

Transcript of Audio Clip
Michelle Angela Ortiz, NJMML North Jersey Monument Artist

“My name is Michelle Angela Ortiz, and I am the monument artist for North New Jersey. Being a part of the New Jersey Monuments to Migration and Labor Project has been really a great experience in the sense of just learning more about New Jersey in general, but also specifically the different stories in North New Jersey.

I think that coming at it at the point that I entered, right, which was already months of dialogues, engaging with community members, the different teaching artists that engaged already with the community members, I was able to kind of see on a larger perspective all of the different conversations that came out of that.

And so, it was a lot of content, which is a good thing, but also very challenging in the sense of how to envision a monument. And in this case, I'm not envisioning one, but a number or a series of monuments, just so that it is really being mindful in terms of the design, including multiple voices and the different stories and histories that have been shared.

I think what I really have, you know, have taken from some of these conversations. Because I think people like to focus specifically on demographics, or “I'm from Jersey City, or I'm from Newark, or I'm from Paterson.” And then even when we think about labor, too, there's all these different forms of labor.

And I have been very interested in what's kind of like that common thread or that common theme in these conversations.

So the monuments, although they will be representing different migrant and immigrant groups that have been a part of this history for, past and present, it is speaking to this current moment. It is speaking to, what are the stories that we want to share at this moment and how are we representing that?

So beyond the labor, it's really around these common themes of justice and perseverance of ancestors and descendants in the sense of legacy.

What is the legacy overall of honoring those different migrant and immigrant groups that have built this foundation or standing of which new immigrant and migrant groups are able to work and survive and contribute to our country?”