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**The Silk Road Project's Spring 2009 Residency at Rhode Island School of Design  
Includes Behind-the-Scenes Look at New Multimedia Musical Work  
with Set Design by RISD Alumnus Henrik Söderstrøm**

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*Residency Turns Focus to Bringing Music, Arts and Culture to the Broader Community  
Leading up to Launch of Silk Road Ensemble with Yo-Yo Ma's North American Tour in Providence*

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PROVIDENCE, RI — February 16, 2009 — Rhode Island School of Design [RISD] is pleased to announce that this year's Silk Road Project residency is focused on bringing the diverse cultural offerings of the Silk Road Project to the greater Rhode Island community. The fifth annual residency will include a workshop at RISD for area high school students, a discussion with the creators of the Silk Road Ensemble's new multimedia performance *Layla and Majnun*, and an exhibition of accompanying artwork. The piece will debut in North America during the Silk Road Ensemble with Yo-Yo Ma's North American tour, which begins with a concert presented by FirstWorks at the Providence Performing Arts Center [PPAC] on March 6 [tickets at ppacri.org].

Teachers from Woonsocket's Beacon Charter High School for the Arts, Pawtucket's JMW School for the Performing and Visual Arts, Central Falls High School, Providence's Hope High School, Textron/Chamber of Commerce Providence Public Charter School, and Gilbert Stuart Middle School with Providence After School Alliance were provided with *Along the Silk Road* study guides, courtesy of FirstWorks, as part of their extended program of educational outreach. Developed by the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE) and the Silk Road Project, the study guide introduces lessons on the history, geography and music of the ancient Silk Road.

On March 4, the curriculum will come to life for students from these high schools during a private interactive *Music of the Silk Road* educational workshop led by Yo-Yo Ma at the RISD Auditorium. This program also features renowned mugham vocalist Alim Qasimov and fellow Silk Road Ensemble musicians. Hailed as a Living National Treasure in his native Azerbaijan, Qasimov will later take center stage with his daughter Fargana during the performance of *Layla and Majnun* at PPAC.

RISD is pleased to announce that recent graduate Henrik Söderstrøm [Furniture Design 2008] was selected from a pool of national candidates to design the set for *Layla and Majnun*, the Silk Road Ensemble's new multimedia chamber arrangement of a beloved Central Asian opera based on a series of Arabian and Persian tales of ill-fated love often likened to *Romeo and Juliet*.

Söderstrøm participated in the 2008 Silk Road Project residency that took place at RISD, which focused on *Folktales in the Digital Age*. On March 4, joined by lighting designer Aaron Copp and Silk Road Ensemble members, Söderstrøm will return to RISD to lead a discussion in the Tap Room on the set creation for *Layla and Majnun*, sharing his experiences on the collaborative process of creating the visual design.

His original sketches, materials and models will also be presented in a colorful exhibition during the discussion and will remain up through the week. **Discussion and exhibition are open to RISD students, faculty and staff, and will take place on March 4 at 3:00 in the Tap Room, 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Memorial Hall, 226 Benefit Street, Providence.**

In 2005 RISD entered a multi-year affiliation with the Silk Road Project, an artistic and educational organization founded by cellist Yo-Yo Ma in 1998. In keeping with the Project's mission to promote learning through the arts, the partnership encourages RISD students, faculty and the larger community to explore cross-cultural artistic expression through workshops and performances centered on music, storytelling, visual art and other cultural traditions.

"When we enlarge our view of the world, we also deepen our understanding of our own lives and culture," Ma said. "This spring at RISD we are continuing an ongoing investigation of two types of expressive media—music and the visual arts. That each residency brings new opportunities for exploring responsive collaborations across art forms speaks to the innovative, creative relationship we have developed with the RISD community."

"We are extremely pleased that this year's residency is focused on bringing the Silk Road Ensemble to the greater Rhode Island community," said RISD Provost Jessie Shefrin. "The Silk Road Project has been a vibrant part of RISD for years, and by bringing the language of music to high school classrooms throughout the region, they're helping to create new paths for integrated arts learning that will change the way these students view the world. We're also incredibly proud of alumnus Henrik Söderström for his stunning visual design for the *Layla and Majnun* set, and thankful for his return to RISD to share his experience of creation."

"The Silk Road Ensemble draws its exceptional performers from cities and towns the world over, and the Silk Road Project is in many ways a uniquely global cultural organization," said Laura Freid, Silk Road Project CEO and executive director. "The Project has been based here in Providence since 2005, when we launched our affiliation with RISD, and over the past several years this local partnership has engaged students and faculty providing wonderful opportunities for creative exchanges and artistic development. This year we are pleased to collaborate with both RISD and FirstWorks on educational programs and performances that will broaden our reach to the greater Rhode Island community."

The Spring 2009 Silk Road Project residency at RISD is supported by Lead Sponsor Bank Rhode Island and Sponsor Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge LLP.

### **About Rhode Island School of Design**

Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) has earned a worldwide reputation as the preeminent art and design college in the country. Today, with more than 26,000 alumni, the college enrolls 1,926 undergraduates and 426 graduate students from the United States and almost 50 countries, offering degree programs in the fine arts, architecture, and design disciplines, and art education. Academic programs include research and design initiatives, the exploration of art criticism and contemporary cultural concerns, as well as international exchange programs. Each year, RISD hosts prominent and accomplished artists, critics, and authors to its campus. Included within the college is The RISD Museum of Art, which houses a world-class collection of art objects from Ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome and art of all periods from Asia, Europe and the Americas, as well as the latest in contemporary art. For more information, visit [www.risd.edu](http://www.risd.edu) or [our.risd.edu](http://our.risd.edu).

### **About the Silk Road Project and the Silk Road Ensemble**

The Silk Road Project is a not-for-profit artistic, cultural and educational organization with a vision of connecting the world's neighborhoods by bringing together artists and audiences around the globe. Cellist Yo-Yo Ma founded the Project in 1998 as a catalyst to promote innovation and learning through the arts. The Silk Road Project takes inspiration from the historical Silk Road trading route as a modern metaphor for multicultural and interdisciplinary exchange. Under the artistic direction of Mr. Ma and the leadership of CEO and Executive Director Laura Freid, the Silk Road Project presents performances by the Silk Road Ensemble, a collective of internationally renowned musicians, composers, arrangers, visual artists and storytellers from more than 20 countries; engages in cross-cultural exchanges and residencies; leads workshops for students; and partners with leading cultural institutions to create educational materials and programs. The Silk Road Project is affiliated with Harvard University and RISD, where the Silk Road Ensemble holds regular residencies to promote cross-cultural and interdisciplinary interaction with students and faculty. Developing new music is a central mission of the Silk Road Project, which has been involved in commissioning more than 60 new musical and multimedia works from composers and arrangers from around the world.

The Silk Road Project's 2009 residency at RISD is part of the Silk Road Project's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which launched in October 2008 with a special performance at the United Nations for U.N. Day. Other highlights include a series of performances, premieres and innovative educational programs in North America; a European tour with festival concerts in England, Belgium, Germany Switzerland and Romania; and a series of performances at Lincoln Center, marking the first performance by the Silk Road Ensemble with Yo-yo Ma at the New York performing arts campus, including a free outdoor concert in Damrosch Park that will be telecast on *Live From Lincoln Center*.

### **About FirstWorks**

As a model private/public partnership with the City of Providence's Department of Art, Culture + Tourism, FirstWorks was launched as a vehicle to build community, reach underserved audiences, and present extraordinary arts programs that elevate Providence's national profile. FirstWorks connects art with audiences through performing arts festivals, youth education and special projects. FirstWorks was launched in 2004 as a vehicle to build community and present extraordinary arts programs that elevate the national profile of Providence, RI. In collaboration with the Providence's Department of Art, Culture & Tourism, FirstWorks has produced eight groundbreaking arts festivals, attracted 55,000 participants, and engaged more than 100 nonprofit community organizations and schools. Visit [www.first-works.org](http://www.first-works.org) to learn more.

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