C O C A

NEWS RELEASE

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COCA Unveils *The St. Louis Map Room* in Collaboration with Jer Thorp's Office for Creative Research
Project Takes up Residence in Shuttered North St. Louis Middle School
Community Invited to Explore and Create Original, Interpretive Maps of the City

Presented by: **PNC arts alive** be part of art

With additional support from:
- **Regional Arts Commission**
- **Missouri Humanities Council**

In partnership with:
- **Saint Louis Public Schools**

St. Louis, MO – From March 3, through April 9, 2017, COCA (Center of Creative Arts), in collaboration with Jer Thorp's Office for Creative Research, is taking over the gymnasium in the Stevens School, a shuttered north-side neighborhood middle school, to create The St. Louis Map Room: a community space for exploring and creating original, interpretive maps of the city that reflect the personal stories of its residents.

The St. Louis Map Room is a collaborative project between The Office of Creative Research and COCA in partnership with the St. Louis Public Schools, and with generous support from the Regional Arts Commission, through the PNC Arts Alive initiative through the PNC Foundation, and the Missouri Humanities Council.

"The arts community across Greater St. Louis is very active with a wide selection of theater, dance and concerts," said Michael Scully, PNC regional president for St. Louis. "Through the PNC Arts Alive initiative, we can contribute to the region's outstanding cultural arts and support new and imaginative arts programs that help enrich our community and strengthen our local economy."

As a result of an open call to the St. Louis community, a diverse set of groups – including middle school, high school, and university students, artists, senior citizens, neighborhood representatives, and more - will take part in free facilitated workshops working together to make large-scale maps (10' x 10') that express their experiences. Finished maps will be ceiling mounted and on public display.

"We're interested in something beyond typical geography: not just factual dots marking places people go and the routes they take, but the unique perspective of St. Louis residents, their experience of being there, what makes their maps different from a typical city map, or from the map of others," said Jer Thorp, the lead advisor/artist for *The St. Louis Map Room* and the founder of the New York City-based Office for Creative Research. "Mapping is a very subjective process, and the end result reflects the politics and experiences of the person making the map."

Thorp has a distinguished track record of projects that explore the intersection of art, culture, and technology. He currently teaches at New York University's ITP and is a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council of Design Innovation. During his 2014 visit to St. Louis, as COCA's Data-Artist-in-Residence,

Thorp was struck by the city's divided geography and began to explore the role that map-making has on the identity of communities and its residents.

"If mapping is a source of power, people can claim power by making maps of their community that reflect them as they are, or that communicate what they'd like them to be," said Thorp. "By surfacing diverse and underrepresented experiences of living in St. Louis, this project creates an opportunity for open and honest discussion that can become replicable in other cities facing similar challenges."

Free and open to the public, visitors will be invited to explore present and historic civic data using maps as instruments. Interactive projections will allow viewers to overlay these community maps with census data, historic city-planning maps, live policing data, and more, to understand how the community has been shaped by acts of mapping.

"The COCA team is so proud to be a part of this project," said Kelly Pollock, COCA Executive Director. "It provides an intersection for art, technology, and social justice to meet, and I'm certain the results will inspire conversations and action that will have a lasting impact on our city."

***Map Room Specifics*:**

- The St. Louis Map Room runs March 3 - April 9, 2017; an opening reception is set for Friday, March 3 from 6-8pm.

- The St Louis Map Room is located at Stevens Middle School, 1033 Whittier St, St. Louis. The public entrance is on the Finney Avenue side (north) of the School. Parking is available on the street, as well as in a parking lot directly off of Finney, just west of the entry.

- Public open hours for visits and observation are Tuesdays through Fridays 10am to 2pm; Saturdays and Sundays 12pm to 5pm; Thursday evenings 4pm to 8pm; and closed Mondays.

- Community group mapping workshop sessions are still being scheduled. For more information on The St. Louis Map Room, or if you would like to participate, please contact ECatedral@cocastl.org.

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ABOUT COCA
Founded in 1986, COCA is the fourth largest multidisciplinary community arts center in the country and a national leader in innovative arts education. With a mission to enrich lives and build community through the arts, COCA serves 50,000 people of all ages and skill levels, from enthusiastic amateurs to emerging professionals—all taught by a faculty of distinguished arts educators. We provide meaningful arts experiences in our own studios, gallery and theatres as well as in schools, community centers and corporate settings in order to build a vibrant St. Louis that is creative, connected and inclusive. To ensure diversity and inclusion in all of our programs we are committed to eliminating economic and social barriers to participation in the arts.

About Jer Thorp, Co-Founder, The Office for Creative Research
Jer Thorp is an artist and educator from Vancouver, Canada, currently living in New York. Coming from a background in genetics, his digital art practice explores the many- folded boundaries between science and art. Recently, his work has been featured by The Guardian, Scientific American, The New Yorker, Popular Science, and the CBC. Thorp's award-winning software-based work has been exhibited in Europe, Asia, North America, South America, and Australia and all over the web, including at the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan. Jer has over a decade of teaching experience, in Langara College's Electronic Media Design Program, at the Vancouver Film School, and as an artist-in-residence at the Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Most recently, he has presented at Carnegie Mellon's School of Art, at The National Academies in Washington, and at IBM's Center for Social Software in Cambridge. He is currently Data Artist in Residence at the New York Times, and is an adjunct Professor in New York University's ITP program. He is a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council for Design & Innovation.

About The Office for Creative Research
The Office for Creative Research is a multidisciplinary research group exploring new modes of engagement with data, through unique practices that borrow from both the arts and sciences. OCR clients are research partners, helping to pose, refine and ultimately solve difficult problems with data. We are reshaping the relationship between client and designer, client and technologist, client and data scientist. Technology is an uncomfortable partner in research practices, driving discussions to questions of existing capabilities. OCR is creating a new approach to solving problems with technology – asking not just what could be but what should be. Over the last decade, Ben Rubin, Jer Thorp, and Mark Hansen the three principals, have each had active careers exploring the expressive possibilities of algorithms, code and data, with work realized in print and site-specific installations. Through OCR, we continue our individual work and also expand our collective practice, learning from each other as well as from new client-focused research projects.