

## In the spring of 2015,

Mare Liberum designed a boat to be built at Haverford College as a culminating workshop for a course entitled "DIY Movements and American Environmentalisms," led by Professor Joshua Moses. The result was the collective's first plywood punt, based on the construction of flat-bottomed English boats designed to be pushed along shallow rivers or canals with a pole. In a single day, the punt was assembled, transported to Southwest Philadelphia, and launched on the Lower Schuylkill River at Bartram's Garden. She was christened Onward! Swift Sedona to pay tribute to both Professor Moses's distinctive email sign-off and a classmate who could not attend because she was competing in a track meet.

Following a few uneventful years sitting in a student maker cooperative at Haverford, the punt was recently dusted off and painted in collaboration with artist Chloe Wang, who was involved in the construction of the boat as a student. The punt launch was her first visit to Bartram's Garden, where she now works, helping to deliver free and low-cost recreation and educational programs on the river. The painting depicts features of the river that may not be immediately obvious, such as its tide cycle and many animal inhabitants. A similar painting, one in a series of four, will soon hang at the Bartram's Garden Community Boathouse.

## About the Lower Schuylkill:

Below Philadelphia's Fairmount Dam, the Lower Schuylkill River travels just over seven miles to meet the mighty Delaware. As the gravitational pulls of the sun and moon slosh the Atlantic ocean to and fro, the rising and falling of tides reach up through the Delaware Estuary all the way to Fairmount Dam, causing the water level to fluctuate by an average of six feet. Twice each day, the direction of flow reverses: upriver toward the dam approaching high tide, and back down toward the Delaware approaching low tide, a semidiurnal tide cycle.

The Lenape name Tool-pay Hanna ("turtle river") would suggest that turtles have long made this river their home, and indeed, several turtle species can be seen sunning on rocks and logs throughout the warmer months. Called Schuylkill ("hidden creek") by Dutch explorers, the tidal river was once populated to the point of near concealment with aquatic plants. Among these was spatterdock, a yellow waterlily with heart-shaped leaves that still persists in small patches. The spatterdock compass rose on the bow planking orients you to the map of the river traversing the punt from bow to stern, sporting odd bulges created by human-imposed infrastructure. Its meanders are fixed in place by tall bulkhead walls that confine its flow to a narrow dredged channel with sparse natural shoreline. Many of the 40 combined sewer outfalls along its length were once tributary creeks, transformed over time into tributary sewers.

The sides of the boat depict the two skylines dominating Lower Schuylkill horizons: that of Philadelphia's Center City, on the starboard side, and of the Philadelphia Energy Solutions refinery on the port side. The latter is the largest and oldest petroleum refinery on the eastern seaboard of the United States. When paddling on the river, the intersection of industrial and natural space is disarmingly perceptible. These two "sides" of the same river, figuratively speaking, are visually represented through the choice of green and grey for the ground to the east and west of the river's silhouette.

The diverse river ecosystem includes an abundance of species that would seem to indicate good water quality, despite ongoing pollution. The bottom face of the boat depicts a small selection of fauna inhabiting the Lower Schuylkill. Over 40 species of fish live here, some year-round and some during migration. Of the dozen-plus species of freshwater mussels once found throughout the Delaware Estuary, many are near extinction. Efforts are being made to restore mussels to Pennsylvania waterways, where they can do the important work of strengthening streambeds against erosion and filtering the water of particles and pollutants.

Beavers are not typical inhabitants of tidal areas, because the changing water level disrupts their attempts to construct lodges and dams. However, in the fall of 2017, a pair of beavers was spotted multiple times in the Lower Schuylkill, to the great excitement of their beholders. We learned they would likely soon move on from their outpost in the small tidal wetland at Bartram's Garden, but freshly gnawed wood in the area leads us to believe they are still around, and their residency is honored here.

she studied chemistry and environmental studies and indulged whenever possible her love of visual and participatory art.

Mare Liberum is a collective of visual artists, designers, and writers who formed around a shared engagement with New York's waterways in 2007. As part of a mobile, interdisciplinary, and pedagogical practice, the collective has designed and built boats, published broadsides, essays, and books, invented water related art/educational forums, and collaborated with diverse institutions in order to produce public talks, exhibitions and voyages.

ML's work bridges dialogues in art, activism, and science, by remapping landscapes, reclaiming local ecologies, and observing and recording the overlaps of nature, industry, and the polis. The collective's projects connect divergent constituencies with shared environmental concerns, create waterfront narratives ranging from the industrial to the personal, and catalyze the creation of engaged publics. Employing the methodologies of civic hacking, participation, open source, social



PINHOLE PHOTO BY CHLOE WANG AT THE LAUNCH OF ONWARD SWIFT SEDONA, 2015

# A LOWER SCHUYLKILL PUNT

BUILD YOUR OWN → [HTTP://WWW.THEFRESEAS.ORG/PUNT](http://www.thefreeseas.org/punt)

In many boatbuilding traditions worldwide, eyes are painted on boats to animate them and to provide protection and awareness. We had to make do with adhesive googly eyes on the day of construction, so we hope Onward! Swift Sedona's new, painted eyes will grant her better vision into the next chapter of her story.

## Acknowledgments:

This punt has been a point of community convergence from the beginning, and so many have contributed to her realization and adventures. Immense gratitude to Laura McGrane, James Weissinger, Joshua Moses, and Kent Watson at Haverford, as well as to Christina Catanese and the wonderful staff at the Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education, for logistics and literal heavy lifting! Special thanks to Alana Tartaro.

Punt and poster design: Mare Liberum  
Text, painting, punt diagram: Chloe Wang

Chloe Wang grew up alongside the Hudson River, and her aquatic engagements have ranged from oceanographic research to canoe voyaging to her current work in River Programs at Bartram's Garden, where she is deeply immersed in learning about the Lower Schuylkill. Chloe recently graduated from Haverford College, where

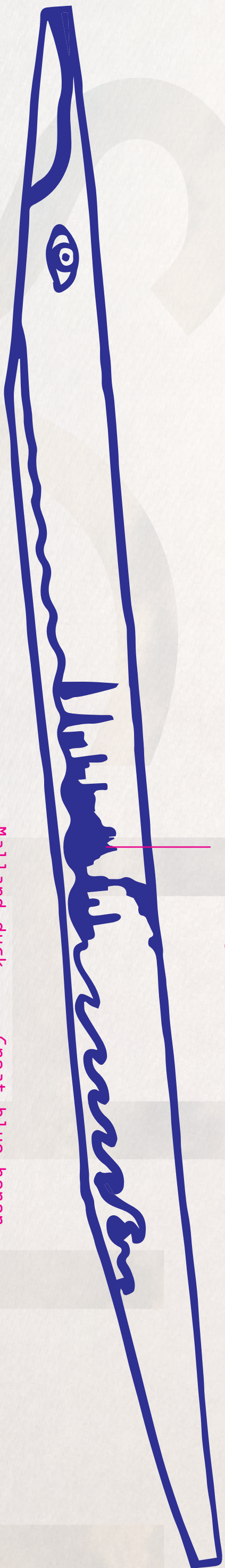
sculpture, and temporary occupations, the collective extrapolates on Lefebvre's or Harvey's "right to the city" to include its neglected waterways.

Mare Liberum has presented work at the Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, Paris, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, the Parrish Art Museum, Parsons/The New School, Boston Center for the Arts, EFA Project Space, Smack Mellon, MASS MoCA, The Neuberger Museum, Works on Water Triennial at 3LD, Maker Faire, the PsyGeoConflux Festival, Alexandraplatz, and the Antique Boat Museum and has been reviewed by Hyperallergic, The Brooklyn Rail, Bad at Sports, The Village Voice, Hakai, Vice Magazine, NBC, NPR, Good Magazine, Orion, among others. The collective is Jean Barberis, Ben Cohen, Dylan Gauthier, Stephan von Muehlen, Sunita Prasad, and Kendra Sullivan. Visit [thefreeseas.org](http://thefreeseas.org) for more.



2018 MARE LIBERUM





Petroleum refinery



Lower Schuylkill outline

Bald eagle

Redbelly turtle

Beaver

White perch

Mallard duck

Belted kingfisher

Great blue heron

Tide chart

Spatterdock compass rose

Double-crested cormorant

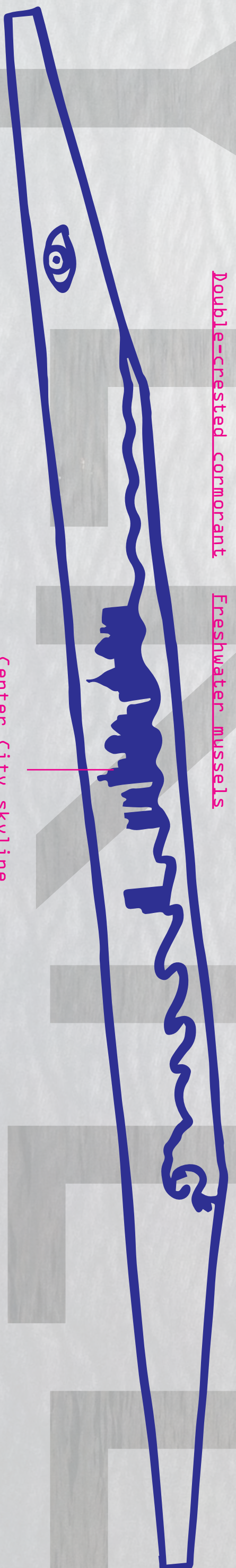
American eel

Freshwater mussels

Common carp

Channel catfish

Pumpkinseed sunfish



Center City skyline