

WaterLines: RiverBank, Chestertown, Maryland

RONIT EISENBACH

University of Maryland

CASSIE MEADOR

Choreographer, Dance Exchange

ALEKSANDRA VREBALOV

Composer

JENI WIGHTMAN

Visual Artist & Biologist

Ephemeral works employed as part of creative placemaking efforts can enhance and catalyze a community at critical junctures to create a sense of possibility, spark imagination and stimulate public discourse. *WaterLines: RiverBank* was an installation and performance that transformed a vacant bank into a “world of rippling light and sublimely meditative sound” evoking the connections, interdependency and exchange between river and town. At a moment when the historic town of Chestertown, Maryland was grappling with the potential impacts of sea level rise, ecological degradation, economic inequality and social fissures, the project sought to strengthen community by offering shared opportunities to surface and celebrate connections between residents and local identity, exploring changes that have reshaped each.

WaterLines: RiverBank was the culmination of a yearlong residency at SANDBOX, Washington College by an architect, composer, visual artist and choreographer. Public engagement events built relationships between individuals from parallel communities who shared their knowledge and shaped the final work. Connecting the vacant Chestertown Bank building and the Chester River, *WaterLines* fused art, science, and social history to create an immersive art experience that reflected the town’s river setting and cultural history. The work transformed a rigid, formal space originally designed to reassure investors into a place that questioned our relation to natural systems.

In place of the valuables once secured in the bank’s abandoned vault, participants encountered small bowls of river water and video interviews with residents describing their connections to their river and what they value now. In the banking hall, luminous images of the river and microbial life within its sediments were brought to life through video projections upon the banks’ walls and floor while a sonic composition made from local natural and man-made sounds infused the space. A dance performance concluded with a public procession from the bank to the river’s edge led by community members who provided stories about life along and upon the river. Water collected earlier in the day by local children was returned to the river, reinforcing the town’s deep connection to the water, encouraging a greater understanding and sense of responsibility for this natural resource and the worlds it supports.

Upon experiencing the work one participant, Andrew Case wrote of *WaterLines*’ impact upon the community, as it “brought people together who, although they live and work in very close proximity, rarely share cultural events... like many places with a history of segregation, most of the town’s events are divided, but this one was decidedly not.” Mary McCoy, another resident noted the impact on restoring the bond between town and river while raising the visibility of environmental concerns: “For those of us who have lived in this area for many years, *WaterLines* was saturated with memory and love -- memory of the

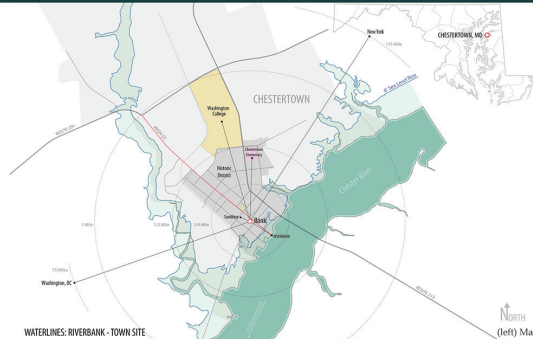
buildings, businesses, people and seasons that have come and gone, and love for the river and its marshes, shorebirds, shifting tides, and halcyon days of sunlight on the water. Such feelings are warm and joyful, but also fraught with anxiety as the ecological challenges to our beloved home become more obvious.”

WaterLines was made possible through the tremendous generosity and vision of Alex Castro and Sean Meade of SandBox, Washington College. Its success was only possible by the many talented people who joined us: Leslie Raimond, Kent County Arts Council, members of the design and production team: Debra Gilmore, Lighting; Shane Meador, Projection Designer; Austin Raimond, Design Assistant; Ian McClain, Video and Lighting Systems Engineer, Margaret Campbell, Stage Manager; Performers: Dante Brown and Matthew Cumbie, Dance Exchange; Irene Moore, Gospel Singer, and the participation of Chestertown residents and Washington College faculty, students and staff.

Chestertown, Maryland

WaterLines: RiverBank

Ronit Eisenbach, Cassie Meador, Aleksandra Vrebalov, Jeni Wightman



WATERLINES: RIVERBANK - TOWN SITE

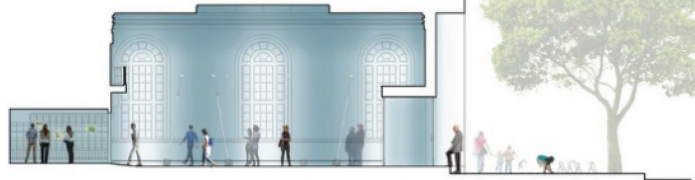


(right) Diagram highlighting the cyclical relationship between the river and the bank.

(left) Map of Chestertown and Chester River, noting locations of key partners. Light green indicates expected flooding due to sea level rise.

Process: *unearthing connections between community and the river*

Installation: *exploring the relationships, exchanges and tension between the natural and built environments*



VIDEO VAULT + SOUNDSCAPE + PERFORMANCE

ENTRANCE + PROCESSION



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Impact: *strengthening community, sustainability, and restoring the bond between town & river*

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photos: Zachary Z. Handler, Brian Palmer, Sean Meade, Shane Meador
diagrams: Austin Raimond, Russell Holstine

