



WRTG 4950 Student Group Collaboration on Graffiti Art & Murals in Salt Lake City: Mapping as Rhetoric

Description

Map showing murals in Salt Lake City, including Legends of Rock, Egyptian Jazz Mural, Harvey Milk

We are students in the **University of Utah's WRTG 4950: Archives Beyond the West**, taught by PhD Candidate Keolanani Kinghorn. This collaborative project explores graffiti and murals across Salt Lake City through the lens of map as rhetoric—approaching mapping not as neutral documentation, but as a practice that shapes how space, memory, and power are organized and understood.

Maps often claim authority: they define boundaries, name places, and determine what is visible or erased. In this project, we challenge those assumptions by creating a counter-map of the city—one that centers graffiti and murals as forms of rhetorical expression and living archive. These visual works mark presence, resistance, identity, and community in ways that often fall outside institutional records.

Our process was land-based and collaborative. Together, we documented sites across Salt Lake City, traced their locations, and analyzed how meaning emerges through placement, repetition, layering, and disappearance. We approach mapping as an interpretive act rather than a neutral one, recognizing that every map reflects choices about what to include, what to omit, and how to frame space.

Two central themes guide this installation: spatial power and visibility. Who gets to mark the city? Whose stories remain, and whose are painted over? By mapping graffiti and murals, we reveal how public space becomes a contested archive—one continuously rewritten through both creation and erasure.

Installed in the J. Willard Marriott Library and available online, this project brings street-based knowledge into an institutional setting. It invites viewers to reconsider what counts as an archive and who has the authority to produce it. Rather than offering a complete representation, this map highlights movement, tension, and layered histories.

This work reflects an ongoing process of listening, observing, and mapping as rhetorical practice. It is an invitation to see Salt Lake City as a dynamic, living archive—one written across walls, streets, and communities.

Collaborators: Noah Bowers, Claire Donohoe, Riley Johnson, Rachel Nguyen, and Abelene Ulibarri

A Light in the Darkness Surrounding LGBTQ Youth: The Mural at the Heart of Harvey Milk Blvd.

A mural dedicated to Harvey Milk, a prominent LGBTQ+ politician and activist, located on Harvey Milk Blvd.

Google Maps location: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/jnhR9eyE9JFqkUFv6>

Creative Companion Piece:

[A Litany for Survival](#) by [Audre Lorde](#)

[poem](#)

Rhetorical Analysis: For those who aren't aware of [Harvey Milk](#), his beliefs, and his impact, [Josh Scheuerman](#)'s mural at the heart of 900 S is little more than a painted face and words. But for those who do, and for the community that occupies Harvey Milk Blvd where the mural presides, the piece of art represents the selfless dedication to protecting the rights of LGBTQ+ youths and individuals. Beyond even that, the mural represents the refusal to let LGBTQ+ voices be silenced.

Harvey Milk, politician and activist, stood out among his political colleagues as the first openly gay elected official, and one who fought devotedly for the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals like himself. However, in 1978 he was assassinated while still in office. In this way, the assassin sought to silence Harvey Milk and the progressive values he championed. Now the mural and the boulevard it stands on represent a refusal to be silenced. Instead of continuing to be afraid of violent opposition, this mural shouts out its dedication to the change that Harvey Milk sought to bring to a country which has villainized and dehumanized the LGBTQ+ community for so long. What stood out to me about this mural was the colors. With most of the piece being in shades of black and gray, the quote, which states the necessity of protection and love for all youth regardless of identity or sexuality, stands out as bright white against the dark background. To me this speaks to the nature of our society, and while most things aren't black and white, statements like this quote are. It is an immovable fact that children and young people deserve to feel safe and supported. However, there is one break in the black and white color scheme: a small pin on Harvey Milk's lapel painted blue. This singular spot of color among overlapping shades of gray represents the way Harvey Milk stands, even now, as a light amidst a world of ever-darkening voices and opinions - a lighthouse reaching out for the LGBTQ+ individuals, especially youth, who feel alone or ostracized because of who they are.

Unfortunately, all these years later, Harvey Milk's ideals are still under attack. This last November, the mural was vandalized with a bright splotch of red paint. Whether intentional or not, that vandalism stands as a haunting visual for those who are aware of Harvey Milk's assassination. In addition, a recent proposal put forth by Utah Republican Rep. Trevor Lee sought to rename 900 S after Turning Point leader and Republican activist Charlie Kirk. This situation is a striking parallel of both men's ideologies and beliefs. Just like Charlie Kirk, who built his platform on opposing LGBTQ+ curriculum in schools and rolling back protections for queer youth, the renaming proposal seeks to erase and devalue the opinions and lives of LGBTQ+ and other minority groups. Harvey Milk, on the other hand, sought peace, wishing not just for the survival of gay and queer Americans, but for an active transformation of America into a

place where LGBTQ+ rights and voices were welcomed and celebrated. While the USA is still a far way off from becoming the safe space Harvey Milk envisioned, it is important to know that Harvey Milk Blvd will remain a sanctuary for LGBTQ+ individuals as its inhabitants fight to protect it. Their efforts not only include the quick repair of the vandalized mural, but also bringing forth thousands of names in rejection of Trevor Lee's proposal, so that Harvey Milk Blvd will continue to proclaim the beliefs and values of the man for whom it is named

Artist Statement:

My name is Riley Johnson, and I am a freshman here at the U, majoring in Writing and Rhetoric and minoring in Creative Writing. The major focus of my class with Professor Kinghorn is the creation of meaningful and unconventional archives that go beyond the conventional Western scope. As such, me alongside the rest of my class have collaborated on a group project archiving some of the many murals of Salt Lake City. For my part of the project, I was drawn pretty quickly to Josh Scheuerman's mural of activist and politician Harvey Milk. As a member of the LGBTQ+ member myself, I have always been grateful for the people around me and support I received as I grew up, and have a deep sympathy for others who were not as lucky as me. This mural stands in agreement with that sentiment, as one of Harvey Milk's famous quotes reminds the viewers that all children, regardless of their identity or sexuality, should receive the love and support they need. Recently, this mural, what it represents, and the street it stands in have come under fire due to a dangerous increase in anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric across Utah and the USA as a whole. By creating this project, I hope to bring awareness to such attacks and fight for the rights of other LGBTQ+ individuals such as myself.

Out living community archive of Utah wildlife: Neighborhood Hive Community Market in Salt Lake City

Mural titled 'The Bonnie Wall' by Chris Peterson, showcasing a vibrant depiction of Bonneville cutthroat

Google Maps location: 2065 E 2100 S, Salt Lake City, UT 84108,
<https://maps.app.goo.gl/3Z6BTxYCWG3zsJxbA>

Creative Companion Piece:

The waters used to flow here, filled with life
Trees, not manufactured in place, flourished
Small life was cared for and large life respected
Balanced made by a shared existence
Connections made in affiliations
A bond forged in a shared home, shared air
The grey has infiltrated sky and ground
A floor of weaving mesh, winding and trapping
See through only if wanted, often never wanted

Now a distant uncaring unfocused past
What connection do we have left if you are there
And I am stuck here keeping you out

Rhetorical Analysis:

[Chris Peterson](#)'s The Bonnie Wall Mural, installed in 2022 at the [Neighborhood Hive Community Market](#) in Salt Lake City, is a piece with presence, bringing vibrant colors from top to bottom. The mural depicts a Bonneville cutthroat trout, native to Utah rivers, some of which once ran through Salt Lake City. This mural is one of 15 currently installed murals for the Wildlife Walls project. Their goal is to bring Utah wildlife back into cities. Utah has always had a close connection to nature and wildlife, home to many different biomes, including rivers, lakes, mountains, and deserts.

However, in cities, people can lose this connection and the care they would otherwise have for nature. This mural breaks the disconnect between the city and nature by bringing nature into the city. Having these projects be murals creates a presence in the art that would be missing in any other medium. The bright colors and the large stature create an eye-catching piece that refuses to be ignored. There is a value in demanding a presence and creating something that brings the subject into the public mind. With this showing nature in a place such as Salt Lake City, which has no wildlife. Despite a significant disconnect, many people, including the artist, value nature and want to share this connection with others. This project creates a living archive to help keep Utah wildlife in the public eye. The Wildlife Walls project documents animal species in an impactful way that can be shaped by both the artist and the viewers. This archive lives in the public mind and connects people to the subject matter through art and presence.

This project highlights community memory of Utah wildlife, as people who are in touch with it can see these murals for what they are, and anyone outside this group is invited to learn. The memory and connection to Utah wildlife is one to be shared, and this project is giving people a chance to see and connect with wildlife, even if they might not have before. This community memory belongs to everyone in Utah, as it is connected to the place we live and cannot be separated from it. Even in cities, we should maintain a strong connection to nature and see it as part of our community. Murals, specifically The Bonnie Wall Mural, creates a connection and breaks down barriers between cities and nature by bringing in large, bright, colorful depictions of wildlife to remind us and bring wildlife back into our lives.

Artist Statement:

My name is Abelene Ulibarri, and I am a Junior at the University of Utah, majoring in Writing and Rhetoric. My project for this class, Archives Beyond the West led by Keolanani Kinghorn, is focused on the mural made by Chris Peterson titled: The Bonnie Wall Mural at the NeighborhoodHive Community Market in Salt Lake City. This mural is part of Chris Peterson's Wildlife Wall project that is meant to bring wildlife back into the places where they are from. The Bonneville cutthroat trout is native to Utah and used to live all throughout Utah. Now there are cities where they, and many other wildlife animals and plants, used to live. I found this project an inspiring way to bring back wildlife into the cities that had cut them off and bring more attention to something that not many people think about in their day-to-day lives. My exhibit is designed to show how the impact of this project is created through its medium of being a mural and analyze the rhetoric around it.

Suicide Rock Mural

Colorfully painted rock formation with a small shelter at its base, surrounded by greenery and a clear

Google Maps location: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/MfmUVHEzwqfpVErN9>

Creative Companion Piece:

A display of various photographs mounted on a wall, showcasing natural landscapes, rock formation

Go thru the path

What once was

What is it that we leave behind

Will it in turn, consume us

I do not wish to live longer than the earth

What will remain

Rhetorical Analysis:

Calling to mind the culture, art, and erasure we see around our local community, Suicide Rock on Parsley's trail containing more questions than we see when passing by on the freeway. Suicide Rock proudly displays the paint of high school, college kids, artists, and more. The graffiti has been going on for so long as a tradition it makes its mentions of these groups on its plaque. While graffiti very displays an expression through art and forming urban culture, the concern of sensitivity towards the location and the respect for the land and history is hard to ignore in the conversation.

The name Suicide Rock, previously Sentinel Rock, had once stood as a native watchtower, said to be where a Native American woman jumped to her death, due to the death of a loved one. I find myself reexamining what I know about the history surrounding this piece and the human interactions around it. Although it is not known completely about the history of Suicide Rock and its previous name, Sentinel Rock. It is known in our archives how this area was used before the spray paint. The river, once a reservoir, Parsley's Creek, flowed through the valley, provided water for individuals living in the area. Flooding and the creation of new reservoirs quickly changed the site. Parsley's Creek still spans to cities such as Sugarhouse and Ballpark. However, unlike how it used to look, the tracks, paved roads, and other built items no longer stand anymore in the culture surrounding graffiti has been drawn to the landmarks left behind by the reservoir's disuse.

We cannot take away the importance of art and expression, but we also cannot ignore the stories surrounding the rock and the ways we are able to preserve nature itself. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson focuses on discussions of how pedagogy and learning from the land can benefit, as well as

how we show respect and build relationships with the land. In an act of survivance, although we use and abandon these places we've relied on for times in our history, these places still stand, more now than ever, because of the students and artists. The art that is expressed through graffiti can be culturally significant for sure. However, how are we respecting the places, such as the trees, cliffs, rocks, and animals that live in these areas?

As I hiked to Suicide Rock, the area surrounding the piece not only just displays graffiti on the rock, but also on the trees, and rocks nearby. While we used to drill metal into trees, perhaps to support the infrastructure we attempted to create, the land showed perseverance, growing despite the intrusion. Perhaps we'll see the land surpass what we expect. I want to reiterate the question as we build, paint, and create in these areas, "Are we considering the land?"

Artist Statement:

My name is Rachel, and I am a junior here at the U, studying Writing and Rhetoric. This project was worked within a collection in the class led by Professor Keolalani Kinghorn, focusing on the art and culture in our local community and on how erasure or stories have been told through graffiti and wall art. This project depicts a part of Parsley Canyon, famously known as Suicide Rock. The site has unconfirmed tales of once being a native watch tower, where a native woman jumped from its peak, however, most is unknown about the origins of its name. Throughout the years to recently it has been used by teens and young individuals to tag and graffiti with spray paint, even being mentioned in its plaque. While this has been a tradition for high schoolers and college students going on for years and generations, the graffiti tagging of public lands is described as "an act of cultural violence" according to the National Park Service. When it comes to nature, the phrase "leave no trace" comes to mind, to bring respect to the land and the other inhabitants of it. My exhibit is meant to take you through the histories, stories, and hikes towards this site as a way to learn through experience and understand the land, as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson states.

Karabo Poppy's Utah Jazz Mural

A mural depicting four stylized figures engaged in basketball activities, featuring musical elements and

Google Maps location: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/HqMXgja83jRSi3Ga7>

Creative Companion Piece:

Rhetorical Analysis:

In the fall of 2018, the arrival of a vibrant, 20-by-70-foot mural was put up on the west-facing wall of Valter's Osteria in downtown Salt Lake City. Commissioned by the Utah Jazz, the mural is the work of internationally renowned South African illustrator and street artist [Karabo Poppy](#). Using visual rhetoric practices, Poppy creates a dialogue between the culture of American basketball and the aesthetic traditions of contemporary Africa.

Poppy's primary rhetorical appeal lies in her use of hybridity. Prior to this commission, Poppy had never visited Utah. She interviewed Utah Jazz players to better understand the team's culture. Poppy uses a bold, graphic style characterized by thick black outlines and a restricted color palette. Her visual arrangement does not just depict basketball; it translates the physical rhetoric of the game — the explosive power of movement and the rhythmic style of dribbling — into static lines and shapes.

The mural also acts as a bridge between geographic identities. Poppy intentionally weaves symbols of Utah's natural beauty, such as stylized mountain peaks, with the vibrant, pattern-heavy visual language native to South Africa. A saxophone anchors the piece, serving as a dual metaphor for the team's namesake and the expressive nature of street art itself. By placing traditional African aesthetic motifs side-by-side with local sports imagery, Poppy makes a powerful claim about the global reach of culture.

This fusion also serves as a subtle act of resistance against the homogenization of public space. By inserting bold, Afro-futuristic aesthetics into the heart of a predominantly Western, urban landscape, Poppy complicates the dominant narratives of what local sports art should look like. The mural refuses to be passive background decoration; its sheer scale and vibrant energy command the attention of passing pedestrians, forcing a moment of pause and reflection in a busy commercial district.

Rhetorically, the mural challenges the viewer's expectations of sports art. Instead of relying on hyper-realistic portraits of famous athletes, Poppy uses abstract geometry and cultural symbols. She effectively argues that team spirit is not just about the players on the court, but about a shared, living rhythm that connects people across continents. Ultimately, Karabo Poppy's Utah Jazz Mural stands as a testament to cross-cultural exchange, proving that the visual language of passion and community requires no translation.

Artist Statement:

My name is Claire Donohoe, and I am a senior at the University of Utah studying political science and writing and rhetoric studies. I made this project on Karabo Poppy's Utah Jazz Mural as part of a final project for Professor Keola Kinghorn's Archives Beyond the West class. I was interested in this mural because of its intense presence in downtown Salt Lake City, and wanted to share its origins, meaning, and significance with others.

Legends of Rock Mural

A colorful mural featuring stylized portraits of famous musicians on a curved wall, showcasing aspects

Google Maps location: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/dMuR9hZMfenGcgzt9>

Creative Companion Piece:

Songs to listen to:

Come Together- The Beatles

While My Guitar Gently Weeps â?? George Harrison Cover (Prince, Tom Petty, Jeff Lynn, Steve Winwood)

Roadhouse Blues â?? The Doors

Another One Bites the Dust â?? Queen

Ziggy Stardust â?? David Bowie

Gimme Shelter â?? The Rolling Stones

All Along the Watchtower â?? Jimi Hendrix

Ball and Chain â?? Janis Joplin

Rhetorical Analysis:

The first theme of this project is refusal as evidence. The Legends of Rock mural at the Gateway in downtown Salt Lake City depicts eight musicians, including **Freddie Mercury, Jimi Hendrix, Mick Jagger, John Lennon, David Bowie, Jim Morrison,** and Janis Joplin. The mural was made in 2019 by muralist Gina Ribaud. Its dimensions are 65 feet by 14 feet, and on the surface, it commemorates generational influence from early rock and roll. There are many artists not included, which encompasses refusal as a form of rhetoric. Of the eight musicians, two are Black males, and one is a woman. Instead of adding every artist from the early days of rock and roll, the mural intentionally keeps or leaves out musicians. The purpose of this is to grasp the viewersâ?? attention to using known faces who had an important influence on the rock genre. The refusal itself is a form of commemoration to prevent complication in the history it is attempting to tell. Specifically, it keeps the kind of musician to rock artists who have had a wide influence in the world of music, especially today. The purpose of this project is to look at these refusals as data without trying to fill every gap left open. It also requires analysis into where the murals are physically positioned, who gets to see them, and why they were made. To relate to class readings from Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, refusal does not represent a gap in data but a deliberate form of knowledge. This leads into the muralâ??s second theme. The large mural dominates the physical space itâ??s in and the things around it.

The second theme concerns the ethical issues surrounding the archive. This part of the project is a deliberate choice not to fill gaps. It is possible to name

every artist not depicted in the mural or make another archive of the erased history of rock musicians. Compiling every detail of every artist creates the assumption that commemorating the artists requires the most complete archive. The mural competes with art in the surrounding area that depicts similar themes.

This project is meant to practice restraint when telling history. The mural is specific in who is portrayed and who is not. It is an ethical act to partake in this silence. It would be unethical to open doors into the lives of the subjects that have already been explored. The gaps are a meaningful and ethical act of refusing to make sense of things that do not require such analysis.

The knowledge of the archive belongs to those who lived it. In academics, it is important to know that extraction cannot always be the end goal. Rather, there are limits on how complete things should be.

Artist Statement:

My name is Noah Bowers, and I am a senior at the University of Utah. I am majoring in finance. The project is for a class led by Professor Keolanani Kinghorn that seeks to understand meaning through physical space and the murals's silence. I chose the mural at the Gateway, titled "Legends of Rock," created by muralist Gina Ribaud. The mural displays eight artists who defined the rock genre over the years. The artists included are: Freddie Mercury, Jimi Hendrix, David Bowie, Mick Jagger, John Lennon, Jim Morrison, Prince, and Janis Joplin. The space the mural creates challenges regarding what kind of murals can be made and who gets to make these decisions. The musicians in the mural influenced people around the world, making their remembrance important. As a musician, I decided to include QR codes in the library for my favorite songs, each linked to the musician who performed them. My dad introduced me to music when I was young, to musicians like Jimi Hendrix and the Rolling Stones. I felt it appropriate to display my love for rock through my favorite songs.

To view a map of all the murals in this post, go to

[mural Map](#)

A word of thanks

Taught in conjunction with the ***We Live Amid and As Archives Workshop***, facilitated by **Romeo GarcÃa, WRTG 4950: Archives Beyond the West** was designed as a space for collaborative, community-engaged learning. Through this integrated structure, I developed and taught the course while gaining valuable experience in facilitating student-driven, public-facing archival work. This work would not have been possible without the **University of Utah's Graduate School's** generous support through a University Teaching Assistantship, which provided the time, resources, and institutional backing necessary to bring this course to life, and the support of the **Writing and Rhetoric Studies**.

I am also deeply honored to thank **Dr. Darren Parry, an Elder of the Shoshone Nation**, for joining our class as a special guest this semester. His presence, knowledge, and generosity offered students an invaluable opportunity to engage with Indigenous perspectives on land, history, and relational responsibility in ways that cannot be replicated through text alone.

I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to **Rachel A. Ernst, Reference Librarian for Special Collections at the J. Willard Marriott Library**, for working closely with students both in the classroom and in Special Collections. Her guidance and expertise helped students engage archival materials thoughtfully and critically, strengthening their understanding of archives as both institutional and lived spaces.

My thanks also go to **Allison Allred, Access/Operations Support Manager at the Marriott Library**, whose support with printing and exhibition logistics made this project possible. Her work behind the scenes was essential to bringing this collaborative installation into a public, accessible space.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to teach this class and to work alongside students whose projects continue to challenge, expand, and reimagine what archives can be. Their work—such as our collaborative counter-mapping project, graffiti, and murals across Salt Lake City—demonstrates how archives live not only in institutions, but across communities, walls, and everyday spaces. Thank you for supporting this work, for investing in innovative and inclusive pedagogy, and for making it possible to cultivate spaces where students and communities engage archives as living, relational practices.
—Keolanani Kinghorn

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keola06