

# Socializing Sculpture

## Commemorative Public Art as a Pedagogical Tool

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### Abstract

As protestors across the world call for the toppling of statues celebrating racist figures, cities must consider what new narratives and designs for public art can most appropriately and inclusively engage communities in conversations about the past. While many studies center on finding anti-racist figures to instead celebrate, I propose a method for evaluating projects that centers upon critical pedagogy and community involvement rather than emulating the monumental hero model with new heroes. In this way, we might envision a more inclusive commemorative landscape by entirely reimagining its structure. While the public may trust monuments to present an unbiased account of history, implicit in their status as representations of history is their interpretive nature, which is necessarily situated in a particular viewpoint. Creators must maximize the potential of public spaces to communicate to a wider audience while also considering the historic asymmetries that continue to favor white, male perspectives within these spaces. Public art serves as a potential tool to reshape cityscapes and address historic injustices. This paper investigates projects' abilities to meet this potential by combining scholarship in critical pedagogy and memory studies, as well as analyzing existing projects in terms of their educational and interactive qualities. I conclude that public art projects addressing historical injustices must incorporate inclusive pedagogical models like those of Paulo Freire and bell hooks. Tulsa's Greenwood Art Project, which commemorates the 1921 Race Massacre, might serve as a model for this. Head artist Rick Lowe, informed by the theory of social sculpture, is able to address community members' various perspectives, not just in the realization of the project but in all levels of its conception. By rethinking the relationship between artist and audience, public art projects have the potential to incorporate previously erased perspectives without positing a single, universal truth.

## Introduction

Commemorative public art has the exceptional potential to narrate history to a larger community but does so without the space to explore the nuances allowed for in museums. In the urban environment, artists must doubly consider the ways to frame the narrative of an event, person, or place, as well as to consider the particular audience they wish to reach. In doing this, public art can frame the past by composing a specific perspective of history that becomes the “truth.” The stories that are told here, in turn, often recreate power structures underlying a particular community; only those with resources can access the space to create these works. They are therefore effectively allowed to write history as it manifests in them. As the toppling of confederate and other racist monuments challenges people across the world to rethink the role of public art in remembering the past, creators must respond to these changes by adapting new models to create art that more appropriately addresses historic injustices.

As we consider the ways to reframe history through art, a shift in thinking about the relationship between the artist and the community is an effective means to not only work towards overturning the whitewashing of history, but also engaging a wider audience. Over time, commemorative public art projects have been transformed, moving from an older model seen in statues looking back at historical “heroes,” through the abstracted memorial to become increasingly interactive. Through these shifts, the distance between artist and audience gradually shrinks. As this happens, public art projects move more and more towards representing the public, rather than representing history to the public. Reframing discourse about these projects and planning for public art initiatives with the intention to fuse the artist and audience allows communities to address history most effectively and inclusively, particularly historical injustices that are perpetuated in systemic racism and classism.

## Constructing Heroes

Monuments in public spaces have been a particularly hot topic as protestors across the world topple statues of controversial figures like confederate soldiers or political figures with histories of exploitation. As these monuments fall, it is increasingly urgent to both consider the systems which allowed them to be erected and the effects that these have on the collective memory of the individuals that cities choose to remember. The endeavor to monumentalize history in the form of heroic individuals is a particularly illustrative example of the ways in which public space can be mobilized as a tool to control the collective memory of an event, person, or circumstance. If the ideal notion of public spaces aspires to assign them a level of universality, the messages that public art carry consequently aspire to represent universal values. The selected candidates for monuments, then, are representative of political powers constructing a particular national consciousness, a self-replicating system that advantages white male perspectives of history.

The celebration of an individual like Christopher Columbus, for example, highlights the ways in which a dishonest and privileged framing can shape public opinion—both of Columbus himself and of the legacy he represents. While the long-standing perception of Columbus in the country credits him with the discovery of the Americas, this perspective necessarily ignores the resulting colonization and genocide of Native Americans which his expeditions spurred.<sup>1</sup> Celebrating Columbus allows the country to avoid confrontation with this destructive past and to frame the beginnings of American history as a triumph in exploration rather than in exploitation. Individuals with a vested interest in bolstering this view of history are those who benefit from the gaping holes it leaves in considering the implication of “discovering” land that was already populated. To protect these interests, those with economic resources and political power can “organize public space to convey (and thus to teach the public) desired political lessons.”<sup>2</sup> In this, monuments to figures such as Columbus allow for a fabrication of consensus cementing them in history, effectively squelching opposing perspectives.<sup>3</sup> Recalling the contradiction of a single public, the model for memorializing circumstances such as the colonization of the Americas definitionally privileges the white, upper-class public at the expense of individuals affected by this exploitation. As public spaces are mobilized to serve the interests of those in power, they effectively become less about serving and more about controlling the public.

The growing debate over blatantly racist figures like Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee has shown, however, the model of monumentalizing any figure brings with it certain limitations. Even when depicting non-white individuals, monuments to historic “heroes” can still white-wash and regulate history to continue to serve the interest of those with existing power. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial (see Figure 1) in Washington D.C., the first memorial honoring an African American on the National Mall, represents another complication in producing monumentalized statues of individuals. Both in Savannah and in Washington, the impetus for creating monuments to Black people in America came from a call for diversity in the commemorative landscape; the historically Black fraternity Alpha Phi Alpha, of which King himself was a member, had to lobby Congress for several years before President Clinton signed an act authorizing the construction of the memorial in 1996.<sup>4</sup> In 2011, the memorial was finally unveiled.



Figure 1. Lei Yixin, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial*, 2011, Washington, D.C.  
Photo by Ron Cogswell. December 31, 2011. Licensed under CC BY 2.0.

The selected design derives from a quote from King's "I have a Dream" speech, in which he promises "With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope." Building on the image of a stone of hope, the memorial features a piece being pulled from a monumental carved mountain; this "stone of hope" features a rendering of King made by Chinese sculptor Lei Yixin.<sup>5</sup> Joining the ranks of four other sculptures—to Presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt—Martin Luther King Jr. was both metaphorically and visually cemented in the fabric of American history through his induction into the National Mall. King's memory, though, has been somewhat distorted by his ubiquity as a lone figurehead of the multifaceted struggle for Civil Rights. While justly celebrated as a martyr today, King had a public disapproval rating of nearly 75 percent during his lifetime of advocacy for a "revolution of values," as he described to journalist David Halberstam in 1967.<sup>6</sup> Today, though, powerful individuals, many of them white, adopt King's image to represent peace, integration, and "some panracial form of the 'Beloved Community' that he often preached" that has somehow moved past race.<sup>7</sup> The neutralization of King's legacy is in part achieved through monuments like his memorial on the National Mall; several elements in the final design for King's memorial not only distance him from the Civil Rights Movement, but also entirely decontextualize his own words. The initial design for the memorial included 24 niches featuring additional figures from the Civil Rights movement, including Rosa Parks and Fannie Lou Hamer, contextualizing King as a *part*, rather than the only actor in the movement.<sup>8</sup> In the process of selecting quotes to inscribe on the memorial, King was further dissociated from his historic context. The two original quotes from King's "I Have a Dream" speech—meant to visually accent either side of King's likeness—were to be the section describing the Stone of Hope that inspired the design and another referred to as the "Promissory Note" section. In the latter, King outlines that in the Constitution and Declaration of Independence, "they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men ... would be granted the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," but that "it is obvious today America has defaulted on the promissory note in so far as her citizens of color are concerned ..." In place of this poignant passage, the designers instead inscribed, "I was a drum major for justice, peace and righteousness," (see Figure 2) effectively epitomizing the abstract and universal image of King that is favorable to white and powerful decision-makers. In removing the element of antagonism and blame, King's message of racial justice could be co-opted by the same people responsible for this oppression.

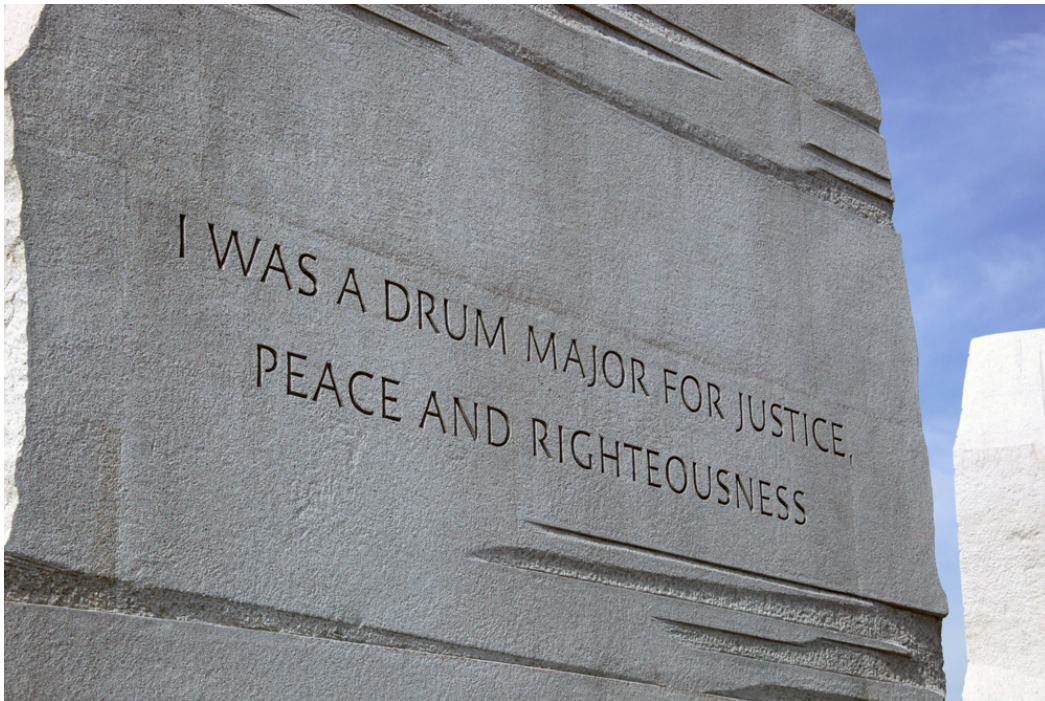


Figure 2. Lei Yixin, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial* (detail), 2011, Washington, D.C.  
Photo by Tim Evanson. March 15, 2012. Licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Extracting King from his position as a leader against oppression enacted by the same category of authority, the drum major quote aims to make King a neutralized figure for everyone regardless of their positionality. The quote was met with outrage at the memorial's 2011 opening, where it was criticized for being misquoted to the point of misrepresentation. A year later, the quote was replaced with King's original words: "If you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice. Say that I was a drum major for peace. I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter."<sup>9</sup> Still detached from the topic of race, the new design for the memorial embodied the shift that chief architect Ed Jackson Jr. described, accounting that "the sponsoring foundation has clarified the memorial's focus to include Dr. King's broader impact on issues of universal importance, extending beyond the civil rights movement ..."<sup>10</sup> Without the context of the racially charged threats to justice against which King fought, the specific meaning of his words are reduced to aphorisms.<sup>11</sup>

The processes which the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity in D.C. endured to break into the decidedly white commemorative landscape highlight the distance between marginalized groups and those with the power to shape public spaces. Only through the exceptional efforts of Black individuals and groups were these monuments created; only with pointed criticism of whitewashed public spaces were these strides made in the first place. The years that separated the starts of these efforts from the realization of the projects themselves reveal the dissociation of governing bodies from their constituents. For the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial in D.C., such strenuous parsing of message entirely removed King from the Civil Rights struggle, instead manufacturing an inoffensive hero for the country to applaud. The processes which stifled King's role in dismantling a deeply racist system are the same which wish to erase the continued existence of the same oppressive system. By reframing King as a depoliticized figure, his memorial is in turn distanced from the Civil Rights Movement, fabricating its distance from the present.

The inclusion of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial on the National Mall is undoubtedly a momentous stride in remembering history. Here, King is justly contextualized as one of the most decisive actors in American history. However, the controversies that arise in its fulfillment are in part a result of a desire to address an unattainable monolithic public to achieve the ideal of the universal and neutral public space. The conspicuous distance between the public calls for diversity in who is monumentalized as a figure and those with the power to mold the public environment allows for manipulation and distortion. People's calls for monuments may be answered, but their perspectives are inhibited in the realization of these projects. The desire to generate inoffensive heroes is of concern mainly to those in power. When presented with the problem of addressing multiple publics, heroic figures, even justifiably heroic figures like King, are distorted. Inclusion of diverse figures in the commemorative canon is not enough when their legacies are watered down to feign universality. While King's striving for justice and courage in the face of deeply rooted hatred can and should be universally admired, neutralizing his words absolves oppressors from their role in these systems. Thus, the production of King through the historic model of the heroic monument relies on narratives of the past that are asymmetrically reliant on white male perspectives. This issue is not singularly a result of misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the past, but moreover of a failed system for making meaning of history.



## Public Pedagogy

If a major goal of commemorative public art is to educate inhabitants about a particular history, it is necessary to consider the ways in which history is produced. While the public may trust monuments to present a true account of history, implicit in their status as *representations* of history is their interpretive nature that is inherently situated in a particular viewpoint.<sup>12</sup> As a discipline, history seeks to understand and analyze the past; this is often done through careful parsing of primary sources, of memories. In this way, history relies on individual memories to make meaning and construct the truth. However, history and individual memories often come in conflict as sources of information. Transforming individual memories into a kind of national memory “replaces experience with a unifying abstraction to which the memories are co-opted.”<sup>13</sup> In order to lend legitimacy to a particular narrative—one that can be modeled as an objective narrative—individual connections must be negated in favor of the collectively accepted storyline. In his essay *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, Pierre Nora distinguishes between history and memory, arguing that “Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon ...[while] history is a representation of the past.”<sup>14</sup> For Nora, the ideal history represents an entirely objective and true account of history, regardless of its attainability. In the process of constructing history, the resulting narrative is necessarily distanced from personal experience to produce an illusion of neutrality. History seeks to become objective, no longer owned by the individuals who experienced the past, but rather a universal truth.

If history is, as Winston Churchill was famously quoted saying, “written by the victors,” this must come at the expenses of the losers of history. The endeavor to produce an objective account of the past inevitably favors those with the power and resources to write history. By only accepting perspectives of the past that bolster the narrative of history, in Nora’s sense, memories that contradict this narrative must be delegitimized. However, just as the public is idealized as a universal community, imbued with the ability to serve every individual equally, Nora’s sense of history is detached from the inevitability of contradicting perspectives. In both cases, the ideal is unattainable, an unreality that can only be preserved by disempowering and negating perspectives that are incompatible with this utopian vision. Building on this principle, Michael Apple challenges education systems and their role in emboldening some forms of knowledge over others in his book, *Official Knowledge: Democratic Education in a Conservative Age*. Raising the question of “Whose knowledge is of the most worth,” Apple points out that what counts as legitimate knowledge is far from neutral, but rather reflective of power relationships and struggles of certain race, class, gender, and religious groups.<sup>15</sup>



In the context of the city, the internally contradictory ideals—of an objective history, of a neutral and all-serving public space, and of the universal values represented in heroes—collide. Evaluating the consequences of these convenient distortions demonstrates the ways in which the continuity of unattainable ideals bolsters the authority of those in power by masking power structures under the guise of objectivity. As Richard Dyer outlines in *White: Essays on Race and Culture*, “whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen,” creating a sense of superiority by going unnoticed; those who are not white are characterized as being “colored,” as having something *added* to the pure slate of whiteness.<sup>16</sup> Through this process, the systems of authority that disempower individuals based on racial identities and economic status stay in power through their invisibility. With their claims to neutrality and legitimate knowledge, conflicting perspectives are effectively undermined.

The construction of a single, true history is achieved by suppressing memory; individual memories expose the internal inconsistencies in history and undermine the claim to objectivity. Rather than encouraging individual connections with the past, history is manufactured as detached reality. In the realm of commemorative public art, this is especially illustrated in the model of heroic individuals. In these sculptures, the audience is hand-fed a narrative of history, indoctrinating the public with an appropriate attitude. As figures like Martin Luther King Jr. are severed from their revolutionary context, history is mobilized to serve the interests of those in power rather than those whose lives were directly affected by King’s legacy. In some sense, King “belonged to the whites, who claimed the final say in his representation.”<sup>17</sup> Monumental statues commemorating the Civil Rights Movement in this way replicate the Western monumental tradition that revered figures from emperors and kings to confederate leaders, historically only produced by the elites with disproportionate power and prestige. Inheriting this visual tradition only perpetuates the myth of an objective history.

Navigating the inconsistencies in history through the medium of public art necessitates a consideration of alternate modes of teaching and remembering the past. In his revolutionary text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire warns against aspiring to the position of the oppressor, rather than to liberation from the system of oppression as a whole.<sup>18</sup> Celebrating figures that stand for liberation of Black people using a prototype of Churchills “victors” of history replicates the model of history that only allows for a single perspective—that of the victors. Faced with the endeavor to diversify the commemorative landscape as racist heroes of the past are toppled, a new mode of representation that reimagines history with a new visual vocabulary might be taken as an opportunity to rethink how art can represent the past more meaningfully. As Audre Lorde taught, “the

master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."<sup>19</sup> Put another way, the endeavor to use public art as a tool to promote inclusivity and diversity in history cannot be achieved by replicating the praise of white male heroes; inserting figures like Martin Luther King Jr. into the canon of history in this way legitimizes the figuration of other historic heroes. In the process of representing King as a depoliticized hero, those in power inhibit individual inquiry and connection by instead using propagandistic manipulation. Rather than allowing for dialogue and ambiguity in the King memorial, the design dictates an appropriate attitude from which no deviation is possible.

In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks similarly explores the ways in which education can be adapted to be more democratic and inclusive for students of all backgrounds and social statuses. While society has shifted to emphasize multiculturalism, she teaches, there has been little discussion about ways to transform education to incorporate methods to include diverse perspectives and experiences.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, calls to diversify monuments reflect the growing emphasis on diversity and multiculturalism; however, without consideration for alternate pedagogical methods in application of projects that increasingly feature new narratives, multiculturalism is merely superficial. Failing to consider a diverse audience and the ways that public art is an educational tool to teach about the past disallows engaged learning. Freire distinguishes between pedagogical and manipulative techniques in the endeavor to create inclusive education. Defining the typical "banking" mode of education in which the students are passively filled with knowledge belonging to the educator, "projecting an absolute ignorance" onto the student.<sup>21</sup> This model only allows for a narrow view of truth; by only allowing for a single narrative of experience and reality, students are taught from a singular perspective presented as universal.<sup>22</sup> In assuming a passive role in learning that is disconnected from the lived experiences of many students, they increasingly become objects in the learning process with no avenues for critical inquiry. The same principles that hooks and Freire explore in building inclusive educational practices in the classroom must be considered in the realm of public art. The problem of dictating a single perspective of the past—of emphasizing Nora's history at the expense of individual memory—delegitimizes any narrative that conflicts with those constructed to serve the interests of the upper-class white men at the center of historic representation. Looking to pedagogical theories, the alternative to the problems this poses in cultivating inclusivity and diversity lies not only in representation, but further in rethinking how information is communicated. Rather than emulating the model of heroic individuals to insert new figures, innovative projects might challenge existing pedagogical tools to instead encourage alternative narratives and individual inquiry.

## Interactivity

Public art projects looking to commemorate history have increasingly searched for ways to engage their audiences in meaningful dialogue about narratives previously absent from the public sphere. As Quentin Stevens, in his book *Memorials as Spaces of Engagement*, outlines, in some cases these repressed histories recognize and articulate darker histories of the country. Whether this be through increasing abstraction that presents alternative perspectives of histories we are already familiar with in works like Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veteran's Memorial* (see Figure 3) or models that encourage audience participation in newly articulated narratives like the *NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt* (see Figure 4), innovative choices by artists seek to encourage individuals to interact with the ideas presented in public projects, or even with the physical project itself. While on a national level, these works may succeed in encouraging the kind of critical inquiry that Freire outlines, the specific circumstances of smaller communities necessitate approaches that center the experiences and needs of a particular place. By applying similar methods in project design but ensuring that economic and creative resources are primarily sourced to the spaces with individuals affected by a particular history, public art projects can both contribute to remedying asymmetric historic narratives and concretely benefit the community.



Figure 3. Maya Lin, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, 1982, Washington, D.C.  
Photo by Howard Ignatius. November 28, 2014. Licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veteran's Memorial* is among the first major works of commemorative public art that challenged the existing national consciousness and the prevailing exaltation of war as an act of bravery. The black granite design features the names of more than 58,000 individuals who were killed in Vietnam or as a result of injuries sustained there.<sup>23</sup> Dug into the earth, rather than rising above it, Lin imagined the memorial as a park-like area meant for "personal reflection and private reckoning."<sup>24</sup> With this, Lin seems to move away from the practice of monumentalizing, distancing the works to look over the people; instead, the *Vietnam Veteran's Memorial* is carved into the landscape of the National Mall, seeming to not only emphasize permanence and loss, but also reimagining the relationship between audience and work by moving them closer together (Fig. 5). Lin's use of an abstracted design, as opposed to the kinds of figural representations of heroes of war, challenges viewers to interpret the design more individually.<sup>25</sup> Rather than offering a comforting answer to the audience, Lin cultivated a space more centered on contemplation than celebration.

The *Vietnam Veteran's Memorial* not only encourages individual thought through abstraction, but also encourages individual interactions, both with the themes folded into the design and with the physical work itself. The black surface of the granite is reflective, seeming to encourage visitors to consider themselves in relation to the design and names inscribed on the wall. Lin goes on to describe that viewers should have to come increasingly closer to the wall to read the name, ensuring that visitors make individual connections to the design by shaping their movement towards the wall.<sup>26</sup> Once close enough to read the wall, the memorial design even allows for physical interaction. Here, Lin's design invites visitors to experience the wall in a multisensory way, able to look up specific names on the directory and create a rubbing of the inscription to take home.<sup>27</sup> In encouraging individual experiences with the design as opposed to a clear and dictated message, Lin's memorial allows for multiple interpretations. While the commission, and therefore Lin's proposal, was specified to be apolitical, various interpretations elicit political agendas from it. The departure from the traditional model of monumentalizing war led to a criticism of the memorial as being anti-war, characterizing the war in Vietnam in terms of defeat and degradation.<sup>28</sup> Alternately, the sheer number of names inscribed in the wall emphasize the enormity of the loss, seeming to highlight the theme of sacrifice. Ultimately, the pointed abstraction and intention to depart from the monumental tradition marks Lin's *Vietnam Veteran's Memorial* as a turning point in approaches to remembering history.

Lin's somber and contemplative approach to the war in Vietnam comes in contrast to previous commemorative works. While the memorial to the veterans of the war in Vietnam expresses profound loss and devastation, works like the *Marine Corps Memorial* (Fig. 4) are more celebratory and triumphant. While this memorial is dedicated to the Marines and the country's gratitude for their service, the specific image references Joe Rosenthal's photo taken after the Battle of Iwo Jima. At Iwo Jima, troops erected an American flag to celebrate victory in capturing the small island after a 72-hour bombardment.<sup>29</sup> The strenuous raising of the flag on the top of Mount Suribachi reflects a vision of the event synonymous with the monumentalizing of figures like the presidents imagined on the National Mall: heroic soldiers overcome the odds and prevail in raising the flag, a symbol of American achievement and nationalism. The memorial intentionally centers on a moment of triumph in the face of devastating losses—notably, three of the six men depicted in the original photo were killed on Iwo Jima—framing the American military's impact singularly in terms of bravery. Lin's departure from this method of framing was even offset with the addition of an additional statue of *Three Servicemen* (Fig. 5) intended to reincorporate traditional war memorial features by depicting those who served in the war in a heroic light.<sup>30</sup> In the context of narratives of history that celebrate victories—even victories at the expense of thousands of lives—the *Vietnam Veteran's Memorial* notably complicates the national attitude towards war through the use of abstraction and interactivity. By allowing space for the audience to interpret the design outside of the traditional model of heroism and exaltation of war, Lin effectively reimagined the commemorative landscape to allow space for alternative perspectives.



Figure 4. Cleve Jones, *NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt*, started in 1987, pictured in Washington, D.C. Photo by Elvert Barnes. June 26, 2004. Licensed under CC BY 2.0.





Figure 5. Maya Lin, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, 1982, Washington, D.C.  
Photo by Ron Cogswell. December 28, 2017. Licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Other commemorative art projects dealing with darker histories further expand the principle of interactivity to engage audiences. Through this process, memorial designs allow visitors to choose how to engage with the spaces and memories depicted, “framing them as actors, not just viewers.”<sup>31</sup> While the *Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial* both facilitates individual inquiry and contemplation as well as physical interaction with the design, projects like the *NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt* (Fig. 6) are designed to rely on individual contributions, not just interactions. San Francisco gay rights activist Cleve Jones conceived of the project in 1985, creating its first panel in memory of his friend Martin Feldman.<sup>32</sup> Anyone can submit a 12” x 12” panel to be added to the quilt; each panel includes the name of someone who died from AIDS. The project has grown to incorporate almost 50,000 panels with contributions from every state and from 28 countries.<sup>33</sup> While the quilt is primarily housed in San Francisco, it has been showcased in several cities, including on the National Mall, where it covered the entire Mall in 1996.<sup>34</sup> With the *NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt*, the role of individual connections to history is not only encouraged, but required. This model for design responds to the desire for informal memorials that center on individual connections. Despite this, these inputs take the form of specifically delineated panels, which dictates the ways in which individuals can contribute.

In both the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* and the *NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt*, the creators were able to fold elements of memory, as opposed to history, into their designs. Allowing for interactivity as well the abstraction of the *Vietnam*

*Veterans Memorial* facilitates individual connection and interpretation that isn't possible in the heroic monuments with clearly dictated messages. This similarly disrupts the narrative of war as an exclusively noble endeavor. The criticisms of the project as being anti-war and the assumption of a negative attitude towards the military reflects the pervasive nature of pre-existing sentiments. While Lin's design does not specifically take a position on war, the deviation from the idealization of war is taken as a challenge. The *NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt* delves more into interactivity in the project's foundation of public contribution. With each panel contribution, people from all around the world add to the growing quilt, both emphasizing the individuals affected by the AIDS epidemic as well as the enormity of the devastation. Each of these projects pointedly allow and facilitate individual interactions and in turn encourage connections beyond recognition of a motif like courage or heroism. However, as histories of a particular space are increasingly publicized and acknowledged, new approaches to commemorative public art must also consider the locality of projects. Here, art projects commemorating a circumstance or event in a particular community might incorporate the methods that creators like Maya Lin and Cleve Jones employed to reinvigorate what a memorial can be by encouraging physical and personal engagement. However, without centering the experiences of individuals in a particular community at all levels of creation—from commission, to design, to audience interactivity—these projects will not fully realize the potential of public art as a tool in educating equitably and inclusively.

## Social Sculpture

The designs of works like the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* and the *NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt* were effective in achieving their specific visions on a national level, but it is perhaps more relevant to consider the specific circumstances of the audience a work aims to engage with. Moreover, to genuinely achieve the educative goal of public art projects, the entire audience (effectively, the students) might take a more active role in the conception of a project, not singularly in the execution of an individual's vision. Here, by further blurring the line between artist and audience, projects can most effectively deal with issues in a way that facilitates individual inquiry and dismantles the ideal of a single, universal history.

German artist and social activist Joseph Beuys explored this concept in the theory of "social sculpture" in the 1970s. Social sculpture revolves around the idea that everything is art and in turn, everyone is an artist with the capacity to shape society



through creativity. Through art projects, individuals within a community would be able to directly impact public policy. Rather than viewing these projects as art dealing with social issues, social sculpture “transformed the way artists interacted with the public and allowed them to approach community development through an artistic lens.”<sup>35</sup> In this way, the principles of thinkers like Freire that demand agency and humanity be granted to the students are folded into Beuys’s teachings on what art can and should be. Rather than conveying a single message, social sculpture relies on participation. If, as Freire asserts, pedagogy best serves the interests of everyone through dialogue and inquiry rather than a “banking” system of education that dictates a single correct message, social sculpture is structured to facilitate more meaningful interactions.

With the system of social sculpture, the idea that the foremost goal is concentrated in community action rather than on a particular aesthetic objective. In this way, the theory of social sculpture facilitates a more regional approach to projects, centering actionable objectives for the audience. Particularly in considering commemorative public art that aims to deal with histories that continue to affect contemporary populations, the reframing of projects to focus on the needs of the audience most aptly incorporates the pedagogical techniques that Freire and hooks encourage. If the adaptations to a traditional model of commemorative works by artists like Lin and Jones allow projects to incorporate interactive elements that avoid the “banking” model of education by facilitating individual connections to a history and message, these elements might be most effectively applied in a particular space by incorporating elements of the social sculpture theory.

Beuys’s theory of social sculpture has been extended into the present through the works of several contemporary projects by Rick Lowe. Lowe was awarded a MacArthur Genius Grant in 2014 for his affiliation with the *Project Row Houses (PRH)* in Third Ward, a historically Black community in Houston.<sup>36</sup> *PRH* intended to revitalize a gentrified neighborhood through the transformation of 22 houses within two blocks into spaces for arts education and community development.<sup>37</sup> Here, Lowe incorporates the principles of social sculpture by concentrating on direct action in the community and on the potential of art to facilitate these changes. Perhaps the most impactful aspect of the *PRH* is the longevity of the project based on the incorporation of local organizations and artists in programming. Artist residents are invited to work on projects in the houses to address issues dealing with African American experiences.<sup>38</sup> Further, Lowe involves local organizations like churches, schools, and community groups in

services and programs offered by the *PRH*. With this, Lowe's approach to public art necessarily approaches issues through the lens of the specific community which he addresses. In this way, the audience is involved in every step of producing the final project, not singularly in its execution. While works like the *NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt* also incorporate participation by individuals, their contributions are delineated by specific requirements. Instead, within the *PRH*, contributions are allotted freedom to shift based on individuals' ideas, experiences, and needs.

Tulsa's *Greenwood Art Project (GAP)* commemorating the 1921 Race Massacre can be similarly seen as an example of a project that effectively incorporates the pedagogical tools of thinkers like Freire and hooks, and Lowe's approaches in social sculpture. As the head artist of *GAP* with William Cordova, Lowe expands on his principle of centering audience. An initiative of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission funded by a \$1 million grant from The Bloomberg Philanthropies Public Art Challenge, *GAP* incorporates more than 30 discrete, temporary projects proposed and undertaken by Tulsa natives or current residents of Tulsa rather than one large project.<sup>39</sup> These projects range from dance performances to sculptural installations to a directed walk following the path of an individual fleeing from the Massacre. Expanding the tenet of social sculpture that everyone is an artist, these projects incorporate proposals from all members of the community, rather than just local artists. This includes contributors like an individual whose family experienced the Massacre, a chef, educators, activists, and business owners whose lives were impacted by the Massacre and its legacy. Through the process of selecting "artists" to contribute based on a wide range of experiences, *GAP* embodies the pedagogical principles that emphasize the role of the "student" in jointly building knowledge rather than passively receiving teachings. By blurring the line between artist and audience, *GAP* empowers individuals in Tulsa to share their experiences and reclaim ownership of public spaces.

## Conclusion

With an increasing shift to remember histories of injustice, the public sphere offers a setting for learning that is both accessible and engaging. If art can be an opportunity to evoke personal and emotional responses to these histories, it is imperative to evaluate the ways in which these histories are constructed and presented. Freire and hooks each outline ways in which education must be adapted to recognize the humanity of students, looking to engage them in critical inquiry rather than deposit information unto a passive and ignorant subject. Through the process of emphasizing the abilities and experiences of students, they are empowered; this lends legitimacy to experiences outside of the narratives of history that serve the interests of those with existing authority. These are the same individuals whose power and resources have historically dictated the figuration of public spaces.

This power is continuously reaffirmed in public art projects that dictate certain attitudes, whether it be through the monumentalizing of historic heroes or in the celebration of war. Works like the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* and the *NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt* depart from this tradition by facilitating interactivity. With these design features, these projects look at history in a way that allows more for connection outside of a dictated standard. However, individual participation in these works is still delineated by specific standards and limitations. Joseph Beuys's theory of social sculpture builds on the pedagogical tools of Freire and hooks by asserting the possibility of art to invoke community changes. Through this, public art is mobilized as a tool in shaping contemporary populations rather than singularly as a tool to remember the past. With this, public art acts as a bridge to visualize and materialize the experiences of marginalized communities as they manifest today.

Artists like Rick Lowe embody this endeavor by centering individuals within a particular community in the process of designing and carrying out projects. In the *PRH* project, Lowe used transformed houses with programming centered on revitalizing a gentrified area through arts education. In this, Lowe includes input of local organizations and artists. Further building on community-based programming, *GAP* aims to commemorate the Tulsa Race Massacre through a series of art projects proposed and undertaken solely by individuals in Tulsa. *GAP*, through this process, not only expands on the theory of social sculpture and the pedagogical teachings of Freire and Hooks by centering the experiences and agency of the "audience," but also pours economic resources back into the community through the allocation of grants to contributing artists.

To approach histories that affect a particular space, new projects must find innovative ways to meet the needs of that specific community. While design features may encourage interaction beyond the visual, delving more into personal connection and inquiry, it is increasingly urgent to fold members of the affected community into the creative process at all levels. Rather than studying the impact of design features to implement indiscriminately in commemorative projects, it is perhaps more constructive to focus on the group it aims to address. Expanding the role of the audience as a multifaceted and diverse collective in the design process, these projects can most effectively and appropriately address histories of injustice by refusing to reproduce the systems that created these injustices.

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## Notes

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