Creative Care: Artistic Action in the Stop Cop City Movement

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Abstract: The Weelaunee Forest, also known as the South River or Atlanta Forest, is currently receiving national attention as protestors from the Stop Cop City (SCC) movement attempt to protect the land from being cleared for the development of a large-scale police training facility. Relying on a combination of existing scholarly literature, recent news articles, and two personally collected interviews, my research investigates the role of artistic and creative forms of activism, resistance, and community support in SCC movement. I apply ethics of care to this research by focusing on the ways artistic activism encourages multiplicity of perspectives, responds to psychological needs, and facilitates alternative forms of communication that bridge distances of difference. Ultimately, this paper advocates for the irreplaceable importance of creative expression and artistic meaning making in local efforts to resist cycles of institutionalized oppression.
Key words: art activism, Stop Cop City, ethics of care, interviews, American South

The Weelaunee Forest, also known as the South River Forest, currently comprises one of the largest remaining urban tree canopies in the U.S, and in 2017 was designated one of the four major "lungs" of Atlanta, Georgia.[1] That same year, despite 70% opposition from local residents, the city announced a development plan for building a militarized training center for police and firefighters on the site of the forest, costing an estimate of ninety million dollars.[2] Catapulting from the momentum of the 2020 Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, the Stop Cop City (SCC) movement arose in 2021 as the civic and creative defender of the forest. Based out of Atlanta, this movement is comprised of people from all walks of life concerned for the forest and what its demolition represents. As such, it has expanded across state borders and developed a strong digital presence, protesting institutionalized violence and spreading coalition around intersections of environmentalism and social justice broadly. Art and creativity have been consistent facets of the SCC's efforts to protest the construction of The Atlanta Public Safety Training Center, also known as "Cop City," proving effective for achieving widespread communication, coalition building, and emotional support for those advocating for the forest.

The primary goal of this paper is to illustrate the importance of art and creativity as a widely accessible and care-centered path towards engaging with the particulars of social justice movements, embracing their innate relationship to human emotion and responding to contexts of trauma. In an effort to demonstrate the ways care manifests at a very local level, yet nevertheless is interconnected with broader existential and political concerns, this essay incorporates interviews from two artistic organizers. Sampson Reichard (he/him), an artist based out of Florida, appears first in this essay. This interview focuses on *Manny's Quilt* (2023), which Reichard created in memoriam of his friend—Manuel "Tortuguita" Paez Terán (they/them) —who was killed during a police raid of the forest (Fig. 1). Following a history of the Weelaunee Forest leading into the present-day conflict, Liz Elliot's (she/they) interview approaches the role of artmaking as a strategic device for coalition building. Both of these conversations began through Instagram, and due to the contemporary nature of this topic, a significant amount of my research has required me to reference various forms of mass media, including

[1] Charles Bethea, "The New Fight Over an Old Forest in Atlanta," *The New Yorker*, August 2022, https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-the-south/the-new-fight-over-an-old-forest-in-atlanta.
[2] Bethea, "The New Fight Over an Old Forest in Atlanta."

social media and public news sources. Informed by ethics of care as my primary methodology, I analyze the artistic responsiveness of these individuals to the particularities of conflict, confrontations, and coalition.

Care as an Ethical Approach

Before approaching the artist interviews, I will provide some clarification on care and how I use it in this essay. Ethics of care is a philosophical and practical framework for addressing conflict that centers ideas of interconnectivity and interdependency, making space for both specific individualities and shared collectivities in its approach. Ethics of care does not profess to resolve every problem, but rather offers a potentially helpful way "to *notice* the mutual dependence of people and *investigate* the construction of difference."[3] Those invested in the SCC movement each have their own nuanced motivations, but joining in this collective effort to protect people and nature alike demands that they acknowledge the interdependence shared between humans, societies, and environments. Acclaimed political scientist Joan Tronto has explained, a caring approach necessarily "includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all that we seek to interweave in a complex, life sustaining web."[4] Therefore, social movements seeking to sustain life must attend to small scale, local, and personal particulars in their fight for widespread care.

Care's attentiveness to locality does not mean that one must *only* respond to what is immediately surrounding them, for instance cultivating one's own garden and not bothering with the problems of others.[5] Many involved in the SCC movement engage from a distance, often organizing in the contexts of their own cities and combining the interests of the Atlanta-based movement with globalized movements such as BLM and pro-Palestine demonstration. While SCC is grounded in the specific place of the Weelaunee Forest, its abolitionist and environmentalist message resonates with people throughout the South, the U.S., and beyond. Marvelously and with expansive care, the SCC movement inspires a search for interdependencies and solidarity amongst our many specific differences and personal contexts. Likewise, care as an ethical approach aims to navigate conflicts and interactions on both a local and global scale through a morality of closeness, which directly acknowledges the ripple effect of one action on the lives of people many miles, or even many years, away.

Interview with Sampson Reichard Section

In the SCC movement, the presence of human life is used to prevent the destruction of the more-than-human world, with camp style sit-ins being erected amidst the trees to delay demolition. Following a catastrophic police raid of an encampment in the forest on January 18, 2023, the SCC movement reached a peak in media coverage when Paez Terán was shot over a dozen times while still inside the tent they had been camping in.[6] Paez Terán was twenty-six years old and an honors student studying psychology at Florida State University. Impressively, they also found the time to organize community gardens dedicated to feeding people in their community who were without reliable housing and actively participated in forest defense efforts in Atlanta.[7] At the 2023 press release, lawyers detailed the findings of Paez Terán's autopsy report, stating that "both Manuel's left and right hands show exit wounds in both palms. The autopsy further reveals that Manuel

[3] Fiona Robinson, "Globalizing Care: Ethics, Feminist Theory, and International Relations," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 22, no. 1 (Jan–Mar. 1997): 127.
[4] Berenice Fisher and Joan C. Tronto, "Toward a feminist theory of caring," in *Circles of care: Work and identity in women's lives*, eds. E. K. Abel & M. K. Nelson (New York: SUNY Press, 1990), 40.
[5] M. de Voltaire, *Candide*, (New York: Random House, 1975).
[6] The Associated Press, "The family of a 'Cop City' protester who was killed releases more autopsy findings," *National Public Radio*, https://www.npr.org/2023/03/13/1163272958/cop-city-protester-autopsy-manuel-paez-teran.
[7] Tim Craig, "In Atlanta, a deadly forest protest sparks debate over 'domestic terrorism," *The Washington Post*, January 26 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2023/01/26/atlanta-forest-protester-police-riot/.

was most probably in a seated position, cross-legged when killed."[8] Paez Terán's mother, Belkis Terán, stated "Manuel loved the forest. It gave them peace. They meditated there. The forest connected them with God. I never thought that Manuel could die in a meditation position."[9]

At the intersections of mass media and social change, individual points of suffering and loss often become politicized and distorted. Sampson Reichard, who had shared a friendship with Paez Terán, became painfully aware of this consequence of widespread media attention. As an act of care for the posthumous memorialization of a deceased friend, Reichard used the creative medium of quilting as a personalized and affect-driven form of engagement with the events of the SCC movement. The quilted portrait, titled *Manny's Quilt*, is comprised of colorfully patterned cloth, patchworked together in a lively memorialization (Fig. 1). Scenes of outer space, green vegetation, and blooming flowers come together to form the abstracted shapes of Paez Terán's hair, headband, and facial features. Their smile appears to be open, perhaps in the midst of a laugh. Their cheeks are rosy. The portrait has a joyful, whimsical appearance.

Reichard has been quilting for the last twenty years, starting work professionally about five years ago. For *Manny's Quilt* he used entirely repurposed fabrics and a process of improv piecing and applique techniques to render the abstracted yet recognizable image of Paez Terán. The use of repurposed scraps of fabric is common in quilting traditions, where small pieces of otherwise unusable cloth can be given new life in the form of a quilt. Some scholars have described this practice as a "form of care for seemingly discarded materials" and connected it to environmentalist notions of re-use and sustainability.[10]

Reichard explains that "quilting has a long, long history of cultural resilience and expression. Manny's is not the first memoriam portrait stitched on Turtle Island...theirs was just my first."[11] In their article exploring the presence of "craftivism" in response to the 2016 mass shooting at Pulse, a gay bar in Orlando, Florida, authors Anna Keune, Nickolina Yankova, and Kylie Peppler argue that quilt-making functioned as "a physical instantiation of societal care."[12] They explain that the process of stitching together quilts, which were then donated to mourning loved ones, appropriately links compassion to socio-political engagement. These authors recognize creative engagement as "an alternative way forward, in which grief was normalized, recognized, and met with compassion."[13] The same could be said for Reichard's quilted memorial portrait of his friend.

Reichard explains that this quilt responded to his own interpersonal needs at the time while still maintaining a link of support to the SCC movement.

> I did not create Manny's quilt as an attempt to join the digital fray. My activism is something I engage with directly in my community. While I can financially contribute to bail funds, that's the capacity I can participate in supporting the Forest Defenders during these times. I created Manny's quilt in order to work through my personal grief. Later I shared prints in order to send to anyone else mourning Manny that may have needed it. I would not be able to craft the same portrait twice nor would it have been a sustainable process by attempting to do so, however I did want to give connection to anyone else also experiencing what I was.[14]

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[8] Kaitlyn Radde, "Autopsy reveals anti-'Cop City' activist's hands were raised when shot and killed," *National Public Radio*, March 11, 2023, https://www.npr.org/2023/03/11/1162843992/cop-city-atlanta-activist-autopsy.

[9] The Associated Press, "The family of a 'Cop City'protestor."

[10] Anna Keune, Nickolina Yankova, Kylie Peppler, "#Quiltsforpulse: connected and shared socio-political activism through craftivism," *Routledge* 47, no. 2 (2022): 263.

[11] Sampson Reichard, interview by Ivy Borden, Feb 21, 2023, digital.; Turtle Island refers to an indigenous name for Earth or the North American continent.

[12] Keune, Yankova, Peppler, "#Quiltsforpulse." 253.

[13] Keune, Yankova, Peppler, "#Quiltsforpulse." 260.

[14] Reichard, interview.

This quote addresses several of the benefits social media can offer artists. Sharing his art through an online channel, Reichard was able to express his own grief over Paez Terán's death and reach a vast array of people sharing in that grief. Additionally, Reichard implies environmentalist motivations for sharing artwork digitally, as it allows for a dispersal of the work without the need to produce multiple material versions.

However, the decision to make this quilt and share it online was not only motivated by Reichard's need to mourn Paez Terán's death, but also a desire to publicly celebrate and honor the fullness of their life. When Reichard learned on January 19 that his friend had been killed by police in the forest, he was deeply concerned over how the media would portray Paez Terán to the world. Peaz Terán and Reichard shared an interest in decolonized agriculture and food sovereignty efforts in Florida, and in our interview he fondly recalled spending time together in the trees around his farmstead when Paez Terán would come to visit.[15] In making the quilt, Reichard explains "I just wanted to remember their face, their laughter…I wanted Manny to be seen and for people to know they were loved."[16] Since posting this quilt online Reichard has sent out thirty prints of the quilt to people who had personal relationships with Paez Terán and says he is willing to gift the quilt directly to Paez Terán's family if they ever express a desire to receive it.[17]

In our interview, Reichard made it clear that he resonates with the eco-political goals of SCC, but that his efforts are focused towards his own community in Florida. Nonetheless, his approach to memorializing Paez Terán exemplifies the relational, emotional ways in which an ethics of care can be both personally and politically active. Though Paez Terán easily transforms into either a dehumanized martyr or radical antagonist online, Reichard's quilt demands we remember that they were cared for and will be missed. Though perhaps not the most typical way of engaging with SCC activity, this creative approach is an immensely important way of showing up for the Forest Defenders as well as showing up for one's own psychological needs. Reichard explains that creating and sharing this quilt was "about being there for those of us personally grieving." [18] He remarks that the defenders have "more immediate" struggles to dedicate their attention to, such as legally reckoning with increasingly criminalizing and violent tactics by the police and Georgia legislature to eliminate resistance. Still, I think the caring work of creatives such as Reichard is imperative for sustaining hopeful, emotionally supportive representation of the movement and its impact on people's lives.

When I first came across the Instagram post of *Manny's Quilt*, I was struck by a sentence in its caption that read "the opposite of violence isn't peace, it's creation."[19] I asked Reichard to elaborate on what he meant by this and he explained that it is a variation on a line from the song "La Vie Boheme" by Jonathan Larson in the musical *Rent*: "the opposite of war isn't peace, it's creation."[20] In discussing this quote, Reichard reflected on the ways in which violence is so often perpetuated due to the apathy of bystanders. He thoughtfully questioned what it takes to move people off the sidelines and motivate them to engage with the trouble.[21] According to Reichard, "it takes Movement. It takes Love. It takes Passion and Care."[22] This answer is not one that suggests a one-size-fits-all approach, it is intentionally vague and charged with emotion, which can be experienced and expressed differently by different people. Similarly, ethics of care is an approach to conflict, but not a universal answer to the layered problems of history, the present day, or the future. This sort of ethical approach, embodied by Reichard's quilt, "must be

[15] Reichard, interview.
[16] Reichard, interview.
[17] Reichard, interview.
[18] Reichard, interview.
[19] Sampson Reichard (@littlepecanfarmstead), "Last Thursday morning, a friend shared notice of an Atlanta Forest Defender's death," Instagram photo, January 23, 2023.
[20] Reichard, interview.
[21] Reichard, interview.
[22] Reichard, interview.

attentive insofar as it can assume no 'ideal' moral situation, but must listen to and learn from the particular standpoint of real individuals."[23]

Movements for social, political, and environmental justice are extremely taxing on the wellbeing of those who sustain them, at times they are even fatal. As in all of life, there is no certainty in these movements and there is no one right way of participating in them. Reichard says that creativity and art "move people to action…move people to understand and love."[24] For him, this approach defies colonial, environmental, and heteronormative oppression. "Through queer joy and emotion, we stand defiant and tall against any violence and build community."[25] Art and creativity can thus be forms of activist engagement capable of conforming to the specific needs of one's own context while still avoiding insularity and reaching out into a broader community of interconnectivity.

A Forest's Generational Trauma

The history of the Weelaunee Forest depicts a local unfolding of broader regional developments throughout Southeastern North America. An overview of this history is important to properly illustrate the ways in which the forest represents a legacy of interconnected social, ecological, and political struggle. Prior to European colonization the forest was home to the Muscogee Creek Confederacy.[26] The nutrient rich soil of the Southeast, kept fertile by the many rivers flowing throughout it, eventually caught the expansionist eye of colonial powers. As early as the 1790s this landscape began to suffer the trauma of plantation-based agriculture and witnessed the abuse of people held captive by slavery.[27] In 1821 the forest and surrounding land was officially stolen from the Muscogee people via a federally constructed land lottery that enabled eligible White men to gamble for 202.5-acre plots for their own families, farms, and the people they enslaved. [28]

Following the gruesome battles of the Civil War, which resulted in the burning of Atlanta and immense bloodshed across Southern soil, new forms of racialized oppression and violence began to develop institutionally amidst the South's march towards modernity. The Thirteenth Amendment, ratified in 1865, included a loophole for maintaining slave labor after its legal abolition, stating that slavery shall not exist within the United States "except as a punishment for crime."[29] After the failure of reconstruction, the early twentieth century saw a horrific surge in lynchings and racialized criminalization tactics. It was commonplace for Black people to be arrested for petty offenses such as loitering or breaking curfew and sentenced to prison labor in conditions akin to slavery.

The Weelaunee Forest Zone eventually came under the control of the Bureau of Prisons and United States Federal Penitentiary in Atlanta and once again was repurposed as a site of control and exploitation for those oppressed by systems of colonial-derived incarceration. During the 1920s The Old Atlanta Prison Farm—also known as Honor Farm—was built in the forest on the same land which had once borne grim witness to the "finest plantation in the county."[30] Honor Farm was intended for prisoners—both men and women—serving sentences for non-violent crimes. These prisoners were required to do unpaid agricultural work on the farm,

[23] Robinson, "Globalizing Care," 121.
[24] Reichard, interview
[25] Reichard, interview.
[26] Timothy Pratt, "'The birds stopped singing:' Inside the battle for Atlanta's South River Forest," *Atlanta Magazine*, January 20, 2023, https://www.atlantamagazine.com/great-reads/the-birds-stopped-singing-inside-the-battle-for-atlantas-south-river-forest/.
[27] Mark Auslander and Avis E. Williams, "What these Trees have Seen: Slavery, Post-Slavery, and Anti-Blackness in the South River (Welaunee) Forest Zone," *Mark Auslander*, 23 April 2022, https://markauslander.com/2022/08/04/what-these-trees-have-seen-slavery-post-slavery-and-anti-blackness-in-the-south-river-welaunee-forest-zone/.
[28] Auslander and Williams, "What these Trees have Seen."
[29] US Constitution, amend. 13, sec. 1.
[30] Auslander and Williams, "What these Trees have Seen."

supplying a significant amount of the cheap produce and dairy products sold in Dekalb County.[31] Though the farm was advertised at the time as a rehabilitative site designed to teach prisoners honest work in the luxury of fresh air, there are many reports of intense police brutality, sexual violence, and poor health services throughout the prison's lifetime, which remained active until the 1990s.[32]

Since the closing of the prison farm, the forest and the people living near it have continued to experience neglect and abuse from city officials, namely in the form of destitute public infrastructure and extreme pollution. In the 1970s the forest was used as a "de-facto city dump."[33] Following Atlanta's many cycles of demolition and development, the city discarded debris and material from demolished buildings into the out-of-sight landscape of the forest, where many of these relics can still be found amidst overgrowth today.[34] The South River—which runs throughout the forest and is its current namesake—was among the top ten most endangered rivers in America as reported by the American Rivers organization in 2021.[35]

Additionally, the Atlanta Police Department has operated a firing range in the forest for decades, which many have expressed concern over, including environmentalists disturbed by heavy metal pollution and community members who have their walks through the forest interrupted by the "sounds [of] a battleground."[36] Throughout the U.S., placement of hazardous waste facilities often correlates with racial and economic inequality.[37] As in the case of this forest, it is all too often spaces predominantly inhabited by working class and marginalized groups where environmental hazards are left by city officials to fester.

On March 31, 2023, despite the resilient efforts of protestors, clearcutting began in the forest. As I hope this section on the history of the forest has made clear, this land is a local microcosm of deeply intertwined legacies of human and environmental abuse within a very particular context of Southeastern U.S. history. The SCC movement has its foundations in a legacy of more-than-human generational trauma, making it important that methods of protecting the forest reflect its interconnected ecological, social, personal, and political importance. Creative action can bridge these concerns, becoming a communicative mediator across difference and distance.

Interview with Liz Elliot

To learn more about the presence of art as a strategic tool in the forest defense efforts, I interviewed student activist Liz Elliot about their experiences and observations as an SCC organizer focusing on artistic outreach. At the time of our interview, Elliot was studying Art History and Photography at their university, describing a passion for the power of art to build bridges between people from differing backgrounds and perspectives, emphasizing its strategic benefits as a tool for collaboration.[38] Elliot identifies that all art is inherently political, but defines art activism specifically as an "act of intentionally using art as a rallying cry."[39]

I found Elliot through an Instagram post advertising a community art day they were hosting in tandem with an SCC protest that had recently taken place in Atlanta. In Elliot's posters, Paez Terán's memory and legacy is invoked through the symbol of a turtle. This symbol is linked to Paez Terán's nickname—"Tortuguita" meaning

[31] Mia Gant, "Injustice Hidden Deep in Atlanta's Forest: The Old Atlanta Prison Farm and the South River," *Georgia State University History of Our Streets*, April 12, 2022, http://sites.gsu.edu/historyofourstreets/2022/04/12/old-atlanta-prison-farm/.
[32] Pratt, "The birds stopped singing."
[33] Bethea, "The New Fight Over an Old Forest in Atlanta."
[34] Bethea, "The New Fight Over an Old Forest in Atlanta."
[35] Gant, "Injustice Hidden Deep in Atlanta's Forest."
[36] Bethea, "The New Fight Over an Old Forest in Atlanta."
[37] Isabella Piper, "The Inequitable Placement of Hazardous Waste Facilities: How Underserved Communities are Disproportionately Impacted," *Stockton University William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy*, December 2023.
[38] Liz Elliot, interview by Ivy Borden, March 13, 2023, digital.
[39] Elliot, interview.

"Little Turtle" in Spanish—but also contributes to an ecologically oriented aesthetic, trimmed with borders of climbing vines and delicate flowers (Fig. 2). In another poster advertising an upcoming community "Art Day," the turtle rises from green vegetation, ferns curl off the lettering, and birds fly out of frame (Fig. 3). On the shell of the little turtle is the symbol of the raised fist, often most associated with the Black Power movement but used commonly among a plethora of other anti-oppression groups. Through these posters, Paez Terán is indeed martyred, but in a way that emphasizes the inseparability of their death and the proposed ecological destruction necessary for the development of Cop City. Furthermore, Paez Terán as martyr in this case becomes a device for creative communication and coalition building, inviting people in to create artworks to be displayed in a gallery exhibition in support of the SCC movement.

In their analysis of the psychological impact of environmentally conscious artworks at a 2015 Paris art festival focused on climate change, Laura Sommer and Christian Klockner argue that art triggers emotional responses in people, which in turn impacts their understanding of and engagement with environmentally conscious behavior. Sommer and Klockner work under the assumption that "emotional reactions can be key in making climate change personally relevant to people" and thus can be a crucial component in generating action.[40] Elliot similarly acknowledges the importance of inspiring emotional investment, observing that art has been "an effective tool in reaching people who may not have a tangible stake in the fight."[41] The Weelaunee Forest is particularly haunted by histories of oppression, which carries with it the potential to inspire an apathetic sense of powerlessness among its defenders, therefore making it all the more important to garner positive emotional support despite such a barrage of discouragement. Elliot echoes this idea, saying that "people talk a lot about feeling like when they fight or debate or protest injustice they're screaming into the void, and art, in addition to being good for the soul, just makes those cries a little louder."[42]

Art has affective value as well as a knack for reaching a wide-ranging audience and therefore is an ideal tool for sustaining morale over long periods of time. As Elliot explains, "it takes so much passion and collaboration and joy for creation to keep a movement like this one—that relies entirely on community solidarity—alive."[43] Teresa Sanz and Beatriz Rodriguez-Labajos argue that the transformative power of art in social justice movements lies in its ability to spread awareness and education in a way that is enjoyable and accessible to many different people, allowing it to maintain an energized presence even during periods of apparent stagnation.[44]

Sanz and Rodriguez-Labajos open their study on artistic activism by acknowledging that the intense "global, ecological, political and economic dynamics" which seem to control environmental justice movements necessarily create the need for resistance tactics that "foster imaginative routes towards alternative socio-environmental relationships."[45] Art takes many different forms and this malleability can encourage a welcoming atmosphere for people to engage with the topics at hand regardless of differences in age, identity, education, language, etc. In fact, creative action easily embraces such differences, fostering an environment of inclusivity and connectedness that visibly manifests a thoughtful, engaged, and plural public voice. This diversity of creativity, not only in the people it engages but also in the mediums it moves through, permits working *with* difference and distance rather than against it. Elliot believes that such interdisciplinary approaches to creativity have been inseparable from the SCC movement. They describe community events organized around visual art,

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[40] Laura Kim Sommer and Christian Andreas Klockner, "Does Activist Art Have the Capacity to Raise Awareness in Audiences?—A Study on Climate Change Art at the ArtCOP21 Event in Paris," *American Psychological Association* 15, no. 1 (2021): 61.

[41] Elliot, interview.

[42] Elliot, interview.

[43] Elliot, interview.

[44] Teresa Sanz and Beatriz Rodriguez-Labajos, "Does artistic activism change anything? Strategic and transformative effects of arts in anti-coal struggles in Oakland, CA," *Geoforum* 122 (2021): 50.

[45] Sanz and Rodriguez-Labajos, "Does artistic activism change anything?"

food, poetry, music and dance all as forms of "radical creativity" that have been crucial in resisting suppression of the movement's momentum.[46]

In thinking about art's ability to spread awareness across borders and differing perspectives, I'd like to dedicate some attention to the role of mass media in this movement. Art of any medium is often shared via the mediator of photography, allowing it to be distributed far and wide regardless of its original context. This can assist in spreading awareness, allowing for the mobilization of creative counter-narratives against dominant ideologies or power structures.[47] Elliot expresses deep appreciation for the use of art as a method of expressing nuanced emotions and humanity in a movement that is often demonized in the media.[48] However, social media can often flatten this nuance just as quickly as it shares it, and the mass distribution of imagery has the potential to backfire against the interests of human lives.

In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin states that "even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."[49] When an image is untethered from its physical, ephemeral context and reproduced in the erratically multiplying context of mass media, its meaning is transformed by its dispersion. Elliot expressed some concern over the ways mass media has severely desensitized the public to images of tragedy and conflict. She believes that this desensitization is particularly true in the U.S., especially following the BLM movement between 2020 and 2022.

> Think of how many black squares were posted in 2021, how many Black people were murdered and how much national outrage there was over that. What has happened since then? How many names of those killed by police do we remember? I think the use of art is a big reason why certain cases got more attention than others and why they stuck around longer on our societal radar.[50]

In this quote Elliot simultaneously expresses skepticism over social media's ability to create lasting change while also acknowledging the role that art plays in creating specific public memories that survive beyond fleeting trends. Towards the end of our interview, Elliot reiterated the benefits they have observed in artistic interventions on digital platforms. "I think when you see how widespread art in solidarity is and how there's more every day, it makes it easier to conceptualize the massive amount of support there is."[51] The artwork in the forest and in the community events Elliot organizes, when reposted online and included in national news articles, function as visual signifiers of active community organizing, making the movement much harder for the local government and international public to ignore.[52]

Conclusion

For Sampson Reichard, Liz Elliot, and many others, creativity offers a fluidity of interconnected, highly mobile methods for sustaining the fight against oppression and violence in spite of staggering complexity and difficulty. Both *Manny's Quilt* and Elliot's organizational "Art Day" posters delt with the construction of useful memory, finding in the tragedy of Paez Teran's death an opportunity to inspire hope and engagement. Since writing this essay, there have been many more instances of SCC creativity, perhaps most notably with the

[46] Elliot, interview.
[47] Sanz and Rodriguez-Labajos, "Does artistic activism change anything?"
[48] Elliot, interview.
[49] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 2.
[50] Elliot, interview.
[51] Elliot, interview.
[52] Elliot, interview.

Weelaunee Art Action Gathering, an organization dedicated to curating outdoor exhibitions, raising funds for the movement, and organizing art therapy events for SCC activists and local community members. The forest has a deep legacy of violence and exploitation, but wherever such a legacy exists so too does a legacy of resistance and hope. The sustained artistic activity of the SCC movement demonstrates and embodies this legacy, creating a rippling wave of creative liberation that will survive long after this particular movement has faded into history.

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Figure 1. Sampson Reichard, *Manny's Quilt*, quilt, courtesy @littlepecanfarmstead on Instagram, 2023.

Figure 2. @stopcopcitycolumbus, *Art Day*, poster, Instagram post, January 26, 2023.

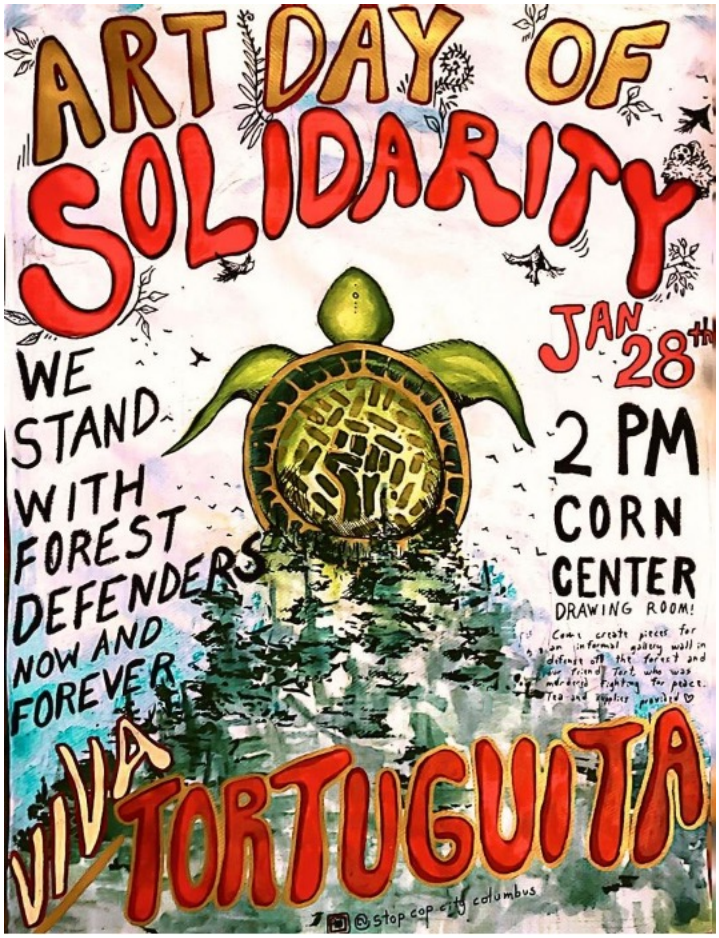

Figure 3. @stopcopcitycolumbus, *Art Day of Solidarity*, poster, Instagram post, January 26, 2023.