in the shadow.

Pope Ends Secrecy Rule in Abuse Cases,

By ELISABETTA POVOLEDO
The Vatican on Tuesday said it would abolish the high level of secrecy it has applied to sexual abuse accusations against clerics, ending a policy that critics said had often shielded priests from forward.

Parishioners react to new sex-abuse claim

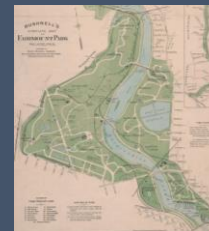
Some were resigned and others upset that names were withheld.



9

FAIREST-OF-THE-FAIR(MOUNT)

The stunning foresight of 19th c planners to buy up 2000 acres on both sides of the Schuylkill River resulted in one of America's greatest urban parks- and so this city possesses and nurtures a Garden of Eden, the site of family picnics and world's fairs, free concerts and zoos, biking trails and boat races, freely open and so easily accessible to all residents



10

THE RED DRAGON OF KENSINGTON AVENUE

Over 3000 people died of overdoses in Philadelphia in the last 3 years. Kensington is one of America's premier drug markets. What's to be done?

FEATURE

Trapped by the 'Walmart of Heroin'

A Philadelphia neighborhood is the largest open-air narcotics market for heroin on the East Coast. Addicts come from all over, and many never leave.



Largest Open-Air Narcotics Market For Heroin On East Coast Draws 'Drug Tourists' On Hunt For Cheap, Pure Opioids

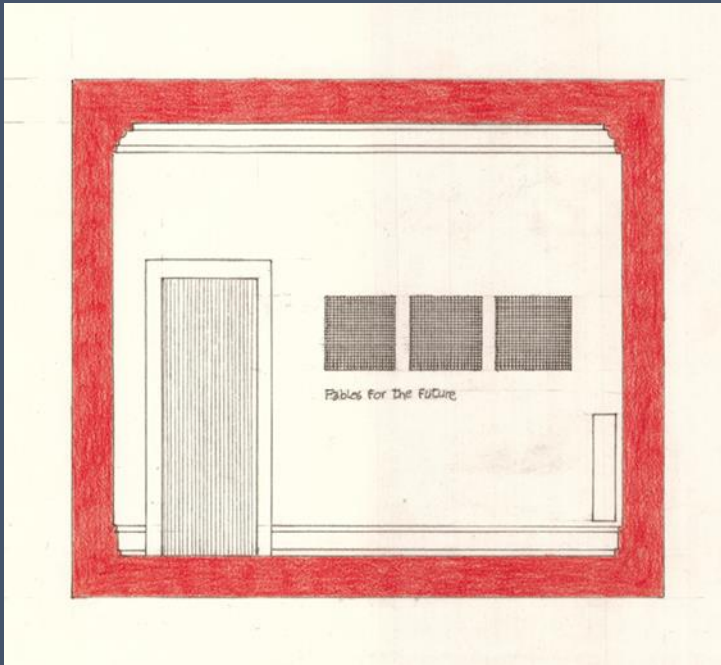
FABLES FOR THE FUTURE

NOT A QUESTION OF TRUE OR FALSE, FACT OR FICTION, HEARSAY OR DOCUMENTATION, THIS IS MORE ABOUT HOPES FOR THE FUTURE, OR FEARS FOR WHAT MIGHT SEEM INEVITABLE AND DESTRUCTIVE, WHETHER THEY HAPPEN GRADUALLY OR PRECIPITOUSLY.

MORE THAN “*WISFUL THINKING*”, I AM AN ARCHITECT AND SO I TRY TO *THINK* BEFORE I *WISH*.

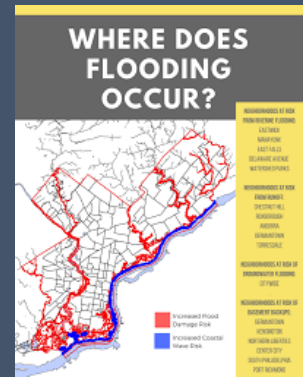
BUT THESE ARE ABOUT HUGE, INVOLVING, LONG-TERM ISSUES AND, IF PROBLEMMATIC, INVOLVE MORE THAN INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENT AND ACTION. THEY REQUIRE WHOLE COMMUNITIES SUPPORTING MAJOR CHANGES.

WHATEVER THESE OUTCOMES, THEY WILL BE SIGNIFICANT ENOUGH FOR THEIR STORIES BE TOLD TO OUR GRANDCHILDREN. THEY ARE WELL BEYOND OUR OWN DAY-TO-DAY CHALLENGES,



11

SOCIETY HILL AT HIGH HIGH TIDE



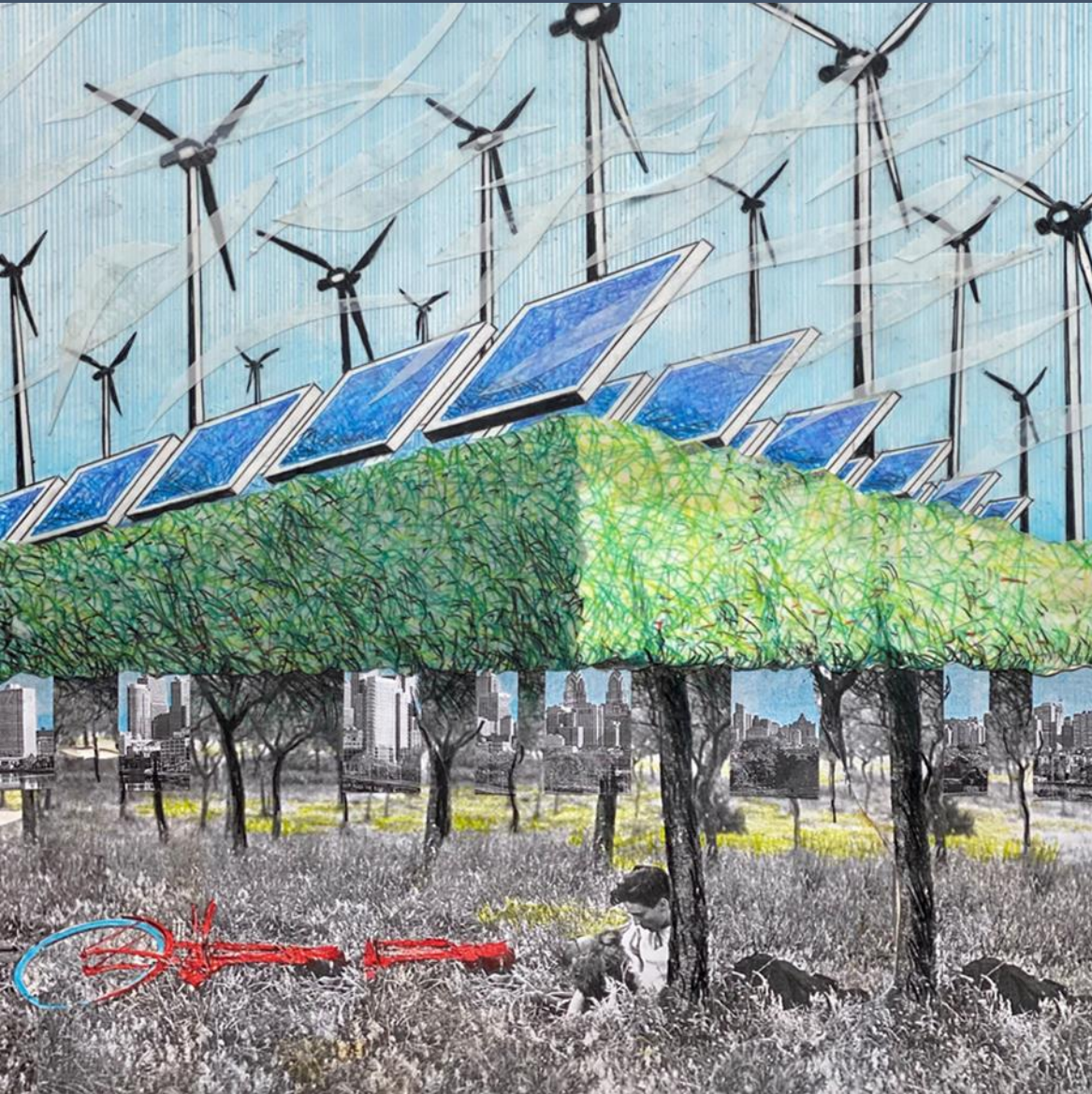
Philadelphia's River Wards (along the Delaware River) are tidal and will increasingly flood as global warming causes oceans to rise, due to global warming. Not unlike Venice, lower house floors will be abandoned, walkways will float between houses and- perhaps- we will raise our significant and historic structures on stilts. Either resolve the water issues or rethink the nature of these communities.

THE NEW ENERGY SOLUTIONS NON-REFINERY

In June 2019, a terrible fire destroyed this refinery- the largest on the east coast US, sitting on 1,300 acres of polluted riverfront between center city and the airport. It will not be restored to its past usages, but instead it will be devoted to green energy.

In layers, a giant wind farm will channel breezes, beneath it a huge solar panel farm will face the hot SW sun. Then acres of orchards, safely grown in contaminated soil.

And below that, shady recreational meadows for the use of the public, lining a pollution-free Schuylkill River

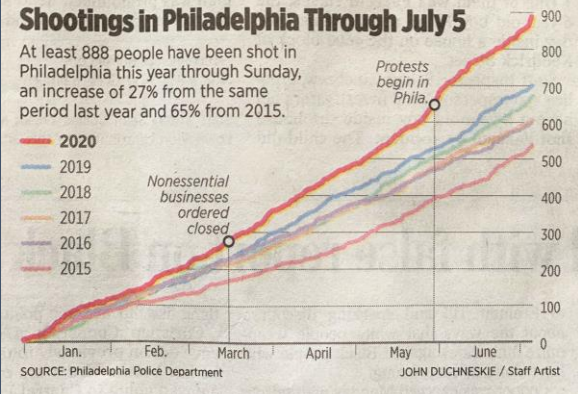


THE KIMMEL GUN-MELT SMELTER & COLLECTION POINT



Shootings in Philadelphia Through July 5

At least 888 people have been shot in Philadelphia this year through Sunday, an increase of 27% from the same period last year and 65% from 2015.



The gun epidemic in this city is so so out-of-control. While not a problem in rural, hunting counties, it cannot be allowed here. More and more “gun melts” are being built—many of them as increasingly sustainable smelters. Put one right in the heart of the city, letting its long tentacles suck guns up

Where Guns Go to Be Reincarnated

Steel from firearms melted down at mills around the country is used for construction, mining and more.

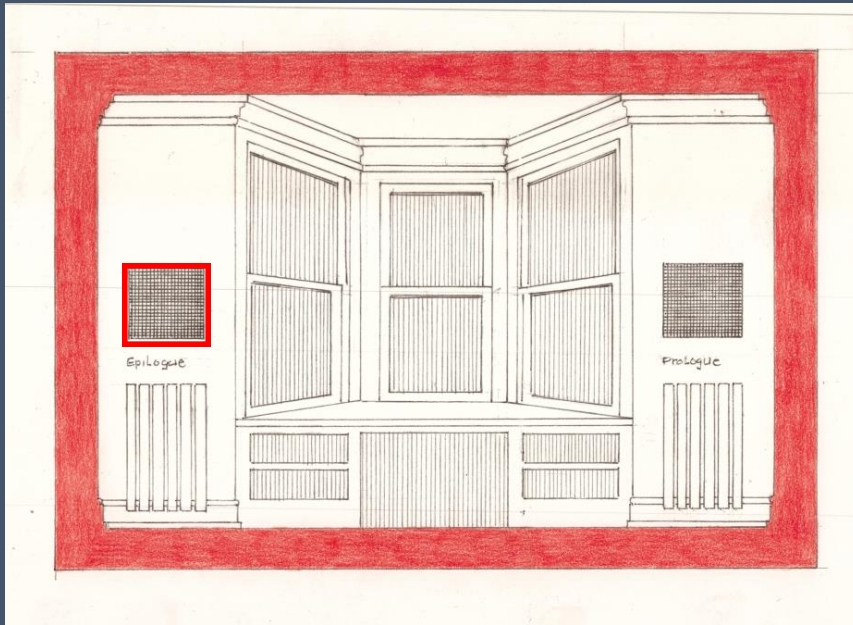
What should America do with its unwanted guns?

At steel mills around the country, the answer is simple: Throw them into a giant caldron, heat them up to 3,000 degrees Fahrenheit and liquefy them into an orange ooze.

For years, firearms at these so-called gun melts have served as an inexpensive supply of scrap metal that can be turned into bars of high-grade steel and later used as components in mining, construction and energy projects.

THE EPILOGUE

Past history: well, its not fixed. There is more and more information to access, plus standards of behavior and morality are always in flux: what was tolerated before is just not acceptable now. **Present history:** recognize that we are individual active participants in shaping it. One cannot simply shrug...or pray. **Future history:** its beyond us as individuals to control, and the responsibility for decision-making must involve community, family, all humanity. We cannot alone decide to validate or eliminate or ignore Mt Vesuvius, the San Andreas Fault or nuclear bombs. In order to shape our **long-term future**, it's not enough to think only of your immediate self today. Think of your own, indeed everyone's grandchildren.



14

THE UNEXPECTED ERUPTION OF MOUNT COVID-19

I just cannot end this series of visual tales on a mindlessly happy note. I do not believe that “everyone will live happily ever after” in this story. Plus I have been always deeply suspicious of the strange hill under the Art Museum in an otherwise flat city. Is this our Vesuvius? Is it silently erupting?

My fear about Covid-19 is that it will irrevocably change the very nature of cities, where peoples come together for mutual support and shared cultural enrichment. Will it end all face-to-face socialization? Malls and department stores will disappear as we shop online (Amazon, Walmart) and deliver online (FedEx, UPS). No more shops and restaurants (no indoor dining and winter outside is not do-able). No live witnessed sports, or concerts or conventions. There will be no offices in the office buildings (with everyone working at home). No business travel, no tourism, empty hotels. Virtually deserted museums. No parades. Urban-lovers now want to move out, not in.

This city will not be suddenly destroyed but might it disintegrate into many isolated particles of disconnected individuals? This is my fear for my beloved Philadelphia.

