

Odeimin Runners

First International Relay Map

Abstract

The Odeimin Runners art collective strives to foster and nourish relations between communities. The First International Relay Map visualizes Indigenous and Caribbean embodied mapping methodologies as an interactive storymap representing the multiple interconnections of three different geographies: St. Elizabeth, Jamaica; Saugeen First Nation; Wasauksing First Nation.

In the past decade, activist movements such as “Idle No More” and “Black Lives Matter,” as well as governmental and institutional policy changes resulting from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, imprinted decolonial and anti-racist discourse into mainstream culture. Working against performative discourse and allyship, Odeimin Runners’ approach refuses to operate oppositionally to colonial institutions and systems. Instead, our art practice offers an alternative path focused on mutually nourishing all our relations¹ in the worlds we are born into and encounter. As an Indigenous and Black-Persons-of-Colour (IBPOC) media art collective, Odeimin Runners engages our communities to re-trace trade and ceremonial routes between the north of Turtle Island and the Caribbean archipelago—routes and roots that have been there/here since time immemorial—linking stories, videos and artworks to traditional territories. In other words, while Afro-Indigenous relations are trending, they are nothing new.

Adrian Kahgee (Afro-Anishinaabe) and Debbie Ebanks Schlums (Blakka—Black and Hakka Chinese), form a media art collective called the Odeimin Runners guided by the traditional teaching of the odeimin/strawberry plant as a model for interpersonal, inter-communal relations. We use Bolex film cameras and process cinema to connect and visualize the different worlds we live in and with at micro and macro levels—including plant, spirit, human, animal, and celestial worlds. The First International Relay Map offers the insights of shared stories of lived experience by creating a lattice of interconnected odeimin/strawberry runners in an online storymap.

The odeimin (heartberry) or strawberry teaching evokes the shape and function of the plant to teach relationality. The fruit is in the shape of a heart and its roots create a networked lattice of relations between individual plants. Inherent in this understanding is the notion that connected communities are also parts of the self, relying on the soil, sun and air to thrive. Pre-dating and parallel to Western theoretical debates, odeimin teachings circumvent a god-eye, human-centered view, since no one entity—plant, animal, mineral or spirit—dominates another; instead, all are in relation.²

¹ All our relations refers to the interconnectedness of all things reflecting a deep sense of shared knowing and being. See for instance <https://firstnationspedagogy.ca/interconnect.html>.

² An article detailing the theoretical frameworks we adopt from Indigenous and Caribbean scholars will be published in an upcoming special issue of *PUBLIC* on the pluriverse. Here, we provide a brief description of the map and its methodologies.

The storymap, *First International Relay*, embodies the engagement of the geographies and communities with which we are connected, including Anishinaabek communities, Jamaican villages and artistic networks. Our method of artmaking involves what Janine Marchessault and Phil Hoffman call process cinema. This utilizes analogue Bolex cameras and hand processing high contrast 16mm black and white film, employing plants to develop the image. Plants were collected from each of the members' territories by giving thought to the plant's purpose or properties in terms of its cultural use in their territories, as a way to embrace and acknowledge the interrelational connectivity of all our relations. Giving thanks to the plants, laying down tobacco, acknowledging our ancestors, following community and family protocols are incorporated into how we work with plants and communities.

With Canada Council for the Arts funding, we were privileged to spend time in each of the territories and share stories with members of the communities, all of whom received honoraria. Public Visualization Lab's Patricio Davila created the online platform for the *First International Relay Map*. The digital map embeds the stories which are available as audio, photographs and video as a layer of content that viewers must interact with and spend time with in order to hear, see and experience.

The map itself consists of multiple layers of digitized phytograms—phytochemically produced imprints of the plants on film when exposed to sunlight—as well as conventional cartographic online maps. The map contains stories—video, audio, photographs, and links to collaborators. Each story is marked by a strawberry. Scrolling over a strawberry triggers the runners that represent points of connection between the stories and territories. Clicking on the strawberry reveals the story.

We hope you enjoy!



Start The Relay!