The Story Corridor:

This project is a collaboration of artists, designers, and culture-bearers committed to designing a series of monuments that acknowledge and celebrate the unique histories that have shaped the community of Willowbrook, an unincorporated neighborhood situated between Watts and Compton in South Los Angeles. The project builds on a three-year collaborative process between the Willowbrook Inclusion Network led by Reinald Johnson, LA Commons with Willowbrook artist and community elder George Evans, and Professors Alison Hirsch and Aroussiak Gabrielian of the USC School of Architecture. The intention of the monuments and the connective "storycorridor" connecting them on 120th St is to contribute to correcting the public narrative of Willowbrook from one constructed by the media over generations to one that celebrates the richness of the area's past and present, and as it develops into the future – as a center of Black life and culture, and as a place that has transitioned into a mixed Black-and-Brown community with diverse stories to share. The hope is these cultural interventions challenge the traditional monument dedicated to often oppressive narratives of the past and, instead, bring presence to people and places whose important stories have not been widely told.

Monuments reflect and legitimize historical narratives that draw from and are contextualized by the archival body. In Willowbrook, decades of disinvestment and "archival silences" (Kelly Lytle Hernandez) elide the histories that community members carry in their memories and stories. With this in mind, we are generating an interactive community archive to be brought into the physical fabric through augmented reality experiences activated by monuments and rest stops along the corridor.

The monuments include: (1) "Bearing Witness," a monument recognizing challenges overcome in the community situated near the site of Ujima Village, a housing development that had to be torn down due to a public health crisis from legacy contaminants in the soil from previous industrial use; (2) "Bridging and Building," situated at a critical gang line that celebrates the people of Willowbrook that have bridged and built the community into the culturally rich place it has become; (3) "Deep Connections," situated on the bridge over Compton Creek, the impetus for the community's origins and celebrating its ecological and agricultural histories of relations between the people and the land.

120th Street is the primary spine linking Willowbrook's east and west side, which have historically been divided by gang activity and general development and investment patterns. The "story corridor" will be punctuated by the monuments but complemented by rest stops in the form of bus shelters that tie the monuments together and enforce the stories of the place while providing critical shade needed through the community. Phase One (above) connects Earvin "Magic" Johnson Park on the west side to Carver Park and Carver Elementary School on the east side. The corridor then extends and connects the Safer Passage to School routes and ultimately stretching from Athens Park (west) to Mona Park (east).

How will the Corridor extend?

What will the corridor consist of?

| Community Monuments |
| Pathways and Rest Stops |
| Community Archives |

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In 1923, the General Petroleum Company purchased the site and ExxonMobil Oil Corporation operated it as petroleum storage (“tank farm”) until 1963 when it was dismantled and the tanks removed. In 1972 the Ujima Village Apartment Complex opened on the site without a proper environmental review. When residents started getting sick, the county closed the site (in 2008), giving residents 90 days to evacuate.

The ‘healing garden’ takes its geometry from the former tanks and transforms that harm into healing through the use of red willows (*Salix Laevigata*), a plant native to the area that is often used to remediate petroleum in the soil. The tree is also emblematic of the place - WILLOWBROOK.

**“WITNESS TREES”**

Trees that remain in place decades or even centuries after noteworthy events are referred to as witness trees. Many were young when the events took place and have grown to be large, silent sentinels of history. In the early 1800s, surveyors in Illinois planted “bearing trees” as landmarks to grid the ground. After centuries of development, many are still around today and are documented in the Witness Tree Project.

**“WITNESS TREES”**

Petroleum tanks to Ujima Village to EMJP

Plants and trees belonging to the Salix genus are widely used in phytoremediation (the use of plants to decontaminate soil). The willow is especially known to mitigate petroleum ever-present in the soils of the site. While this small grove of willows will not necessarily clean the site, the intention is to use a native, sculptural shade-giving plant that is both emblematic of Willowbrook and of healing.

**The Community Archive**

“Archival silences” are no longer muted in the healing garden. The “meridian” in the center of the space casts stories significant to Willowbrook’s past and present. It serves as a light beacon in the evening and a sundial - tracing the passage of time - during the day.

**The Healing Trees**

The intention of this monument is to recognize challenges the community of Willowbrook has overcome. It is a site of healing, of stories of trials and triumphs. These stories are told in shadows - that move and shift and bring an element of the sacred into the context of the profane.

**What stories would you like the shadows to tell?**

**Would you like these monuments to double as community gathering space?**

**What could you imagine happening there?**
120th and Central is a critical intersection in Willowbrook - a gang line and dividing line marking east and west - the monument at this intersection will focus on the people - past, present and the outlines of those to come - that bridge and build the community into the culturally rich place it is and will become.

some faces of Willowbrook

This is an opportunity to highlight and remember some of the prominent people that have been significant to shaping the success and joy of Willowbrook. Forthcoming generations of Willowbrook residents will have the chance to know the faces behind the names of Willowbrook's landmarks, and appreciate the success stories that have emerged from the community. The silhouettes (see above) of those to come have the chance to represent the people that will continue to shape the beauty and joy of the place moving forward...

Who represents Willowbrook most to you? Why?

Do you think a monument like this would be uplifting for this critical intersection through Willowbrook? How else would you like to see the theme of bridging and building represented?

How do you think monuments start to stitch divides and celebrate all of Willowbrook?
Deep Connections (Compton Creek):

Situated on the bridge over Compton Creek, the impetus for the community’s origins, this monument celebrates the community’s ecological and agricultural histories of relations between the people and the land. The monument is more of a system - like the watershed - celebrating the creek through multifunctional fencing that frames the creek and provides interactive opportunities to acknowledge this unique ecological resource for the agricultural and urban development of the unique community of Willowbrook.

Willowbrook’s Ecological and Agricultural History

Willowbrook was named after its landscape: widespread marshlands and willow thickets attributed to Compton Creek, a major tributary of the LA River. At one time, Compton Creek was a valuable water resource and a focal point of the agricultural settlements during the 1700’s. Willows lined the now concrete clad creek, and the surrounding soil was very fertile. With development, however, the creek was sorely mistreated and the area was often used as a dumping ground.

In the 1890’s, the first subdivisions were built in Willowbrook. These subdivisions were rather large compared to other parts of the county and were broken up by expansive fields, which provided residents plenty of space to grow their own food. Much of land around these subdivisions remained undeveloped until after World War II. Many of the large 300-foot lots remain; some residents still have horses, cows, roosters, and chickens. In the last decade, residents have turned some of the remaining open fields into community gardens, continuing Willowbrook’s long agricultural legacy.

In order to maintain a visual connection between the creek and the pedestrian and to monumentalize the significance of the creek, the bridge will be framed by fencing that frames the creek, echoes the marshlands, thickets, willows, flows and tributaries of the watershed. The fence would dually operate as seating and shade.

The creek as monument

Inspired by the the storytelling power of silhouettes displayed in community art by George Evans and Charles Dickens and the dynamic work of artist, Kara Walker, the bridge has the opportunity to incorporate people, places and things that represent the pre-settlement and early settlement of Willowbrook, including the equestrian past. We propose a new fence along the bridge to frame views of Compton Creek, celebrate its early history and make the space more welcoming to pedestrians, including the children who may walk this way to Carver Elementary and the Boys and Girls Club.

How would want the ecology and agricultural history of Willowbrook celebrated and monumentalized?

Write, draw or sketch...