

The sculpture "Distant Mirrors" is an archipelago--a cluster of islands--connected by history, water, and oil. The largest island is based on the map drawn up by Roger Williams, founder of Providence Plantation, which set aside 52 plots of land for Williams' followers who shared his belief in religious freedom and separation of church and state.

For it's first two weeks in the Providence River, this "sculptural map" was populated by architecture based on that of Rhode Island's early 17th century settlers and of the Narragansett Indians, who gave land to Williams and to the settlers. After two weeks, this architecture was replaced by architecture of the 21st century oil economy--including an oil refinery, a "McMansion", and the ubiquitous triple-decker apartments which often house urban working-class New Englanders.

Floating nearby were two islands in the shape of the North American landmass--each a mirror image of the other. They were surrounded by shapes representing the oil fields of the leading suppliers of crude oil to the United States: Canada, Nigeria, Venezuela, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia.

"Distant Mirrors" was fashioned from plastic, itself a product made from oil and water. To make the sculpture, thousands of plastic water and milk bottles were collected from the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation and then scrubbed clean and cut apart.

The utopian community founded by Roger Williams eventually fractured--broken apart by individual profit seeking by white settlers and increasing animosity between settlers and the native population. Today, unchecked consumption and exploitation of our natural resources echo and reflect these early traumas of 17th century America. While oil companies reap enormous profits, the profligate use of oil has resulted in global inequality, class conflict, and war.

"Distant Mirrors" asked the viewer to consider the butterfly effect of even the simplest action: As you take a sip of water from a plastic bottle, do you catch a glimpse of a reflection in a distant mirror?

ELLEN DRISCOLL

### Ghosts of a Landscape

*...having made covenant of peaceable neighborhood with all the sachems and natives around about us, and having, in a sense of God's merciful providence unto me in my distress, called the place PROVIDENCE, I desired it might be for a shelter for persons distressed for conscience;*

Just of quarter of a mile northeast of here, three hundred and seventy five years ago, Roger Williams and a small group of followers set forth a "lively experiment" in freedom and established the first civil society in the New World. He called this settlement Providence.

Here, one's personal beliefs were not dictated by the government but, instead, by one's conscience. It was in Providence that Williams wrote in 1644, "...the sovereign original and foundation of civil government lies in the people." Those persecuted elsewhere for their beliefs made their way to Rhode Island, a refuge where one could exercise "soul freedom".

This original settlement was laid out according to these emerging democratic ideals. Every one of the original 52 lots, including Williams', was the same size, fronted the common lands and included access to the fresh water spring. Landowners, both women and men, each had a voice in the governance of this new society.

The preamble to the United States Constitution begins with the three simple words that are written larger than any others, *We the People*. These words and what they stand for are rooted in the beliefs that Roger Williams put into practice here and serve as the foundation for what it means to be an American. It is this legacy and its interpretation by artist Ellen Driscoll in her work, *Distant Mirrors*, that we celebrate today.

JOHN McNIFF

PARK RANGER, ROGER WILLIAMS NATIONAL  
MEMORIAL

