

DESIGNING A SENSE OF PLACE: THE EVOLUTION OF PARTICIPATORY
COMMEMORATIVE ART IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
AMERICAN LANDSCAPE

by

CAROLINE CONLEY MCDONALD

(Under the Direction of Wayde Brown)

ABSTRACT

The origins of site-based, participatory commemorative art in America began in the mid-twentieth century as a response to traditional representational memorials, empty modernist formalism, and a growing desire for the public commemoration of the country's significant history, leaders, and events. The aesthetics of these experiential memorials were influenced by the form, as well as the conceptual and rhetorical qualities, of contemporary outdoor sculpture, architecture and landscape architecture and their emphasis on environmental art, site-specific sculpture and earthworks. This mid-twentieth century postmodern commemorative art provided the aesthetic and political foundation for the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* and the proliferation of participatory memorials in the 1980-90s. This thesis examines late-twentieth century American participatory commemorative art as a distinct and significant cultural resource brought about by the unique socio-cultural values inherent in public commemoration, experience-based aesthetics and the inclusivist political ideology of its era.

INDEX WORDS: American Commemorative Art–Twentieth Century, Civil Rights Memorial, Environmental Art, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, Memorials–Twentieth Century, New England Holocaust Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

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DEDICATION

“If you want someone to be ignored then build a lifesize bronze statue of them and stick it in the middle of town. It doesn’t matter how great you were, it’ll always take an unfunny drunk with climbing skills to make people notice you.”

— Banksy

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“We erect monuments so that we shall always remember, and build memorials so that we shall never forget.”¹

The origins of site-based, experiential memorials in America, as exemplified in Maya Lin’s *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (1982), began in the mid-twentieth century as a reaction to traditional representational memorials, ‘empty’ modernist formalism, and a growing desire for the public commemoration of the country’s significant history, leaders, and events. The renewed interest in national collective memory and public history at the mid-century spawned a desire to improve communities through education about the past, both by preserving historic buildings and districts as well as designing commemorative public artworks that created a ‘sense of place’ for the visitor. The aesthetic of commemorative art created during the 1960-70s was influenced by the form, as well as the conceptual and political stance, of contemporary outdoor sculpture, architecture, and landscape architecture and the emergence of environmental art, site-specific sculpture, and earthworks. These works provided the aesthetic and political foundation for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the proliferation of ‘participatory commemorative art’ constructed in the 1980-90s. The term ‘participatory commemorative art’ denotes a distinct type of constructed memorial space defined by its

¹ Arthur C. Danto, *The Wake of Art: Criticism, Philosophy, and the Ends of Taste* (Amsterdam: G + B Arts, 1998), 153.

site-specific and experiential design, abstract formal elements, and unique ability to present both personal and collective memory.² The central question this thesis explores is which cultural, historical, and aesthetic properties make participatory commemorative art a distinct cultural resource? By discussing the role of memory in public commemoration and memorial construction and tracing the aesthetic and cultural history and evolution of memorials in America, this thesis establishes a framework to understand the socio-cultural and aesthetic values that brought about these commemorative spaces in order to define participatory commemorative art as a unique and significant resource. This study promotes a higher level of appreciation and education about memorials and the nuances of public memory, and provides a practical basis for recommendations for the conservation and management of these sites.

Though participatory commemorative artworks have defined national public memory (and the controversy around it) for the last fifty years, surprisingly little has been written about them. With the exception of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial— which has a sizeable body of critical literature pertaining to its construction, meaning and controversy, including founder Jan Scruggs’ account, *To Heal a Nation* and Kristen Hass’s, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*— many of these places have been largely forgotten or ignored by art historians and preservationists alike. As snapshots of the collective attitude toward a person or event in America’s past, at a particular moment in history, these resources in essence commemorate two histories: the past they are memorializing, and the contemporary

² This term is a variation on ‘participatory public commemorative art’ used by Nicholas Capasso in his dissertation, “The National Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Context: Commemorative Public Art in America, 1960-1997” (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 1998), 324.

society that has given form and content to the memorial. In this sense, participatory memorials offer us a double glimpse into American cultural and aesthetic values of the last half of the twentieth century. This study incorporates a detailed look at selected significant memorials in order to identify common values shared within the meaning and forms of participatory memorials in America. This study establishes a foundation and structure through which to better understand the contextual history and significance of these resources and to encourage further education and scholarship. This provides a basis for recommendations and policies regarding the management and conservation of such sites.

Though this thesis discusses the history of public commemoration in America as a background and point of origin for late-twentieth century memorials, the primary area of focus will be on commemorative spaces designed and constructed between 1960 and 1997. These dates represent the signposts of a period of collective impetus, not only to remember the past, but to memorialize it in a very specific way, through a built space composed of site-specific, experience-based aesthetics and highly politicized rhetoric. Though cultural attitudes and aesthetics are discussed in general terms, specific American memorial sites are used as case studies to illustrate the evolution of participatory memorials and the distinct cultural, political, and artistic values that define them.

As a means to better identify the memorial sites being examined in this thesis, the term ‘public commemorative art’ is used as presented by Nicholas Capasso in his dissertation, “The National Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Context: Commemorative Public Art in America, 1960-1997”. He defines the term as descriptive of objects or spaces which “...exist to commemorate intentionally, or call to mind, historical events,

individual persons, or groups of people in some way related to one another.... They are works of art, sited in public spaces, officially sanctioned by federal, state, or local governments, and are intended to address all members of the general populace.”³ This term is used for addressing memorial works in general, however the term ‘participatory commemorative art’ describes public commemorative art that falls within the specific category of being an experiential, site-specific, multivocal, artwork built in the last four decades of the twentieth century.

To further clarify the language used in this thesis, a discussion of the meanings and connotations of the terms ‘memorial’ and ‘monument’ is warranted. The differences and similarities in the meanings and usages of these terms has long been debated by scholars without consensus; art historian and critic Arthur Danto presents a distillation of typical connotations, stating that the term ‘monument’ signifies celebration, positive remembrance, and the eternal present, while the term ‘memorial’ denotes the sacred, mourning, and the finality of the past. He writes, “Monuments make heroes and triumphs, victories and conquests, perpetually present and part of life. The memorial is a special precinct, extruded from life, a segregated enclave where we honor the dead.”⁴ While the term ‘monument,’ derived from the Latin word *monere*, literally means ‘to remind,’ art historian Donald Reynolds casts it in a more political light, stating: “...our monuments are the physical embodiments of the fundamental principles of our cultural heritage and are one of the primary means by which we communicate our traditions, beliefs, and values from generation to generation.”⁵ Memorials also inform the present

³ Nicholas Capasso, “The National Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Context: Commemorative Public Art in America, 1960-1997” (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 1998), 7-8.

⁴ Danto, 153.

⁵ Donald Reynolds, *Masters of American Sculpture: The Figurative Tradition from the American Renaissance to the Millennium* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993), 61-3.

about the past, however Marita Sturken further argues that memorials specifically are “contemplative rather than declarative.”⁶ Aside from these linguistic differences, ‘monument’ and ‘memorial’ differ significantly in aesthetic connotation. Monuments are large and imposing (thus the term ‘monumental’) and typically refer to forms that range from works of corporate or ecclesiastical architecture or natural landscapes to representational sculptures. Memorials are smaller and more intimate and encompass less tangible forms of remembrance such as liturgical rites, parades, place names, and philanthropic foundations as well as many varieties of commemorative structures (both representational and funerary). Because of these differences in language and aesthetics, the term ‘memorial’ will be primarily used in this study to denote works of commemorative public art.

The research for this study included literature review, archival, and site visits to memorials in Washington, D.C. and Boston, MA. Because the design of these commemorative spaces centered on creating a unique memorial place, the best way to understand their full cultural and aesthetic impact is to personally experience them.

This thesis approaches the subject of participatory commemorative art by addressing the historical, cultural, and political influences, in addition to the stylistic synthesis found in participatory memorials in the last four decades of the twentieth century. In order to fully understand these works in cultural and aesthetic context, the second chapter explores the role that memory plays in the desire to build memorials, discussing issues of personal and collective memory, identity, and nostalgia. Chapter three presents a brief history of commemorative art in America from the 1860s through

⁶ Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997), 53.

1950s, focusing specifically on war-related commemoration as a gauge for the stylistic and cultural type of memorials built during this period. The fourth chapter identifies the beginning of the shift toward participatory memorials by highlighting the influence of environmental art, place-making, the renewed interest in public history, and the design of early participatory memorials, including the role of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in defining the essential character of participatory commemorative art on a national scale. Chapter five discusses the proliferation of participatory memorials built after the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (including additions to the VVM site) with an emphasis on the Civil Rights Memorial and the New England Holocaust Memorial as examples of a larger cultural and political movement toward widespread commemoration and memory construction. Chapter six provides a summary and recommendations for the conservation and management of participatory commemorative art.

CHAPTER 2

THE ROLE OF MEMORY IN MEMORIAL CONSTRUCTION

“Memories are not ready-made reflections of the past, but eclectic, selective reconstructions based on subsequent actions and perceptions and on ever-changing codes by which we delineate, symbolize, and classify the world around us.”⁷

The impulse to build memorials as permanent, public reminders of persons or events in the past is reflective of a culture’s attitude and connection to its history. Memories of the past are shaped by the circumstances of the present, while conversely, the present is defined by a remembrance of what has past.⁸ Because a society’s relationship to the past determines how its history will be remembered, memory in a cultural context can be examined through three main avenues: as both personal and collective expressions of a remembered past, as a forger of identity, and as a vehicle for nostalgia. Through a discussion of these determiners and products of memory, their role in shaping public commemoration, aesthetic language, and rhetorical sensibility can be further identified.

Personal and Collective Memory

Cultural memory is “...memory that is shared outside the avenues of formal historical discourse yet is entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning.”⁹ It is created by the “...social body’s beliefs and values, rituals, and

⁷ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1985), 210.

⁸ Lowenthal, XVI.

⁹ Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997), 3.

institutions....” and expresses itself publicly through museums, memorials, and monuments and personally through individual remembrances.¹⁰ Because of this personal and collective nature of cultural memory, it is an ever-evolving narrative that changes according to public and individual awareness and feelings. Despite the seeming disconnection between individual and public memory, these two avenues of remembrance feed off each other to create a consensus about what comprises a society’s past. David Lowenthal argues in his book, *The Past Is A Foreign Country*, that individuals impress their personal remembrances on public history to provide confirmation of their memories and to ensure their long-term recollection. At the same time, individuals use public history to shape their personal memories in order to connect their private pasts with collective memory: “Gratified that our memories are our own, we also seek to link our personal past with collective memory and public history.”¹¹

The tying together of personal and collective memory creates continuity between not just the past and the present but between different groups within a society. This establishes a public historical and cultural memory that incorporates the experiences of many people, even if they are often conflicting or disputed, “... we have become increasingly conscious of how social and collective memory is constructed through a variety of discourses and in multi-layered sedimentations.”¹² The inclusion of many viewpoints within cultural memory creates both a more subjective and a more objective view of the past. By including the histories and experiences of various groups and peoples, a society may produce a more objective and homogeneous public memory but it

¹⁰ Andreas Huyssen, “Monument and Memory in a Postmodern Age.” (*Yale Journal of Criticism* 6, no. 2 (Fall 1993) : 249-261), 249.

¹¹ Lowenthal, 197.

¹² Huyssen, 257.

will still be dependent on the subjective interpretations of the past found in the memories of individual people. Because collective memory is formed out of this jumble of sources, it is often created or changed, both deliberately and unintentionally. These invented or altered cultural memories become as important and pervasive as ‘authenticated history’ and may determine to a greater extent the way a society views its present and future through the lens of its past.

Identity

A knowledge of the past is essential to a society’s and an individual’s sense of identity. Individual identity is rooted in past memories and experiences, “The past is integral to our sense of identity...the ability to recall and identify with our own past gives existence meaning, purpose, and value.”¹³ A person’s understanding and recollection of their past gives them a framework through which to recognize their role in the present and what they might become in the future. Without this knowledge, they are bereft of a fundamental understanding of their position within daily life and society at large.

Cultural identity is as crucial to a society’s well-being as personal identity is to an individual. Identity in a cultural context is dependent on the public memory of its social values, beliefs, rituals and institutions and is produced through objects, images and representations that illustrate its past or present: “Memory is crucial to the understanding of a culture precisely because it indicates collective desires, needs, and self-definitions.”¹⁴ Cultural identity is based not just on a common history, but on a common memory of that history. Individual pasts and identities play into the formulation of this remembrance creating a heterogeneous narrative.

¹³ Lowenthal, 41.

¹⁴ Sturken, 2-9.

Cultural identity defines the relationship between individuals within a society as well as their connection to people outside the society. The political implications of this are equally unifying and divisive. As cultural boundaries are defined, a determining of those who are a part of the culture and those who are not is necessarily produced. This can lead to conflicts within a society over who determines its values and memory, as well as create an attitude of exclusion (a culture being defined by what it is not). Within a diverse society, a consensus over what comprises its cultural values, beliefs and institutions may not be reached. This can either create a battle within the society with each faction vying for the recognition of their cultural interests or can create a new form of cultural identity based on a multivocal dialogue between different groups and individuals where all values and histories are celebrated.

Nostalgia

Nostalgia, though it may seem peripheral to the discussion of cultural memory, is essential to addressing the way societies and individuals view both history and their own past. As individuals habitually view history through the lens of present moment, their memories are rarely accurate and nostalgia serves to further dilute them with the addition of general forgetfulness, the deliberate erasure of painful memories, and a highly romanticized vision of the realities of the past. As Lowenthal writes, “It is no longer the presence of the past that speaks to us, but its pastness.”¹⁵ Nostalgia is employed by people and cultures to distance themselves from the painful and disturbing actualities of history, particularly those that conflict with contemporary social values and practices. Nostalgia shields the present from the reality of its origins, in order to discount its

¹⁵ Lowenthal, XVII.

meanings and implications for the future. Nostalgia is criticized for discouraging people from living fully in the present; the past as it is idealized or imagined is believed to be more pleasurable than the actuality of every day life in the modern era. Nostalgia for a past that never existed insinuates itself into cultural expressions of history, most evocatively in public memory and commemoration.

Memory and Public Commemoration

These different aspects of cultural memory: personal and collective memory, cultural and individual identity, and nostalgia, all create the meanings and forms of public commemoration. Public commemorative art is the product of complex political and social factors that determine what is included in cultural memory, who is a part of the culture, and whose version of the history is going to be presented. Sturken writes about the complications of memorialization, “In acts of public commemoration, the shifting discourse of history, personal memory, and cultural memory converge. Public commemoration is a form of history-making, yet it can also be a contested form of remembrance in which cultural memories slide through and into each other, creating a narrative tangle.”¹⁶ This tangle manifests itself through the aesthetics and rhetoric at nearly all American participatory commemorative sites, which continue to seek a narrative that will provide universal meanings for a society with increasingly few cultural connections. This mission to forge a common memory for a nation composed of diverse and often estranged pasts is tenuous at best and is fraught with complications and controversy. The long-term influence of these memorial places on American memory and

¹⁶ Sturken, 44.

culture cannot yet be determined; their immediate impact has been the construction of more memorials and the opening up of cultural space to previously ignored groups and interests.

CHAPTER 3

THE HISTORY OF COMMEMORATIVE ART IN AMERICA: 1860-1960

“Traditional memorial sculpture, whether it was funerary in nature or dedicated to ideas, events, or individuals, took a figurative form and was built with the assumption that the community that commissioned it existed as a historical continuity and that the values it expressed were shared.”¹⁷

From the founding of the United States, the form and content of the nation’s commemorative art was based on European models, specifically those invented by the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. The memorial forms developed in the western world of antiquity included the Egyptian pyramid and the obelisk; the Greek temple complex and representational and allegorical sculpture; and the Roman column and the triumphal arch. The narrative of these early memorials was as influential as their structure and focused on religious expression, mourning, the proclamation of military victory, and the veneration of leaders. The celebration of military victories for the cultures of ancient Egypt and Rome was limited to the acknowledgment of successful military leaders, not common soldiers (this extended to funerary expressions as well). For ancient Greece, however, the individual soldier was commemorated in death with marked graves and a proliferation of ‘fallen soldier’ memorial images and sculptures. Historian Kristin Hass argues that this difference in memorialization has to do with the position of the soldier within the culture; if the society’s soldiers were citizens, as in

¹⁷ Harriet F. Senie, *Contemporary Public Sculpture: Tradition, Transformation, and Controversy* (New York: Oxford University, 1992) 15.

ancient Greece, rather than hired mercenaries, as in Egypt and Rome then there was a stronger desire to commemorate their loss.¹⁸ This principle is evident in the individualized soldier and war remembrances designed in America, as its military beginning with the Civil War, was composed of primarily of citizens.

During the European Middle Ages, new and ancient memorial places and objects became part of the functional landscape of the towns and cities through the construction of city walls, moats, castles and cathedrals. These buildings and structures commemorated the pervasive influence of warfare and religion that dominated the society and culture of the period. Funerary commemoration expressed more explicit values of memory as the graves of soldiers of rank were ornamented with portraits of the deceased in military dress. This ‘honorable warrior’ pose was later translated into the American landscape as ‘unknown soldier’ or ‘everyman soldier’ commemorative statuary. The aesthetics and meanings of the monuments and memorials of the ancient western world were revived during the European Renaissance with the addition of the equestrian monument which celebrated military and political leaders.¹⁹ With the advent of the American and French Revolutions, the common soldier began to again be celebrated and ultimately memorialized, however it was not until the Civil War that American soldiers were buried with individual markers, instead of in mass battlefield graves.

Public commemorative artworks began to be constructed in America in the nineteenth century. The *Bunker Hill Monument*, in Boston, MA, was the first large-scale

¹⁸ Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 41-43.

¹⁹ James M. Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape: The American Experience and Beyond* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 1-3.



Figure 1. *Bunker Hill Monument*. Boston, MA, 1843.

memorial built in the United States (See Figure 1). Dedicated in 1843, the memorial was initiated by a group of local citizens to commemorate the Revolutionary War Battle of Bunker Hill. The construction of the obelisk-shaped memorial was seen as way to link the people of the mid-nineteenth century to the earlier generation of ‘patriots’ that founded the nation while the form borrowed from the aesthetic legacy of ancient Egyptian commemorative architecture.²⁰ This memorial is an early indicator of the influence of American nationalism which would find its full expression in the post-Civil War years as the nation commemorated both official and vernacular cultural memory.

The commemorative expression after the Civil War marked a new era of memorialization in the United States which can be defined as a ‘cult of sacrifice’ that shaped collective memory by relating it to grief and sorrow over the losses of the war and presenting that loss as an act of loyalty and a contribution to the salvation of the nation.²¹ This consolidation of public memory came about through a renewed acknowledgement of the sacrifices of the soldiers during the war and a strong desire to have each individual recognized. The Civil War was the first American conflict that buried the dead in individual marked graves; this denotes the social position of these soldiers within American society and the cultural importance of the individual. Because Civil War soldiers were not issued identification tags, bodies of the war dead were searched for any identifying items so that they could be named for the notification of the family and the erection of a burial marker.²² The marked burial was a gesture of respect toward the fallen soldier as well as a way to memorialize the loss of life. At the first national

²⁰ John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 21-25.

²¹ Bodnar, 28.

²² Hass, 36-45.

battlefield memorial cemetery at Gettysburg, PA dedicated by then-President Lincoln in 1863, the graves were placed not in the order of military hierarchy, but grouped together by state. This further illustrates the nationalist spirit that drove the commemoration at this and other Civil War memorial sites; “The impulse to remember the individual soldier as an emblem of the nation, in short, came at the moment of the flowering of nationalism.”²³ The result of this shift in memorialization was an increased emphasis on the remembrance of the fallen soldiers, rather than on the victories or losses of the war itself. This ‘cult of sacrifice’ was further consolidated with the Spanish-American War, when in 1898 a policy of repatriation for the bodies of American soldiers that died outside U.S. was initiated. This policy gave families the option of having their loved one’s remains disinterred and brought to America for an ‘honorable’ burial, thus securing the soldiers’ place as defenders and champions of the nation.

The legacy of commemoration following the Civil War produced another shift in the way American culture viewed death and burial. The Rural Cemetery Movement, which began earlier in the century with the planning of Mount Auburn Cemetery, outside of Boston, MA in 1831, influenced the design of the Battlefield Memorial at Gettysburg and became a national movement after the war. The Rural Cemetery Movement was initiated to bring burial grounds outside of crowded metropolitan centers and into more pastoral settings. These planned landscapes were meant to be used as a retreat from the city into the more healthy countryside and designed to serve as a setting for both mourning and recreation. These cemeteries allowed the tradition of individual burial to

²³ Hass, 35.

serve a civic function for the citizens by providing ‘rural sanctuaries’ as a peaceful resting place for the dead and as a place of leisure for the living.²⁴

The change in attitude toward the dead, as illustrated in the design and location of these cemeteries, is also evident in the shift in the form and content of the burial markers used to commemorate the dead. As opposed to the spare gray slate tombstones used in Protestant cemeteries which served to remind visitors of the inevitability of death, the markers in rural cemeteries were meant to encourage a reserved emotionalism about the sadness and loss of bereavement. These markers were elaborately carved memorials that relied on Egyptian and Roman commemorative structures such as the column, the obelisk and the pyramid and were often decorated with genealogies and patriotic signs; “This movement transformed burial markers in America from reminders of the facts of death to remembrances of the past.”²⁵ These cemeteries created a foundation of public memory that centered on the importance of the individual and the sorrow of death.

The next quantifiable shift in commemorative practice and forms in America occurred in the years after World War I. The physical remembrance of the ‘Great War,’ though it drew from previous memorial ideology and aesthetics represented a new era in commemorative artwork, “Driven by the sheer numbers of the dead and the ideological void left by the nature of the conflict, memorial commissions...turned to the lost bodies and to the names of the dead.”²⁶ Because the scale of the war and the large casualty rate, WWI elicited a greater response to the sorrow of loss than did any previous war: the nation wanted to commemorate the war as a warning against future wars.²⁷ As a result of

²⁴ Hass, 51-67.

²⁵ Hass, 71.

²⁶ Hass, 54.

²⁷ Hass, 55.

this explicit rhetoric of remembrance, two memorial types rose to forefront of commemoration after the war: the Doughboy statue and the monumental architectural memorials built on the battlefields of Europe.

The Doughboy, a free-standing sculpture of an infantry soldier, received its name as a result of the resemblance of the gold buttons on the uniform of the soldier to the form of a British cake called a 'doughboy' (See Figure 2). The Doughboy is a representational figure based on classical models of the fallen soldier and composed of a single male soldier in the distinctive uniform worn in WWI standing at attention with a rifle at his side. The figure is typically flanked by a tree trunk with leaves scattered at the base and around the feet of the soldier which represents that young life has been taken before its time. To further strengthen this reminder, the figure of the Doughboy is boyish with a young, hopeful face.

These sculptures were modeled on *The Hiker*, the statue of an infantry soldier used to commemorate the Spanish-American War that was created in 1906 by sculptor Theo Ruggles Kitson. Fifty castings of the sculpture were made and placed around the country as memorials to the common soldier or 'everyman.' While the Hiker was produced from the replication of one sculpture, the WWI Doughboy was interpreted by many artists, stonecutters, and local foundries. This resulted in the fabrication of various forms of the Doughboy; however, they were mainly mass-produced by the growing war memorial industry that sprang up in the post-war years. The widespread availability and affordable nature of these statues allowed them to be erected in many local communities that may not have been able afford to commission an original memorial. Though many,



Figure 2. E. M. Viquesney. *The Spirit of the American Doughboy*. Fort Smith, AR.

particularly among the art world elite, felt that the use of mass-produced memorials produced a generic commemorative sentiment, the Doughboy was meant as a local memorial and often had the name of the soldiers from the community that had been killed in the war engraved on its base.²⁸ The Doughboy presented one aspect of the warning against future wars by illustrating, if generically, the face of the sacrifice that is required for waging war. These sculptures commemorated the individual, even if he was not explicitly named or represented, much in the same way that the creation of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in 1921 at Arlington National Cemetery presented a general, if elaborate memorial for the American soldiers that died in WWI.²⁹

The large-scale memorial complexes created by the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) represent the stronghold that Beaux-Arts architectural style had on American commemorative aesthetic in the early part of the twentieth century. In addition to neo-traditionalist architecture, the memorial rhetoric portrayed through the representational imagery at these sites displayed conventional values of heroicism and sacrifice rather than loss and sorrow. At the end of WWI in 1919, the U.S. War Department made the decision to create permanent military cemeteries in Europe rather than undergo the costly repatriation of the bodies of the war dead, many of whom were already interred on the battlefields. To further this end, Congress created the ABMC, a seven member commission, in 1923 to oversee the building of appropriate cemetery and memorial complexes.³⁰ Most of the sites featured vast cemeteries composed of

²⁸ Reynolds, 153-158.

²⁹ Hass, 57.

³⁰ Elizabeth G. Grossman, "Architecture for a Public Client: The Monuments and Chapels of the American Battle Monuments Commission" (*The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (May, 1984), pp. 119-143), 120.

individual grave markers with a collective battlefield memorial placed nearby. These memorials were designed and constructed for battle sites in Europe and embraced a pared-down neoclassical style (See Figure 3). Though the ornamentation was spare, the scale of these commemorative structures was monumental. This aesthetic was supplemented by representational and decorative sculptural elements, often portraying crusader or triumphant warrior imagery and patriotic symbols such as the bald eagle.³¹ These images overtly provided commemorative meanings of valor and victory, while the sheer scale of the surrounding cemetery implicitly revealed the heavy losses sustained during the war; “Memorials for the First World War commemorated not only those who sacrificed their lives, but also the deep belief that there would be no more ‘great wars.’”³²

The built landscape created by British architects to commemorate the sacrifice of the WWI influenced the direction of American commemorative art in the twentieth century as much as the American-designed memorials. Much in the way the individual burial markers reflected the values of loss and presented a warning against future wars at the American cemetery memorials, the battlefield memorials built in France at Ypres (the Menin Gate) and at Thiépval reflect the commemorative significance of naming by listing the names of all of the British soldiers who were killed during the battles on their walls.

The Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing at Ypres, designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield, used the existing monumental arched gateway that served as an entryway into Ypres as the base structure of the memorial (See Figure 4). He enlarged the arched portal to create an interior barrel vault which could accommodate a listing of the 54,896 names

³¹ Mayo, 96-97.

³² Mayo, 99.

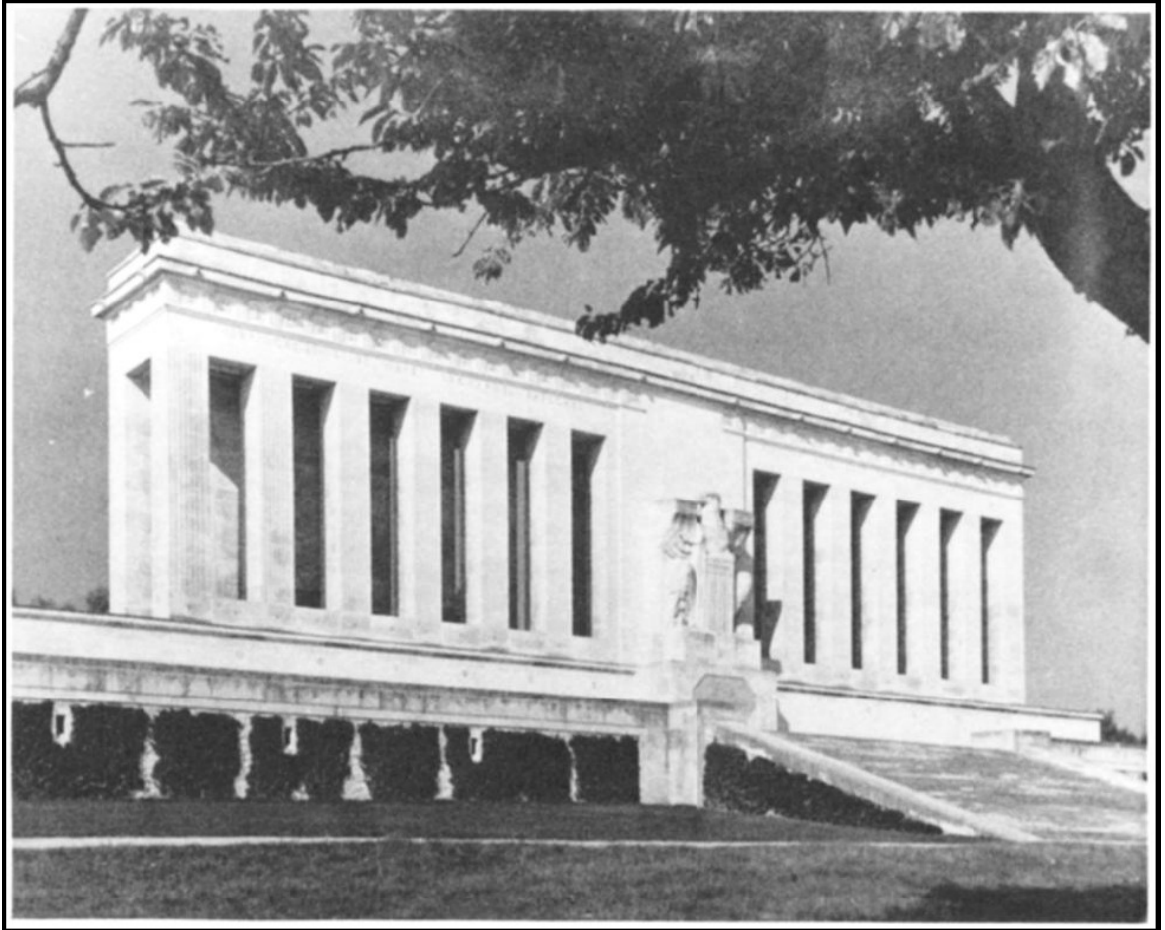


Figure 3. Paul Cret. *Aisne-Marne Monument*. Lorraine, France.



Figure 4. Sir Reginald Blomfield, *The Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing at Ypres*, Ypres, France.



Figure 5. Sir Reginald Blomfield, *The Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing at Ypres*, Ypres, France, interior view.

of the dead and missing (See Figure 5). This ‘Hall of Memory’ provides both the architectural and the rhetorical content for the memorial, “The names seemed to be all that these architects found worthy of the task of remembering so much loss, but this use of names was complicated: it both asserted an individual memory and lost that memory in the mass of names.”³³ *The Thiépvál Memorial to the Missing* similarly features a triumphal arch form and a listing of the names of the war dead as narrative content. The memorial designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens was rendered in a streamlined neoclassical style and composed of a multi-tiered arch structure (See Figure 6). The 73,357 names of the dead and missing were carved into the memorial, as at the Menin Gate, to present a portrait of the losses of the war, “Lutyens created an individual monumentality that owed much to classicism, but was stripped, transmogrified, and changed to something more deeply personal and very moving” (See Figure 7).³⁴ The design of both of these memorials, unlike those built by the ABMC, shunned representational sculpture as a way of avoiding sentimentality in their commemoration, though their very austerity and solemnity produces a strong emotion reaction. The emphasis on the listing of names at these memorials, in juxtaposition to the triumphal arch form which traditionally signified victory and glory, imparts a message of sorrow and sacrifice that illustrates the purpose of the commemoration of the First World War, to use remembrance as a warning against future wars.

³³ Hass, 55.

³⁴ James Stevens Curl, *A Celebration of Death: An Introduction to Some of the Buildings, Monuments, and Settings of Funerary Architecture in the Western European Tradition* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1980) 317-19.



Figure 6. Sir Edwin Lutyens. *The Thiepval Memorial to the Missing*. Thiepval, France.



Figure 7. Sir Edwin Lutyens. *The Thiepval Memorial to the Missing*. Thiepval, France, interior view.

In the years after WWI and the aftermath of the Great Depression, American culture began looking back at its history to restore a sense of security to the shaken nation. In the 1920-30s, commemorative celebrations were common, especially those focused on Colonial and Revolutionary War history, including the 300th anniversary of the landing at Plymouth in 1920, the sesquicentennial of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence in 1926 and the sesquicentennial of the Battle of Yorktown in 1931. This commemoration of the past for entertainment, education, and consolation was intended to spark patriotic renewal, civic pride, public optimism and ultimately better economic conditions.³⁵ This extended not just to festivals and celebrations, but to historic restoration and preservation projects, such as those undertaken at Williamsburg, VA and George Washington's home, Mount Vernon.

The National Park Service (NPS) played a large role in the determination of public memory and history during this period, creating a system of historic interpretation, education and preservation that went unchallenged until the last half of the twentieth century. Established in 1916 by Woodrow Wilson, the NPS was originally dedicated to the overseeing the conservation of wilderness and natural landscapes such as Yellowstone and Yosemite. This focus shifted in 1933 when newly-elected President Roosevelt reorganized the management of historical resources and transferred all the federally owned national parks, monuments, military battlefields, national cemeteries, and national capital parks into one national park system. This action created a strong political base and a greater degree of professional competence for the NPS while also

³⁵ Bodnar, 172-173.

effectively narrowing the range of symbols and messages from American history that would receive official attention.³⁶

With this change in the power structure and influence of the NPS over public history and memory, the organization attempted to rationalize and centralize the process of selecting historic landmarks and sites (although the National Register of Historic Places would not be established until the *National Historic Preservation Act of 1966*) as an effort to boost national confidence, “In a period [1930s] when the reality of economic decline accentuated citizen concern over future social and economic change, government leaders moved to consolidate their own authority and reinforce loyalty and calm anxiety about the future by memorializing the history of nation building, a story which implied that change in the past had been purposeful and positive.”³⁷ In this new era of historic interpretation and control, the government played an increasing role in determining public memory, imposing a nationalist framework through which to view the past. Because park programs were created and administered mainly by middle class professionals, education about the past increasingly reflected middle class values of progress and patriotism, rather than the multi-vocal local, regional, and ethnic history that had previously influenced public memory. This policy of the interpretation based on a progressive and celebratory ideology about the American past, limited the discussion of U.S. history to specifically chosen sites that solely illustrated a story of progress and positivity, rather than one in which negative, controversial, or alien pasts were discussed or remembered.³⁸

³⁶ Bodnar, 169-171.

³⁷ Bodnar, 169.

³⁸ Bodnar, 177-182.

This insular view of the past and the values of contemporary American society influenced the rhetoric of commemorative art and public art in general. The 1930s also saw the birth of public art as a federally funded social project. The New Deal era Public Works of Art Projects (PWAP) was started to create work for unemployed artists, as a thriving arts community was seen as a symbol of a strong nation and economy. The PWAP was also meant to bring art into the public realm in order to enrich the lives of ordinary citizens. To this end, the majority of the art produced by this project went into state and municipal institutions, not federal buildings, and encouraged the creation of contemporary American art that reflected the values of average citizens, not *avant-garde* or elitist members of the arts community. This democratization of art was seen as a way to create a more homogenized national culture while still acknowledging the distinctness of local communities. Many of the 100,000 easel paintings, 18,000 sculptures, 13,000 prints, and over 4,000 murals that were produced between 1933 and 1943 depicted local places and history. These public artworks ornamented post offices across the nation as an initiative to spread the collectivist ideas portrayed by them to as many communities as possible.³⁹ This approach of using art and history as a vehicle to create a better quality of life in America set the stage for commemorative expression after the Second World War and fueled the explosion of modernism in the post-war period.

Though historic commemoration and public art was flourishing in the 1920-40s, few memorials were produced. This so-called ‘death of the monument’ was partly a reaction to proliferation of memorials after World War I, the irrelevance of representational artwork in the emerging modernist style, and the lack of cohesive and

³⁹ Harriet F. Senie and Sally Webster. *Critical Issues in Public Art* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1992), 131-137.

universal social values in the face of an increasingly diverse population. To the generation that participated in the Second World War, the traditional memorial forms such as statues, obelisks, triumphal arches and other commemorative structures erected by previous generations were viewed as relics of a bygone era and provided little culture or commemorative meaning; “The doughboys, shafts, and sepulchral memorials that dominated the American memorial landscape were lambasted for their clutter, sense of age and decay, vulgarity and expense, and superfluousness and ineffectiveness, among other things.”⁴⁰ With this attitude towards traditional forms of commemoration, the debate on how to memorialize the events and people of WWII was split between those who thought that distinct memorial places and objects were the only way to ensure true remembrance and those who thought that the legacy of the war should be the creation of a better American society, rather than a shrine to a painful past. The latter group won the debate with the justification that America would be bettered through progress rather than remembrance, a reflection of the changing attitudes toward death and the perceived morbidity of traditional memorials, “Building a victory column or a triumphal arch was anathema at a moment when many Americans experienced a compelling drive to move on and to forget war and the society that had fought two of them in quick succession.”⁴¹

The solution to the obligation to commemorate the war came in the form of ‘living memorials,’ civic projects that such as community centers, libraries, forests and highways that were dedicated as ‘memorials.’ Living memorials presented a way to acknowledge the sacrifices and triumphs of the war without forcing anyone to actually

⁴⁰ Andrew M. Shanken, “Planning Memory: Living Memorials in the United States during World War II.” (*The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 84, No. 1 (Mar., 2002), pp. 130-147), 131.

⁴¹ Shanken, 130.

remember them and was a way to rebuild the sense of community in American cities and towns that had been lost during the war years. The creation of many of living memorials dovetailed with the renewed interest in urban planning and civic building and the duty that many Americans felt to enjoy the freedom and prosperity that was the result of their sacrifice during the war.⁴²

The focus on building a better community life through the creation of civic facilities dictated the form that many living memorials would take and incorporated them into the larger goal of the re-planning of cities and towns which included the rejection of the inherited city, an emphasis on urban renewal and slum clearance, and a push for suburbanization.⁴³ Projects as diverse as auditoriums, community centers, parks, playgrounds, highways, community fitness centers, gymnasiums and stadiums served to enrich the leisure hours of community members creating a conflation between memory and recreation, which partly reflected the legacy of the Rural Cemetery movement. Living memorials were meant to be a part of the daily life of the community, not peripheral to it as traditional commemorative art was seen to be. In this way, they displace the memory of the past with the activity of the present and shy away from issues of sacrifice, victory, war, and death which in the aftermath of the dropping of the atomic bomb and the revelation of the Holocaust, seemed preferable to many.⁴⁴ Ultimately, these memorial buildings, structures and landscapes accomplished their purpose of bettering their community and illustrating values of community, democracy, and American progress to a culture ready to shake off its past and step into the future.

⁴² Hass, 59.

⁴³ Shanken, 138.

⁴⁴ Shanken, 140-144.

In the post-WWII years, the emphasis on progress extended beyond community building and war commemoration to architecture with the introduction of modernist style into the American landscape and aesthetic vocabulary. Modernism, based on styles developed in European design schools in the early twentieth century, was brought to the United States by its developers, such as Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe who were escaping the Nazi occupation. The aesthetics of modernism were based on geometric shapes, unadorned surfaces, and a general utilitarian simplicity of design which reflected the rejection of historical architectural style and ornament. The elimination of past styles was meant to reflect Modernism's timeless and universal qualities that would transcend national and historical boundaries and provide the architecture of the future, the first truly 'International Style': "Rather than constituting an art form, modernist architecture was to signify the twentieth century's achievements and dominance of technological innovation, rationality, and corporate power."⁴⁵ The ideology of progress coupled with the rejection of history that modern architecture embodied dovetailed well with the prevailing post-war American spirit of cultural amnesia toward the events of the past.

In the midst of this pervasive cultural neglect of American history and traditional commemorative expression, a large-scale modern memorial was planned and created to celebrate the expansion of the nation. *The Jefferson National Expansion Memorial* (Gateway Arch) in St. Louis, MO, dedicated in 1966, was designed by second-generation modernist architect, Eero Saarinen. The federally-funded project was planned as a way to boost the local economy of St. Louis by providing a memorial and

⁴⁵ William L. Nothstine, Carole Blair, and Gary A. Copeland. *Critical Questions: Invention, Creativity, and the Criticism of Discourse and Media* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 353.

educational complex that would be a tourist destination, create jobs, and redevelop the seedy waterfront of the city. The memorial which was staffed and interpreted by the NPS, was dedicated to Thomas Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase and the exploratory expedition of the land undertaken by surveyors Lewis and Clark. It celebrates values of Midwestern patriotism and pride and the American pioneer spirit of expansionism as well as the modernist devotion to progress and technology.⁴⁶ The memorial according to Saarinen's plans was to focus on a single symbolic design element, the parabolic arch (See Figure 8). The monumental scale of the arch (it reaches 630 ft) and its stark surface create a memorial to technological and engineering innovation as much as to the Louisiana Purchase, "Saarinen's modernized version of a traditional architectural form was a triumph of technology. Esthetically beautiful, its scale and implicit celebration of territorial expansion...invited personal participation rather than awe."⁴⁷ The only example of large-scale modernist memorial architecture, Gateway Arch undermines the decisively non-commemorative stance of modern architecture to reintroduce traditional memorial content into the American landscape.⁴⁸ This pairing of modernist aesthetic and commemorative meaning was influential in ushering in the next era of American memorial design which was reflective of contemporary architectural and sculptural form and provided historical and cultural commemorative content.

⁴⁶ Bodnar, 168-190.

⁴⁷ Senie, *Contemporary Public Sculpture*, 21.

⁴⁸ Nothstine, 369.



Figure 8. Eero Saarinen. *The Jefferson National Expansion Memorial*. St. Louis, MS, 1966.

CHAPTER 4

THE BIRTH OF PARTICIPATORY COMMEMORATIVE ART: 1960-1982

“These are consecrated spaces for a willfully secular era.”⁴⁹

The emergence of participatory commemorative art in the 1960-80s reflected a growing dissatisfaction with the progressivist rhetoric and repetitive formalism of modernism, an increasing awareness of environmental concerns, and a renewed interest in public history and memorialization from the ‘baby boomer’ generation who had grown up in prosperous and socially-insulated post-WWII America. The social upheaval that began on the cultural fringes of the 1950s and penetrated mainstream America in the 1960s influenced the direction of artistic and rhetorical expression allowing many marginalized groups and individuals to receive national attention and social acceptance. The values of this post-modern culture increasingly differed from those of earlier twentieth century generations, particularly the WWII generation, who valorized rationality, technology and corporate culture. Postmodernists critiqued the social and cultural ‘normal’ and encouraged pluralist dialogue, subjectivism, and an interest in the connection of humans to their history and the natural environment.⁵⁰

This cultural shift resulted in the creation of a new type of commemorative artwork: the participatory memorial. The form and rhetoric presented in participatory

⁴⁹ John Beardsley, *Earthworks and Beyond* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), 9.

⁵⁰ Nothstine, 354.

commemorative art was influenced by the emerging environmental art movement in the 1960-70s, which focused on creating art that related to a specific landscape. This environmental or land art was informed by history and provided an interactive, rather than passive, experience with the visitor. The participatory memorial translated the 'sense of place' created by environmental art into a commemorative landscape that celebrated unrecognized people, groups, and events and presented multiple viewpoints and meanings. Participatory commemorative art evolved in the second half of the twentieth century as a result of the successes, failures, and influences of memorial projects undertaken in the 1960-1980s, culminating in the creation of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* in 1982.

Termed site construction, earthworks, or marked sites, the environmental art movement of the 1960-70s merged large-scale sculptural and architectural works with natural or created landscapes to produce artwork that combined the man-made with the natural. These works were composed of a fusion of sculpture, architecture, and landscape architecture which blurred the lines between art and the physical environment. Created on a monumental scale, these earthworks engaged the viewer physically in order to create an aesthetic experience, rather than an art object. Their experiential or participatory nature reflected the desire to create a distinct space with its own aesthetic values and rhetorical meanings, in order to, "...reveal the world to us anew, to combine symbolic form with the landscape in the creation of differentiated and evocative places."⁵¹

Environmental art was inspired by the entanglement of nature and aesthetics

⁵¹ Beardsley, 9.

found in non-western art, particularly ancient sculptural and architectural works, which were traditionally idealized by twentieth century European and American artists. This ‘romantic primitivism’ influenced the form and content of environmental artworks which were inspired by the earth mounds of the Ancient Native North Americans, the monolith stone construction of Egyptian pyramids and Stonehenge, and the landscape incision and marking of the Nazca lines in Pre-Columbian South America. By looking to history and prehistory for inspiration, these artists challenged modernist principals of progressivism and anti-historicism and sought to create spatial and temporal connections to the land and to the past.⁵² This rejection of modernism, which was essentially a European aesthetic translated to American cities and culture, was also an attempt to find or reconnect with an authentic ‘American’ art form. These artists sought independence from the empty formalism of the European schools in order to create art that was more intuitive, spiritualized, and subjective. The sacrosanct character of the natural environment presented a way for artists to provide an emotional and spiritual aesthetic experience for an increasingly urbanized and secular American population.⁵³

Artists began working in landscapes as a rejection of the commoditization of art that they felt was produced by the gallery and museum system. These artists saw land art as a way of breaking free from the elitism and commercialism of the metropolitan art world and reestablishing a purer relationship between art and the environment; “There was a feeling, however misguided, that the artist was operating outside the crassness of the marketplace, that he had left off producing saleable objects, that he was somehow specially privileged by this patron relationship, that he was acting more in the real

⁵² Senie, *Contemporary Public Sculpture*, 141.

⁵³ Beardsley, 9-14.

world.”⁵⁴ Though many environmental artists saw their work as separate from the commercialism of the art establishment, the creation of these sites were rarely financed by the artists themselves, but instead relied on patronage from private or government sources. In the same way, these works were presented by the artists as the ultimate ‘public art’: available to everyone at all times, however the reality was that few could make the pilgrimage to the isolated and generally inaccessible places that many of these earthworks were situated. As Harriet Senie points out, “In a sense the remote location of these earthworks actually make them more elitist than gallery art, or certainly available only to much smaller audiences.”⁵⁵ However as the environmental art movement progressed, there was a gradual shift from producing work in secluded natural or untouched landscapes to land reclamation or renewal projects located in or near urban environments. These works focused on creating aesthetic and livable landscapes from disused or industrial sites and presented a more overt message about the effects of human destruction and pollution of the landscape than did earlier earthworks.

One of the first siteworks was Michael Heizer’s *Double Negative* (1969-70), which was composed of two trenches cut into the desert of the Mormon Mesa in Overton, NV. These large-scale trenches (50 ft deep and 30 ft wide and 1,500 ft long) play with the vastness of the landscape and the use of a void or negative space as an object (See Figure 9). Rather than Heizer’s space and form through absence, Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970) sought to create a unique space within the landscape that both conformed to it and was a distinct place. The Spiral Jetty, built on the Great Salt Lake in

⁵⁴ Senie, *Critical Issues*, 254.

⁵⁵ Senie, *Contemporary Public Sculpture*, 141.



Figure 9. Michael Heizer. *Double Negative*. Overton, NV, 1969-70.



Figure 10. Robert Smithson. *Spiral Jetty*. Great Salt Lake, UT, 1970.

Utah, is a coil of black basalt rocks and earth from the site that extended 1,500 ft into the red water of the lake (See Figure 10). In designing the work, Smithson sought to draw out the best characteristics of site: the translucent water, the connection between the surrounding earth and the lake, and the rough to smooth texture of the landscape. The Jetty was designed to become part of the landscape and is submerged into the lake with the rise and fall of the water level. Smithson intended that his work would age and decay with the natural erosion of the lake and shore and would eventually be destroyed. This attitude was common among environmental artists who felt that their work should follow the birth and death cycle of nature, rather than be artificially preserved.⁵⁶

Other artists, such as Christo and Jean Claude, sought to limit their long term impact on the environments in which they were working and instead of building permanent structures created art installations. *Running Fence* (1976), composed of twenty-four and a half miles of nylon fabric panels hung between steel poles, was installed in the landscape of North California from Freeway 101 through the rolling hills owned by ranchers into the Pacific Ocean at Bodega Bay (See Figure 11). The work remained on the site for fourteen days before it was removed from the landscape without any trace of its existence remaining. The focus of the work was to graphically highlight the landscape through the pliable medium of fabric in order to reveal its monumental and curvaceous properties and ultimate drop into the ocean; to view the land in one continual flow without the interruption of roads, fences or other obstructions.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Beardsley, 17-23.

⁵⁷ Beardsley, 29-31.



Figure 11. Christo and Jean Claude. *Running Fence*. Northern California, 1976.

These works relied on the distinctive qualities of the landscape to form their content as well as their shape. The site-specific nature of environmental art was a result of the desire to create work that was entirely unique, as well as the need to design a complete aesthetic. Land art is one of the few media where the artist controls where their work is located, its physical context, and how the viewer will experience it. The artist also dictates the longevity of the work, and determines its permanence or purposeful impermanence, as in the case of *Running Fence* or the *Spiral Jetty*. The fierce emphasis that land artists placed on physical context was a result of their critique of the modernist assumption that ‘International Style’ designs would suit any environment. This landscape of modernist ‘urban bombs’ or buildings and art that did not reflect or correspond to their surroundings, often produced a discordant and alienating environment.⁵⁸ The incorporation of the context into art was an attempt to reintroduce a ‘sense of place’ into the American landscape. Instead of producing work that was universally appropriate (as modernism presented itself), environmental artists created work that was purposefully limited to one place because its very form and meaning was taken from its location, “...context was extended to encompass the individual site’s symbolic, social, and political meanings as well as the discursive and historical circumstances within which artwork, spectator, and site are situated.”⁵⁹ In this way, environmental artists created work that was not only entirely unique, but revealed seemingly forgotten values about the importance of place and individual character.

The distinct character of the earthworks of the 1960-70s relied not just on their landscape context, but the approach that these artists took to the audience. Because land

⁵⁸ Nothstine, 353.

⁵⁹ Senie, *Critical Issues*, 159.

art was self-consciously public art, it emphasized the interaction between the piece and the viewer to greater degree than previous art forms. The viewer in these works, rather than being merely a spectator, became central to its design. Environmental artworks sought to create an experience, rather than a passive viewing, in which the visitor interacts with the space by being physically in it: “Changing the nature of the art meant changing the role of the audience as well, questioning the purely contemplative role the observer plays in the conventional setting of the museum or gallery.”⁶⁰ The experience of the viewer as they pass through the work gives the art meaning. This experience was meant to be individual and subjective and to produce new or different meanings for the viewer with each encounter with the work. The interaction between the work and the viewer revealed the viewer as part of the art itself, “The gap between art and audience is closed by bringing the audience into the art, by making spatial experience the very subject of the art.”⁶¹ The central role played by the viewer in determining both the form and meaning of postmodern land and installation art reflected and encouraged a pluralistic dialogue.

The rejection of modernist principles extended beyond the art world to mainstream American culture which began to embrace American history and cultural tradition that had fallen out of favor during the mid-century. The general spirit of interest and awareness about the past that was sparked in the 1960-70s and became pervasive in the 1980-90s, was the result of a backlash towards modernism, “...the undisputed erosion of tradition in modernity actually generated compensatory organs of remembrance such as the humanities, societies for historical preservation, and the museum, among others. In

⁶⁰ Mitchell, 10.

⁶¹ Mitchell, 11.

this view, social and collective memory, as paradigmatically organized in the museum, in historiography or in archeology, is not the opposite of modernity, but rather its very product.”⁶² Part of this postmodern sanction of the American past was a reaction against the dislocations and social turmoil of the 1960s and the desire to return to what was perceived as a more stable and livable time.⁶³

This embrace of history included the incorporation into mainstream culture and society the past of marginalized peoples and aspects of American culture that had been previously ignored. Along with the celebration of traditional patriotic American history such as the United States Bicentennial Celebration in 1976, the history and contribution of minorities, women and ethnic groups began to be recognized. This introduction of multivocal rhetoric into the American political and cultural landscape ultimately found expression in the creation of commemorative art.

Along with the celebration of the past, came an appreciation for historical objects, ‘vintage’ styles, and old buildings and furniture, “...the historicizing restoration of old urban centers, whole museum villages and landscapes, the boom of fleamarkets, retrofashions and nostalgia waves, the obsessive self-memorialization per camcorder, memoir writing and confessional literature, even the widespread artistic practice of quoting, citing, and recycling...the museum in a broad and amorphous sense can be said to function as key paradigm in contemporary postmodern culture.”⁶⁴ *The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966*, which established the National Register of Historic Places, a registry for historic structures, objects, and landscapes, was one of the products

⁶² Huyssen, 252.

⁶³ Lowenthal, 13.

⁶⁴ Huyssen, 253.

of this urge to recognize and protect the vestiges the past. Museums, history centers, libraries, and commemorative sites were constructed to meet the demands for places of public memory; "...never before has a cultural present been so obsessed with the past to the same extent as Western culture in the 1970s and 1980s when museums and memorials were being built as if there were no tomorrow."⁶⁵ Huyssen argues that this obsession with the preservation of the past was partly a reaction to technological innovation and the speed at which objects, trends, and attitudes become obsolete in postmodern culture.⁶⁶ Museums and memorials acted as a way to hold onto a present that was ever more rapidly becoming the past.

The participatory memorial emerged as the dominant commemorative form during this period by combining the historicism of post-1960s American culture with the *avant-garde* aesthetics of environmental art. The emphasis on site-specificity and experiential design pioneered by land artists was translated into the commemorative landscape as designers struggled to find a memorial solution that would engage a postmodern American public. Rather than the monumentalism of traditional (and modernists) memorials, the mass-produced character of statuary, and the utilitarianism of living memorials, designers and memorial commissions wanted a memorial form that responded to its surroundings, was relevant to the event or person being commemorated, and provided multi-vocal education and emotional content for individual viewers. Participatory commemorative art developed progressively to address these needs and to provide a new form of memorialization, "Gradually, an alternative to traditional memorials evolved, one that focused on victims rather than heroes or adopted an ironic or

⁶⁵ Huyssen, 253.

⁶⁶ Huyssen, 254.

humorous stance, and often, in one form or another, engaged the public physically by providing a walk-through experience.”⁶⁷ The design stages of *The Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial* (1997) provide a clear example of the evolution of the participatory memorial form as it progressed from the 1950s to the late-1990s.

The Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, which took nearly fifty years to complete, illustrates the struggle that memorial designers and commissions underwent to produce a commemorative artwork that would be appropriate for the subject being commemorated, the location and surroundings of the memorial site, and commemorative values of contemporary culture. Though not completed until 1997, the progression of the design influenced commemorative art and paved the way for the design of the participatory memorial. The FDR Memorial was conceived in the patriotic post-WWII years and a Congressional Resolution was passed in 1955 that established a memorial commission to oversee the design and construction of a national memorial to honor the 32nd president. The site selected for the memorial was on the Mall in Washington, D.C., in West Potomac Park between the Potomac River and the Tidal Basin. This prominent memorial site was surrounded by the dominant commemorative art of other great presidents: the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Jefferson Memorial. The memorial design was to be chosen through a design competition held in 1959 with guidelines that defined the standards and approach for the design. These guidelines dictated that the memorial enhance the surrounding land and not encroach on the existing amenities (the memorial site was located near recreational facilities, including ballfields); that it serve the residents of the capitol and the nation; that it be in

⁶⁷ Senie, *Contemporary Public Sculpture*, 18.

harmony with the existing presidential memorials by taking a less dominant form; and that it takes its content from the "...character and work of Franklin Delano Roosevelt...[to] do him the honor he deserves and transmit his image to future generations."⁶⁸

Six hundred architects and architectural firms submitted proposals for the memorial design with the first prize going to the New York architectural firm of Pederson and Tilney in 1960. Pederson and Tilney's design was composed of eight monumental concrete *stelae*, raised on platforms and set at angles to one another (See Figure 12). These slabs, the tallest of which was 167 ft, taller than the height of the Lincoln Memorial, would be inscribed with quotations from Roosevelt's speeches. Placed within a sixty-six acre park, the design was to be approached via ambling footpaths that would connect it with the other memorials on the mall as well as a nearby parking lot for visitors. Dubbed 'instant Stonehenge' by the press, the modernist design proved to be controversial and was ultimately rejected by the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), the ruling body of art and architectural construction in Washington. As the first presidential memorial since the beaux-arts Jefferson Memorial in 1937, the CFA struggled with the definition of what an appropriate contemporary memorial should be. It supported an aesthetic of abstraction and modernism as the contemporary mode of artistic expression, but realized that the memorial also needed to address the collective national memory, a problem compounded by the fact that FDR remained within living memory of most of the population, a consideration not present during the construction of the Jefferson

⁶⁸ Thomas Ardola. "The FDR Memorial: Halprin Redefines the Monumental Landscape" (*Landscape Architecture* 69 (January 1979) : 42-52), 42-44.

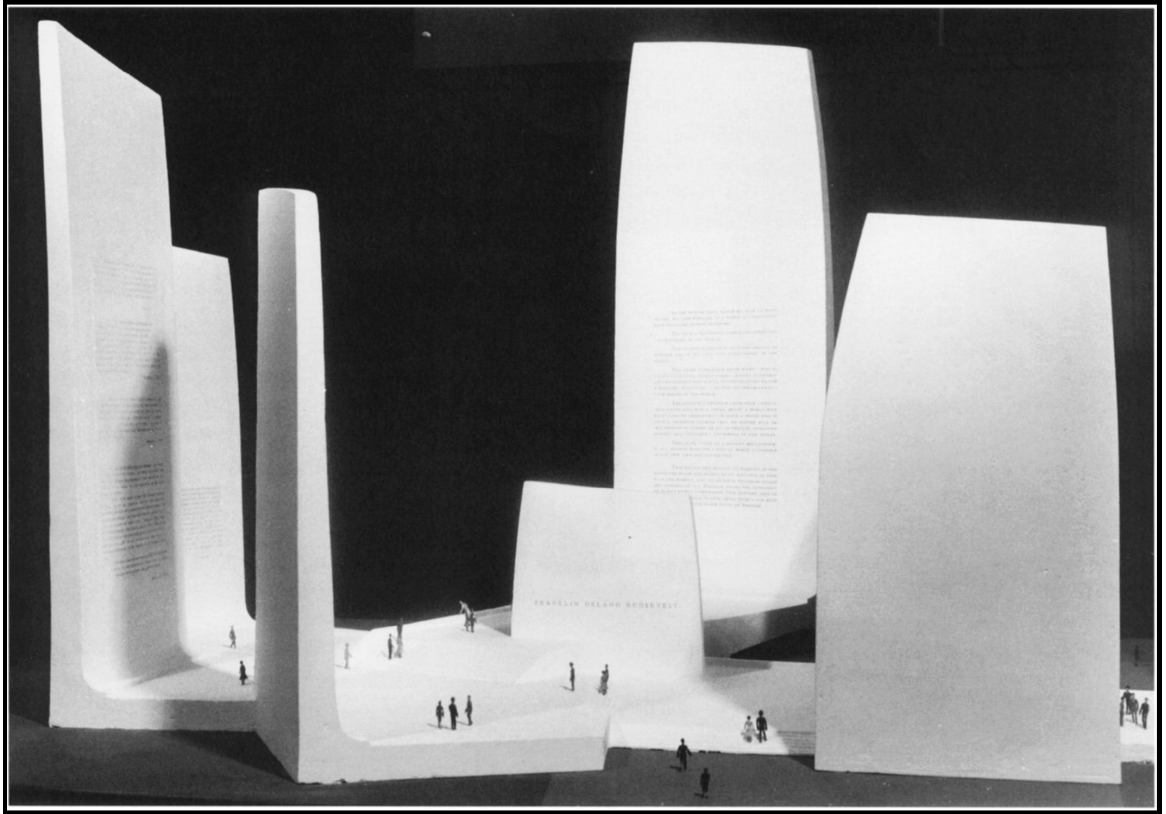


Figure 12. Pederson-Tilney. *Model of the original FDR Memorial Design*. 1960.

Memorial.⁶⁹ The memorial, as designed by Pederson and Tilney, did not satisfy these concerns.

Despite winning the top prize in the memorial competition, the design did not adhere to the guidelines, "...its large scale competed with the Lincoln and Jefferson memorials, it contained no image of Roosevelt, it lacked the 'serenity' and 'repose' requisite for a memorial, and its use of concrete was inappropriate, given that material's poor weathering qualities and lack of refinement."⁷⁰ The central objection to the design was that it did not harmonize with the surrounding memorials, however as architectural critic Wolfe Von Eckhardt pointed out, "How does one harmonize a space age creation with an oversized obelisk, a pseudo-Roman pavilion and a neo-classic temple?"⁷¹

Despite these problems with the design, a modified version was resubmitted to the CFA in 1964 that included a figurative representation of FDR. The Commission of Fine Art approved the new plan, but it failed to be approved by Congress (under pressure from the Roosevelt family who disliked the design) and the memorial project was put on hold.⁷²

After the disaster of the Pederson and Tilney design, the FDR memorial commission decided not to undertake another costly design competition, but instead to choose an established architect to design the memorial as a way to avoid controversy. In 1966, the commission contacted modern architect, Marcel Breuer, to produce a memorial design. Breuer had completed several previous government projects, including an American Embassy in the Netherlands in addition to his design for the Whitney Museum

⁶⁹ Isabelle Hyman. "Marcel Breuer and the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial" (*Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. Vol. 54, No. 4 (Dec., 1995), pp. 446-458), 446-448.

⁷⁰ Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn. *Places of Commemoration: Search for Identity and Landscape Design* (Washington: Dumbarton Oakes Research Library and Collection, 2001), 381.

⁷¹ Wolfe Von Eckhardt. "Monumental Decision" (*The New Republic* 146 (April 1962) : 28-29), 29.

⁷² Hyman, 446.

of American Art in New York City that was completed only a few months before he began work on the Roosevelt memorial. Breuer's design was composed of a paved plaza with seven large-scale granite triangles, arranged in a pinwheel configuration around a center granite square block (See Figures 13-14). This center block featured images of Roosevelt engraved with a sandblaster, while the tapering dark gray granite slabs created walled corridors for visitors to contemplate FDR's life and work. One of the most innovative features of the work was the inclusion of a sound component: recordings of some of Roosevelt's speeches would play at intervals from loudspeakers hidden in the center of the plaza. Also incorporated into the design were benches, trees, night lighting and water troughs.

The design was approved by the memorial commission; however the Commission of Fine Arts once again opposed the plan. Their objections were similar to those leveled at the Pederson and Tilney; they argued that the geometric granite forms were 'crude' and that the modernist formalism of the plan did not harmonize with the landscape. In an enlightening critique of the design, one member of the CFA argued that Breuer's design was both too old fashioned: abstract modernist, and too contemporary, with the pop art influences of the pixilated sandblasted images and the loudspeaker sounds.⁷³ Another CFA member, landscape architect, Hideo Sasaki, summarized the problem of the design, "I think to design any monument is a difficult thing because we're not in the period of monument buildings. We are seeking a new solution, if we did something that had been done traditionally it would be a very simple thing."⁷⁴ This "new solution" proved elusive as Breuer's design was reconsidered in 1969 and again rejected.

⁷³ Hyman, 449-450.

⁷⁴ Hyman, 456.

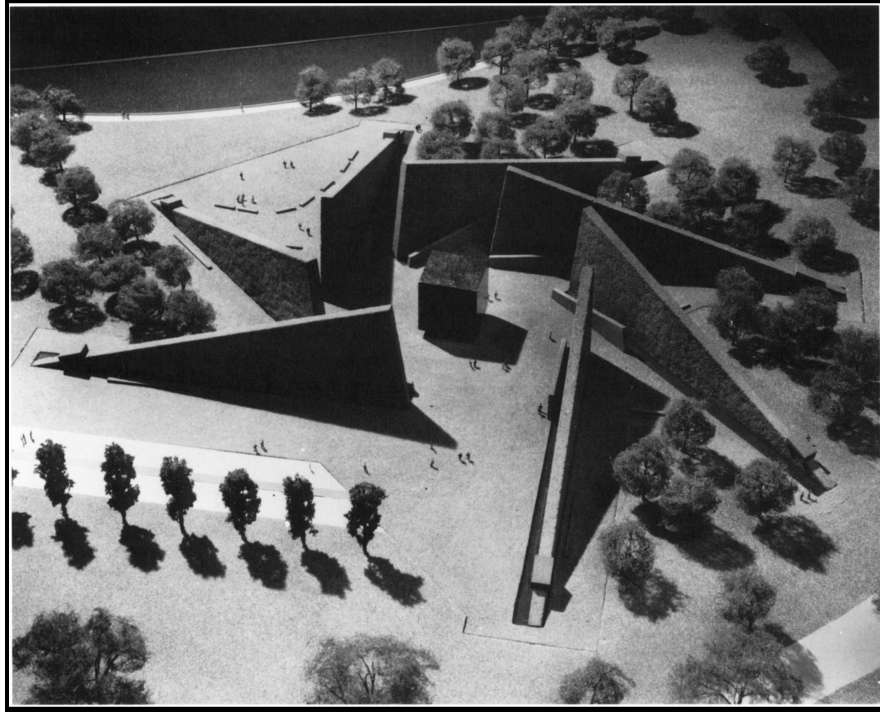


Figure 13. Marcel Breuer and Herbert Beckhard. *Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Model*. 1966.

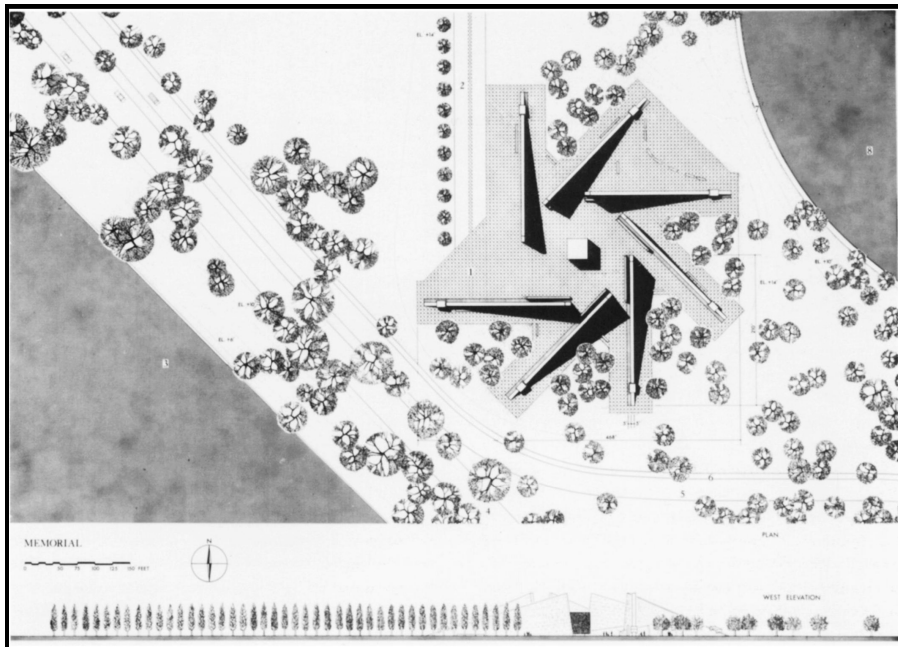


Figure 14. Marcel Breuer and Herbert Beckhard. *Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Site Plan*. 1966.

In 1974, the memorial commission enacted a new set of guidelines that reflected the change in direction they were seeking for the memorial design. These guidelines were based upon the earlier design suggestions but offered more explicit instruction for the way the memorial should be laid out and what elements it should include. These guidelines show the ‘new solution’ for memorial design defined by the commission, one that would present a significant break from previous commemorative art and would influence memorialization in the twentieth century. The new guidelines stated explicitly that the memorial design should be a ‘landscape solution’ that would harmonize with the site without a major structure to compete with the surrounding memorials. The design should include a water feature and appropriate images of Roosevelt and the recreational areas at the site should be retained.⁷⁵ These guidelines revealed the memorial solution to be a landscaped memorial park rather than a monumental architectural structure, “...it had taken over a decade to determine what that response should be, over a decade to leave notions of structural monumentality behind and arrive at an appropriate memorial gesture.”⁷⁶

The memorial commission contacted seven nationally recognized landscape architects and architects to prepare and submit designs according to the new guidelines. Lawrence Halprin, a renowned landscape architect, was chosen to design the memorial in 1975. Halprin’s original design concept featured a multi-level water garden with a single room centered on a large free-standing statue of Roosevelt. Halprin modified this design in 1978 after consulting with the CFA and the memorial commission and instead settled on a plan composed of four linked garden rooms featuring sculptures and quotations that

⁷⁵ Wolschke-Bulmahn, 383-384.

⁷⁶ Ardola, 45.

told the story of Roosevelt's life and presidency, "...forming a processional of rich narrative content expressed through figurative sculpture" (See Figure 15).⁷⁷ The design responded to the new guidelines by utilizing a landscape plan that relied on a human scale, fit into the existing park area, and did not compete with the surrounding memorials. The horizontal walled garden was constructed of a mixture of plants, trees and water features as well as more durable materials such as granite and bronze (See Figure 16). The narrative of the design as it was displayed through the procession of the garden rooms, "strives for dignity and emotional and intellectual impact" as well as to be a "living, friendly, changing, contemplative place for people."⁷⁸

The sculptural images were created by a team of American sculptors including Neil Estern, Leonard Baskin, George Segal, and Robert Graham. The resulting representational sculptures depicted Roosevelt and images of his times, such as Americans waiting in a Depression-era bread line (See Figure 17). These images proved to be the only controversial elements of the design: none of the memorial images of Roosevelt depicted him as disabled or in a wheelchair, reflecting the fact that he refused to be shown this way during his presidency. This sparked controversy among various groups representing disabled persons and a decision was reached to include a sculpture of Roosevelt in a wheelchair. In another nod to late-twentieth century values, none of the images at the memorial depict Roosevelt smoking, highlighting the political character of the design process.⁷⁹

The evolution of the design was influenced by Halprin's study of historical monuments, landscapes, and other environments that used a processional format to

⁷⁷ Wolschke-Bulmahn, 379-386.

⁷⁸ Wolschke-Bulmahn, 379.

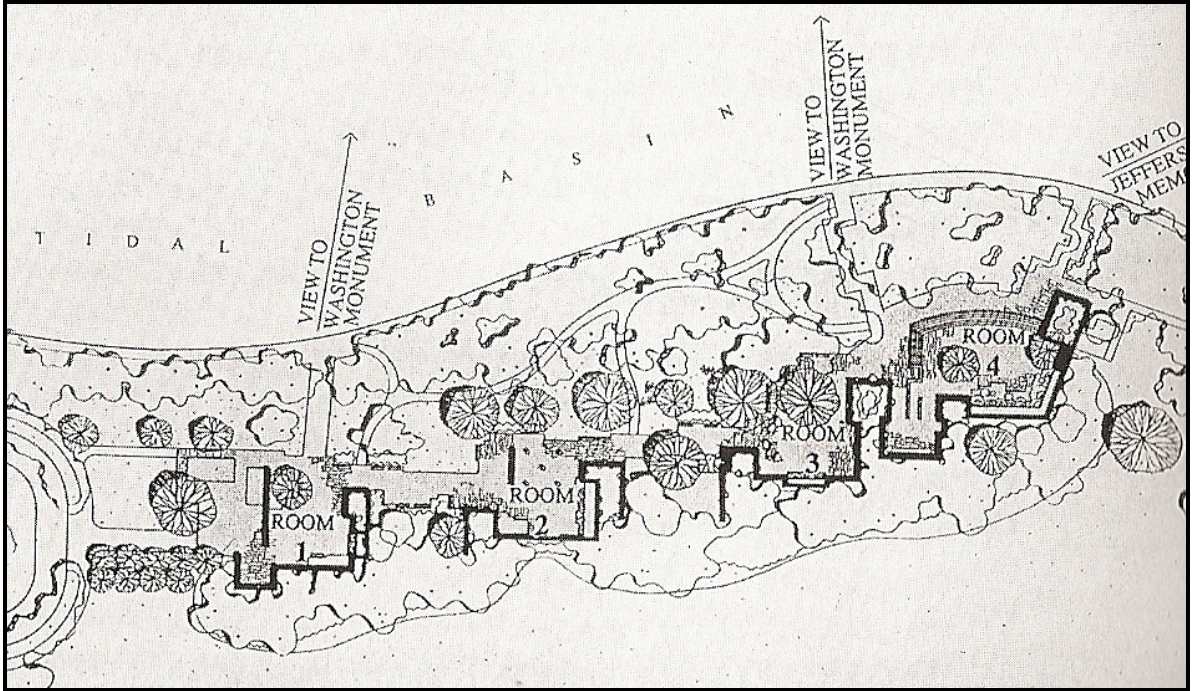


Figure 15. Lawrence Halprin. *Site Plan for the FDR Memorial*.

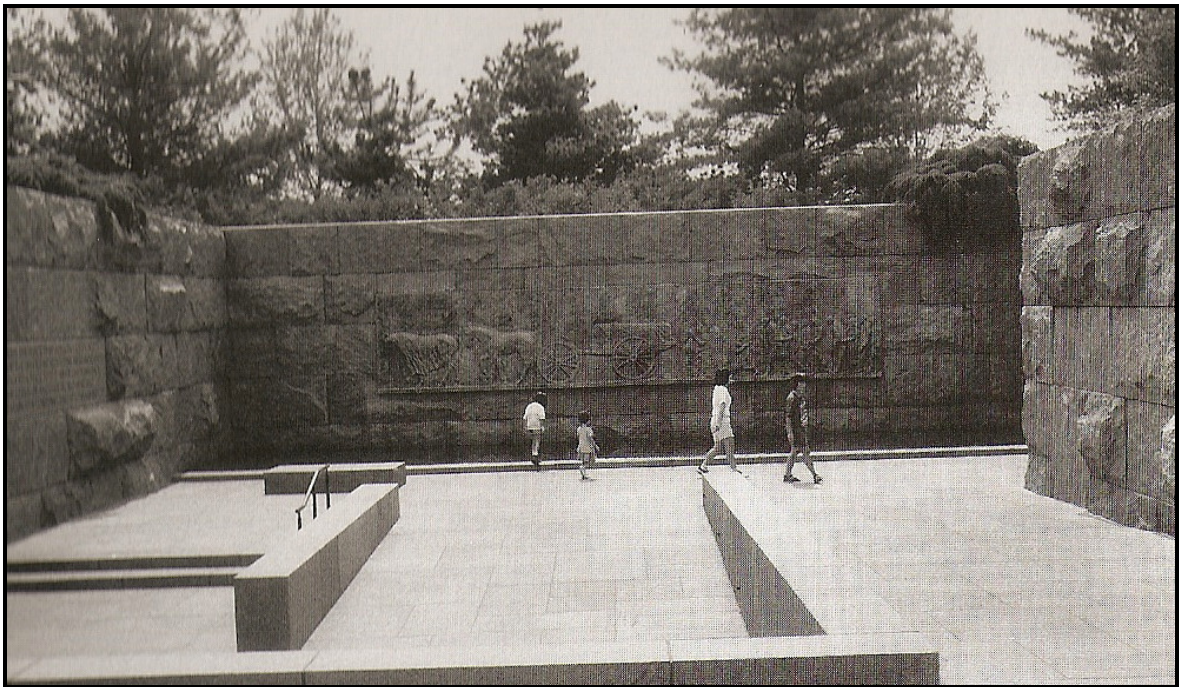


Figure 16. Lawrence Halprin. *Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial*. 1997. Fourth Garden Room.

⁷⁹ Wolschke-Bulmahn, 389-404.



Figure 17. George Segal. *Breadline*. FDR Memorial, 1997.

provide narrative, emotional, and aesthetic content. These memorial spaces, “...including the Acropolis, the sanctuary at Delphi, the Ise Shrine, the Great Temple of Karnak, Beijing’s Forbidden City, and Gunnar Asplund’s Woodland Crematorium, Stockholm...” had similar design elements such as a sequence of interrelated spaces that ended in a final ‘event,’ with the narrative increasing in drama and intensity of as the viewer passed through each space. He discovered that these places contained coherent and overt symbolism as well as possessing qualities that caused visitors to linger and absorb the atmosphere.⁸⁰ Halprin sought to incorporate the sacred qualities of these memorial places into the FDR memorial by creating a processional space that visitors experienced temporally as well as spatially and that provided an atmosphere of contemplation and commemoration. Influenced by the environmental art movement, Halprin used the landscape of the site as a guide for the flow of the design, preserving existing foliage, and purposely separating the ‘profane’ space (the recreational areas) from the ‘sacred’ areas of the memorial garden. He also drew on the life and work of Roosevelt for inspiration, particularly his love of gardening and green space conservation. The final design of the memorial, approved in 1990 by the memorial commission and the CFA, was a “...complete and contemplative experience, instead of a single isolated piece of iconography...the memorial’s environmental qualities involve the experiences of the visitor and the evocation of the man and his times.”⁸¹

Finally completed in 1997, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial reflected the search for a commemorative solution that would reach contemporary visitors by providing a distinct memorial place that encouraged an emotional and contemplative

⁸⁰ Wolschke-Bulmahn, 394.

⁸¹ Ardola, 46-48.

experience, "...Halprin's work addresses the richness and complexity of history and elicits reflection on the relevance of the accomplishments and values of the past to the tasks of the present and future."⁸² The design of the memorial, influenced by architectural history and the land art movement, also included recreational elements, a hold-over from the living memorial, as well as aspects of the rural cemetery movement, through the planned contemplative landscape ornamented with sculpture. Though the representational images and text focus the rhetoric of the memorial on the historical context of the Roosevelt era, the reflective nature of the design allows the viewer to supply their own remembrances and meanings to the site. This facilitation of both personal and collective memorialization presented by the landscape solution of the FDR memorial is carried over into other participatory commemorative art created during this period.

The *John F. Kennedy Memorial*, designed in 1965 and dedicated in 1970 in Dallas, Texas presents another example of the evolution commemorative aesthetics and meaning created during this period. Designed by architect Philip Johnson, the memorial is sited near Dealey Plaza, the area where the president was assassinated. It is composed of four fifty-foot concrete walls arranged in a box formation surrounding a black granite square inscribed with the president's name (See Figure 18). The walls of the memorial are raised two-and-a-half feet from the ground level and are broken with vertical slits, keeping the memorial interior open to the surrounding plaza and buildings (See Figure 19). Also known as the 'Kennedy Cenotaph' (cenotaph is derived from the Greek word,

⁸² Wolschke-Bulmahn, 380.



Figure 18. Philip Johnson. *John F. Kennedy Memorial*. Dallas, TX, 1970.



Figure 19. Philip Johnson. *John F. Kennedy Memorial*. Dallas, TX, 1970, interior.

kenotaphion, meaning ‘empty tomb’), the memorial presents a minimalist aesthetic while providing an essentially blank canvas for commemoration. This lack of memorial rhetoric creates a space for individual reflection and meaning, “The construction of commemorative content is given over entirely to viewers/participants by the blank design, the empty place rich in ambiguity and silence.”⁸³ The purposeful absence of text or representational imagery allow the visitor to assign meaning, much like the voids of Michael Heizer’s *Double Negative*, while the engraved name recalls the WWI commemorative significance of naming. These elements of aesthetic minimalism, rhetorical subjectivity, and symbolic naming play a role in the design of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, the national memorial that codified participatory commemorative art as vessel of public memory in the following decades.

The *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (VVM), the most controversial, beloved, and influential memorial built in the twentieth century, was fashioned out of the elements of historical commemorative art and the environmental art that dictated the design of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial. The challenge of the VVM, like the John F. Kennedy Memorial, was to effectively commemorate a contemporary event; unlike the JFK assassination which has brought the nation together in common mourning for the president, the Vietnam War provided no such consensus of feelings. Rather its policies divided the nation and its ultimate failure to produce an American victory marked the events in many citizens’ minds as shameful and best forgotten. This painful and ignoble public memory of the war determined that its commemoration would have to be drastically different from previous memorials; even the ‘new solution’ presented by the

⁸³ Capasso, 123.

FDR Memorial was not enough to heal the physical and emotions wounds that the conflict had exacted upon the nation. The actuality of ‘bringing home’ the war experience and casualties dictated that, “...the memorial had to record, on an American landscape insulated by the distance from the physical ravages of the war, the enormity of the losses and damage the war produced; the memorials had to acknowledge an historical experience that the nation had, in the immediate postwar period, blocked out of memory; and they had to mark the reincorporation of the nation’s veterans into a society that the veterans claimed had rejected them and from which the veterans felt alienated.”⁸⁴

Despite the daunting nature of the task, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial succeeded in providing a place for individual and collective remembrance, reconciliation, and recognition for society estranged by its past, and in doing so effectively changed the nature of commemorative art in the twentieth century.

The initiative to build the Vietnam Veterans Memorial came from a seemingly unlikely source: Jan Scruggs, a twenty-nine year old former Army rifleman. In March 1979, only four years after the war ended, Scruggs saw the movie, *The Deer Hunter*, a story about the effects of the Vietnam War on three small town friends and soldiers. He reportedly stayed up all night drinking whiskey and determined that he would get a Vietnam memorial built that listed all the names of the soldiers killed in the war, provided a symbol of reconciliation, and didn’t rely on government funding. He enlisted the help of other Vietnam veterans and started a non-profit organization, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF), to raise money and oversee the construction of the memorial.⁸⁵ Scruggs unflinching publicizing of his plans for the memorial eventually

⁸⁴ Wolschke-Bulmahn, 313.

⁸⁵ Jan Scruggs and Joel L. Swerdlow. *To Heal A Nation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 7-12.

attracted the attention of Senator Charles Mathias, Jr. who introduced congressional legislation to allocate land for the memorial. Scruggs insisted that the only way the memorial would be legitimate was to have it located on the National Mall, rather than the site across the Potomac River, near Arlington Cemetery that had originally been proposed by Congress, a site he viewed as ‘an insult’ to veterans. Scruggs feared that any location other than one in Constitution Gardens would be a way of ignoring or dishonoring veterans as he, and many others, felt the American society and government had been doing since the end of the war. By building the memorial ‘at the feet of the Lincoln Memorial,’ the country would finally be putting marginalized veterans in the center of its patriotic rhetoric and symbolism, physically as well as emotionally and culturally.⁸⁶ The VVMF was eventually granted a piece of land located between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial with the stipulation that the memorial design would have to be approved by the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) and the Department of the Interior (See Figure 20).⁸⁷ The VVMF decided to select the design through an open competition that “...would fit in with the American spirit of solving problems through fair and open contests, and would give the American people an opportunity to speak out about what sort of memorial they wanted.”⁸⁸ In July 1980, the fund hired Paul Spreiregan, a renowned landscape architect, to act as a professional advisor for the competition and to put together a jury. Spreiregan’s jury was composed of arts professionals, rather than veterans, and included landscape architects Hideo Sasaki and Garrett Eckbo, architects Harry Weese and Pietro

⁸⁶ Scruggs, 15-41.

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Hess. “Tale of Two Memorials.” (*Art in America* 17 (April 1983) : 120-126), 121.

⁸⁸ Scruggs, 49.

Belluschi, sculptors Constantino Nivola, James Rosati, and Richard H. Hunt, and Grady Clay, editor of *Landscape Architecture* magazine.⁸⁹

The competition guidelines, determined by the VVMF, dictated that the form and content of the design more so than any other part of the design process. The guidelines stated that the design should: "... (1) be reflective and contemplative in character; (2) harmonize with its surroundings; (3) contain the names of those who had died in the conflict or who were still missing; and (4) make no political statement about the war."⁹⁰ Like the guidelines for the FDR Memorial, the VVMF called for a 'landscaped solution' with a horizontal orientation that would not compete with the nearby Washington and Lincoln Memorials. The statement of purpose emphasized the principles of the memorial design stating, "The purpose of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is to recognize and honor those who served and died. It will provide a symbol of acknowledgement of the courage, sacrifice, and devotion to duty of those who were among the nation's finest youth. The Memorial will make no political statement regarding the war or its conduct. It will transcend those issues. The hope is that the creation of the Memorial will begin a healing process."⁹¹

The competition received 1,421 entries, the designers of which were kept anonymous until the winner was chosen. Because of the number of entries, the VVMF had to use a hangar at Andrews Air Force base to house the designs for the jury selection. Among the works submitted were a "...huge peace symbol, a giant pair of combat boots, a massive hand holding a torch of Liberty, a forty-five-foot sculpture of a mourning

⁸⁹ Hess, 121.

⁹⁰ Hass, 13.

⁹¹ Scruggs, 53.

figure, a huge block punctuated by protruding pieces of a military aircraft and a ship, and three knights on chargers crossing the rolling clouds of Valhalla.”⁹² Ultimately, the jury chose a simple set of hand drawings depicting a black v-shaped wall placed within a green field (See Figure 21). The memorial, as described by the designer in a hand-written statement, would form a rift in the park-like setting of the site through the placement into the gently-sloping hillside of long, polished stone walls that emerged and receded into the earth (See Figure 22). The walls which came together to form an angle, would contain the engraved names of the soldiers placed in chronological order according to their death, “The memorial is composed not as an unchanging monument, but as a moving composition, to be understood as we move into and out of it...the area contained within this memorial is a quiet place meant for personal reflection and private reckoning.”⁹³ The memorial design was meant to be approached across the open space of the park to the apex of the walls where the chronological listing of names begins and ends (See Figure 23). In this way, the memorial could be seen as whole first and then its individual walls and the listing of names as the visitor came closer (See Figure 24). The quiet power and seeming simplicity of the design intrigued the jury while the low profile, listing of names, and political ambiguity satisfied the competition guidelines.

The designer of the winning memorial was then twenty-one year old Yale architecture student, Maya Lin. Lin originally created the memorial design as an assignment for a funerary architecture class she was taking. Lin and some class mates visited the memorial location to take measurements and do some sketches and she based her design around the configuration of the landscape with its low grassy hills. She later

⁹² Wolschke-Bulmahn, 319.

⁹³ Maya Lin. *Boundaries* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 405.



Figure 20. *Site Plan of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Constitution Gardens.*

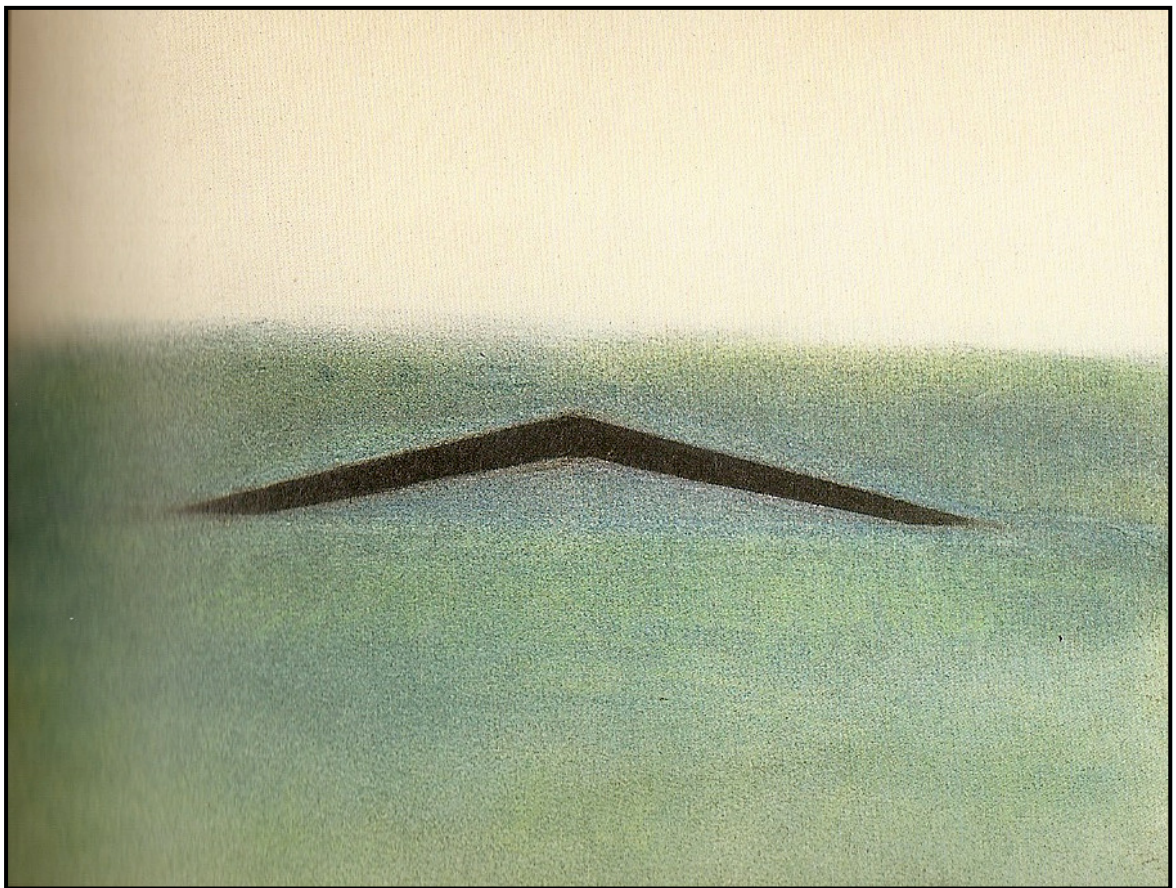


Figure 21. *Maya Lin. Original Drawing of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. 1981.*



Figure 22. Maya Lin. *The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. 1982.



Figure 23. Maya Lin. *The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. 1982. Apex of the Walls.



Figure 24. Maya Lin. *The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. 1982.

said she, "...imagined taking a knife and cutting into the earth, opening it up, and initial violence and pain that in time would heal. The grass would grow back, but the initial cut would remain a pure flat surface in the earth with a polished, mirrored surface, much like the surface of a geode when you cut it and polish the edge."⁹⁴ The listing of the names in chronological order was inspired by her study of World War I memorials, particularly the Lutyens' Memorial at Thiepval, which listed the names of the soldiers killed in battle. The sheer mass of names presented a moving statement about the loss of the war while maintaining a record of the individual. The chronological listing was a way of ordering the names so that those who had served could find their friends and to keep the listing from reading like a directory. Her original design had the names beginning and ending at the tapering points of walls, but she modified the design to have them begin and end in the center, creating a circle between the walls and the earth. Lin's last-minute decision to enter her simple drawings and written explanation into the memorial competition altered the direction of American memorial design by providing a new model for commemoration.

Though the competition jury and the majority of the art establishment embraced Lin' design, the memorial was immediately mired in controversy over its shape and rhetoric, as well as the age, gender and heritage of the designer. Complaints about the design echoed earlier fears that the memorial would be another instance in which Vietnam veterans would be slighted or dishonored, instead of receiving the recognition and acceptance that the memorial concept promised. Echoing complaints heard around the country, prominent Vietnam veteran, Tom Carhart, wrote an editorial to the New

⁹⁴ Lin, 410.

York Times calling the memorial design “anti-heroic,” a “black hole,” and “a black gash of shame and sorrow.” He ended his comments by asking, “Why can't we have something white and traditional and above ground?”⁹⁵ Others published similar thoughts on the memorial, troubled that the design sat below ground level, “denoting shame,” that there was no flag at the site, that the design was non-representational or looked like a tombstone, that there was no rank or service designation of the names, and that the V shape formed by the walls symbolizes a peace sign or a V for Vietcong. Some feared the memorial would become a site for anti-war demonstrations or vandalism.⁹⁶ That the design was produced by a young Asian-American woman led to criticisms that the minimalist, meditative space was ‘too Asian’ or that the v-shape and landscape-bound form ‘feminized’ the memorial, and that Lin was too young and inexperienced to know what she had created, “The Vietnam Veterans Memorial became a medium for the struggle over class, race, and gender made possible by its larger cultural context: the masculinist ideology of the mall, the Vietnam War and the Reagan administration, and the female associations of the landscape.”⁹⁷ Ironically, the aspects of the design that generated the most controversy were the ones dictated by the competition guidelines: that the memorial be a landscape solution that harmonized with the surrounding monuments, that it list the names of the war dead and missing, and that it be a contemplative environment while making no political statement. The fact the memorial sought to be reflective, individual and apolitical revealed the essentially political nature of all

⁹⁵ Tom Carhart. “Insulting Vietnam Vets” (*The New York Times* (24 October 1981) : 23), 23.

⁹⁶ Scruggs, 82-84.

⁹⁷ Deborah L. Rotman and Ellen Rose Savulis. *Shared Spaces and Divided Places: Material Dimensions of Gender Relations and the American Historical Landscape* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 81.

commemorative art – the VVMF was making a political statement about the unresolved social conflicts over the war by dictating that the memorial be apolitical. The insistence on listing of the names of the war dead was an attempt to portray the war through the only common denominator of collective national experience, the American casualties.⁹⁸

Eventually, the storm of controversy proved so intense that the Secretary of the Interior, James Watts, advised the VVMF to look for an alternate design, however, the organization chose to keep Lin's design while searching for a compromise. The solution came in the form of an addition to the site; American sculptor, Frederick Hart (who originally submitted a memorial design to the competition) was asked to create a representational sculptural group that would be placed at the memorial site. This proposal soothed critics and allowed the memorial to be dedicated on November 13, 1982.⁹⁹

Immediately after the memorial was opened to the public, the innovation and power of the design won over critics and visitors and firmly established the memorial as a place for commemoration and healing, distinct from the other monuments and memorials on the mall, "One can sit and have lunch at the Jefferson Memorial, fly a kite at the Washington Monument; one can smile at the gentleness of the Seabees' Memorial; children can play on the nearby statue of Einstein; but one cannot treat the VVM with informality or familiarity."¹⁰⁰ The respect garnered by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is linked to the way the memorial is experienced: the distinct place that memorial presents allows the visitor to determine commemorative meaning. Like the FDR Memorial, the

⁹⁸ Wolschke-Bulmahn, 312.

⁹⁹ Robert F. Howe, "Monumental Achievement" (*Smithsonian* 33 (November 2002) : 90), 90.

¹⁰⁰ Mitchell, 101.

VVM is experienced as a processional, with visitors entering at the side (due to the overwhelming response to the memorial, the entrance was changed from the original design, which envisioned the visitor entering the memorial at the center, to control traffic flow and to keep the grass from being trampled) and following the sloping hillside into the center of the wall, which slowly rises from the earth and increases until it towers over the visitor at the intersection of the panels, “The descent into the center of the memorial is therefore accompanied by an intensification of its physical and, perhaps, emotional impact” (See Figure 25).¹⁰¹ The height of the walls gives the space an enclosed quality and blocks out background noise allowing the visitor to concentrate on the commemorative meaning presented by the walls (See Figure 26). Though the memorial feels like a protected space, it is not isolated due to the layout of the panels which from the center point create an axis between the white obelisk of the Washington Monument and the temple structure of the Lincoln Memorial. This serves to place the events that are being memorialized within the historical and cultural context of American public memory, “The site-specificity of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is crucial to its position as both subversive of and continuous with the nationalist discourse of the Mall.”¹⁰² The overall feeling of the memorial is one of solemnity when faced with the evidence of so much loss, the mass of names that the visitor sees on first entering the memorial is succeeded, as the visitor progresses into the memorial, by the contemplation of the individual names. These names, carved into the smooth reflective surface of the black granite, invite sorrow for the loss of life, “Indeed, if the memorial facilitates or

¹⁰¹ Wolschke-Bulmahn, 332-336.

¹⁰² Sturken, 50.



Figure 25. Maya Lin. *The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. 1982.



Figure 26. Maya Lin. *The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. 1982.

accomplishes mourning, if it is performative in some respect, it is precisely in stating these names, in offering them to be read – the names as an overpowering mass and the individual name that can be read and also touched and in whose grooves one can even place one’s fingers.”¹⁰³ The reading of the names is rendered more meaningful by the polished, mirror-like granite that surrounds them and reflects the face of the viewer, as Maya Lin stated, “The point is to see yourself reflected in the names.”¹⁰⁴ This insertion of the viewer firmly within the memorial rhetoric and aesthetic creates a venue for both individual and collective commemoration as the distinct space of the memorial is both intimate and public.

The participatory commemorative meaning of the site creates a space for multivocal dialogue and lets the visitor add to the memorial landscape. Since the memorial site opened in 1982, visitors have left 64, 000 objects at the Wall, including flags, dog-tags, letters, photographs, and even a motorcycle, “The Wall elicits a physical response. It has inspired visitors to represent their own grief, loss, rage and despair. Contributing their private representations to public space, they cross a boundary between the public and the private, the nation and its citizen, powerfully claiming the memorial as their own.”¹⁰⁵ These left objects illustrate the VVM as a national site of remembrance and a repository of cultural memory, both public and private. The connection of the site to American memory and commemoration goes beyond just the Vietnam War to encompass other painful or controversial aspects of culture, “Artifacts concerning the abortion debate, the AIDS epidemic, gay rights, and the Persian Gulf War have been left

¹⁰³ Karen S. Feldman, “The Shape of Mourning: Reading, Aesthetic Cognition, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial” (*Word & Image* 19, no. 4 (2003) : 296-304), 299.

¹⁰⁴ Hess, 123.

¹⁰⁵ Hass, 21.

at the memorial.”¹⁰⁶ The power of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is encompassed in its distinct sense of place, its ability to facilitate individual and collective memorialization and its focus on providing a participatory visitor experience. It is these qualities, which were introduced by environmental art and explored through the designs of the FDR and JFK memorials, were finally formed into a cohesive whole in the VVM. These elements continued to define commemorative art at the end of the twentieth century, as memorials began to be created, following the success of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, for other marginalized groups and events.

¹⁰⁶ Sturken, 80.

CHAPTER 5

PARTICIPATORY COMMEMORATIVE ART IN THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE:

1982-1997

“...the architecture by which a people memorializes itself is a species of pedagogy. It therefore seeks to instruct posterity about the past and, in doing so, necessarily reaches a decision about what is worth recovering.”¹⁰⁷

Though the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* was immediately recognized for its distinct commemorative power and artistic achievement, its success was tempered by the forced compromise reached between the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund and the critics of Lin’s memorial design. Unprecedented power was wielded by the public in the debate over how the Vietnam War should be commemorated and what form an effective memorial should take, “The entire complex is an emblem of the participation of the public in the framing of public art.”¹⁰⁸ The atmosphere of inclusionist politics, created by willingness to compromise the memorial design in order to have it constructed, ultimately produced an aesthetically cluttered and confused memorial site, rather than the distinct meditative space imagined by Lin. The addition of two representational sculptures at the site, Frederick Hart’s *The Three Fightingmen* (1984) and Glenna Goodacre’s *The Vietnam Women’s Memorial* (1993) highlighted the on-going debate over public memory and the aesthetics of commemoration.

¹⁰⁷ Mitchell, 80.

¹⁰⁸ Danto, 157.

The controversy over Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial reached its peak in early 1982 and faced with the possible postponement of memorial construction (the VVMF feared a long delay or having to find another design, as in the case of the FDR Memorial), the VVMF chose to compromise with opponents of Lin's design and add a representational 'heroic' sculpture to the memorial site, as well as a flag. The compromise resulted in the creation of Hart's sculptural group, *The Three Fightingmen*, which depicts three young male soldiers dressed with Vietnam-era uniforms and weapons (See Figure 27). The soldiers, expressed in realistic detail at a slightly larger-than-life scale, look out into the distance; in an effort to create a more collective memorial, the soldiers are presented as racially different, one soldier is white, one is black, and the third is vaguely ethnic. The sculpture aspires for a realism and heroicism akin to that of the *Iwo Jima Memorial*, which is unsurprising considering that Hart studied under Felix de Weldon, the Iwo Jima designer.¹⁰⁹ However, the Iwo Jima Memorial was based on a memorable patriotic photograph, and in the absence of a similar image that embodied the war spirit for the majority of Americans, Hart chose to present the Vietnam experience by simply showing soldiers in appropriate gear. The sculpture harkens back to the tradition of everyman statues such as the Hiker or the WWI Doughboy and in doing so, presents a traditionalism and continuity of memorial expression that many felt was necessary in order to place the Vietnam War within the framework of American patriotic public memory and history.

The art community was quick to dismiss *The Three Fightingmen* as trite, irrelevant, and a defacement of Lin's design; the sculpture was called, "...a competent

¹⁰⁹ Scruggs, 49.



Figure 27. Frederick Hart. *The Three Fightingmen*. 1982.

homage to an abstraction called ‘vets’ - as traditional as a Hallmark card.”¹¹⁰ Other critics complained more vehemently around the addition at the site, “It’s as if Michelangelo had the Secretary of the Interior climb onto the scaffold and muck around.”¹¹¹ Maya Lin, disappointed over the capitulation of the VVMF to the alteration of the memorial site, characterized the statue in an interview, calling it: “Three men standing there before the world – it’s trite. It’s a generalization, a simplification.”¹¹²

Though a compromise had been reached to include the sculpture and flag at the memorial, the site placement of the additions continued to be debated. Critics of Lin’s design wanted the flag placed at the top of the Wall with the sculpture located at the their intersection; this placement would produce a direct alteration of the Wall’s aesthetic and commemorative meaning, as the sculpture and flag would significantly change the experience of the memorial space. Ultimately, an agreement was reached to site both the sculpture and the flag 120 feet from the Wall, near the entrance to the memorial.¹¹³ The juxtaposition of the representational and heroic statue of soldiers and the solemn and contemplative landscape designed by Lin formed an oppositional dialogue about both the aesthetics and meaning of commemoration and the divisive character of the war. “The antagonism between the statue and wall at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has been likened to a conflict between Jane Fonda and John Wayne and, therefore, an argument about the politics of commemoration.”¹¹⁴ Maya Lin summed up the conflict at the memorial site, saying: “...in a funny sense the compromise...brings the memorial closer

¹¹⁰ Hess, 125.

¹¹¹ Scruggs, 121.

¹¹² Hess, 123.

¹¹³ Hess, 125.

¹¹⁴ Wolschke-Bulmahn, 329.

to the truth. What is memorialized is that people still cannot resolve the war.”¹¹⁵ The stand off presented by the opposing forms and meanings at the memorial site, as well as the unofficial additions left by visitors, offer a multi-vocal commemoration of the war. The dialogue between the two memorials allows the site to tell multiple stories, even conflicting ones, in order to express a more complete picture of the American experience of the war, “The Memorial is a testimony to the conflict that led to the compromise of its own character; it is a historical recapitulation of the battle over the appropriate rhetoric of commemoration.”¹¹⁶

The battle between the two memorials went beyond the implied patriotism or heroicism of the commemorative meaning of the memorials to focus on the memorial aesthetics. The group opposed to Lin’s design, drawing on memorial traditions dating back to the Civil War, believed that meaning in commemorative art could only be achieved through a literal depiction of the war, a physical representation of what was being remembered. The participatory approach to commemorative art, which had been developing since the mid-century, had yet to be proven as a meaningful form of remembrance. The designs for Halprin’s FDR Memorial were publicized during this period, however, few understood its full commemorative implications and representational sculpture played a central role in the creation of the rhetoric and meaning of the memorial. Johnson’s JFK Memorial was easily dismissed as an exercise in postmodern nihilism. For those unversed in the contemporary art scene or unfamiliar with the landscape orientation that memorial art was pushing towards, Lin’s memorial was shocking and simply not meaningful. That Lin’s critics did not understand the

¹¹⁵ Nothstine, 367.

¹¹⁶ Nothstine, 366.

commemorative impact of her memorial design was obvious, as evidenced by this quote from Frederick Hart, “People say you can bring what you want to Lin’s memorial. But I call that brown bag esthetics. I mean you better bring something, because there ain’t nothing being served.”¹¹⁷ Instead of recognizing the universal and multivocal qualities that were embodied in the experience of the Lin’s design, the opponents of the design turned to familiar forms and rhetoric for commemoration.

The battle over the memorial site continued in the early 1990s when female Vietnam veterans, angered that Hart’s sculpture only presented the male contribution to the war, asked for a memorial dedicated the women who served. The campaign for a women’s memorial was lead by Vietnam veteran, Diane Carlson Evans, who argued that neither Hart’s sculpture nor the Wall commemorated the experience of female veterans and made women a visible presence at the memorial site. *The Vietnam Women’s Memorial*, dedicated in 1993, became the first national memorial dedicated to female veterans. Located around three hundred feet from the Wall, sheltered in a grove of trees, the sculpture was designed by American artist, Glenna Goodacre (See Figure 28). It depicts four figures: a blindfolded, injured male soldier held by a white nurse, an African American woman standing beside the nurse and scanning the sky, and a third woman kneeling over medical equipment. The sculptural group was panned by critics as ‘uninspiring’ as it was feared by the NPS and the Commission of Fine Arts that it would become a precedent for the construction of further national memorials for ‘special interest’ groups.¹¹⁸ The addition of the third sculpture at the memorial site further cluttered the landscape while reinforcing the additive values induced by the multi-vocal

¹¹⁷ Hess, 124.

¹¹⁸ Hass, 19.



Figure 28. Glenna Goodacre. *The Vietnam Women's Memorial*. 1993.

qualities of the memorial, “The multiplication of memorials, names and objects at the Wall has, indeed, replaced the possibility of a singular memory of the war; the single figure of the male citizen embodying the nation has been supplanted by three official memorials and a steady stream of combat boots, bicycle parts, and St. Christophers. People come to this memorial and they make their own memorials.”¹¹⁹

The expansion of memorials at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial site reflected the proliferation of commemorative art that was occurring across the nation. The groundswell of national memorial activity included the construction of the *Free Speech Monument*, the *Korean War Memorial*, the *Kent State Memorial*, the *Astronauts Memorial*, and the *AIDS Quilt*, in addition to various local memorials and commemorative projects. As one writer quipped, “If the Washington landscape were to hold all its proposed monuments (to Martin Luther King, Khalil Gibran, patriots, pilots, merchant marines, Christopher Columbus, American housewives, John Muir), it would sink below the Potomac.”¹²⁰ This outpouring of commemorative activity was reflective of the cultural desire to recognize the experiences of the ‘other’ or people and groups that were outside of the mainstream of American public memory, or to memorialize groups or events from the past that had been overlooked during the post-WWII period of utilitarian memorials. As Sturken relates, the push to commemorate these ignored histories may in part be an effort to rewrite their stories or correct a previous cultural wrong, “The rush to embrace the memorial as a cultural symbol reveals not only the relief of telling a history that has been taboo but also a desire to reinscribe that history.”¹²¹ The push to

¹¹⁹ Hass, 20.

¹²⁰ Jane Kay Holtz. “Honoring the Quick and the Dead” (*Landscape Architecture* 80 (January 1990) : 66-68), 67.

¹²¹ Sturken, 75.

commemorate may also be viewed as a way of establishing a unified public memory as an effort to bring together an increasingly diverse society. Conversely, memorials were constructed to preserve a sense of identity and heritage in the face of an impermanent society and to evoke the emotional resonance found in the VVM, “Clearly, there is a potential for these symbols of community and collective history to create a ... shared iconography.”¹²²

Whatever the reason for commemoration, the memorial forms and meanings created during this period have produced an indelible mark on American collective memory and landscape and stand as a testament to the cultural rhetoric and aesthetics of their time. *The Civil Rights Memorial* in Montgomery, Alabama and the *New England Holocaust Memorial* represent two examples of the meaning and forms of commemoration in post-VVM America. Though neither is a national memorial, these sites illustrate the crystallization of the participatory memorial type and provide insight into the impetus behind memorial construction and its impact on the surrounding communities.

The Civil Rights Memorial, dedicated in 1989, was designed by Maya Lin on the heels of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The project was commissioned by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), a non-profit organization founded by Morris Dees and Joe Levin, dedicated to promoting Civil Rights. The memorial was to be located at the entrance plaza of the SPLC’s building in Montgomery, Alabama, which was reconstructed after it was firebombed in 1983 by a member of the Klan. The memorial serves as the public entrance to the new building to illustrate the determination of the

¹²² Holtz, 67.

organization to move forward and to commemorate on-going efforts towards Civil Rights (See Figure 29).¹²³ The memorial design reflects its setting in downtown Montgomery, as well as the influence of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, creating a distinct space for education and commemoration about the Civil Rights movement.¹²⁴

The memorial is composed of two elements, a nine foot wall and a circular tabletop, twelve feet in diameter, resting on an asymmetrical pedestal base (See Figure 30). Both are made up of black Canadian granite and are covered by water which falls down across the wall and onto the table top. The composition of the memorial is asymmetrically balanced between the dark curtain of the wall and the broad openness of the table. The flowing water and the curved wall create a sheltered as well as unenclosed space in which to experience the memorial, while the sound produced by the rushing water masks the noises of the surrounding city and serves to further designate the area (See Figure 31).¹²⁵

As at the VVM, text plays an important role in the aesthetics as well as the meaning of the memorial. The curved wall is inscribed with the words, "...Until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream," a quote paraphrased from the Book of Amos, spoken on two historic occasions by Martin Luther King, Jr.. The

¹²³ Carol Blair and Neil Michel. "Reproducing Civil Rights Tactics: The Rhetorical Performances of the Civil Rights Memorial." (Rhetoric Society Quarterly, Vol. 30, No. 2. (Spring 2000), pp. 31-55), 41.

¹²⁴ William Zinsser. "I Realized Her Tears Were Becoming Part of the Memorial." (Smithsonian, Vol 22. September 1991 p. 32), 32.

¹²⁵ Daniel Abramson. "Maya Lin and the 1960s: Monuments, Time Lines, and Minimalism." (Critical Inquiry 22 (Summer 1996). Pp. 679-709), 692.



Figure 29. *The Southern Law Poverty Center Building and Civil Rights Memorial,*
Montgomery, AL.

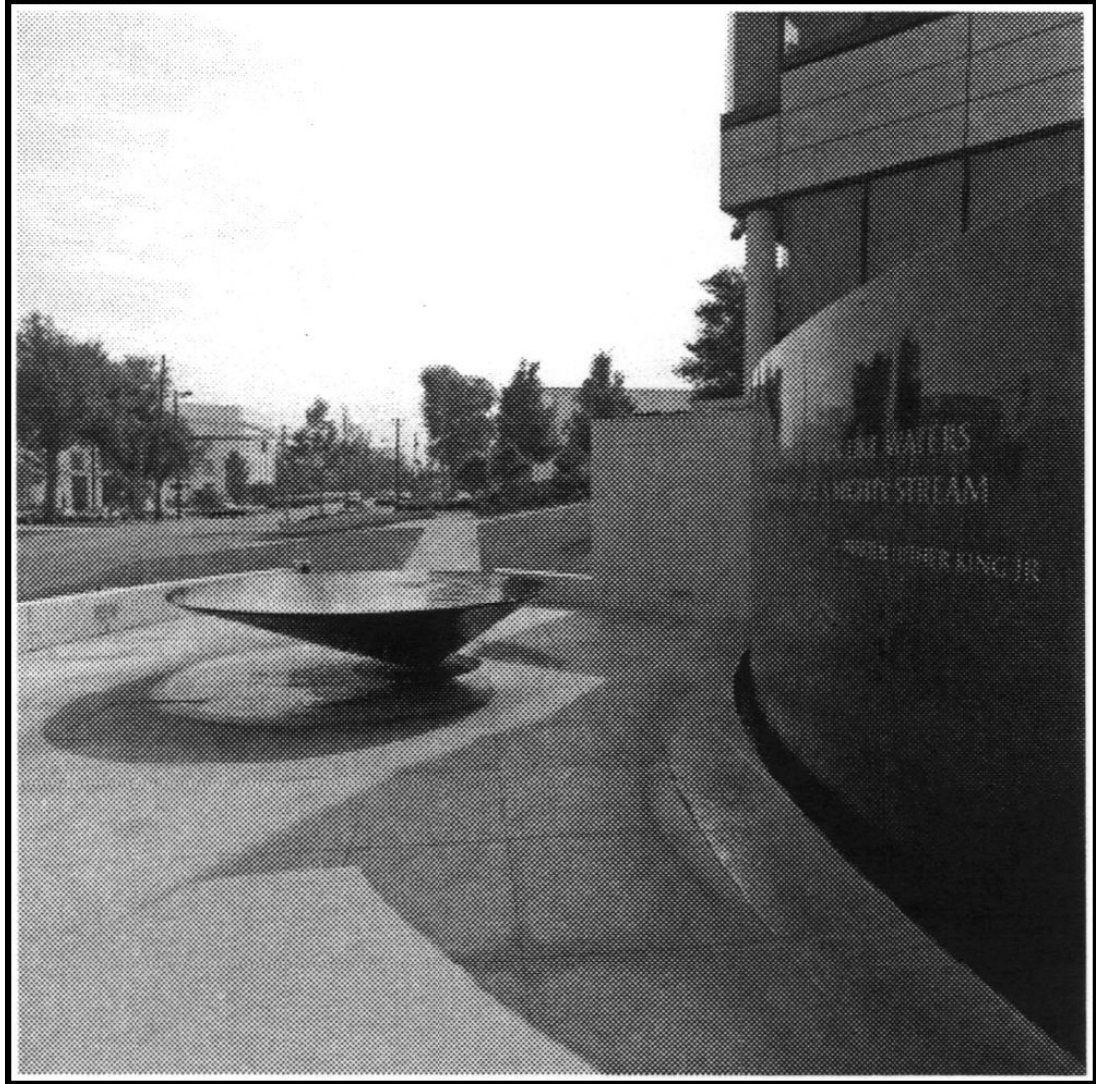


Figure 30. Maya Lin. *The Civil Rights Memorial*. Montgomery, AL, 1989.



Figure 31. Maya Lin. *The Civil Rights Memorial*. Montgomery, AL, 1989.



Figure 32. Maya Lin. *The Civil Rights Memorial*. Montgomery, AL, 1989.

table top is engraved around the edge with fifty-three inscriptions that mark events in the 1950-60s: thirty-two of the inscriptions describe the circumstances of the deaths forty individuals, and twenty-one present landmark events of the Civil Rights movement (See Figure 32).¹²⁶ The inscriptions read as a chronological timeline beginning with the 1954 Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. the Board of Education*, which banned segregation in public schools and ending with the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. There is a large blank space between the end of the timeline and starting date, indicating that the history of Civil Rights is not yet completed. The text for the memorial was written by the SPLC, who established three criteria for the inclusion of individuals on the tabletop, among those who were memorialized were individuals who had died because of their own nonviolent civil rights activism, individuals who were killed by agitators trying to stir up opposition to the movement or throw some obstacle in its path and individuals whose death created momentum for the movement.¹²⁷ The emphasis on individual stories as well as the collective history of the movement presents, like the VVM, a history through absence, and the memorial rhetoric seeks to align the visitor with the victims, “The timeline performs the dynamics of whiteness as a form of authority that maintains itself through brutality and terror and only under the sign of rationalized insanity.”¹²⁸ The highly politicized language of the memorial text, however, does not allow its rhetoric meanings to be determined by the viewer to the same degree as does the VVM. However, like the Wall, it condenses the narrative to a cultural common denominator,

¹²⁶ Blair, 37.

¹²⁷ Zinsser, 32.

¹²⁸ Blair, 45.

that racial discrimination and oppression is bad, in order to construct a collective or universal meaning.

The experience of the memorial further reinforces its political implications. The placement of the memorial space within the plaza sets it firmly within the public space of downtown Montgomery. The memorial disrupts or infringes on the sidewalk so that when it is encountered, the visitor will have to either enter the plaza or purposefully go around it, drawing its placement from the tradition of Civil Rights activism that involved infringing upon or inconveniencing everyday activities to call attention to the participants and their political and moral claims to justice. The memorial stands as a quiet challenge to the surrounding monuments and memorials to the Confederacy or the white establishment of the city that populate Montgomery's downtown, while the curved, reflective wall projects images of the city into the memorial space.¹²⁹ The text of the memorial is visible underneath the sheet of water that both rushes down the wall at waterfall speed and flows smoothly across the surface of the table before falling over the edge and disappearing down a drain at the base. The water, when touched, alters its course around the table, allowing the visitor to symbolically insert themselves into the history presented by the chronology of the table. Maya Lin stated that the water, "...remains very still until you touch it. Your hand causes ripples, which transform and alter the piece, just as reading the words completes the piece."¹³⁰ This tactile, personal engagement encouraged by the memorial facilitates meditation and memory about the people and events being commemorated.

¹²⁹ Blair, 40-41.

¹³⁰ Zinsser, 32.

The Civil Rights Memorial, like the VVM, presents a distinct memorial space where visitors can participate in the meaning and even the aesthetics of the site. Though the memorial is influenced by the commemorative forms and language of the Wall, it successfully transforms those influences into an individual space with its own rhetorical, aesthetic, and sensory experiences. It takes a painful or marginalized past—the racial discrimination of African Americans, and creates a place for reflection, education and ultimately, healing, while acknowledging that the past is not finished and that the fight against discrimination must continue. Through its engaging and meditative commemorative space, the Civil Rights Memorial acknowledges a shameful history and brings both the past and the present together to intercede for a better future.

The *New England Holocaust Memorial*, dedicated in 1995, was the product of a community effort to erect a memorial in honor of the six million Jews killed during the Holocaust. The design and construction of the memorial in Boston, relied on public participation to steer the final form and content of the work, creating a powerfully commemorative landmark within the city. The impetus for the memorial came from a Holocaust survivor, who after seeing Holocaust liberation sculptures in other U.S. cities, wanted to create one in Boston. The image of the liberator is often depicted in American Holocaust memorials, as the role of liberator is viewed as the American part in the story of the Holocaust. The community of Holocaust survivors in Boston, however, was unhappy with this narrow focus and wanted a memorial that would commemorate their remembrance and loss.¹³¹ They appealed to Boston Mayor Raymond Flynn for a memorial site and were granted Union Street Park, a long strip of park land between

¹³¹ Senie, *Critical Issues*, 66.

Faneuil Hall and City Hall that served as a traffic island for Congress Street in the 1960s. The plot was located along the Freedom Trail, a path around the city that marks sites of historic interest, specifically the Colonial and Revolutionary history. The location of the memorial site along side the Freedom Trail was significant as it sited the memorial physically into the story of American history being told by the Trail, "...it will be located both spatially and metaphysically in the continuum of American Revolutionary history."¹³²

The community wanted to use the design and construction of the memorial to provide a public forum for education and remembrance of the Holocaust and for discussion about Jewish identity and American civic culture. To this end, the memorial committee sponsored public debates on the virtues and liabilities of the memorial and public symposia were organized for survivors to relate their experiences and art historians to lecture on the function and meaning of commemorative art, "The process, if not the monument, would be interactive; it would remind the community as often as possible how much memory depended on them, and not on the space."¹³³ The memorial committee allowed the debate and public input to drive the project forward and in 1990, an international design competition for the memorial was announced.¹³⁴ The competition jury was composed of Marshall Berman, a cultural historian; Rosemarie Bletter, an architectural critic and historian; Henry Friedlander, a German historian and Holocaust survivor; Frank Gehry, an architect; Katy Kline, an art historian; Michael Van

¹³² James E. Young. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. 1993, 324.

¹³³ Young, 327.

¹³⁴ Young, 325.

Valkenburgh, a landscape architect; and Elyn Zimmerman, a sculptor and environmental artist.

Five hundred and twenty designs were submitted to the competition by architects, artists, sculptors and landscape architects. The statement of intent, written by the memorial committee, declared the ultimate purpose of the memorial: “The memorial will be for the six million – a place to grieve for the victims and to mark the loss of their culture to history...In seeking a universal understanding of the Shoah, we acknowledge the place of each experience in the horror of that collective history.”¹³⁵ Seven finalists were chosen from among the applicants and in the public spirit of the memorial process, the finalists’ models were made available for the community to view and respond to. The memorial selected by the jury was a design by San Francisco-based architect, Stanley Saitowitz, in partnership with Ulysses Kim, Tom Gardner and John Bass. The construction of the memorial, which broke ground on Holocaust Remembrance Day, began with the ritualistic preparation of the site, using the destruction of the existing landscape as a part of the memory construction.¹³⁶ The memorial was dedicated in October, 1995.

The design features six fifty-four foot glass towers set in a row, each illuminated from below by a black granite pit filled with electrically heated volcanic rocks from which misty smoke rises (See Figure 33). Iron grates cover the pits so that a visitor can walk across them on a black granite path that leads through the bases of the towers (See Figure 34). Each of the six towers is named after a death camp: Chelmno, Treblinka,

¹³⁵ Young, 326.

¹³⁶ Senie, *Critical Issues*, 68.



Figure 33. Stanley Saitowitz, in partnership with Ulysses Kim, Tom Gardner and John Bass. *The New England Holocaust Memorial*. Boston, MA, 1995.



Figure 34. Stanley Saitowitz, in partnership with Ulysses Kim, Tom Gardner and John Bass. *The New England Holocaust Memorial*. Boston, MA, 1995.



Figure 35. Stanley Saitowitz, in partnership with Ulysses Kim, Tom Gardner and John Bass. *The New England Holocaust Memorial*. Boston, MA, 1995.

Majdanek, Auschwitz, Sobibor and Belzec.¹³⁷ Etched onto the thick glass that composed the towers are six million numbers, placed in an orderly pattern, which suggests the numbers that were tattooed onto the prisoners of the concentration camps while commemorating individually each of the six million Jews that died in the Holocaust (See Figure 35). Inscribed on the lower portion of the glass, at eye level with the visitor, are quotes and stories from survivors and victims about their experiences. A large black granite panel placed at the entrance to the memorial outlines the history of the Holocaust from the Nazis rise to power in 1933 to their defeat in 1945. 'Remember' is engraved onto the pathway in both English and Hebrew. As an effort to educate the visitor about the history of the events of the Holocaust, there are short statements inscribed along the edges of the pathway in between the towers that tell the viewer about the chronological experience of the Holocaust (See Figure 36). At the end of the memorial, there is a final panel with a quote from Lutheran Pastor Martin Niemoellerm about the universal implications of discrimination and hatred.

The semi-translucent towers serve as an intermediate between the glass and steel skyscrapers of the city and the old, colonial brick architecture of Fanueil Hall. The visitor approaches the entrance to the memorial by passing by the historic structure and continuing to the small strip of land adjacent to a busy street. Once inside the park, the noise of the traffic and surrounding city give way to a solemn landscape populated with trees and the silent vigilance of the glass towers. The black granite path winds through the towers, providing historical information and facilitating meditation on the events and people of the Holocaust. The towers, their glass faces made almost opaque by the

¹³⁷ Young, 332.



Figure 36. Stanley Saitowitz, in partnership with Ulysses Kim, Tom Gardner and John Bass. *The New England Holocaust Memorial*. Boston, MA, 1995.



Figure 37. Stanley Saitowitz, in partnership with Ulysses Kim, Tom Gardner and John Bass. *The New England Holocaust Memorial*. Boston, MA, 1995.

prominence and sheer volume of the etched numbers, dominate the landscape while their interiors are softly illuminated by the ground pits that drift smoke through them and onto the adjoining path (See Figure 37). The visitors walk quietly through the towers reading the facts, quotes, and stories of Holocaust victims while contemplating the loss, horror and suffering of the events.

The journey of the visitor through the site illustrates its experiential design and reflective memorial content. The text of the memorial is composed of both personal quotes and stories and historical, factual information. This presents a narrative that encompasses both past and present, as the past is revealed through the individuals' voices and the present through the statement of contemporary historical knowledge about the development and outcome of the events. The language of the memorial, like the Civil Rights Memorial, aligns the visitor with the victims of the events, placing the viewer physically within the 'concentration camps' after which the towers are named. By transcribing this history onto American soil, the memorial seeks to place the story of the Holocaust firmly within American public memory and history. As America's role in the Holocaust story is usually as the liberator or as a safe haven for refugees, the New England Holocaust Memorial reappropriates this immigrant story of survival to one that is American, "As a land of immigrants, the survivors had hoped, America would also be a land of immigrant memories, of pasts that are 'foreign' only insofar as they transpired in other lands but American in that they constitute the reason for having come to America in the first place."¹³⁸ As the survivors' became American citizens, their history was absorbed into American culture and experience. The incorporation of the Holocaust into

¹³⁸ Senie, *Critical Issues*, 60.

American public memory was a way to assimilate its survivors into American society and culture and to recast themselves and their experiences as American. To this end, the form and content of the New England Holocaust Memorial is necessarily different than those erected in Europe, as it expresses foremost grief and loss, rather than guilt or atonement. The memorial provides an educational role for the community, illustrated by the desire of the memorial committee to use the memorial to facilitate public learning and debate about the events of the Holocaust, especially as the number of survivors is becoming fewer.

The Civil Rights Memorial and the New England Holocaust Memorial represent two significant examples of the rhetoric, form, and commemorative meaning utilized by participatory memorials in the late-twentieth century. Both illustrate narratives of the 'other,' commemorating the experiences of groups outside of the political and cultural majority. These memorials were erected with the desire to raise awareness about the struggles endured by these peoples and to keep their suffering and eventual acceptance within American society in the public memory. The significance of naming or marking the individual at these sites, as well as at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, is way of commemorating the individual's place within the group, allowing the visitor to make a personal connection to those being memorialized. The participatory and multi-vocal nature of these memorials strengthens the relationship between the viewer and those being remembered, creating a more intimate and ultimately, meaningful commemorative experience. This memorial meaning is strengthened by the distinct sense of place produced at these sites through their landscape-based design, simple forms, and rhetorical pith.

CHAPTER 6

ISSUES IN THE MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION OF PARTICIPATORY COMMEMORATIVE ART

“...There is no guarantee that today’s monuments, designed and built with great public participation, lively debate and memorial engagement will not one day stand, like their predecessors from the nineteenth century, as figures of forgetting.”¹³⁹

Participatory commemorative art in the late-twentieth century was the product of both the aesthetic and cultural circumstances of its era and the influences of memorials built by previous generations. The site-specific, experiential and multi-vocal design elements that make up these memorial sites reflect the dualism of their contemporary and historical natures. The history of American memorial art influenced the direction of late-twentieth century memorial design, beginning with the emphasis on the individual and naming that came out of Civil War commemoration and later WWI memorial architecture. The rejection of historical forms, representational sculpture and non-utilitarian commemoration and the embrace of the modernist aesthetic in the post-WWII period both created an era of forgetting (that later generations sought fiercely to remedy through unprecedented memorial construction) and sparked an architectural revolution whose commemorative power was revealed by the iconic streamlined design of Eero Saarinen’s *Gateway Arch* in St. Louis. The site-specific, landscape-based and emotive spaces created by the environmental artists of the postmodern 1960-70s, embraced the

¹³⁹ Huyssen, 255.

past and the spiritual meanings inherent in art and the landscape, reaching back to prehistory and the ancient past to create forms with personal and universal meanings while placing the viewer physically and rhetorically within their work. This new appreciation for history, the environment, and individual landscapes resulted in controversy over the design of the first national presidential memorial to be built since the 1930s, the *Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial*. After the creation and rejection of various monumental modernist designs, a new memorial solution was found that was landscape-based, processional, and experiential and incorporated traditional representational sculptural elements to provide an educational as well as meditative rhetoric. The *John F. Kennedy Memorial* provided another example of the search for an effective contemporary memorial, utilizing minimalist modern aesthetics and a simple text to create a distinct space for reflection and mourning.

The diverse elements of these commemorative expressions came together in Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, which codified a new type of commemorative art that was composed of a site-specific, landscape-based, abstract design, a rhetoric that relied on individual naming, and a commemorative meaning that encompassed both personal and collective memorialization and was determined by the viewer. The participatory memorial type that was born out of the VVM was translated across the country as memorials construction began to proliferate in the 1980-90s. The *Civil Rights Memorial* and the *New England Holocaust Memorial* offer examples of the commemorative form and memorial content pioneered by the VVM, memorializing the painful pasts of minority groups that have been ignored in the historical commemorative landscape and

providing local communities with distinct spaces to remember and learn from their history.

The development of the participatory memorial in the late-twentieth century is due to its ability to provide commemorative meaning for diverse individuals, a quality essential to reaching the American public, as Senie points out, “The very concept of public art, defined in any meaningful way, presupposes a fairly homogenous public and a language of art that speaks to all. These two prerequisites were never present in the United States.”¹⁴⁰ The capacity to relate to the viewer on an individual level and thus, as a public, allows participatory commemorative art to present both a personal and shared expression of remembrance. Though these works seem to embody a timeless quality, they are foremost representative of the multi-vocal and individualized rhetoric of their time and their social relevance may wane with the passing of postmodern cultural values, as in the case of nineteenth century monuments. In order to preserve these sites as both cultural resources and as contemporary places of commemoration, their management and conservation plans must be rooted in the values that make up the form and content of these memorials. Using the ideology that inspired these works, recommendations can be made to guide the management and preservation of these sites.

As participatory memorials are of relatively recently construction, the material conservation issues presented by these works can only be discussed in general terms. The high volume of visitors at these sites presents a challenge to maintain the aesthetic and experiential qualities exhibited by these works while dealing with the issues of wear and tear caused by constant use. The landscape elements of these sites, in particular,

¹⁴⁰ Senie, *Critical Issues*, 171.

receive the most abuse from visitors and present the greatest challenge to sustain. These problems were evident at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in the late 1980s, as the large number of visitors at the site had worn the grass in front of the memorial into a muddy rut. The solution taken by the NPS (which currently manages the memorial site) was to build a stone pathway that visitors could walk on, thus preserving the grassy landscape. Though this seems to be a relatively minor alteration of the site, the path extends from the walls of the memorial onto the lawn, blurring the straight edge created from the wall to the landscape and only allowing viewers one approach to the memorial, rather than the multiple entrances Lin envisioned for the design. This example illustrates the pitfalls of mediating between visitor accommodation and the aesthetics of the site. A less intrusive or visible solution would have kept the integrity of the design while allowing for the high volume of visitors. The landscape should be maintained in keeping with the design of the memorial as much as possible, while acknowledging that it will mature over time, and damaged plant materials should be replaced with like materials. The conservation of the architectural elements is equally challenging; visitors often take rubbings of the memorial text found at many of the sites as a souvenir of the commemorative experience. Over time, this, as well as natural weathering and aging of the material, will wear down the surface of the memorial, possibly obscuring the text. Though repair and maintenance will be necessary, preserving the original fabric, rather than replacing it with like materials, is crucial to protecting the authenticity and integrity of the memorial site.

Additions to the memorial site should be carefully considered, as the sites are both cultural artifacts and modern sites of commemoration. Elements should only be added to the site if they do not alter the experience, aesthetics or meaning of the original work and

present a contemporary commemorative expression. The addition of the *Three Fightingmen* at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was planned during the construction of the memorial and therefore forms a part of the original fabric of the memorial, while the *Vietnam Women's Memorial* is a later addition to the site and was placed so that it did not affect the experience or the viewshed of the existing memorials. Because of the site-specific nature of these memorials, their original landscape context should be maintained as much as possible, to retain the memorial experience intended by the design. The modern relevance and visitation of these sites, dictates that while the original fabric and context are preserved, the sites be allowed to evolve with contemporary memorial expression, including conserving the vernacular, unofficial memorials created by visitors. This may include objects left at the memorial site; in the case of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial which receives a large number of left objects, the NPS has the resources to collect these artifacts so that they can be preserved but not overwhelm the original fabric of the site. Other sites may keep these spontaneous memorials for a set period of time or permanently, if they are integral to facilitating memorialization at the site, as long as they are removable and don't damage, compromise or have a permanent impact on the site.

The primary challenge of managing and maintaining these sites is to preserve the aesthetic and experiential integrity of the site while accommodating and educating visitors. Often official additions to the memorial site such as informational signs and markers, guest facilities, and museums or welcome centers are more disruptive to the commemorative space and experience than left objects or wear and tear. While these visitor resources can be important to direct, inform and educate, they should be erected only if essential to the site; signs and markers should be as unobtrusive as possible, while

visitor centers, museums and other facilities should be constructed so as not to compromise the site design, context or experience.

These memorials should be preserved and managed as places that have historic and aesthetic value as well as contemporary commemorative meaning. The current administration and conservation of these sites should be used as an opportunity to allow their memorial meaning to evolve with American culture and public memory. Just as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial became a place where other contemporary events such as the AIDS epidemic and the Persian Gulf War were memorialized, these sites should facilitate the commemoration of events and people outside of their designated memorial language. The personal and participatory character of these commemorative artworks established a precedent of subjectivity and multi-vocal dialogue that will continue to give participatory memorials cultural relevance even after those that remember the events being memorialized are gone. Rather than being “figures of forgetting,” the interactive and individual qualities embodied in these sites may bestow them with a cultural consequence that lasts beyond their time and proves that their aesthetic and rhetorical values are indeed collective and enduring.

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