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Opening Night for Hostile Terrains

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Opening Night for Hostile Terrains

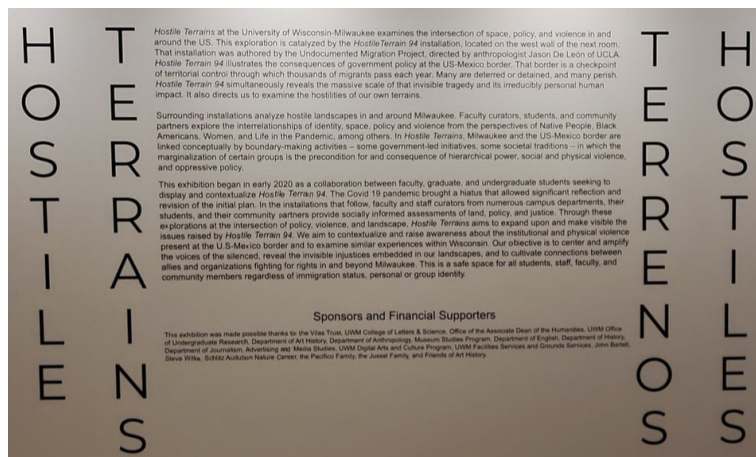
11/11/2021

By Kayla Fettig



The imagery featured in the re-creation of De León's HT94 Exhibit is constructed by museum staff and visitors, who are welcome to fill and hang toe tags during the exhibition. Over 3,200 tags will be filled out by the end of the exhibit. Photo by Kayla Fettig.

The *Hostile Terrains* UW-Milwaukee exhibition marked the first opening of the [Emile H. Mathis Art Gallery](#) since the start of the pandemic. The exhibition opened on September 30th, 2021 hosting the *HT94* exhibit by Jason De León, Professor of Anthropology and Chicana/o Studies at UCLA, which raises awareness about migrant death at the US-Mexico border. As part of UW-Milwaukee's *Hostile Terrains* exhibition, UWM faculty, graduate, and undergraduate students contributed contextualized exhibits of similar experiences within Wisconsin.



Visitors that enter the gallery are immediately welcomed to read the *Hostile Terrains* description that sets the tone for visitors to understand how the exhibits were inspired by hostile terrains in Wisconsin. Photo by Kayla Fettig.

Opening night of the exhibition brought together masked exhibit creators and masked patrons that collectively moved through the gallery exchanging thoughts and feelings provoked by each installation. Emotional conversations filled each corner of the gallery as people discussed how each exhibit exposed them to knowledge, history, tradition, policy, and violence. This isn't surprising given the large display on the left wall detailing the goals of both De León's original exhibit and the exhibit's creations inspired by De

León. The three paragraphs spanning the wall both welcome and prepare viewers for the installations they are about to view. Many people stop to read the statement plastered on the wall, while others opt to skim through it and create space for others to enter the gallery. In the first room of the exhibits, there are several installations overtaking the gallery walls for viewers to digest. Each exhibit proves that it could stir the emotions of people differently.

After viewers get a sense of the gallery's purpose by reading the three paragraphs on the north wall, they are welcomed by a long hall that opens up into a larger gallery. Whether you look to your left or right you are met with a new exhibit that, in one way or another, invokes a ray of emotions. Visitors chattered and grouped across the gallery taking in the collaborative and solo projects of 7 departments and 35 students.



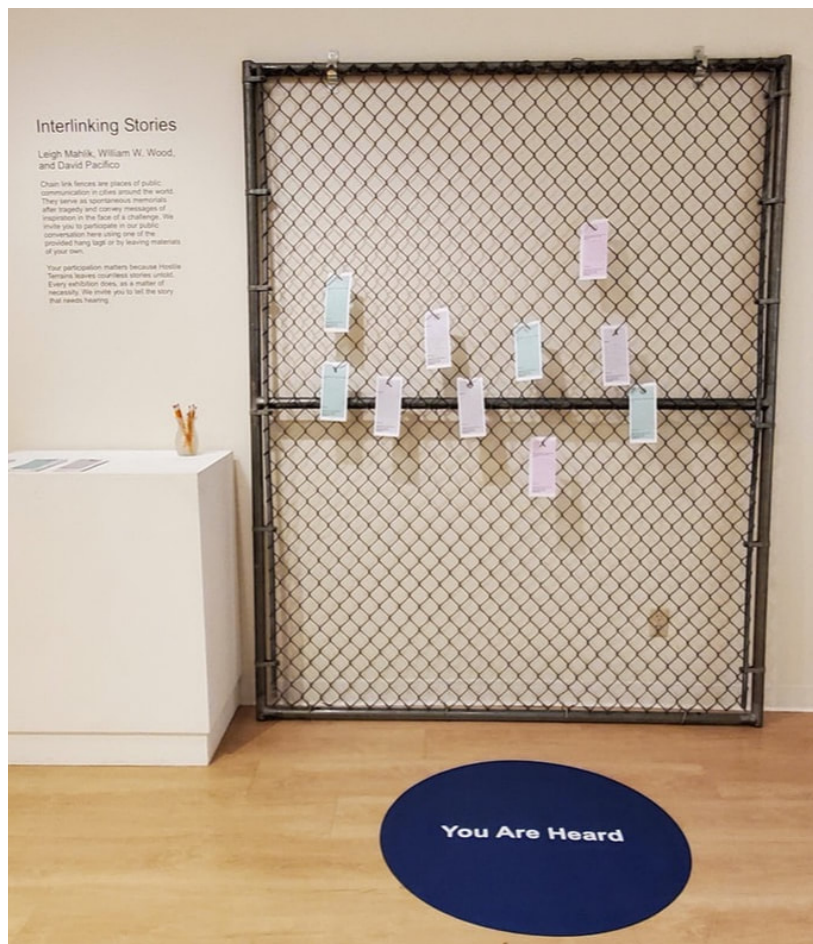
"Community Fabric" by Adam Jussel and Aragorn Quinn. Photo by Kayla Fettig.

The first exhibit sparking a wide range of emotions from visitors was the display: "Community Fabric". The "Community Fabric" display by [Adam Jussel](#) and [Aragorn Quinn](#) wraps patrons in both the display and detailed commentary on its purpose linked to the exhibit. The exhibit is the only of its kind in the gallery as you are forced to actually walk through it to get to the others (although the photo displays them side by side that are actually across from one another), as the display is cast across jutting walls that face each other. The adjacent walls display different

colored and textured fabric represent “traditional dress from all six inhabited continents” accompanied by driftwood provided by the [Schlitz Audubon Nature Center](#).

Many visitors examined the small, but impactful details Jussel and Quinn incorporated in their exhibit. The use of space, the layering of different fabrics, the use of multicultural textiles and colors, and the large barrier of protection of the artifacts by the driftwood. Many read the text out loud, while others stoically reflected on the exhibit itself.

The exhibit that seemed to intrigue the most guests (besides the recreation of De León’s HT94 exhibit) in the gallery was the brainchild of [Leigh Mahlik](#), [William W. Wood](#), and the gallery Director, [David Pacifico](#) titled “Interlinking Stories.” This community piece communicates that it



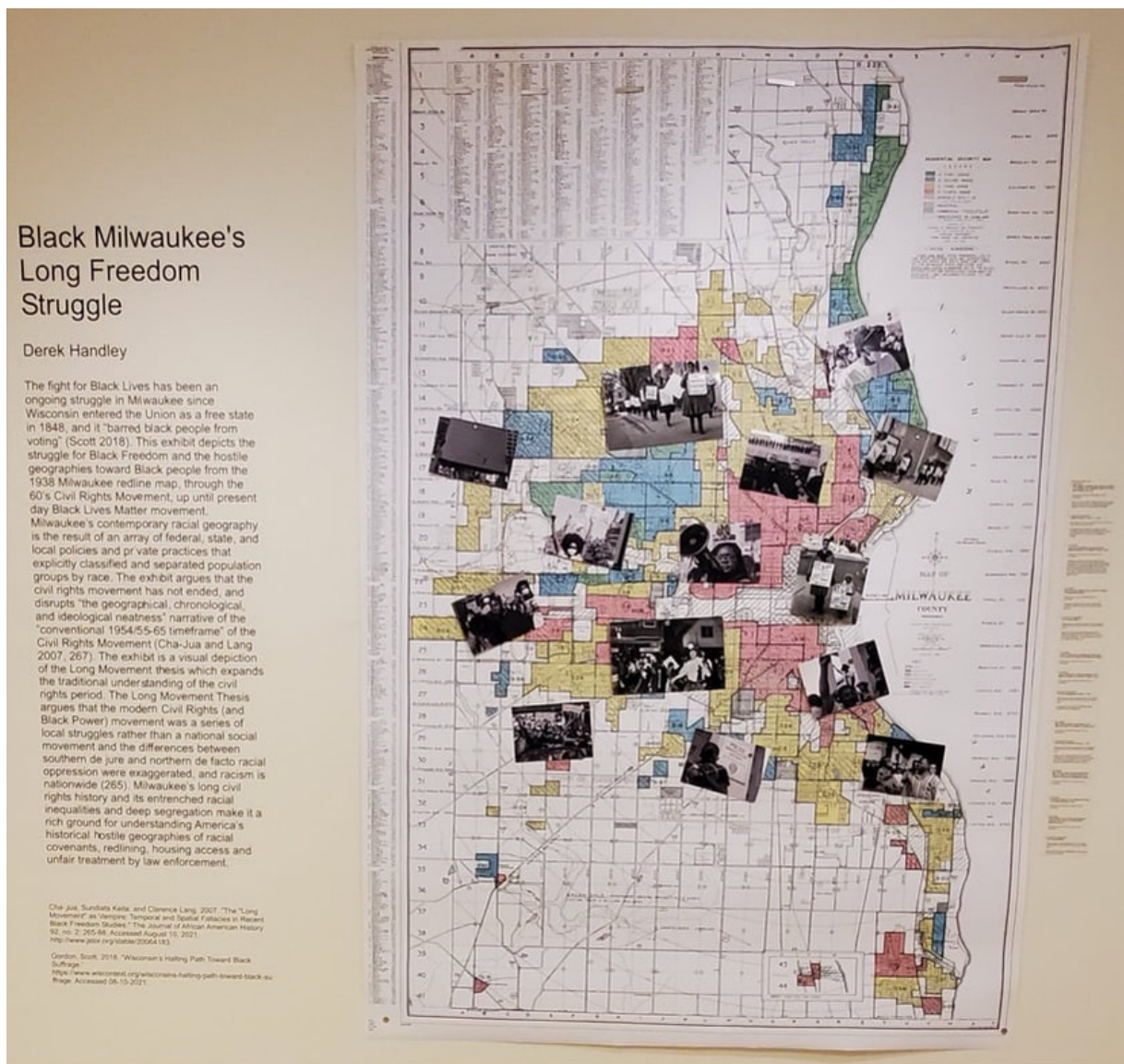
“serves as spontaneous memorials after tragedy and conveys messages of inspiration in the face of challenges.” The physical presence of the fence seems to catch and overwhelm those looming over the exhibit. The exhibit invites visitors to collectively add to the links in the fence, by telling an untold story they feel needs to be told. At first many hesitate to contribute, as they chatter about how important or not their story is, and if it belongs on the fence. Few step forward, willing to be vulnerable as they do their best to convey their story but the “You Are Heard” blue dot placed on the floor in front of the display gives participants the courage to hang their stories.

“Interlinking Stories” by Leigh Mahlik, William W. Wood, and David Pacifico; slips of colored paper and pencils are provided to allow guests to link their stories to the fence, with the encouragement of the “You Are Heard” floor sticker. Photo by Kayla Fetting.

“Black Milwaukee’s Long Freedom Struggle,” by [Dr. Derek Handley](#) is one of the larger exhibits in the gallery

and has no problem drawing the crowd of gallery-goers closely in. The rows of spectators eventually inch towards the exhibit allowing for an up-close inspection of the map of Milwaukee

and the array of black and white photos plastered over specific neighbors. Pictures of Milwaukee's Black citizens participating in protests such as the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Live Matter Movement. Photos that capture the pain, anguish, anger, fear, and history black citizen in Milwaukee have historically gone through. Captivated by the trauma, many people stand silently, otherwise, remark on the photos and map and how remarkably powerful the exhibit is. A select few—including myself—silently wipe the tears from their eyes and try to compose themselves before they move to the next exhibit. Dr. Handley's attention to detail and emotional use of photography captures the tone that many have emotionally expressed: "This struggle for freedom for Milwaukee's Black citizens is not yet over."



Dr. Derek Handley's Map of "Black Milwaukee's Long Freedom Struggle" can be found in the second room of the gallery. Photo by Kayla Fettig.

The *Hostile Terrains* exhibition offers not only a glimpse at De León's original *HT94* exhibit but has also allowed faculty and staff to invite the public to understand that Wisconsin too has its own history of hostile terrains. Each exhibit (and there are many more than showcased in this quick snapshot) tells their own story, invokes their own emotions, and engages with visitors differently.

To experience it for yourself, UW-Milwaukee invites you to stop by the Emile H. Mathis Art Gallery located in [Mitchell Hall](#), Room 170. The exhibition will run through February 10, 2022. The Mathis Gallery is open Monday through Thursday, from 10 am-4 pm, or you may make an appointment by emailing pacifico@uwm.edu.