

# EDITORIAL NOTE: ISSUE 2

*By* The Editors

**T**his issue of the *Commonwealth* digital publication raises and continues many of the core questions that have animated our conversations about the project from its beginning: how do we begin to define “commonwealth”? How do we acknowledge the historic inequities of our commonwealths without being bound by them as we pursue more equitable futures? When do we reform our systems, and when do we create new, alternate models for pursuing the common good?

To add to the range of lenses on and approaches to these questions, we solicited—in addition to *Commonwealth’s* artistic commissions—journalistic reports, historical case studies, and scholarly essays and dialogues from writers in all three of our commonwealths. Like the artworks, these writings approach the central themes of common wealth, common debt, and the productive tensions that arise in the pursuit of common good from a wide spectrum of methodologies and social contexts. The writings in this issue also speak to the range of methods used to create space for common good and collectively held wealth, encompassing activism, mutual aid, and community organizing. Sometimes these collectives pursued goals of developing separate, self-determined spaces and models outside of those of their predominant capitalist and political systems, and sometimes they demanded reforms from within them. Our hope

is to share these narratives as pieces of a larger methodology of questioning, soliciting new perspectives, and respecting differences in positions and context.

This second issue of the publication features three contextualizing contributions from artists who participated in *Commonwealth*: Firelei Báez, Alicia Díaz (with poems by Patricia Herrera), and Nelson Rivera (written by nibia pastrana santiago). This issue also includes two historical case studies: one by Kalela Williams on the founding of the Black-owned United Bank of Philadelphia and one from Mabel Rodríguez Centeno on writer and singer-songwriter Rita Indiana's new album, *Mandinga Times*; its accompanying video, *After School*; and their many resonant intersections with Puerto Rico's queer, decolonial histories. This issue's journalist report by Sojourner Ahebee centers on the mutual aid networks that have developed across the West Philadelphia Promise Zone neighborhoods during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. An essay by anthropologist Yarimar Bonilla reflects on the social and political ramifications of Puerto Rico's recent history of compounding crises. A new comic strip by Jimena Lloreda is also included.

Finally, the conceptual tools first presented in Issue #1 have been transformed into an online game, allowing visitors to group and recombine them. Our hope is that these tools will serve as prompts for further dialogue and new perspectives on the central questions of this project.

*Commonwealth* is organized and curated by Beta-Local co-directors Pablo Guardiola, Michael Linares, and nibia pastrana santiago and former co-director Sofía Gallisá Muriente; ICA at VCU Chief Curator Stephanie Smith; Noah Simblist, Chair of Painting + Printmaking at VCUarts; and Kerry Bickford, Director of Programs, Nicole Pollard, Program Coordinator and Nato Thompson, Sueyun and Gene Locks Artistic Director at Philadelphia Contemporary.

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