

February 5, 2025

Dear Members of the Art Commission,

We look forward to presenting at your February 12th meeting where we will seek your concept approval for our proposed mural at 1631-37 Arch Street, a wall that provides a backdrop for the Horwitz-Wasserman Holocaust Memorial Plaza.

The Philadelphia Holocaust Remembrance Foundation (PHRF) maintains, operates, and programs the Horwitz-Wasserman Holocaust Memorial Plaza under an agreement with the City of Philadelphia Department of Parks and Recreation, which owns the site. The Memorial Plaza is the site of the first public Holocaust monument in the country, Nathan Rapoport's *Monument to Six Million Jewish Martyrs*, installed in 1964, and it continues to serves as a sacred place of mourning and remembrance for those who lost loved ones in the Holocaust. Fifty years later, PHRF led the creation of a Memorial Plaza surrounding the original Monument, which now includes a range of interpretive features. Since its completion, the Memorial Plaza has welcomed more than 55,000 visitors to learn and reflect about the Holocaust.

Not long after the completion of the Plaza, PHRF decided to explore the commissioning of a mural on the large blank wall of a Verizon building adjacent to the site. This would be the nation's first large-scale mural dedicated to Holocaust remembrance and education in a public space.

In 2021, PHRF invited Mural Arts Philadelphia (MAP) to collaborate on the process. Due to the sensitive and complex nature of the project, as well as the mural's prominent location, the partner organizations first assembled a group of subject matter experts to articulate project goals, lead the artist selection process and oversee the artist's design process. After much project planning, the partner organizations released an international call for artists through an RFQ in May 2023. Following an over year-long artist selection process, which included reviewing 54 applications, multi-stage interviews, stakeholder meetings, site visits, and the review of preliminary concept proposals from four finalists, in the Fall of 2024 PHRF and MAP proudly announced the selection of international artist Ella Ponizovsky Bergelson to bring the mural to life.

During the winter of 2024 and 2025, the partner organizations hosted three community events for the public to get to know Ella and her plans for the mural, and for Ella to learn more about the Philadelphia community. More than 210 people participated in these public meetings with the artist and more than 100 people completed forms that asked them to reflect on their personal experiences and memories from which Ella will draw inspiration as she develops her final design in the coming months.

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As you will find out from Ella's enclosed preliminary concept proposal, which she submitted during the last steps of the artist selection process, the mural's main focus is the Holocaust and the continued effects of displacement and discrimination that the Holocaust triggered. Ella's concept explores the Holocaust as an ongoing, evolving history rather than a distant past. In addition to the 6 million Jewish victims of the Nazi regime who are memorialized at the Memorial Plaza, the mural seeks to also reflect on the nearly 7 million people who were also persecuted and exterminated by the Nazis during the Holocaust, as well as other minorities who have been historically marginalized. In this way, the mural will be both complementary and additive to the narrative that already exists at the Memorial Plaza.

Ella's own identity and artistic expression are greatly influenced by discrimination and migration. She was born in the USSR, immigrated to Israel as a child refugee, and has lived and worked in Berlin for the past decade. Her art is also greatly influenced by her great-grandfather David Bergelson, a notable Yiddish writer and Jewish activist who left Germany with his family to escape the Nazis but was murdered during Stalin's "Night of the Dead Poets" for his outspoken views against fascism and Stalinism.

Using her signature style, Ella's mural will display multilingual texts solicited from the public to demonstrate how displacement during and after the Holocaust contributed to our cultural and linguistic diversity here in Philadelphia. Sampling from the public's experiences and memories, Ella's mural will reflect on what has been passed down to us by our ancestors and considers what we, in turn, will pass on to future generations. In this way too, the proposed mural will not only build on the Jewish teaching of *l'dor vador* (from generation to generation) from the Hebrew Bible, but will also be in harmony with the site's evolution from the original Monument commissioned by Holocaust Survivors to the development of its new contemplative landscape and educational features brought about by the second and third generation.

The proposed artwork was also developed specifically and effectively for this site in terms of its spatial strategy, composition, and color. The wall is not flat; it is punctuated by a series of ornamental columns represented in relief. Ella's proposal would occupy the spaces between the columns, heightening the effect of looking out into an adjacent space. The composition is constructed as weaving lines of text, with a vanishing perspective, that reinforces the perception that the space expands far beyond the wall. The Memorial Plaza receives limited direct sunlight, so the simple black–orange color pallet creates a vivid contrast and brightness in the space. Overall, the impression is of a landscape that is viewed at sunset. As such, it can be appreciated with great impact even though it will be placed behind a row of small trees.

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The owner of the wall, Verizon, is fully updated on and supportive of the project and will enter into a wall lease agreement with PHRF and MAP once the design was finalized. Philadelphia Parks & Recreation will provide a letter of support once the project is in its final review stage. Maintenance of the mural, including preventing or correcting incidents of vandalism or graffiti will fall under the shared responsibility of MAP and PHRF that the parties have already agreed to. This mural is entirely privately funded through donations made to PHRF and MAP specifically for this project.

Please note that the Commission will be provided with print copies of the artist's concept design without copyright mark ups at the meeting. Also, note that the mural will be installed using parachute cloth and paint.

We deeply appreciate the complexity of creating a Holocaust-themed mural in this sensitive location, particularly in this challenging time, so we will provide more details to the Commission at the concept review meeting and have Ella introduce her proposed work. We are eager to hear the Art Commission's guidance as our project enters its design phase.

With Kind Regards,

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1617 JFK Boulevard 20th Floor, Unit 2015 Philadelphia, PA 19103 info@philaholocaustmemorial.org 215-809-2474 **philaholocaustmemorial.org**  March 7, 2024

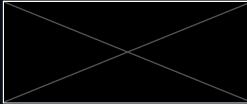
PROPOSAL FOR A MURAL AT THE HORWITZ-WASSERMAN HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL PLAZA

Ella Ponizovsky Bergelson



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At the heart of Philadelphia, a metropolis steeped in the ideals of freedom and brotherly love, I make my way to The Memorial Plaza upon arrival. It stands as a testament to its significance and the profound regard it is held in. I can sense it serves as a sacred ground for contemplation, education, pride, and healing.

At its core lies the Monument to Six Million Jewish Martyrs by Nathan Rapoport, an expression of resistance to tyranny, which stirs within me a contradictory mix of compassion, fear, and frustration. Drawing from the biblical Burning Bush, Rapoport intertwines themes of emancipation and liberation, and the Jewish people's connection to their promised land, reflecting the sculptures' zeitgeist. By the monument stand the Six Pillars, contrasting totalitarian oppression with democratic ideals. I perceived them as parting The Plaza from the casual street. I am particularly moved by The Theresienstadt Tree, the tree of life, that speaks to resilience and continuity. Sprouting from the very tree nurtured by the children of the deadly ghetto, it is grounded and rising as a recall of hope. The eternal memorial candles converging towards a vanishing point as they shimmer against the deepest darkness. Cornered on the left of The Plaza, they offer me a spot of relief from the wind and a window for a moment of stillness. The Treblinka train tracks, especially triggering, introducing the mass deportation and the destiny awaiting at the end of the ride. An end and a beginning: entire communities obliterated, and the commencement of what is to become a generations-long displacement journey. And by the wall, the Tree Grove, representing resistance, channelling the partisan's forests of refuge. I interpret it as an homage to nature as the saviour, provider of a safe space.

I realise how together, these elements form a space for reflection, healing, and commemoration of an irretrievable loss. The Plaza weaves a narrative of organised horror and its counterpoints of heroism and resilience. Within the lines I read a note of patriotic expressions; the historic

#### THE HEART REMEMBERS MURAL PROPOSAL

narrative of the Jewish people – antisemitism, annihilation attempts and endurance, the American ethos of liberty and equality, and the condemnation of Germany as a nation embodying the epitome of evil. A fundamental triangular structure that defines substantial space in the foundational principles of these nations.

I bring to mind how World War II is often viewed as a definitive conclusion, with many perceiving it as the complete annihilation of the Jewish people in Europe and the end of Germany as an oppressive entity. A German friend once recounted to me how during her elementary schooling in 90's Berlin, the Holocaust was presented in a way that suggested that Europe was free both of Jews as of Nazies, leading to her surprise upon later discovering Jewish communities thriving over Europe and modern-day Nazis are on the rise. It is unanimous that the Holocaust marks a dramatic end, however it is also a beginning. What has ended and what has begun? What is the continuity of the reality set in motion then, and what is its future?

#### **BEYOND THE STONES**

For 60 years, The Plaza has stood at the tip of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, as a solemn testament to resilience and commemoration. However, its significance extends beyond the local, connecting to a global network of Holocaust remembrance locations, each tailored to its unique environment. As we gather to honour the memory of the entirety that is lost, we confront the intergenerational trauma constructed by this history, recognizing its impact on shaping our diverse collective identities.

In our pursuit of collective memory construction, we confront questions of what and why we remember. The Plaza faces us with targeted persecution of ethnic

minorities, of diverse individuals who diverge from the norms, and of those who dared to oppose authority, seeking to ensure that their stories are not forgotten and that history does not repeat itself.

As we examine Holocaust commemoration environments globally, we encounter recurring themes and elements, such as: fracture, disruption, and descent below the ground. As an example, the Jewish Museum in Berlin, designed by D. Libeskind, is a striking architectural representation of Jewish history. The building itself serves as a metaphor for Jewish experience, with its jagged, angular design symbolising the fractured and disrupted history. We enter the main building above ground, originating in 1735 during the era of the Prussian Empire, then descend into underground spaces symbolising the fracture in both Jewish and German history. We navigate through narrow corridors evoking exile and isolation before emerging back into the main building, representing resilience and continuity. A further example is Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, featuring stark contrasts between light and shadow, reflecting the profound rupture and the contrasting forces of good and evil.

As I am native to several places, I find myself exploring how different cultural spaces perceive and interpret the same events, offering insights into collective memory formation from varied perspectives. As we delve further, we uncover nuanced differences between the diverse commemoration environments, revealing what lies beneath the surface. From narratives of guilt and shame in Germany, to heroism and denial in Russia, and victimhood and entitlement in Israel, each perspective sheds light on the complex layers of memory and identity. In America, where heroism and nobility are celebrated, we confront a paradoxical dread of assimilating immigrants and rejection of refugees, despite its inherent identity as a melting pot. In its prime, memorials challenge us to confront uncomfortable truths about our past and present, urging us to reconcile with the complexities of our national ethos. As we navigate these complexities, we must look back and ask: Have we put forth our utmost? In shaping the narrative of our memorials, we must steer to a direction that ensures that we honour the memories of the past while forging a path towards a more inclusive and compassionate future.

#### THE DOMINO EFFECT

The onset of Nazi persecution in 1933 marked the beginning of a dark chapter in history, one that targeted Jewish Germans with a shower of discriminatory laws aimed at driving them from their homeland. Forced displacement became a harsh reality for many, encouraging a journey into unknown territories charged with uncertainty. Yet, despite denial and resistance, the imperative to relocate was conclusive. The nearly impenetrable borders posed overwhelming obstacles, highlighting the profound impact of forced displacement during the Holocaust on subsequent migration patterns.

Delving into survivors' experiences sheds light on the broader implications for post-war migration, refugee flows, trauma-induced migration, and diaspora studies. The Holocaust emerges as a pivotal historical event shaping contemporary migration discourse, its echoes resonating through the trajectories of displaced communities worldwide. This intersection of memory and migration emphasises persistent themes of trauma, resilience, and the enduring guest for cultural identity amidst displacement. Moreover, it holds profound relevance in today's global landscape. As we grapple with ongoing crises leading to mass displacement, understanding the historical context illuminates the complexities of trauma and identity formation among contemporary displaced populations. By examining past experiences, we glean insights vital for shaping inclusive policies, fostering empathy, and nurturing social cohesion in diverse societies. In the introduction to the BBC series "Our Planet II," released in 2023, Sir David Attenborough's portrayal of migration as a vital force for survival casts a fundamental truth:

*"60 thousand years ago humans left Africa for the first time. Since then we haven't stopped travelling to every corner of the Earth. But our journey is just one of many. At every given moment billions of animals are on the move and the health of our planet depends on it. Migration is the most vital survival strategy."* 

Global movement is intrinsic to life on Earth, essential for the health of ecosystems and the survival of species. Yet, despite this universal truth, the fear of otherness persists, triggering primal instincts of self-preservation in the face of the unfamiliar. Amidst this primary anxiety, which in the Stone Age aided our survival but now hinders us, lies an opportunity to embrace the richness of diversity and cultural hybridity as a privilege to be celebrated. The Nazis sought to "purify" the German race, yet we know there are no races. There are simply humans, and nations with well guarded borders.

The envisioned addition to the memorial plaza has the potential to amplify this message, weaving together threads of memory, displacement, and diversity into a commemoration tapestry that motivates plasticity of fixed thinking patterns. By spotlighting the resilience of marginalised communities and challenging perceptions of otherness, it shall summon us to embrace inclusivity and coexistence as a cornerstone of our shared humanity.

#### INSIGHTS ON THE MEETING

In the February 15th meeting, I engaged with my role as the artist by embracing a range of perspectives. As the only outsider present, I had the flexibility to shift between roles, taking on personas such as those of a facilitator, a witness, a bureaucrat, an objective researcher, an analyst, and inspector. During our discussion, my aim was to steer towards introspection, focusing on each individual present. I wanted to draw out personal perspectives and see and hear everyone. I wished to spark a thought-provoking yet mindful discussion, assuming that navigating through complexity is an essence we aim to capture as our end goal. The group's expressions include: honour, educate, evoke emotion, engage with future generations, reclaim the narrative, cultural celebration, and a strong sense of ownership underlined our multifaceted exchange.

One aspect of our encounter centred on "A Witness" written in 1945 by D. Bergelson, my great grandfather. It introduces an exchange between the themes of memorial practice, public art and graffiti to Yiddish post World War II prose. It delves into the different aspects of the witness's role in collective remembrance, as well as into personal connection to family roots, their experiences, and expressions and my own responsibility to remember.

We concluded with formalities, as I introduced my invented PGLH Form (Personal Genealogical & Lingual History) to explore participants' perceived identities, rather than objective roots, bypassing factual analysis. It offered intimate insights: a group of 11 participants have resided in 3 countries. Including their ancestors, their collective residency spans across 15 countries. 13 languages spoken by both participants and their ancestors, which revealed trends in migration and language diversity. While most participants identified as American, their origins span a wide range, revealing a rich texture. Language proficiency varied greatly, hinting at the dominance of English and shifts towards linguistic assimilation. The diversity of experiences within the group became evident.

Is it obvious? Perhaps. However, the essence lies in the fact that among 11 individuals hailing from Philadelphia and identifying as Americans, origins span across almost every continent on Earth. Does this serve as our common ground? That each of us embodies a rich tapestry of complex diversity? Could it be argued that the central factor binding us is our origins' broad spectrum? Essentially, that our differences are the main common thread among us?

from the tower of Independence Hall, beckoning the ELLA PONIZOVSKY BERGELSON PROJECT PROPOSA citizens of Philadelphia to witness the first public reading

Interestingly, despite the option for anonymity, every participant included their name—a choice that speaks volumes about the wish to be seen. Have we established boundaries that hinder our ability to thrive as we embrace our inherent cultural and lingual hybridity? The Holocaust is a reminder that despite our multiplicity, often we are not counted as such by those who sought to erase our identities as they dehumanise us to singlelayered linear beings.

#### INTERSECTING WAYS

The future mural occupies Philadelphia's pivotal civic space. Therefore, it shall not only commemorate the Holocaust but also has the opportunity to reflect the essence of the city. Where do the two stories intersect, and how do they connect with the broader American landscape?

The Plaza forms a sharp triangle, the arrow-head of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and Arch St., shooting from the spread of nature, through the Philadelphia Museum of Art. pointing towards City Hall. Alternatively, the city expands outward from that centre point.

Inspired by Paris's Champs-Élysées, the Parkway, adorned with flags, fountains, and art, symbolises its dedication to culture and greenery. The mural wall, situated at the western end of The Plaza, faces City Hall and its tower, atop which stands the statue of William Penn, the founder of the Pennsylvania Province. watching over. It is one of the tallest statues located atop a building worldwide. It stands with one hand extended, which could be interpreted as a welcoming gesture. The extended hand is holding the charter of Pennsylvania, and his other hand rests on a sword, representing the peaceful but prepared stance of the city. It is significant as a symbol of Philadelphia's heritage, embodying the spirit of freedom and democracy that Penn advocated. It faces northeast towards the Delaware River. symbolising his oversight of the city he founded and helped colonise. This orientation aligns with the city's

grid layout, extending from City Hall by major avenues intersecting. From this high vantage point, the statue overlooks landmarks such as Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell, integral to the city's fabric. Penn's gaze encompasses the city's landscape and its evolution.

William Penn was a pioneering advocate for democracy and religious freedom, deeply influencing the colony with principles of tolerance and peaceful coexistence, including equitable relations with Native Americans. His vision for a society based on democratic values and his advocacy for a haven for persecuted minorities reflect a legacy marked by progressive ideals. However Penn's legacy is complex. His vision was progressive for the 17th century, but it existed within the contexts of his time. While he advocated for religious freedom, it primarily applied to different sects of Christianity, and the society he helped build was not free from the inequalities and prejudices common to the era.

Penn named his new city Philadelphia. His bold choice is evident: reaching for the skies and challenging fate with a stroke of irony, as he melded the Greek terms for Love (Phileo) and Brother (Adelphos), establishing its nickname: The City of Brotherly Love. Since its inception, The City of Brotherly Love has served as a sanctuary for a wide array of diverse persecuted minority groups. Yet it shaped the nation's path in other aspects, amplifying its role beyond progression but also as a battleground. Key historical events such as the Declaration of Independence symbolise Philadelphia's role in America's fight for freedom, yet the city's history is also marked by less celebrated moments. The Centennial Exposition, the racial tensions of the 1918 riots, and the tragic MOVE bombing reflect the city's struggles with equality and justice, underscoring the complexities of its political and social fabric.

Inscribed with the words "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land Unto All the Inhabitants thereof," the Liberty Bell holds a noted place in American history. Legend has it that on July 8, 1776, its resounding chime echoed

of the Declaration of Independence. The Bell stands as a timeless symbol of universal rights and freedoms. Its significance was further solidified when abolitionists adopted it as a rallying cry in their fight against slavery. However, it rang its last clear note on George Washington's birthday on February 26, 1846, forever silenced by an irreparable crack. Despite its silence, it is an emblem of America's pursuit of liberty and equality, resonating with the nation's foundational principles and ongoing struggles for justice. Listening to the silence of the cracked and dumb Liberty Bell, metaphor for the city's complex history of liberty and struggle, a tune echoed in my head: "Ring the bells that still can ring / Forget your perfect offering / There is a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in." The emblem of freedom's fragility echoes in the chorus of Leonard Cohen's Anthem, released in 1992. "The future is no excuse for an abdication of your own

personal responsibilities towards vourself and vour job and your love. Ring the bells that still can ring: they're few and far between but you can find them." Cohen disclosed in an interview. Inspired by Kabbalistic mysticism, he emphasises accepting imperfection and personal responsibility. He suggests that through imperfections, light enters, enabling growth and enlightenment.

The convergence of the Holocaust memory with Philadelphia's foundational landmarks and historical truths stresses the city's promise of embracing plurality and confrontation. As the birthplace of liberty and the site of the first Holocaust memorial in the USA, The Plaza stands at the forefront of dialogue on spectrums and rights. Through the juxtaposition of historical significance and contemporary resonance, the future mural becomes a reminder of the pursuit of brotherly love and collective remembrance.

In the next pages I will walk you through my strategic choices, focusing on how the selected methodology, technique, colours palette, composition, and materials embody and

communicate our thematic intentions and the essence of the core message. I will guide you through my vision, which seeks to further evolve The Plaza, speaking to the complexities of memory, displacement, and the undying spirit of human diversity. Through a blend of historical reverence and contemporary relevance, the mural will not only complement the existing memorial elements but also introduce a dynamic, inclusive narrative that resonates with the global nature of Holocaust remembrance and the ongoing story of human shifts and survival.

#### **GOALS & METHODOLOGY**

The overarching goal is to remember the Holocaust, deconstruct rigid social labels and to foster an environment that is open, inviting, and emotionally resonant. The aim is to strike a balance between the personal ownership of its commissioning body and the broader public interest, ensuring it remains a poignant, localised reflection of its environment. To achieve this, the project will draw upon a rich tapestry of textual and linguistic content derived from the community, interwoven through techniques and strategies that were developed particularly for this case. The design and execution will reflect a deep commitment to inclusivity, pluralism, and the dynamic flux of societies.

#### FROM LANGUAGE TO IMAGE: METHODOLOGY & VISUAL LANGUAGE

#### TEXTUAL CONTENT: POLYPHONY & LINGUAL AUTONOMY

In seeking inspiration for expressing diversity and inclusivity, the ancient wisdom of the Talmud and its polyphony—emphasising a multiplicity of voices and opinions—offer a profound foundation. Emerging from the need to preserve Jewish oral traditions after the Temple destruction in 586 BCE and the Babylonian Exile, which resulted in an absence of a centralised place of worship, led to the redaction of the Mishnah (study by repetition), as a means of preservation of cultural identity amidst displacement and the challenge of maintaining continuity in foreign lands. The Talmud (study) is an elucidation of the Mishnah and represents the first major written collection of Jewish traditions and literature. It is a combination of Hebrew and Aramaic,



which was the common language among Jews in Babylon during its redaction. Implementing it, ensured widespread understanding. It embodies the essence of Jewish ethical, legal,

and cultural identity, and mostly critical discourse, showcasing discussions and teachings across centuries and regions, all without a single dominating authorial voice. The polyphonic nature of the Talmud, where multiple narratives and perspectives coexist, guides my current approach: intersecting perspectives to mirror the diversity of human experience.

Resonating is also the idea of "Quasi-Territory" coined by the Yiddish literary critic Boruch Rivkin's (1883, Russia-1945, NY, USA). He is known for his anarchist views, particularly his suggestions that the true space of a nation is defined not by its physical borders but by its language and literature, proposing a form of national identity that transcends geographic and governmental limitations. He emphasised the power of language and cultural expression as foundational elements of communal identity, advocating for a form of cultural autonomy within the broader context of anarchist thought.

The Talmudic polyphony and Rivkin's ideas converge on the significance of language in maintaining a folk's cohesion, presenting an anti-authoritarian stance that backs cultural and linguistic bonds over traditional state structures. This principle guides my exploration of diversity and inclusivity through an anti-authoritarian lens.



#### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A vital component of the project is community engagement, which will inform the selection of texts and languages featured in the mural. Through collaborative efforts, the mural will become a collective canvas that reflects Philadelphia's diverse voices, embodying the city's rich cultural and linguistic heritage. This process not only democratises the creation of the mural but also ensures that it resonates deeply with the local community and visitors alike.

In the PGLH Form, participants were requested to share a title or a line from a lullaby, story, or poem that was significant in their childhood. I am incorporating these contributions into the illustration, selecting samples that resonate with the theme I aim to convey. Utilising lullabies, stories, or poems, I aim to highlight the disruption of intergenerational bonds caused by geopolitical shifts and uprooting, as they serve as vessels of family heritage and folk narratives, acting as building blocks in the architecture of cultural memory. Among the contributions are; Chad Gadya (Aramaic), Proud of all the Irish blood within in me, Oyfn Pripetshik (Yiddish), Hush Little Baby, Hungarian folksong, Rock-a-bye Baby (Mandarin), Shema Israel (Hebrew), The Giving Tree, a Taiwanese song, and more.

#### CURATED TEXTS FOR ILLUSTRATION

This example demonstrates a method for gathering textual materials for the purposes of the illustration. In the final artwork, the texts will vary as it will be open to community contributions, reflecting Philadelphia's diverse social fabric. My suggestion is to link to the full texts and their explanations in a similar manner as demonstrated below:

#### **OYFN PRIPETSHIK**

A traditional Yiddish song, evokes the warmth of a Jewish schoolroom where children are taught the Hebrew alphabet. Composed by Mark Warshawsky in the late 19th century, it nostalgically recalls the innocence of youth and the value of learning the Hebrew letters, set against the backdrop of Eastern European Jewish life. It was shared by a participant in the PGLH form and is the only cherished Yiddish song my grandpa sang to me in my childhood.

**Yiddish**, a diasporic tongue shaped by Jewish migration, defies traditional linguistic boundaries, embodying a spirit of cultural resilience. As a hybrid language born from the convergence of Hebrew, German, Slavic, and other influences, Yiddish serves as a living testament to the power of linguistic diversity in fostering a sense of belonging beyond national confines.

However, Yiddish faced nearextinction due to the oppressive forces of authoritarian regimes such as the Nazis, Stalinist policies, efforts to promote Hebrew in Israel, and assimilation trends in the USA.

#### On the Hearth

On the hearth, a fire burns, And in the house it is warm. And the rabbi is teaching little children, The alphabet.

See, children, remember, dear ones, What you learn here; Repeat and repeat yet again, "Komets-alef: o!"

Learn, children, with great enthusiasm. So I instruct you; He among you who learns Hebrew pronunciation faster – He will receive a flag.

Learn children, don't be afraid, Every beginning is hard; Lucky is the one has learned Torah, What more does a person need?

When you grow older, children, You will understand by yourselves, How many tears lie in these letters, And how much lament.

When you, children, will bear the Exile, And will be exhausted, May you derive strength from these letters, Look in at them!

Link to song →



#### CHAD GADYA

A traditional Passover song which is read during the Jewish Passover Seder. The song (One Little Goat) is sung in Aramaic and tells a cumulative tale of a little goat bought by a father for two ancient Hebrew coins. The song escalates as various characters and forces interact with one another in an unfolding chain of events, where each character is consecutively slain by another, creating a revenge domino effect. The origins of the song are not entirely clear, but it is believed to have been added to the Passover Seder in the late Middle Ages. Its interpretation ranges from allegorical readings as the cycle of life and death, oppression and liberation, to more mystical interpretations.

Aramaic, originating in the 11th century BCE and evolving from the Phoenician alphabet, the Aramaic alphabet significantly influenced the development of writing systems across the Middle East. It was adopted by various cultures for languages like Hebrew, Arabic, and Persian. In Jewish tradition, it was crucial for literature as Aramaic was the lingua franca, symbolising the resilience and adaptability of Jewish culture in preserving cultural identity through centuries of diaspora and changing geopolitical contexts.

**Hebrew Version:** During the first Intifada (1987-1993), the iconic Israeli singer Chava Alberstein recorded a version of "Chad Gadya", that has become the celebrated radio version in Israel since. Alberstein's version, a mix of Aramaic and Hebrew, excludes the final verse of the original, introducing instead her own, in which she alludes to two other Passover Seder songs. Notably absent from her adaptation is the mention of God. In her newly crafted verse, Alberstein delivers a powerful, selfaddressed message. "And once more, we start over" is its final phrase.

### Chad Gadya: Original Version

One little goat, one little goat that my father bought for two zuzim.

A cat came and ate the goat that my father bought for two zuzim. One little goat, one little goat.

A dog came and bit the cat that ate the goat that my father bought for two zuzim. One little goat.

A stick came and hit the dog that bit the cat that ate the goat that my father bought for two zuzim. One little goat.

A fire came and burned the stick that bit the dog that bit the cat that ate the goat that my father bought for two zuzim. One little goat.

Water came and put out the fire that burned the stick that bit the dog that bit the cat that ate the goat that my father bought for two zuzim. One little goat. An ox came and drank the water that put out the fire that burned the stick that bit the dog that bit the cat that ate the goat that my father bought for two zuzim. One little goat.

いいちのようろうろんし

A butcher came and slaughtered the ox that drank the water that put out the fire that burned the stick that bit the dog that bit the cat that ate the goat that my father bought for two zuzim. One little goat.

The angel of death came and slaughtered the butcher who slaughtered the ox that drank the water that put out the fire that burned the stick that bit the dog that bit the cat that ate the goat that my father bought for two zuzim. One little goat.

Then God, came and slaughtered the angel of death who slaughtered the butcher who slaughtered the ox that drank the water that put out the fire that burned the stick that bit the dog that bit the cat that ate the goat that my father bought for two zuzim. One little goat.

#### Chava Alberstein's New Verse

And why do you sing Chad Gadya? Spring has yet to dawn and Passover has not come And what has changed for you? What changed? This year, it is I who have transformed. And night after night I posed only four questions Yet tonight, I have another question How long shall the cycle of terror persist? The pursued becomes the pursuer, the stricken becomes the striker When will this madness end?

And what has changed for you? This year, it is I who have transformed. I have been once a quail lamb Today I am a tiger and a predatory wolf.

I have been the dove, I have been the deer Today, I don't know who I am.

One little goat, one little goat that my father bought for two coins

And once more, we start over

# ELLA PONIZOVSKY BERGELSON PROJECT PROPOSAL

#### **BROKEN VESSELS**

In Lurianic Kabbalah, the concept the Breaking of the Vessels elucidates the process of creation and the origin of imperfection and evil in the world. According to this concept, at the outset of creation, God contracted his divine light to make space for the universe in an act known as Tzimtzum (contraction, reduction). Subsequently, God attempted to infuse his divine light into vessels to commence the act of creation. However, the vessels were unable to contain the intense divine light and shattered. This event led to the dispersion of broken vessel fragments throughout creation, embedding sparks of divine light within the material world.

The shattering of the vessels introduced the potential for imperfection, evil, and suffering into the world, as the broken vessel fragments conceal and obscure the divine sparks within the physical and spiritual realms. Humans are tasked with Tikkun (reparation) of creation, by gathering and elevating these scattered sparks through performing acts of kindness.

This narrative highlights fragility, loss, and the possibility for healing, providing a metaphysical rationale for the world's imperfections and spotlighting the human role in its ongoing reparation.

In Leonard Cohen's song Anthem, which he completed over the course of 10 years and eventually released in the album The Future in 1992, he links this concept to the cracked Liberty Bell, unleashing evil, leaving us with the notion of reparation.

#### Anthem

The birds they sang At the break of day Start again I heard them say Don't dwell on what has passed away Or what is yet to be

Ah, the wars they will be fought again The holy dove, she will be caught again Bought and sold, and bought again The dove is never free

Ring the bells that still can ring Forget your perfect offering There is a crack, a crack in everything That's how the light gets in

rying the bells We asked for signs The signs were sent The birth betrayed The marriage spent Yeah, and the widowhood Of every government Signs for all to see

I can't run no more With that lawless crowd While the killers in high places Say their prayers out loud But they've summoned, They've summoned up A thundercloud They're going to hear from me Ring the bells...

You can add up the parts But you won't have the sum You can strike up the march

There is no drum Every heart, every heart To love will come But like a refugee

Ring the bells..

Link to song →

#### **TECHNIQUE & STRATEGY: LAYERING & DISPLACEMENT**

The creation process itself mirrors the thematic essence of displacement and diversity. Employing a method of layering and displacing (writing, shifting and overwriting again), the mural juxtaposes various eras, languages, and perspectives, with texts superimposed upon one another to form a complex visual narrative. This act generates multiple distinct puzzles that cannot be pieced together, as each segment embodies the essence of every position it has previously occupied. Each piece stands independently as a testament for a rich multilayered existence. This method not only symbolises the fragmentation and reconstruction of displaced identities and their continual reshaping. It also challenges fixed thinking patterns by overlaying new narratives atop the preexisting ones, reflecting on the mutable nature of memory. It is commenting on the phenomena of cultural erasure manifested in uprooting and assimilation as on the manipulation of historical narratives by authoritarian leaders, with the Nazis serving as a prime example.

Recalling the random aspect akin to the cut-up method into the strategy, the mural leverages this chance-

based literary technique, where fragmented texts are reassembled into new narratives. This approach, rooted in the practices of the Dadaists and later expanded by the artist Brion Gysin and author William S. Burroughs, harnesses unpredictability to reveal deeper subconscious meanings.

According to the principles of Japanese calligraphy and watercolour drawing philosophy, each colour layer must possess its own independent perfect composition. Only then, when combined they form the complete artwork. This guiding principle is fundamental to my approach.



A single layer illustration

#### COLOUR PALETTE: SPECTRUM OF MEMORY

Informed by the natural light conditions of the Plaza and the symbolic significance of dawn and dusk, the colour palette chosen infuses the artwork with a sense of change, transition, transformation and the cyclic nature of life and history. The palette aims to evoke a range of emotions and associations, from the warmth of glowing embers in the darkness, remnants of a scorched field, to the vibrancy of blooming meadow in twilight, of endings and beginnings, of memory and hope, thus capturing the dual themes of destruction and renewal inherent in the narrative.

#### MATERIALS: INTIMACY IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

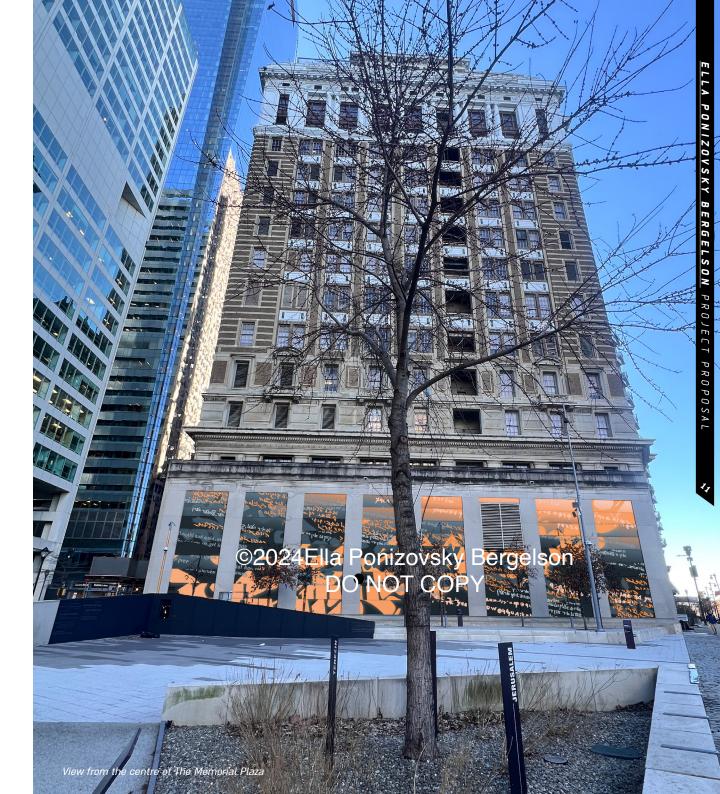
The technique involves tiling, with the choice of material being flexible depending on the available budget. While budget constraints might necessitate the use of paper that can be affixed and sealed, my ideal preference leans towards private-space interior materials ranging from ceramic tiles to wood, which traditionally are not used in public open spaces in Philadelphia's context. This selection aims to blur the lines between private and public domains creating a deliberate tension that mirrors the dynamic between the insider and outsider, creates an interplay between personal and collective, and reflects the experience of migration where the boundaries between inside and outside are perpetually negotiated. Utilising materials such as ceramic tiles, commonly found in the most private sections of a home and exposed in the street view only in the aftermath of destruction, underscores the concept of revealing the intimate within the bustling public sphere of The Plaza, a secluded oasis amidst urban chaos. This approach not only highlights the interplay between interior and exterior but also enriches The Plaza's role as a reflective pause point within the urban landscape. The final artwork will be rendered in paint, offering a distinct texture that enables colours to blend, a detail that the preceding illustration cannot fully convey.



Mural illustration

#### COMPOSITION & SHAPES: ECHOING THE ENVIRONMENT

The strategic use of space aims to create a visual dialogue with The Plaza, inviting viewers into a shared experience. The design respects the existing architectural and environmental cues of its setting, utilising the Plaza's triangular form (widening and softening its angle), and the natural play of light as guides for its composition. Two main diagonals intersect, crossing both the wall and each other, forming a dynamic intersection. The tilted horizon line aims to mimic the afternoon sunlight as it strikes the wall, based on my observations (this effect likely shifts slightly throughout the year). It utilises Hitchcock's famous Dutch angle, to convey a moment of mental disorientation and madness, reflecting on the moment in history the mural is dedicated to. The mural will occupy the gaps between the columns leveraging the wall's grid. This approach creates the illusion of the artwork existing behind the wall as it causes it to seem transparent and reveals a landscapelike image behind it. Thus, the artwork acts as a portal to the natural world, the park, the river, and beyond, that the city masks. The mural features an open composition, with elements that stretch beyond its borders, fostering a feeling of continuity and openness with the space around it. Text uniquely captivates our minds, triggering an innate impulse to read anything that appears letter-like. Thus, when used visually, text distinctively engages the observer. Within the final artwork, the vastness of the wall will allow me to delve deeper into the relationships between the scale and proportions of the various text layers. Contrasting text scales will be noticeable from a distance, as luring viewers to approach the wall. The visual effect of the patterned surface is resonating both with nature's organic shapes and with the gridded urban environment that it is positioned in, guaranteeing it is not disturbing the Tree Grove right in front of it and harmoniously integrates with its immediate surroundings. This approach not only harmonises with the Plaza's environment but also invites viewers to engage with the mural from multiple vantage points, enhancing its impact.



2024 E Por  $(\mathbb{C})$ OVS Bergelson 

Arch St. view

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The State Family In Henory of Ed St

Benjamin Franklin Parkway view

#### LAST WORDS

The mural aspires to be more than a mural; it counters totalism by democratising its creation process, a reminder of the lessons gleaned from history, and a celebration of diversity. Embracing The Horwitz-Wasserman Memorial Plaza, this artwork will stand as a symbol of hope, resilience, and the unbreakable bonds that connect us all across time and space.

Writers, I thought, were the conscience of the nation. They are its nerves. They present their nation to the world. People read a writer's works because they want to learn how the nation lived at his time.

And so I've come to you. I've told you everything. And now that I've told you everything, you are responsible as I am and even more because you are a writer.

David Bergelson, Among Refugees, Berlin, 1922



# Art Commission Concept Review Presentation Holocaust Memorial Mural Project

## February 12, 2025





## Mural Arts Philadelphia

Roots & Reimagination 40th Anniversary

# **Project Partners**

## **Eszter Kutas**

**Executive Director** 

Philadelphia Holocaust Remembrance Foundation

## Ella Ponizovsky Bergelson

**Mural Artist** 

## Lindsey Rosenberg

Public Project Specialist

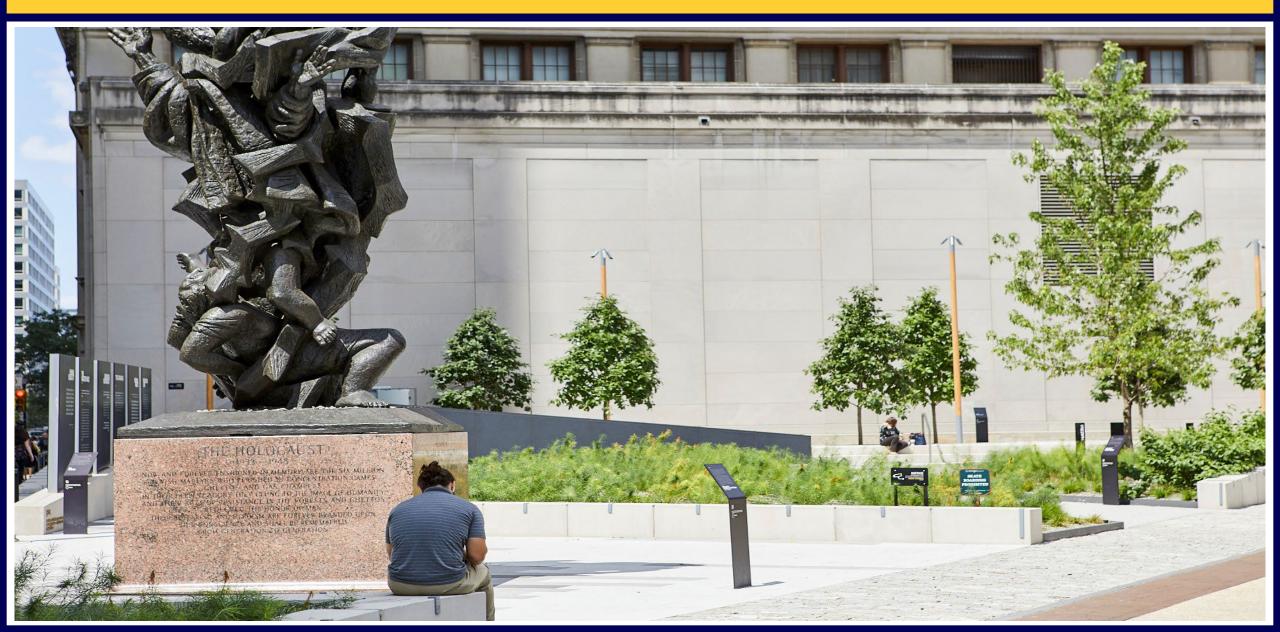
Mural Arts Philadelphia

## **Todd Bressi**

**Curatorial Advisor** 

Mural Arts Philadelphia

# **Project History**



# **Project Goals**

**RFQ Goals:** 

- The Holocaust: Remember, Reflect, Learn
- Embrace this Pivotal Moment in Time
- Connect the Holocaust to Broader Contexts and Experiences
- Build on / Expand the Experience of the Existing Monument and Plaza
- Communicate and Connect through Storytelling
- Approach Storytelling with Utmost Sensitivity

# **Artist Selection Process**

- Assembled Steering Committee
- Released RFQ: 2 Step Application Process
- 54 Applications Received
- 8 Artists Interviewed
- 4 Finalists: Site Visits, Stakeholder Meetings, Preliminary Concept Proposals, and Final Interviews
- Selection of Final Artist

# **Community Engagement & Public Feedback**

- May 2023: Project Announcement & Public Meeting
- Nov 2024: Press Announcement on Artist Selection
- Dec 2024-Jan 2025: 3 Public Meetings with the Artist (2 in-person, 1 virtual)
- Personal Memories Forms: 102 forms received
- Newsletters, Social Media, Dedicated Email
- Concerns Received & Addressed

# **Project Timeline**

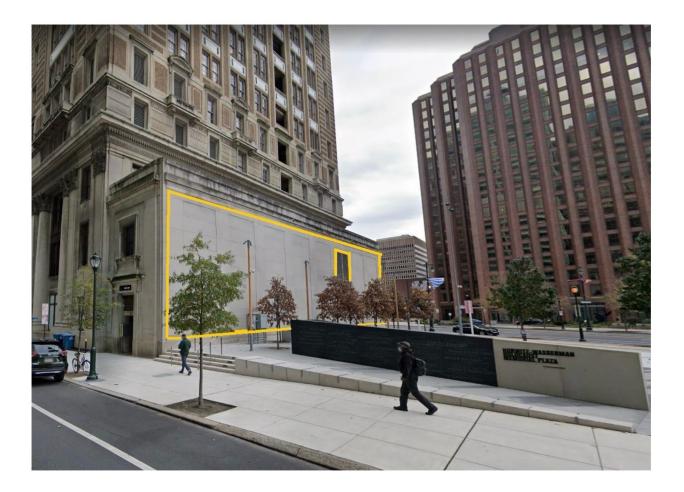
- Design Phase: Next 3 months under Steering Committee's direction
- Reviews & Approvals: May-June 2025 Verizon, PPR, Art Commission
- Painting on parachute cloth Summer 2025
- Mural installation Late Summer 2025
- Public Dedication Early Fall 2025
- Ongoing Care & Maintenance

# **Questions?**

For more info: philaholocaustmemorial.org/mural

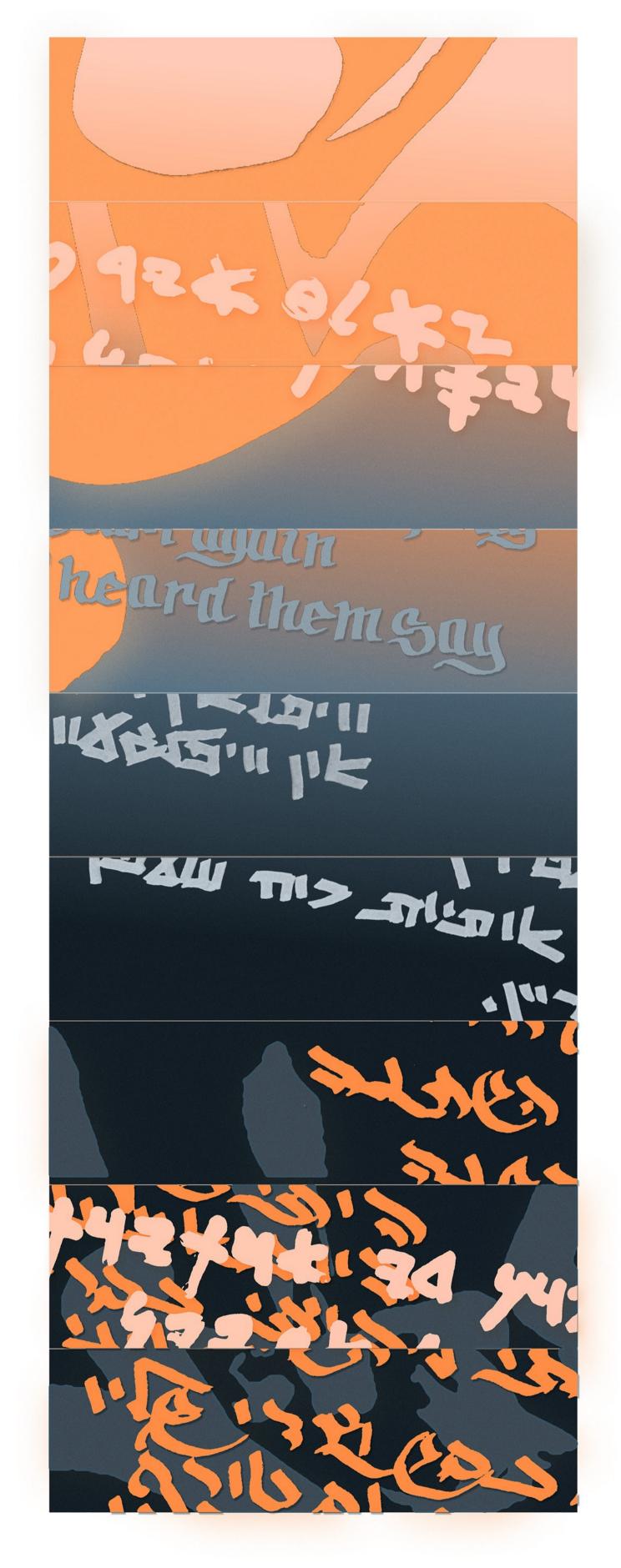
Email: mural@philaholocaustmemorial.org

## Mural Location 1631-1637 Arch Street



















January 29, 2025

To: Philadelphia Art Commission

In 2021, the Philadelphia Holocaust Remembrance Foundation (PHRF) approached Mural Arts Philadelphia to consider creating a public-facing mural on the wall that sits as the backdrop for the Horwitz-Wasserman Holocaust Memorial Plaza located on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway between 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Street. After an extensive search for an artist and a comprehensive community engagement process, we would like to present to the Art Commission our concept review submission at the February 12th meeting.

Our desire is to complete this project by late summer/early fall of 2025. During the concept review, PHRF will present the project, accompanied by representatives from the Mural Arts Philadelphia, and our selected artist, Ella Ponizovsky Bergelson who will join us virtually.

We thank you for your consideration. We look forward to sharing the project proposal with you and the Commissioners.

With Kinds Regards,

Ember Cutous

Eszter Kutas Executive Director Philadelphia Holocaust Remembrance Foundation 1617 JFK Blvd 20th Floor, Unit 2015 Philadelphia, PA 19103 215.809.2474



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