



ZIP CODE MEMORY PROJECT  
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## Towards An Exhibition

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Somewhere between a professional focus-group and an intimate brainstorming session, this workshop aimed to create a shared vision for the upcoming [IMAGINE REPAIR exhibition](#) that could reach and resonate with the experiences of Upper NYC communities who had lost family members, jobs, and favorite places during the pandemic. We invited workshop members to bring their unique artistic and healing practices to the workshop. Curating an exhibition with community members and local artists requires flexibility and openness to multiple ideas and investments.

As curators, Isin Önel and I took extensive notes and followed up with individual respondents on their ideas. We then synthesized many of the contributions and ran our thoughts by the group several times as we developed the final vision for the exhibition. The process was collaborative and co-creative to its core. For example, when artist Chelsea Knight presented her initial sketch of the [Depository of Anonymous Feelings](#) installation, multiple voices pitched in to build on the blueprint. Leah Elimeliah argued for a “message in a bottle” style for the archive of responses, while Yves Dossous and Erachie Brown aired concerns about technological accessibility, pushing in favor of a vintage phone-booth style as opposed to smartphone applications and QR codes. These perspectives shaped the final product in significant ways.

## DEPOSITORY OF ANONYMOUS (COVID) FEELINGS

Have a story about the pandemic you want others to hear?  
An important moment in time from the past two years you want to describe?  
Want to say something about your COVID experience that you’ve been afraid to share?  
Want to sing a song that got you through the pandemic?

Call this number to leave a phone message, up to 3 minutes. Calls go straight to voicemail, all messages will be recorded anonymously and played on rotary phones in a public art exhibition. Come hear your voice and the voices of others. Your experience is the real NYC.

Visitors will be able to listen to these phone messages at the **IMAGINE REPAIR** exhibition.  
The Cathedral of St. John the Divine • 1047 Amsterdam Ave, NYC • April 23, 2022 - May 15, 2022  
The stories will also be hosted on our website and become part of an ongoing oral history archive.

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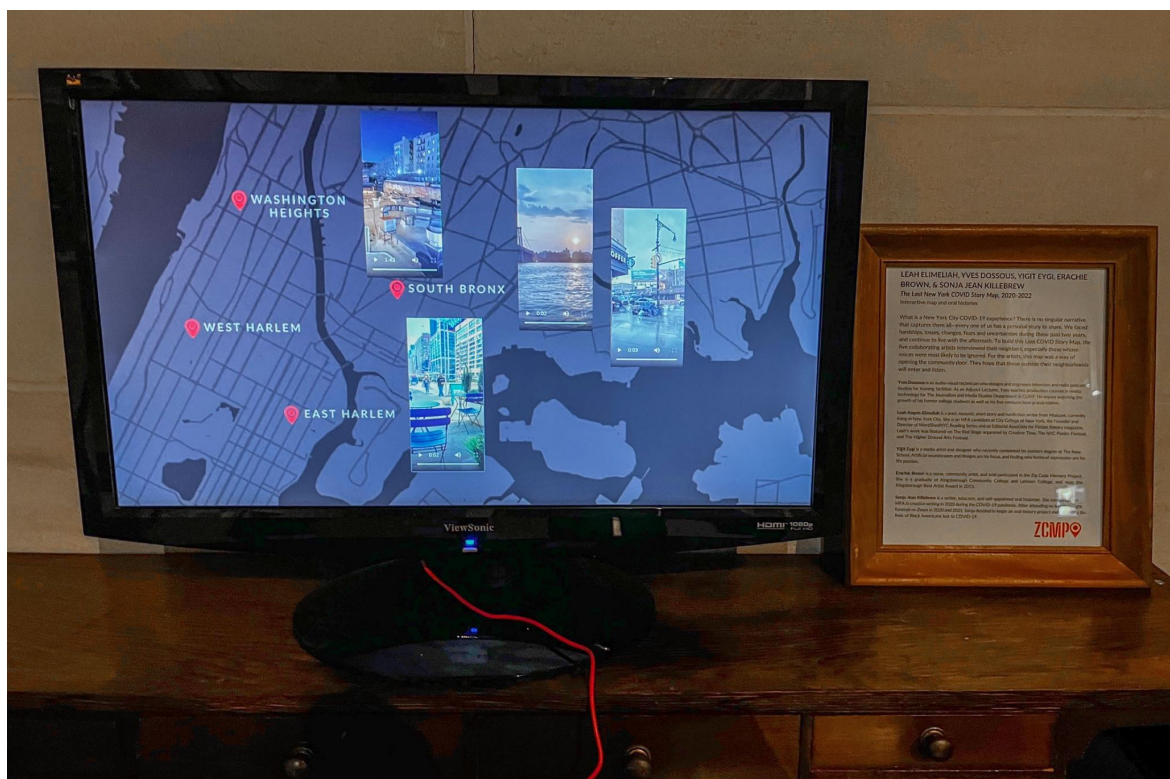
This project was conceived by Chelsea Knight, with Sandra Long, Candace Leslie, and Zahied Tony Mohammed



Likewise, the enthusiasm for finding different avenues to tell a wider range of stories (Chelsea’s vision of short, anonymous snippets versus Leah Elimeliah and Sonja Killebrew’s preference for longer oral narratives) ended up generating an

offshoot project of its own: [The Lost New York COVID Story Map, 2020-2022](#).

This offshoot was an unexpected but welcome addition to our curatorial vision—it was clear from the in-person and virtual workshop sessions that there was a deep investment in going door to door and interviewing one’s own neighbors (“hot mic” style, to quote Erachie Brown). As curators, we were committed to honoring that investment and making space for its creative impulse. Unlike the original *Depository* installation, which casts a wide net and preserves respondent anonymity, the *COVID Story Map* relies on the intimacy of neighbor-to-neighbor conversations. The team leading the latter installation felt that they were subverting the conventions of ethnographic work through their localized focus and personal touch, especially since much of ethnography takes the structure of a stranger or outsider interviewing afflicted people within a community they do not know. As a result, it was the perfect complement to the *Depository* installation, and allowed the exhibition to speak to a range of pandemic experiences that could not have been covered by one project alone.



The Lost New York COVID Story Map exhibition kiosk, [Listen to stories online](#).



Working together to collectively construct and curate IMAGINE REPAIR rendered the exhibition both community-oriented (addressing the community as its primary audience, as opposed to the New York City art scene) and polyphonic (speaking with the voice of the community, as opposed to a handful of people in charge). These considerations structured our installation process as well, which began over a month before opening day. Isin Önel and I made intentional choices about where to position the works of community artists in relation to those by well-known artists, like the satellite installation of *A Crack in the Hourglass* by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, which we presented in collaboration with the Brooklyn Museum. We paired works that we felt spoke to one another and interacted on the level of form: for example, Lozano-Hemmer's piece, which recreates uploaded photographs of lost loved ones using sand and a robotic arm, was installed in close proximity to Seçil Koman's *Window Log*, a video installation that documented the events of lockdown from Seçil's apartment window in New York City. From Seçil's window you can see and hear the pots and pans being banged at sunset, the Black Lives Matter protests chanting below, the ambulances zipping by. Sitting and watching the video has a meditative effect that immortalizes the sensory stimuli of the pandemic just as Lozano-Hemmer's installation immortalizes the faces of those that the pandemic took from us. As curators, we felt that putting such pieces in conversation was important both for the aesthetic and affective dimensions of the exhibition, *and* for democratizing the exhibition space so as to ensure that local, up-and-coming artists received the attention and prominence they deserved even alongside bigger names in the art world.

Weaving together the many voices of the "Towards an Exhibition" workshop and integrating as many ideas as possible in the curation and assembly of the final installation led to a more representative and accessible exhibition than any curator can achieve on their own. We are grateful to all the participants for trusting us with their time and input, and hope that they saw their ideas brought to life in IMAGINE REPAIR.