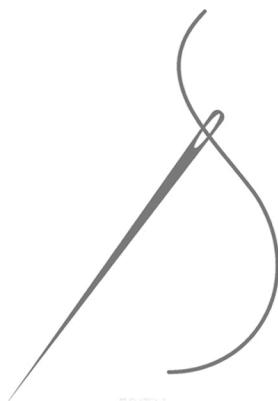




CC4ES

MUSEUM OF SILENCED HISTORIES

Re-Anchoring Ourselves through the Land



COMMUNITY STORYTELLING
THROUGH FABRIC AND THREAD

The Museum of Silenced Histories (MSH) is a physical and digital place of storytelling, healing and reconciliation for those whose stories have been silenced in the past. It offers a place of community gathering, collection, exchange and celebration, while providing a safe space for sharing stories articulating differences while underscoring our shared humanity.

COMMUNITY STORYTELLING CIRCLE *through fabric and thread*

MSH's Community Storytelling Circles are being held within the many diverse minority and marginalized communities of Rhode Island and Providence. Led by staff of MSH or self-led, depending on the state of the ongoing COVID pandemic, these community storytelling circles focus on the sharing of memories and histories about our various relationships to the natural world, to the land itself, to cultivation, and to the harvesting and sharing of healthy food.

The telling of these stories and their documentation through communally-made sewn story cloths creates a unique opportunity to remind ourselves of our responsibility to each other and the earth while stitching together, through fabric and thread, people and land, community to community, and while doing so, mending the tears that have frayed the fabric of our commonality, and silenced the many whose stories

have been lost within the social narrative.

Reconnecting story cloths to each other will create a rich tapestry offering a more vibrant and multi-dimensional portrait of who we are as Rhode Islanders, and a visual commitment to embrace diversity, work for equitable communities, ensure the healthful productivity of our lands and waters, and ground human relations in stewardship of the earth and all living species.

Re-anchoring ourselves through the land

Storytelling through textiles is a tradition almost as ancient as the first weaving of cloth. Such story cloths, since earliest times, have served as means of communication, documentation, identification, commemoration, celebration, protestation and resistance.

Over the course of history, graphic stories have been woven, pieced, appliqued and embroidered. And, they have varied widely in the types of narratives being offered. Some have recorded major historical events like war, changing rulership, and empire building. Others have depicted the societal position of the user. Still others have offered visual narratives as documentation of the daily life of the community, the family, or of personal goals and achievements. Many have presented images of faith, aspiration and hope.

For some storytelling textiles of the past and present, the materials from which they are made and the communal process of their creation are as meaningful as the stories themselves. Worn out clothing of loved ones that is carefully cut and re-pieced into images and narrative structures, along with community gatherings to engage in a process of sharing, mutual support and co-creation, offers a safe space to express life's more difficult moments – trauma and loss and the resultant grief, fear and anger. In such instances, story cloths, or "memory cloths" as they are sometimes called, depict thoughts or realities that words may be deemed inadequate for – incapable by themselves of conveying all that needs to be said.

Making story cloths is a way of reconstructing identity, voice, and wholeness. They are a means of piecing together the larger social narrative and identity. They bear witness to the diversity of peoples and experiences that constitute the fabric of society. They allow for intergenerational and intercultural sharing; and they stitch silenced stories back into public discourse while giving them visual presence within the public realm.



Bible Quilt, 1885-86
Harriet Powers
(African American, born into slavery)



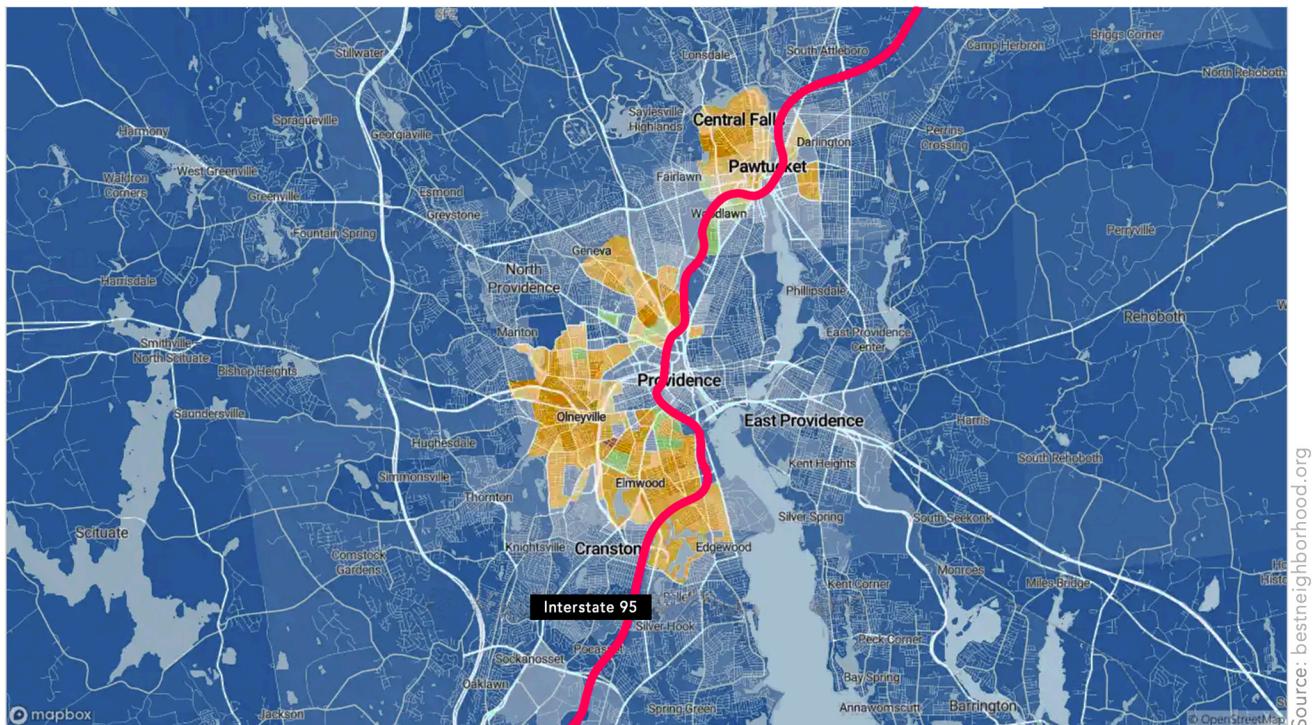
Gathering at the Market, contemporary
Marina Juracan (Mayan Guatemalan)
(multicolores.org)



Forced Migration, contemporary
Women from Kutch, Gujarat, India
(Kala Raksha / Nina Sabnani)



Refugees from Vietnam War, 1980s
Xao Yang Lee (Hmong Refugee)
(Garland Magazine)

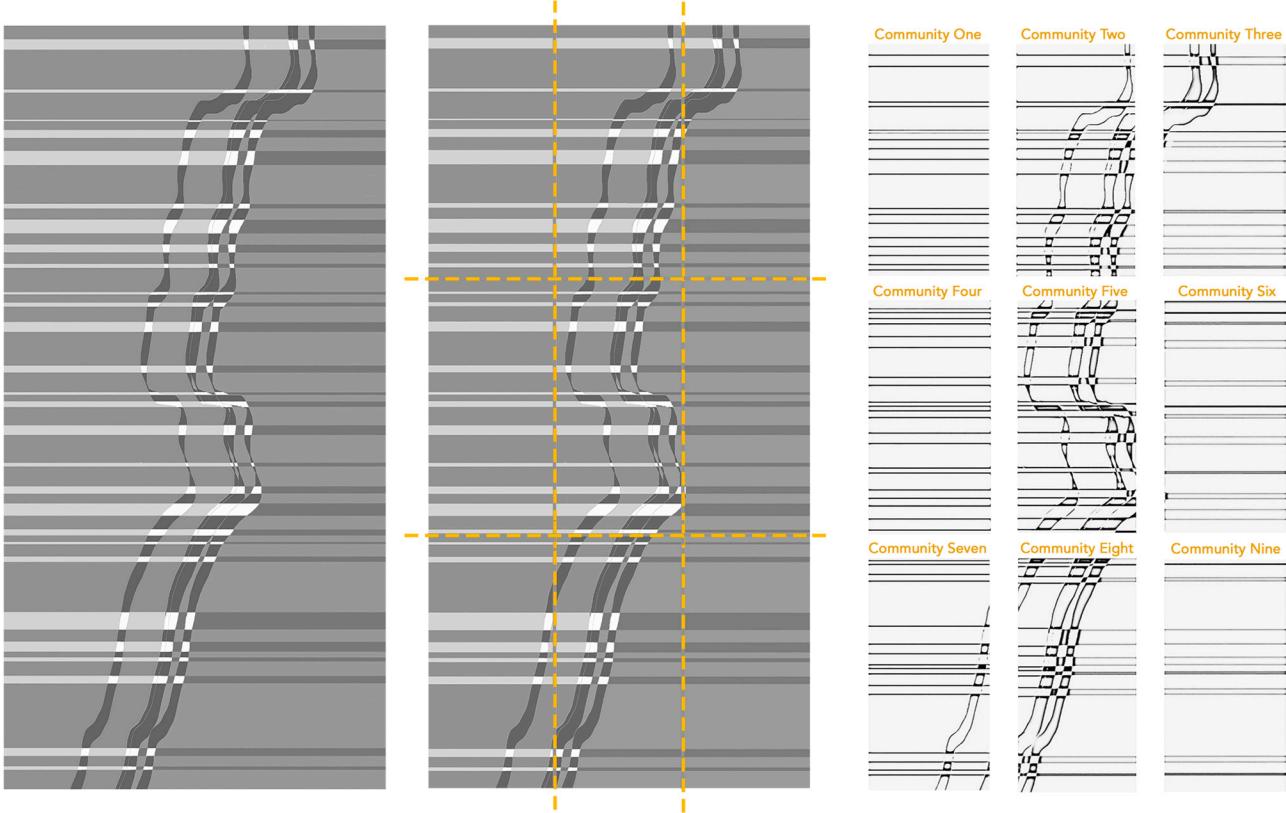


While the larger Museum of Silenced Histories project focuses on Rhode Island as a whole, it situates itself and much of its activities within the I-95 corridor through Providence, a territory where there is much evidence of the fraying of the city's physical and social fabric, the degradation of its physical landscape, and the high level of social and environmental inequity caused by the construction of the highway in the 1950s.

At the same time, over the years the I-95 corridor has become home to many grassroots community initiatives focusing on food justice, sustainability, skills training and jobs, and public health. The Museum of Silenced Histories furthers its parent organization CC4ES's mission in seeking to foster networks among these existing initiatives, and by reframing the I-95 corridor as a new Commons within Providence - a collage of collected identities and cultural expression, and a place of regenerative production.



Food Sovereignty and
Community Agriculture Initiatives
within the I-95 corridor



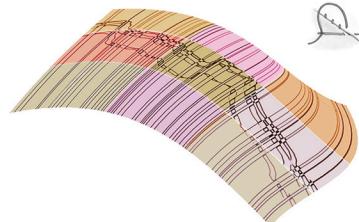
The entire 4 ft x 8 ft story cloth is divided into nine sections and distributed to individual community groups.

Each community is given one section with a drawn outline of the underlying image – an abstraction of the I-95 corridor through Providence, and horizontal lines suggesting fields of cultivation.

Communities can respond to this underlying image in anyway they choose. The intention is to have each section of the overall cloth speak to that particular community's relationship to the land, to cultivation, to issues of regeneration, and to each other.

The materials for the story cloth are fabric, thread and yarn. Stories can be told as pictures and words. If a community cannot finish or cannot sew, the fabric can be cut into the desired shapes and pinned to the background fabric with the words to be included written on a piece of paper. When needed, the Museum staff will help facilitate the completion of sections.

Once communities finish their sections, the pieces will be reassembled into the original 4" x 8" story cloth - but one that now displays the diversity of communities making up the whole. If communities wish to do more than one section, they are most welcome to. However, their various pieces will be included in different 9-section story cloths so as to continue the theme of diversity.



While each complete story cloth only holds 9 separate community stories, the total number of story cloths is limitless. The assembled cloths will be exhibited in Providence sometime in 2022 and will be posted on the Museum's website. The completed works will become part of the collection of the Museum of Silenced Histories and be on permanent display once the Museum has a physical home.



environmental justice & equity

CC4ES
Museum
of
Silenced
Histories

The Museum of Silenced Histories project, is an initiative of the Coalition Center for Environmental Sustainability (CC4ES), a 501 (c)(3) non-profit grassroots organization for building sustainable and resilient communities with environmental, social, and economic justice and equity.

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