



**MEMORY
AND
MONUMENTS**
(Re)
**Claiming
Public
Space**

Karyn Olivier*The Battle Is Joined*

2017

Acrylic mirror, wood, screws, adhesive

Installation view, Vernon Park, Philadelphia

Karyn Olivier's *The Battle Is Joined* is an acrylic mirror encasing the Battle of Germantown Memorial, built in 1903 and dedicated to that American-British Revolutionary War battle in a former colonial settlement, and situated in what today is Vernon Park, Philadelphia, a predominantly African American, working-class neighborhood. Olivier says, "My reinterpretation of the Battle of Germantown Memorial asks the monument to serve as a conductor of sorts. It transports, transmits, expresses, and literally reflects the landscape, people, and activities that surround it. We are reminded that this memorial can be an instrument and we, too, are instruments—the keepers and protectors of the monument, and in that role, sometimes we become the very monument itself."



The Questions That Answers Hide

Karyn Olivier

Rome is a city where monuments confront passersby at every turn. Maybe the word *confront* is too strong, but we certainly can't ignore the physical, cultural, and psychological space these monuments occupy. I decided to walk the twelve-mile-long Aurelian Walls, built in the late third century to fend off attacks by Germanic tribes. (Full disclosure: I didn't finish.) This border wall is a monument—the largest ancient Roman monument in the city. It traverses the city in mundane and unexpected ways, incorporating (in effect, protecting) the other monuments it passes. It is simultaneously colossal, invisible, beautiful, politically charged, commonplace, a hindrance, and obsolete.

I am constantly struck by this city, so flooded in history, where new iterations and evidence of the past are continually unearthed. How do Romans reconcile these markers of the past and the meaning and impact they have on Roman society today? How do they function? And what new lens do they offer to investigate and reimagine the much shorter history of monuments in the United States? One thing my time in Rome has done is to reconfirm what we already know: that historical narratives are layered, conflicting, and simultaneous; that a viewer must be willing to dig through the overbearing complexity of the past to grasp its ramifications today and, in the process, unearth a possible glimpse into the future.

I have been thinking about monuments for some time now—about what they represent and what they can become. During this time, I have had to face (arguably) the most contested monuments in the United States—those dedicated to the Confederacy. Proponents often present oversimplified justifications for the preservation of these monuments (“removal would be akin to erasing history”; “we should defend white heritage”; “demolition would equal censorship”). Any cursory investigation, however, reveals the complex role that racism, power, privilege, money, access, and the fight for civil rights have played in their proliferation. Confederate monuments were initially erected in cemeteries, at the gravesites of the people being remembered. Their construction was instigated by a small segment of the elite white population. (For example, United Daughters of the Confederacy began raising money immediately following the Civil War; Paul Goodloe

1 Dell Upton, "Confederate Monuments and Civic Values in the Wake of Charlottesville," *Society of Architectural Historians*, Sept. 13, 2017, <https://www.sah.org/publications-and-research/sah-blog/sah-blog/2017/09/13/confederate-monuments-and-civic-values-in-the-wake-of-charlottesville>.

2 Robert Musil, *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*, trans. Peter Wortsman (Hygiene, CO: Eridanos Press, 1987), 61.

McIntire commissioned and funded the controversial Robert E. Lee statue in Charlottesville, Virginia.) These monuments were unequivocally assertions of power, and the hierarchical system welcomed them. Architectural historian Dell Upton notes, "Siting[s] in cemeteries were meant to disguise their political meaning as signs of continued allegiance to the Confederacy. After the end of Reconstruction and federal supervision, the monuments moved to the metaphorical public square and became more openly pro-Confederate."¹

Debates continue on what to do with these monuments—remove and destroy, remove and reassign (in general, to museums), create monument parks akin to Memento Park in Budapest (dedicated to statues from the Communist regime). In the course of looking at these memorials, I have assembled thoughts, worries, and hopes for our interpretation and reimagining of monuments today.

Our complicated histories need to be wrestled with, even when they can't be resolved. How do we reconcile dissent, multiplicity, complicity? Simultaneity and paradox, which are embedded in our country's history? What do we say to assertions like one in 1936 from philosopher Robert Musil: "There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument. They are no doubt erected to be seen—indeed, to attract attention. But at the same time they are impregnated with something that repels attention. Like a drop of water on an oilskin, attention runs down them without stopping for a moment"² What about the notion that their inevitable "invisibility" is intentional? The monument starts to feel like a natural part of the landscape—something we don't question. Status quo at best, an implicit or explicit sign of repression at worst.

I believe, though, that monuments should be catalysts that create spaces for discourse. They can commemorate but also allow a viewer to investigate and interrogate America's complicated histories from multiple perspectives. A monument should offer an opportunity to pose questions about our country's past and its impact now, in all of its complexity and messiness. It should let each of us see and imagine our critical role in the ever-evolving American story. The best monuments are instruments that offer a mirror to see ourselves, our community, our city, our country, that implore us to be active, engaged citizens

3 James E. Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (winter 1992): 270.

in the world. The talking statues of Rome, installed in public areas of the city in the sixteenth century, are a model I return to. Citizens attached anonymous messages to these statues, reinventing them as sites for protest, political dissent, and critique and commentary on the religious and political authorities of the time. The effigies became the spokespeople of Rome. At times, messages were posted between two statues, creating an ongoing dialogue among multiple histories and shifting authors. The statuary became active, unfixed, mutable, temporal, and contemporary; works of art were transformed into tools and guardians—the keepers and protectors of democracy.

So what is the role of memory in monuments? How do we ensure that they don't do the memory work for us? How do we keep them active? As James E. Young articulates in his seminal text "The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today," "The surest engagement with memory lies in its perpetual irresolution. In fact, the best German memorial to the Fascist era and its victims may not be a single memorial at all, but simply the never to be resolved debate over which kind of memory to preserve, how to do it, in whose name, and to what end. Instead of a fixed figure for memory, the debate itself—perpetually unresolved amid ever-changing conditions—might be enshrined."³ This temporal, non-concrete approach is an interesting one to consider.

I believe in objects, however, and the authority that material, mass, form, content, context, and the haptic hold. These monuments, these sculptures, are symbolic, but they are also imbued with the power to craft American history and determine which narratives become our collective "heritage." I am intrigued by the many monument projects that extend and expand the stories told, revealing the complexity of what it means to be a citizen, to be human. These projects can be classified as temporal monuments, space-clearing gestures—ones that mine absence and reuse content.

Temporality and Ephemerality

At times, I think the very idea of permanence—whether in meaning or in physicality—is somewhat absurd. The

Berlin Wall loomed for so many years as a stark symbol of division not just between ideologies but between families...and then it took on a whole new meaning as it was dismantled block by block. The same physical walls held completely different meanings depending on the side and era from which they were viewed. And wouldn't it have been something to witness the statue of Saddam Hussein going up and then coming down? This has led me to wonder whether the inverse of permanence is the ideal state for monuments to exist in—fleeting gestures, brief exchanges that become the building blocks for culture. Perhaps we should highlight these moments: they may have more permanence as memories, forever seared into our brains. A piece of marble, a wall of stone: these are ultimately as ephemeral as what we absorb, indelibly, in a moment of connection, emotion, or understanding. These short-lived experiences, ironically, may address our mortality, our need to make something matter in our brief time here, more lastingly than the so-called permanent monument. Felix Gonzalez-Torres's works can be considered to be monuments: he offers pieces of candy (*Untitled*), a fleeting gesture made eternal by its limitlessness—an endless supply to fill our need, our desire. Rudolf Herz's *Lenin on Tour* is another example: a decommissioned statue of Lenin, placed on the back of a flatbed truck, spent the summer of 2004 traveling around Europe. Each night Herz and the Communist-era monument would stop in a new city where artists, sociologists, economists, and passersby were asked for their current views on Lenin.

Clearing and Making Space

The Stolpersteine project, initiated by Gunter Demnig, is comprised of small brass cobblestones, bricks really, embedded into the sidewalk. The information included in the inscription for each stone is the same: “Here lived” followed by the name, date of birth, and fate (usually deportation or murder) of a Holocaust victim. More than seventy thousand stones have been installed, making this the largest decentralized memorial in the world.

THE TIMES, 2017, was a monument to empowerment, hope, and self-realization in the Kensington section of Philadelphia, a neighborhood struggling through a

⁴ See page 171 of this book.

horrific drug epidemic. Artist Tyree Guyton invited residents from Impact Services, a transitional housing facility, to paint cartoonish clocks all over the facade of a colossal former factory. The simple act of collectively painting the building “opened up” the area and created space—psychological and emotional—for those living nearby. There was an urgency to this monument, a calling attention to the possibilities of recovery in the face of adversity. The work had real consequences: drug activity on the block lessened and dealers took their business elsewhere.

Absence and Invisibility

Dan Borelli's *Ashland-Nyanza Project* spotlights a hidden story in his hometown of Ashland, Massachusetts—the dumping of more than forty-five thousand tons of chemicals into its land, air, and water by Nyanza Color & Chemical Co., a dye factory. The area surrounding the plant, deemed a Superfund site by the US government, was capped to prevent more toxins from leaching. Borelli placed colored gels over the streetlights in town to mimic the dye colors produced by Nyanza and to reflect the actual underground concentration of toxins that still exists. He led locals on walks around the neighborhood, using the map created by the colored lights, an ephemeral representation of the scientific evidence. “I [moved] from [thinking about] color phenomenology to color ecology, from color as seducer to color as carcinogen, as cancer.” Borelli has said.⁴

In 2017, I installed *The Battle Is Joined* in Vernon Park, a historic park in Philadelphia. In this public work, I created my own version of Rome's talking statues by “initiating” a conversation between two monuments in the park: one honoring Francis Daniel Pastorius, the German settler who led the first Quaker protest against slavery in 1688, and the other the Battle of Germantown Memorial, honoring the failed George Washington-led Revolutionary War battle. The Pastorius monument was boxed over during World Wars I and II because the look of the monument was perceived to be “too Germanic.” I thought about the paradox of Pastorius, an immigrant fighting for Blacks' freedom from slavery, and Washington, fighting for the freedom of America from British rule while owning

enslaved people. I replicated the concealment of the Pastorius monument but transcribed it to the Germantown memorial. A mirrored facade reflected in real time the present-day viewers and the ever-changing landscape. The reflection reproduced the neighborhood's current demographic, which is predominantly African American (at one time it was a German immigrant stronghold). The mirror encasement made the structure "disappear" from certain vantage points, thus participating in the ongoing debate on the removal of Confederate monuments. As viewers approached the piece, it transitioned from being invisible to being larger than life. Up close, seeing our own reflections, we acknowledge our literal presence and, in essence, *become* the monument. I hoped to summon what was hidden and spotlight a community—one that has one of the highest poverty rates in Philadelphia—in all of its beauty.

Reuse and Displacement

I created *Witness*, a site-specific installation and memorial at the University of Kentucky, in 2018. My intention was to honor Black and brown Kentuckians and deepen the dialogue around a controversial New Deal-era fresco depicting a history of Kentucky. The mural sanitized the portrayal of slavery and presented stereotypes and caricatures of people of color. I gold-leafed the dome to reference sacred paintings, churches, and Byzantine and Renaissance cathedrals. Then I appropriated and reproduced the African American and Native American figures in the painting, inserting the reproductions onto the domed ceiling of the vestibule. This treatment effectively transported and repositioned these anonymous figures into a heavenly space. The gold leaf elevated the oppressed figures—those deemed lowly—to the divine.

The mural depicts subjugated people performing mundane chores and activities but does not reveal their depth of servitude or the range of horrific acts that kept them there. The same figures, transported to a gilded ceiling, reinforce the notion or possibility of rebirth—perhaps spiritually, but more immediately through the viewer's re-investigation, interrogation, and reckoning with our country's complex histories. Around the base of

⁵ James Baldwin, "The Creative Process," in *Creative America* (New York: Ridge Press, 1962).

the dome I inscribed a Frederick Douglass quotation: "There is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven that does not know that slavery is wrong for him." This quote addressed the anonymous figures in the original mural as well as my relocated ones by calling out by name the historical sin of slavery.

Artists who work in the public realm and (re)imagine monuments, memorials, and objects of memory know well that we must dissect and critique our histories, shed light on what is hidden, and lay out the complicated landscape for all to examine and question. I often think of a statement by James Baldwin as it relates to my responsibility as an artist and a citizen: "The artist cannot and must not take anything for granted, but must drive to the heart of every answer and expose the question the answer hides."⁵ ▲

Dan Borelli

artist

Titus Kaphar

artist

Karyn Olivier

artist

FEBRUARY 26, 2018

Isolde Brielmaier How do we construct and contend with our history, specifically here in the United States? How have these histories been visualized, concretized, and memorialized? By whom and for whom? What events and communities have been commemorated in the United States? What or who has been overlooked? When commemorative monuments and symbols, in the form of statues, plaques, flags, and other objects, are removed, are we erasing histories or are we clearing space to lay open new ground for inclusion and for the rewriting and expanding of our historical narratives?

James Grossman, the Executive Director of the American Historical Association, states, “Commemoration is complicated and communal work.” Titus, you have consistently engaged with ideas of traditional art history and the European canon as well as with history, memory, and representation—specifically with the rewriting, reclamation, and appropriation of narratives. Can you tell us a little bit about this work and about your practice?

Titus Kaphar There is a body of work that I’m doing now, *Monumental Inversions*, which speaks directly to what we’re talking about. My work has always been about narratives and the characters in existing compositions who are not the central figures. I’m trying to represent folks who often didn’t get represented.

I give myself the freedom to explore and investigate without any sense of obligation to the original or, in some cases, even to the facts or the origin of a particular piece. I take an existing work as a foundation, and wherever the piece takes me, that’s where I end up going. I give myself that freedom because I recognize that in all painting, in all representation, there is fiction. As I say, “All depiction is fiction; it’s only a question of degree.” If that is true, then I can give myself the freedom to explore in any way.

Emanuel Leutze’s *Washington Crossing the Delaware* from 1851 is not a historical painting, but we treat it like one. When we think of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, we look at paintings by John Trumbull, and those paintings become the visual representations of those moments—but those moments didn’t look like that. All of those folks in Trumbull’s *The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776* made in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century weren’t in the room when it was signed. But in order to tell this narrative in the way that Trumbull wanted it to be told, he altered the facts a little bit.

When I say, “All depiction is fiction,” I’m not the first person to say it. Magritte was saying that in his *The Treachery of Images*, which reads, “This is not a pipe”—this is a representation of the thing; this is not the thing itself. Even our memories function this way. When we remember things, we’re not remembering the incident itself, we’re remembering the last time we remembered that thing, and we pull it out of our file case and begin to have a conversation about it, and we don’t realize how we’ve altered that original memory.

Karyn Olivier The past is legitimate and real, but your history or memory of it is going to be subjective.

IB It’s constructed. Karyn, could you share a little bit about your work?

KO I have a pretty disparate practice. But over the last five years, I've been thinking about how to intersect and collapse conflicting histories, and what those histories mean in the present moment. I think about blind spots or the underconsidered spaces that exist and how I can insert something into that. I think about rearticulating spaces that could allow for a claiming or reclaiming of narratives: new publics that can claim something as their own. I think about invisibility and how I can use invisibility to actually reveal—I don't want to say "truth" because *truth* is such a bad word—but to reveal what we didn't want to see or didn't want to recognize. How can invisibility allow us to see?

This fall, I was invited to participate in Philadelphia's Mural Arts project Monument Lab, where the city tries to reckon with what's an appropriate monument for the city of Philadelphia. I live in Germantown, which is a historic neighborhood—it used to be German, but now is predominately African American. There's a monument in the far corner of Vernon Park dedicated to Francis Daniel Pastorius, a German settler who led the first Quaker protest against slavery back in 1688—so almost two hundred years before the United States abolished slavery. I found out that during World Wars I and II, the monument was boxed over. It was about the same things we're dealing with today—ideas of the foreign, the other, fear.

Then, at the center of the park is another monument, the Battle of Germantown Memorial, which is dedicated to George Washington. The Battle of Germantown was the only Revolutionary War battle that was actually fought in Philadelphia, and it was a failed battle, but power structures allow for monuments to exist based on a person. I thought it was interesting that George Washington was fighting for America's freedom while owning slaves; you also have this immigrant, Pastorius, fighting against slavery and asking, "Blacks are American, so how could they not be treated as citizens?"

I wanted to engage that history and these different time periods. I decided to box over the Battle of Germantown Memorial, which on some level was irreverent. But I knew in the act of boxing or shrouding and making it invisible, people would remember that it was there. All of a sudden, they had to be aware.

Even though I was putting history into the present, it didn't seem enough. So I thought, How can I deal with what's here now? By boxing the monument with mirrors, it reflects the current landscape and is always shifting. Now instead of white faces, Black faces are shown. If no one's in the park, the landscape, the trees are changing; it's never sitting still. I like the idea of the monument having this certain verticality and static nature, then all of a sudden, it dissolves. Or the idea that when you're looking at it, it's not just about the vertical axis—what's above, below, around you is being reflected. Often the monument is made out of stone and marble and is heavy, static, impenetrable. It's almost like the period at the end of the sentence. Monuments can never be the periods of a sentence—that's where we go wrong.

It was spotless; people took care of the work. Someone said, "If they're spending money on this piece, they must realize we're still here, because it's a pretty poor Black neighborhood." The community took the piece

over, and it became theirs in a way. I had a vet from the neighborhood say to me when I was installing it, "How much is this piece costing? Twenty-five thousand?" I said, "Close." He replied, "How can we be building this when people are starving a couple of blocks away?" I said, "I live four blocks from here, and I know people are starving. I know people need basic necessities, I know we can't survive without them, but are you saying that we can't have beauty?"

If you think that's okay, fine, but I think we deserve beauty. I don't think this type of project should exist just in the downtown area, where it's upper-middle-class and rich; we deserve to have a moment to see ourselves reflected, to see ourselves and see our beauty, to see this beautiful park that we take for granted. Yes, you may be right that this \$25,000 could have gone to something else, but I believe that we need this. And what's better than to see yourself reflected, and to see an evolving, changing, constantly shifting narrative of what America is and what it means to be American?

IB **And creating conversations among people on a community level—that goes back to that space-clearing gesture, right? Where we clear the space for people to engage and consider history differently. Dan, your work around this topic?**

Dan Borelli I'm from Ashland, Massachusetts, the second town on the Boston Marathon route. As runners go by, just off to their left in the center of town is one of the first Superfund sites, part of the Environmental Protection Agency's program to remediate contaminated sites. It literally means that it's going to require super funding to clean up an area—it's that nasty. There are about 1,400 Superfund sites in the United States.

I was working on developing my own color theory and mapping the history of color and how color has fallen out of architectural discourse when I discovered that the source of contamination in my hometown was color. Ashland is the site of one of the first color plants in the United States to produce synthetic dye for the textile-manufacturing industry. All of a sudden, I jump from color phenomenology to color ecology, from color as seducer to color as carcinogen, as cancer. Specific chemicals that were dumped in the town manifested themselves as an angiosarcoma cluster. I grew up with friends who passed away from the pollutants of color. In response, I created *The Ashland-Nyanza Project*. It's a multiyear, three-part project, and I'm on year seven. I started the project by going to people whom I came to call the culture of loss: the moms, the sisters, the siblings, and I said, "How would you feel, in your gut, if I were to treat this artistically?" Not what do you think, but how do you feel? And this is where I think artists thrive; we get to the "how you feel" and we make that feeling public. I needed to tell the story of the history of the contaminated. If a place like Ashland forgets about the people they have lost, then we have created social amnesia.

One part of the project is inside of the Ashland Public Library, which is the only place where this narrative is made public by default. The EPA's documents showing the history of the contaminants reside there. The

negative impact, the cancer cluster, the deaths are not marked anywhere else in the town. I restaged the library with interviews, with people giving testimonials. I recontextualized this narrative; I made physical models; I made an interactive sequence of mappings; I used every representational trick I could. Then, I used EPA documentation to map where the contaminants are today to the nearest streetlight. I put gels over the streetlights, and I lit up the entire town with color for a month so people could walk and viscerally feel where the contamination is today.

- IB** **It's like a living, breathing memorial. At the center is loss rather than victory. This goes back to Karyn's point around power. Even though the Battle of Germantown was lost, there's this power there around which we commemorate and build monuments.**
- DB** It was really a gut punch to people who had, for years, been ignoring it. Contaminants had dumped right into the Sudbury River, which is the river where Henry David Thoreau canoed. The sight of contamination, the hill, is named after a Native American inhabitation site.
- I was asked by the culture of loss to make something permanent. They gave me a two-acre parcel that they called a "healing garden." I teamed up with the Laborers' International Union of North America; they have a training facility a mile from the site. I designed a color sundial, because I wanted to get people off the concept of electric time and back to ceremonial time, which is what Native Americans called it. It's a more naturalistic way of looking at time.
- The color sundial is twenty feet wide and twelve feet tall. I wanted to make color back into something positive and have it wash over your body. The Nipmuc tribe, who used to reside there, came to do a healing ceremony. The moms go there and pray and reconnect with their lost loved ones.
- About a year into it, a group of middle-class/upper-class white kids broke the pavilion. Each of the twelve panels consisted of four unique custom-cut pieces, so a total of forty-eight pieces. Close to thirty were broken. There's honestly no reason why they did that.
- IB** **Why now? We saw this big ramp-up in 2015 after nine African American churchgoers were murdered at the Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, by a domestic terrorist who had posted numerous images of himself donning the Confederate flag. About a week and a half later, filmmaker, activist, artist, and producer Bree Newsome climbed up a flag pole and removed the Confederate flag from the grounds of the South Carolina State House. She was arrested for that action, and that was one of the first instances where we really saw this debate take center stage. So why now, and why is there such a heavy focus on the South?**
- KO** I'm going to say something that will sound crazy: I think it's partly Beyoncé. I'm being dead serious. It's a conflation of things: I think it's Beyoncé, and her *Lemonade* video and the Black Panther Superbowl performance. I think it's Black Lives Matter and Black Girl Magic and Trump. It's the combination that's allowing this to happen.

- IB** **It's actually not that crazy in the sense that, in order for these discussions and debates to take off, they need to extend into the realm of popular culture.**
- TK** It's important to recognize that this is not just happening right now. There are folks down South who have been having this conversation for decades.
- IB** **But it's so visible and loud right now.**
- TK** What is different about this particular moment is how an individual voice can spread so quickly. Technology can take these inside-the-community conversations outside the community instantly.
- I made a piece that spoke to the sculpture outside of New York's American Museum of Natural History, and that received a whole bunch of attention. But David Hammons had addressed that sculpture decades ago. As an artist who looks up to David Hammons, I always say, "Yes, I did that, but you need to know what my source was, where it came from." It's important for us to recognize that there are a lot of people who were doing this work who haven't been heard until now, but they still have been in the trenches.
- IB** **Let's talk about this idea of existing monuments: what do we do? I've seen on social media the option to "Check yes or no" and the question "Do we remove or don't we remove?" How do we get out of that binary conversation? How do we see the role of the historian and the artist in that equation?**
- TK** It's interesting that we're having this conversation; often, decision makers are not talking to artists. We're talking about sculptures, we're talking about artworks, but by and large politicians are making these decisions. They're not addressing makers—that's the first thing. The second thing is that I don't understand why "keep it" or "take it down" are the only two options. We limit ourselves by keeping it to a binary conversation. Artists of this moment, of this time, need to make new works that address older monuments and other public works. And those artists, myself included, must recognize that in our making, there are things we're going to miss.
- As Karyn said earlier, these monuments shouldn't be a period, they should be open. Because in twenty years someone is going to come to a work that I've made and say, "Titus, this was nice, but you completely forgot about the transgender community or the Indigenous community." So then I'd need to come back in and engage the work in a way that speaks to that community, too. And we need to recognize that a monument shouldn't be concrete, it shouldn't be a period at the end of the sentence, it should be many, many, many commas.
- IB** **That's a critique of history itself, right? There is this inflexible traditional canon that history has been constructed within, and it is considered truth.**
- DB** People conflate history and the archive as being like a pastoral painting from the Hudson River School or "pure," untouchable. They're not

recognizing that there are very specific choices about what is included and what is intentionally excluded.

KO But what to do with monuments? Sometimes it would make sense to make something else that's in conversation with an existing monument. Another time, maybe it makes sense to put it in a museum. But if we say it has to be one thing, we're going to fail.

TK I think we get out of our binary by going to artists; we let the people who make things address these questions. If the options are just to keep it or take it down, then take it down. But that's not enough: that doesn't even begin to address the problem.

IB **There's still the history and what led to the culture in which these monuments exist.**

TK There's something about monument making itself that we're buying into by thinking that these things are powerful simply because they are where they are. In other words, just because an object is on a pedestal doesn't mean that it deserves to be esteemed, or that it's a valuable piece of art. The truth is that most of these monuments, unfortunately, are not made by our national Berninis. We're not looking at Donatello sculptures and saying, "Oh God, this is such a hard decision because this is so amazing." Most of the time, these sculptures are made by second-, third-, fourth-tier artists.

If you give contemporary artists the opportunity to say, "Let's do battle. You put yours up, and I'll put mine up," I guarantee that the contemporary conversation will be stronger. Because as contemporary artists, we have a whole arsenal of materials that weren't available in the past, and we have the ability to speak to the people in our communities directly. I'm not scared of the sculpture. I'm not intimidated. It doesn't frighten me. I'm not upset about it. What I'm upset about is that we're not making opportunities for our living artists to step in and engage the conversation.

KO If we're looking at the model of a traditional monument, sure. But I make temporary monuments, and, for me, the idea of permanent monuments just makes no sense anymore.

I keep thinking about the talking statues of Rome. In the sixteenth century, there were these six statues, and people would put notes on them. And they became a site for protests. The statues themselves weren't particularly provocative, but someone decided to transform them into these other beings, to have another meaning. It's temporary to me because it's living and breathing and not sitting still.

IB **Think about the notion of power and structures of power and history and how they are intricately bound up in one another. So many people hold on to that painting of George Washington crossing the Delaware as a monument to this man, to the founding of this country.**

DB I'm starting a project on the Plymouth Rock in Plymouth, Massachusetts, and its relationship to the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station. The power plant

is the same plant, same design, same maker, same year as Fukushima. It's sitting right on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, and it's a mile south of the Plymouth Rock. The first claim that the Pilgrims landed there was made in 1741, but on the rock, they wrote, "1620." My point is that when we go back, we see that our predecessors have put these completely staged objects in public spaces.

KO But do you think part of it was wanting us to have something that we all can believe in? I don't think it was malice; some of it was citizens needing a story.

IB **Of course. That's part of national identity.**

DB There's a creationist story by the Pilgrims, and then their successors, to make the claim that they own this land. It's interesting that we project our national identity onto geological formations. Never mind the fact that the rock is in pieces, and that there's even a chunk of it at a church in Brooklyn Heights. But there's an attitude that you can't question certain founding myths.

TK This is part of the challenge. We're questioning all kinds of things: what we held as truth yesterday, we question today—that's a given. In terms of addressing monuments, we have to be able to hold in our hands two opposite things at the same time. George Washington was an important historic figure; George Washington enslaved people. Thomas Jefferson was an articulate, poetic, amazing individual; Thomas Jefferson stole liberty from hundreds and hundreds of people. We have to figure out how to have these monuments, whether they're temporary or permanent—I like temporary better—hold these two diametrically opposing ideas in balance.

DB What's missing around the object of the monument is a discursive space.

TK In a museum and in teaching, you can reframe, recontextualize, and pluralize history. There's not a capital "H."

KO Absolutely. It's that single perspective. It's not necessarily false, but it's only one perspective.

IB **That's "the danger of a single story."**

Audience There's a new archive created by scholars at John Jay College of Criminal Justice that documents the presence of enslaved people in the Capital Region. We've known that there were enslaved people in the Capital Region, but there hasn't been easy public access to these histories. My question is: Wouldn't we want a more permanent monument to the enslaved people, that is, lest we forget? In Germany, there are brass bricks in front of the houses where Jewish families lived. I'm fascinated by what you're saying about temporary monuments, but I also have a hunger for something more permanent, and I wonder if you might comment on that.

DB The House of the Wannsee Conference in Berlin is easily the most powerful exhibition experience I've personally had. Villa Wannsee's role in

the Nazi government is the same as Camp David: it was where high-level politicians went to retreat and strategize. There's now a permanent exhibition that makes public all of these government papers and memos that showed just who was involved in decisions about the Holocaust. When I went, there were photographs of the individuals at the table, listing the types of decisions they made.

The United States hasn't made public this insane archive of the founding fathers, the bureaucratization of enslavement. That's what I think is so brave about what the Germans did: they showed the methodology and the depth and the bureaucratization of the Holocaust, and it blows you away.

- KO** I did a project in Central Park with Creative Time. I found out that Seneca Village was near the site of my piece. It was one of the only communities of free Black property owners in the United States. It existed for about thirty years, and then, all of a sudden, the property was claimed in order to build Central Park, and the residents were scattered wholesale throughout the city. Little evidence of them remains. It turned out that City College completed a dig with graduate students, and they found remnants from Seneca Village. I was thinking about the Wisconsin ice sheet coming through New York twenty thousand years ago and how it affected the terrain of the city and the park. This evidence is in plain view, but we don't see it.

So I thought of making this lenticular billboard with one image of the glacier, to make reference to this history of twenty thousand years ago; one image of a pottery shard from Seneca Village in the 1800s; and one image to refer to the present landscape. It was almost like twenty thousand years were being compressed, and you control time by how you see it. All there is at the site of Seneca Village is this little plaque, so I felt I had to do something more. If the history of Seneca Village was on display, that would be a memorial. That would indicate a statement of dealing with our own terrorism.

- IB** **Before you can commemorate or memorialize, you have to actually acknowledge. I'm half-Austrian, so I've grown up with this history lingering. I went recently to Berlin with my mother, who had not been there since she was a child of the war. It was incredibly moving to walk on the street and see eight bronze stones—*Stolpersteine* or “stumbling stones”—with the names of the parents and six children who were taken from that house, then murdered at Auschwitz or Bergen-Belsen. In the center of the city, you've got the Holocaust Memorial and the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism. There is rich text that fully acknowledges and implicates Germany in this history.**

We have yet to do that here in the United States. When you walk into our Capitol in Washington, DC, there is a specific historical narrative that is laid out and, in my opinion, fed to people. Now we have the new National Museum of African American History and Culture and the memorial to Martin Luther King Jr., but there is no history of enslaved individuals, there is no history of the Indigenous communities on whose land the Mall

actually sits. As a nation, we haven't done the work to contend with and acknowledge our history. It's incredibly difficult work.

I like the temporary idea, but I, too, hunger for that monument that says, “We implicate ourselves. We exist on the backs of many, many people, and we are paying homage to them.”

- TK** There's a distinction between the kinds of memorials or monuments that remember individuals and try to deify individuals and the kinds of monuments or memorials that talk about a moment in time where many people were affected by a particular thing. Whether we're talking about the Holocaust or Indigenous people or the enslavement of Black people, those are different kinds of things. Maybe the memorials where we're trying to reckon with our tragic history and its impact on hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people are the spaces where these things are permanent. But this idea that we glorify a single individual, that we put George Washington on a pedestal, maybe that we get rid of. Maybe we decide we're not going to do that anymore.

Audience In terms of both people and places, do you recognize any place that should have outstanding recognition paid to it? Let's say that the Colosseum in Rome should stay exactly as it is. We have to lock on to some things, even things that were bad, because they served important purposes for many who were there at the time.

- TK** I wonder if there's a space for believing in democracy to work. To what degree do the people who live in a community have a say as to whether something stays or goes? Is there some way to engage that? It's important to give folks the opportunity to say, “This is my community. I live here. I want to have a say.” Right now, these decisions are made from up high, and the people on the ground aren't really asked for their opinions.

- DB** I want to talk about ruination in response to the example that you brought forth. Lots of cultures have a history of staging architecture as emblematic of a previous social structure. In the case of Rome, it signifies a political system and a political ideology that failed. There's something really interesting about using architecture in identity shaping, and in particular for architectural ruination once the object is no longer in use.

For *The Ashland-Nyanza Project*, I proposed to the town to name the large remediated landscape, a cap—it looks like natural green grass—as a ruin. So long as it remains useless, it has cultural use—it can teach you. Once it goes back into human use and flow, and we reinhabit it, we'll forget. To the point about permanence, I made this argument that the remediated cap—one of the first built in this country—has cultural significance while it remains without use. It signifies the failure of a system of unregulated industrial markets. It needs to stay as it is so that we can learn, because we're about to dismantle the regulatory systems by which citizens are able to hold the industrial economies accountable.

Audience I have a theory that the reason we think about these monuments as permanent has to do with the materials used to make them. I'm interested

in hearing from you as makers. How might you incorporate new materials, and how might those materials interact with the old? How do we break down this historically constructed idea of materials like metal and stone and bronze to make them less intimidating?

KO I don't think we shouldn't use those materials, but if the monument doesn't activate, doesn't engage, doesn't allow a space for discourse, then it's failing. The material doesn't matter. But I believe that those materials are so weighted and so loaded that you read them as something other, something from another time, something that may have just a tangential relationship to who you are and what your life is today. If those materials could find a way to bring about engagement, keep them. But if they can't, the materials are a problem.

When I was covering over the monument in Vernon Park, Philadelphia, there were questions like, "Is this going to damage the stone?" I said, "I hope it does something to shift it, maybe." To what end is there preservation? What does it mean to preserve anything? Let it be stone and see what happens over time. I'm not sure how preservation serves a monument conceptually, or serves us in having a dialogue. Monuments can't stay what they are because we keep changing, our culture keeps changing. Let a piece evolve.

Audience I'm the Executive Director of the Preservation Foundation here in Saratoga. One of our most recent projects was a four-year restoration of *The Spirit of Life*, a Daniel Chester French bronze sculpture in Congress Park in Saratoga Springs. It's a hundred years old, and we organized a restoration effort. The bronze was a memorial to one specific person who was responsible for preserving our spring waters, which our community still identifies with—but it's not an image of that person. We did consider how it is used in the park today, and how it's evolved and been used throughout time.

KO Has the signage changed at all? How do you make that relevant, both what it meant back then for French to do that, and what it means today?

Audience (same) The inscription talks about giving back to your community to make it a better place. It still serves that purpose, and it's a very uplifting sculpture.

KO But would people pay attention to it as opposed to if there was a current dialogue? Someone could speak about what the sculpture means today when, in New York and other places, we're talking about fracking. Our water might be ruined.

Audience (same) We are a tiny nonprofit, staff of two, and it was a \$750,000 restoration. We probably fell short on permanent signage.

KO But what about adding that permanent signage? What if, every year, you ask someone in the community to write about what the sculpture means to them now? That would be a way for that monument to have permanence but also be a current subject. You can have the community do the work.

Audience Is it the responsibility of the person who commissions the art or the artist themselves to speak to the future, to try to perceive how a work might be translated generations later? How does that change the meaning? Most of the things I have seen in my life have a context of what was happening at that time.

TK That's challenging—I think it's virtually impossible. I think about what my kids' world is going to look like when I'm dead and gone, and I'm convinced it will look nothing like what I think it will. The best we can do as contemporary artists is to attempt to speak to the people that exist with us in this moment in time. We'll fail, but we'll do the best we can. Then maybe, if we're lucky, something of that will connect to the generation that follows. But that in itself speaks to the reason for talking about this impermanence—it's actually humility. It's recognizing that my ability goes only so far, that I am going to miss some marks. I want to keep space open for somebody else to say, "You know what, Titus missed the mark here, but I'm going to follow up. This is going to be a conversation."

Now we have a dialogue instead of a monologue—that's what most of our monuments are, these little monologues. In my own work, I try not to think about forever and permanence, or even this idea of marble and stone. When you put marble floors in your bathroom, do you feel like that can never go away? No—you think, Next season, I might change that. So there's an opportunity for us to rethink all of this, to stop with the idea that something being made in stone or bronze makes it permanent. And stop with the idea that that's what gives it value. If you do something like having people in the community write, it might last for a moment, but it might also impact somebody deeply. How is the bronze sculpture more significant, more permanent, than that impact? ▲