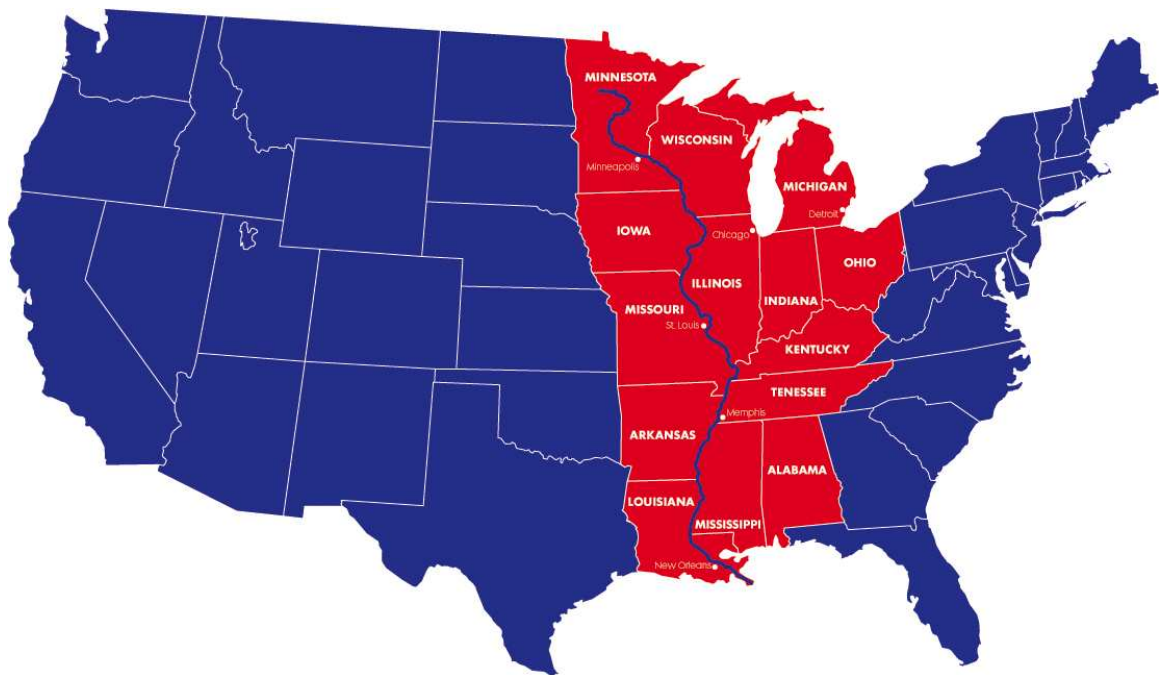


## What is Heartland?



From the perspective of a United States citizen, the word 'Heartland' usually refers to the Midwest, an area which includes the north-central states of the United States of America, specifically Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin. This terminology however, has been stretched to accommodate various uses, such as the 'fly over states', the 'great plains' and 'the forgotten land'. In reference to the interdisciplinary exhibition project, Heartland, we like to use this term in a more metaphorical way – as meaning the 'heart' of the country.

While not an official region, what Mark Twain once called the 'body of the nation' encompasses for us the area roughly in the middle of the United States, linked by the symbolic Mississippi River. Ranging from New Orleans in the south, up to Minneapolis in the West and Detroit in the East, this cultural melting pot has brewed much of the country's social, religious and racial activism. The presence of the Mississippi River has dominated its history being the carrier of different moments of migration, industrialization and struggle. Many of the vital organs of the country's artistic and musical expression are embedded in this middle ground between the West and East coasts and yet this zone is obscured on the global cultural and economic map.

As a result of this underexposure, the prevailing stereotypes of rustic, small-town backwardness remain entrenched in outsider imaginings of Mississippi Basin life and culture. We are talking about a vast distance of land that is more than 20 times the size of the Netherlands!

With the current US presidential elections, it becomes even more important to look into this specific area, beyond the clichés dominating much coverage of the elections. Impressions of this powerful nation's voting behaviour received by European audiences are mostly mediated by the East Coast of the United States. Many of the swing vote areas, however, lie in the country's interior and the front runner for the Democratic party, Barack Obama is himself based in Chicago, Illinois. A 'swing state' (also, battleground state or purple state) in United States presidential politics is a state in which no candidate has overwhelming support, which are not historically 'red' or 'blue' states, but change constantly.

By collaborating with various independent American and European artists, institutions and engaging within and with independent cultural infrastructure, the interdisciplinary project Heartland operates not only within the contemporary art production but looks across other art forms, and in particular at the area's rich musical tradition to tell a new story about an old country.