

Wodiczko versus Maya Lin: A Comparison of War Veterans Memorial and Projection on the Hirshhorn Museum

War Veterans Memorial and the Projection on the Hirshhorn Museum

Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans memorial in Washington, DC, of 1982, consists of a shallow V-shaped 'cut' into the green of the Mall, one side pointing to the Lincoln Memorial, the other to the Washington Monument; it refers to a war the history of which is, in the light of protest and the social invisibility of the returning veterans. problematic. On its polished, black stone surface are inscribed the names of the 58,000 Americans dead or missing in action between 1959 and 1975, arranged so that the first and last are adjacent at the centre. Charles Griswold has described the memorial as open and closed, like a book and cites Maya Linn as describing it in terms of a 'gash in the earth': the scar it seeks to heal is perhaps the rent in American society caused by protest against the war (Rendell, 126).

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is nor an anti-monument like the fountain in Kassel, and there are precedents for its black stone, including the base of the East Coast Memorial in Battery Park. New York: but it avoids the idealizing language of allegory and the replication of social hierarchies. It has created a public. being visited constantly, even on days that are cold and wet. by those who look for or make a rubbing of a name, pause, leave a flower, or simply look into the stone's mirror surface, or cry (Rendell, 127).

In contrast, moving away from formal concerns into more political realms was Krzysztof Wodiczko (born 1943) who, since 1980, has produced "Public Projections" throwing powerful xenon-arc imagery onto public buildings. A case in point is Projection on the Hirshhorn

Museum, Washington, D.C (Stevens, Karen and Ruth, 953). Three central themes were presented: a hand-held candle on the Left representing hope or illumination, a hand pointing a pistol on the other side symbolizing violence or aggression, and microphones below in the center indicating publicity or the power of media. Wodiczko's take on public art is transient or temporarily occupying a particular space as opposed to a permanent, lasting monument. His selection of venerable sites acts as a foil to his visual critiques of contemporary society. The result is challenging—if not provocative—rather than celebratory or commemorative (Stevens, Karen and Ruth, 955).

What is a Memorial and It's Purpose

One function of any war memorial is to serve the psychological and cultural needs of postwar situations. The experience of war, both on the home front and in combat, disrupts familiar patterns and meanings. War-related anxiety and trauma affect groups (even nations), as well as individuals, and war's sociological as well as psychological effects are well documented. Experiencing the fragility of everyday life, the loss of stability, and an alteration in “normal” morality, people in war face an anxiety that mixes fear, anger, and sadness. This painful feeling of loss for a world that has slipped away deepens what Pierre Nora calls a “commemorative consciousness” that seems to demand in remembrance (Rendell, 121).

What must an Artist consider in Designing a Monument?

Commemoration gives memory a performative dimension, offering social rituals and common expediencies that, presumably, bind together the participants and reestablish meaning, fixity, and sanity – hence, this is what artists should focus on when designing a monument. Commemorative sites and rituals honor the sacrifices that were endured. They soothe

displacement by establishing explanatory narratives imparting meaning to loss (Stevens, Karen and Ruth, 951). They provide hope and purpose by memorializing heroes and establishing cautionary tales for future generations which should be clearly communicated to the public through the artists work.

Works Cited

Rendell, Jane. Art and architecture: a place between. London: IB Tauris, (2006). 120-255.

Stevens, Quentin, Karen A. Franck, and Ruth Fazakerley. "Counter-monuments: the anti-monumental and the dialogic." The Journal of Architecture 17, no. 6 (2012): 951-972.