Statues Also Die

Curated by Sarah Fritchey

October 25, 2020 - January 24, 2021

Opening Reception Sunday, November 8, 1-3:30 PM

Image: *Purge*, Doreen Garner, performance (video still), 2017

A **monument** is the plastic object within a memorial, and can be a material object, a sculpture, an installation, or an environment, used to memorialize a person or a thing.

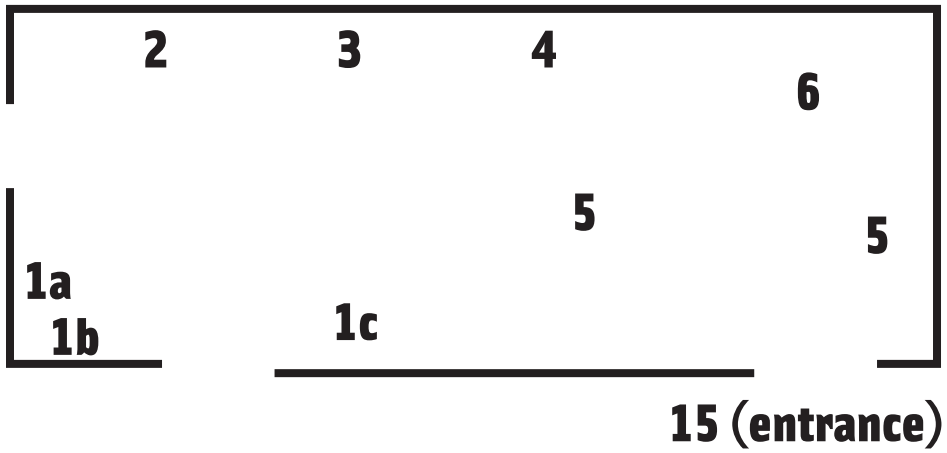
A **memorial** is a memory-site; it can be anything from a book, to an activity, a day, a festival, a sculpture, or a space. A memorial does not need to be a monument.[1]

This exhibition is taking place on the unceded sacred lands of the Mohegan, Mashantucket Pequot, Eastern Pequot, Schaghticoke, Golden Hill Paugussett, Nipmuc, and Lenape Peoples in present-day Connecticut. We invite you to acknowledge and reflect on your potential complicity in the ongoing occupations of unceded native and indigenous homelands, and the long-term relationships such occupations have to the questions of memory, representation, erasure and justice.

1 Young, James.*The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2000:4. Print.

Gallery Maps

Real Room



1a: Real Art Ways *Statues Also Die* Open Call. Graphic Identity by **Veo Veo Design Studio**.
1b: **Paper Monuments** Open Call, New Orleans, May 2017 - May 2019. Courtesy of Paper Monuments.
1c: Statues Also Die open call station.

2: **Nona Faustine**, *Dr J. Marion Sims*, silkscreen, 2019
3: **Nona Faustine**, *My Country*, silkscreen, 2019
4: **Nona Faustine**, *In Praise of Famous Men No More*, silkscreen, 2019
Courtesy of the artist and Two Palms.

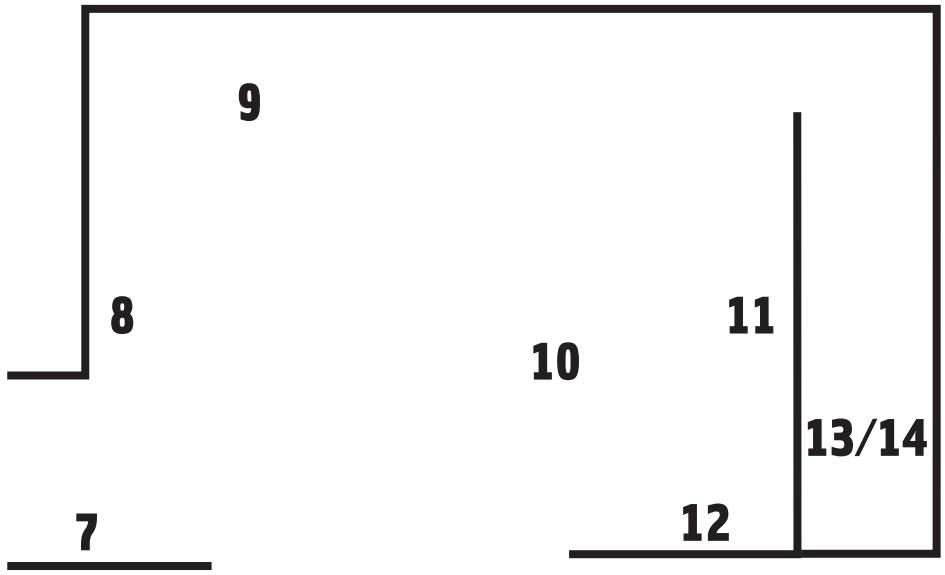
5: **FEED**, *The Monument*, take-away newspaper, 2020. Courtesy of the artists.

6: **Paul Ramírez Jonas**, *Ventriloquist III*, cork, push pins, notes contributed by public, 2013. Courtesy of the artist.

7: **Nate Lewis**, *Probing the Land VIII (Robert E. Lee , After the Fire)*, hand sculpted inkjet print, ink, frottage, graphite, 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Fridman Gallery.

8: **Jeffrey Meris**, *The Block is Hot*, plaster body cast, AC motor, steel, cinderblock, aircraft cable, U-link, pulleys, ratchet strap, 2020. Courtesy of the artist.

Main Gallery



9: **Nick Cave**, *Augment*, inflatables and video, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Now + There.

10: **Doreen Garner**, *Skin of PONEROS* and *Purge (video)*, silicone, staples, Poly-Fil, wood coffin, glass, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and JTT, New York.

11: **Cassils**, *PISSED*, plastic gallon containers in chronological order of use, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Robert Feldman Gallery.

12: **Marisa Williamson**, *Monuments to Escape*, postcard prints, booklet, and video, 2019-2020. Courtesy of the artist.

13: **Xandra Ibarra**, *Turnaround Side Piece*, single channel video, 02:47 (loop), 2018. Courtesy of the artist.

14: **Rebecca Belmore**, *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother*, single channel video, 20:05, 1991, 1992, 1996 and 2008. Courtesy of the artist and Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity.

15: **Lee Mixashawn Rozie**, *Quannatuckwa aka ct*, audio recording approx. 20 min. 2020. (This work will be added after the artist's performance during the reception on November 8 at 2 PM).

INTRODUCTION TO THE SHOW
By Sarah Fritchey

Our current struggle over monuments represents
an effort to articulate the permanent, while dealing
with the ever flow of change.
–Lewis Gordon[1]

The recent call to bring artists to the table to radically reinterpret our memorial landscape is the foundation for the exhibition ***Statues Also Die***. This group show brings together a conceptually and politically motivated group of artists who lend their bright energies to the project of rethinking the future of monuments, from participating in their removal, to building new designs and processes. Taking on public roles as storytellers, educators, activists, community builders and civic designers, the artists critique and reimagine all aspects of traditional monuments, including their shape, size, mobility, what they're made of, the stories they tell, and how they tell these stories. Moving away from stereotypical notions of what a monument might be, these artists offer new forms of monument-making that are temporary, ephemeral, lightweight, organic, and community-driven. Pointing to the holes in our existing memorial landscape, they begin to account more fully for the untold stories and perspectives of our nation's collective past.

We convene this exhibition in a monumental moment: in the midst of a global pandemic that has slowed down time, and radically changed the way we relate to one another and navigate public space; one week before the presidential election, which continues to test our faith in the project of democracy; and in the wake of global civil unrest, sparked in part by the unnecessary and traumatic killings of Black Americans at the hands of police. We owe a great debt of gratitude to the Black Lives Matter activists who have led a mass cultural reawakening and movement against the lingering and often invisible presence of anti-Black violence and racism in our country. This violence extends to the monuments in our memorial landscape which honor racists, murderers and colonizers who have been exalted by previous generations as heroes, discoverers, and conservationists. We come together through this show to process this profound shift in the way we have learned and taught our nation's histories, and to inspire dialogue about how we can fill in its missing parts.

We acknowledge that this show is just one step in a longer journey to think collectively about what equity, justice, and sustainability look like. The discussion that follows brings together the wisdom of people working in the realms of contemporary art, social justice, activism, public history, American history, and memory studies, whose voices reside in the artworks in the show, its public programs, and the body of this text. It is by no means a comprehensive survey of all the work being generated today, especially at the grassroots level, but is a resource for meeting new people, taking action, and sharing perspectives.

As we shaped this exhibition, we imagined it as a window into some of the ways artists have been addressing questions of memory, memorialization and monumentality during the past decade. We recognize that their ongoing work has given major foundations the confidence to invest in artists as the future visionaries of our commemorative landscape. We see this in several national efforts, including the Mellon Foundation's recent $250 million commitment to fund memorialization projects over the next five years, NEFA's current open call for funded monument projects, New York City's She Built NYC Initiative, and local projects, including West Haven's Living Monuments Initiative, the Witness Stones Project, and the FEED collective's Spring 2020 journal dedicated to monumentality (available for free takeaway). Such efforts have motivated Mellon President Elizabeth Alexander to call upon artists to continue to contribute to this innovation project in ways that "do not just result in an earth that is groaning with a zillion new bronze statues," but in an earth that "thinks about about how one life grows out of another."[2] This exhibition highlights a group of artists who work towards these poetic ends.

Several artists in *Statues Also Die* center their own bodies in their works to unearth and reclaim histories that lack representation in our memorial landscape:

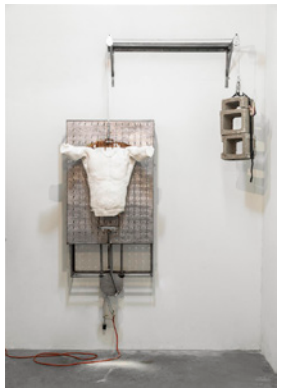
Rebecca Belmore's ***Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother*** documents the ongoing journey of a nomadic monument that provides indigenous communities an instrument for gathering and locating their voice in the land. Composed of locally sourced wood, moose hide, and leather lashing, the seven-foot microphone has traveled with Belmore across Canada and the U.S. to political demonstrations on reservations, and within rural and urban communities. In transit, Belmore has been known to sleep alongside it. The artist created the mouthpiece in response to the

1 Gordon, Lewis, panelist. Panel discussion. *Monuments of the Past / Structures of the Present*, Sept. 26, 2020, Univ. of Connecticut, Storrs.

2 Alexander, Elizabeth, moderator. Panel discussion. *The Power of Monuments and Memorials*. September 24, 2020, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Online: https://mellon.org/news-blog/articles/power-monuments-and-memorials/

Oka Crisis of 1990, a nine-month standoff between the Mohawk Nation of Kanesatake and a private golf club who sought to expand their course into sacred indigenous lands. Rather than address the government, Belmore directed protesters to address the Earth. Their recordings tell a story of their devoted relationships to the land, and include indigenous song, language, music, the murmurs of an intergenerational crowd, and the echoes of the landscape. This work currently resides at the Banff Centre in Alberta Canada, where it debuted in 1991, and continues to serve as a tool for helping indigenous people speak for themselves.

Xandra Ibarra's ***Turn Around Sidepiece*** features a performance of the artist positioning her naked body atop a spinning plinth set in the woods. The formal elements of the composition resemble classical depictions of the female nude, popularized in antiquity and continued through modernity. Male artists have, for thousands of years, depicted the female body as allegory, using it as a platform for the creation of fantastical leitmotifs - nymphs, Venuses, lady liberties, blind justices, and other goddess-like fictions. These depictions are the antithesis of the honor awarded to white male figures, who stand on pedestals engraved with their names, symbolically presiding over land and law. In contrast, these female allegories are stripped of their realness and consequently, their citizenhood, symbolically unrepresented by the state. Ibarra rejects this treatment, annihilating this aesthetic trope by animating it with a dizzying dance. Not only is she alive, real, standing instead of lounging, and wearing white sneakers, she is making this work in protest, denying viewers the ability to see her face, to ever take her fully in, to ever understand her as a static object to behold. Her battery powered pedestal, the spinning rock, emphasizes the sham–it is a prop, no more a natural part of the landscape than she.



Jeffrey Meris's ***The Block is Hot*** is a kinetic sculpture that visualizes the process of a body breaking down. This work pushes us to think about the lifespans and inevitable deaths of both a living body and its sculptural surrogate. Composed of a plaster cast of the artist's torso counterbalanced by a cinderblock, the work is mechanized by a wheel that forces the figure's back to rub against a sharp metal grate.

As the exhibition progresses, a pile of white shavings accumulates underneath, evidence of the body's daily labor and decay. The slowness of the work reminds us of the pace of social change, and a question recently posed by curator Tsione Wolde-Michael, "How many Black, Brown and Indigenous people had to undergo violence to get us to our current awakening?"[3] Its perpetual lurch conjures a range of associations, among them, ritual pain, violence, demise, and mourning. In the artist's words, "the final sound this artwork will ever make is the crash of its own toppling." And maybe then, when the viewer is left alone with this broken sculpture, with nothing to view but fragments, their relationship to the work will change. They will become the subject of the performance, possibly realizing that they have been its subject all along, and they will remain as the statue's witnesses and memory-keepers.

A number of artists in *Statues Also Die* offer solutions for a type of monument that consciously accrues new relevancy, meaning and significance over time:[4]

Paul Ramirez Jonas's ***Ventriloquists*** features a Classical bust of scientist Charles Darwin, reimagined as a community corkboard. Half of Darwin's face is missing, but it is likely that we would not be able to identify him, even if the sculpture was complete. The monument invites viewers to thumbtack personal messages onto its surface, rethinking the monument as a platform for supporting public exchange. Inviting touch, the memory-site thinks about the way artworks are actually used and enjoyed in public space, more often than not serving as wayfinding structures for meeting up with

friends, political landmarks to gather around, environments for enjoying an afternoon lunch, or canvases for graffiti. The work also reminds us of the way some monuments call us to reach out to touch them. We see this effect especially in war monuments, which memorialize the dead, and act akin to gravestones. Through touch, a visitor might feel for a moment that they are closer to a loved one, whose life symbolically resides within the structure.

3 Wolde-Michael, Tsione. Panel discussion. *As the Statues Fall: Conversations about Monuments and the Power of Memory*, July 23, 2020. Online: https://www.sapiens.org/archaeology/statues-falling/

4 Young, James:3.

Doreen Garner's *Skin of PONEROS* builds upon the concept that new generations can rewrite the face and meaning of monuments. Her work re-imagines an existing fourteen-foot bronze and stone statue to Dr. J. Marion Sims, "the grandfather of modern gynecology," as a slain corpse stuffed in a coffin. To make this work, Garner built a life-sized replica of an existing monument to Sims, recasting it in a skin-like silicone and stuffing it with Poly-fil. She worked alongside a team of Black female collaborators to publicly perform the gynecological surgery on Sims that made him famous (shown in the video nearby). Sims perfected this technique by experimenting on enslaved Black women without anesthesia. Telling Sims' untold story through this revised memorial, Garner brings the history of medical apartheid into public memory and the public record. Her work helped focus national attention on this statue, which contributed to the effort by activists to have it removed from its perch on Central Park and 103rd Street in East Harlem. The statue of Sims was removed in April of 2018.

Nate Lewis joins Doreen Garner in the project of considering how a body breaks down physically over time—in sculpture, life, memory, and the paper record. Rendered on thick black paper, incised with cuts, gouges and piercings, his portrait of the Robert E. Lee statue on Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia, reimagines the sculpture as a scene of gruesome death. Lee's torso lies at the feet of his horse, his guts splaying on the ground, undulating in gemlike pink, red and white patterns. Their captivating rhythm is breathtakingly precise and serene, and steals attention away from the statue's time-honored stature and famously sympathetic eyes. The effect is haunting - as the bronze body parts recede into the velvety blackness of the background, the bloody parts of Lee's body come forward. Pulling from a decade of training as a critical care nurse, Lewis cuts the paper with a scalpel to perform a surgery on history. A quiet intensity resides in this study of tissue, flesh, cells, and bones—Lewis brings Lee back to life, only to present evidence of his final breath.

In his essay, *The Texture of Memory*, historian James Young describes how a society's institutions can create the illusion that a group of people share a common history and a common memory.[5] He writes, "it is primarily through membership in religious, national, or class groups that people are able to acquire and then recall their memories at all." It is through the activity of remembering together that we build this sense of shared memory, and a sense of security that we belong to something that is bigger than us, that extends deep into history, and marks us as the progeny of survivors. In this light, the creation of monuments makes sense, they are designed as sites where common memories can be held and told. But when a monument is erected by the state, can it have the full range of interests of its populace in mind? How does a state's interest in uniting its citizens lead to the creation of monuments that tell overly simplified narratives?

Many of the artists in this exhibition complicate the relationship between people and the monuments that purport to tell their common stories:

Nona Faustine's photographs from her ***My Country*** series blur the details of existing iconic American monuments. Her works superimpose an agitated red line across each statue, censoring details, and turning the question of recognizability into a memory game. Her photographs push us to realize that monuments are profoundly connected to the cultural contexts and public opinions of the times they're born into. It is likely that we would not recognize the statue of J. Marion Sims, (an obscure historic figure) if the statue had not been the subject of protest and media attention. The same might be said about the Teddy Roosevelt statue outside New York City's Natural History Museum, which existed despite ongoing protest for years.

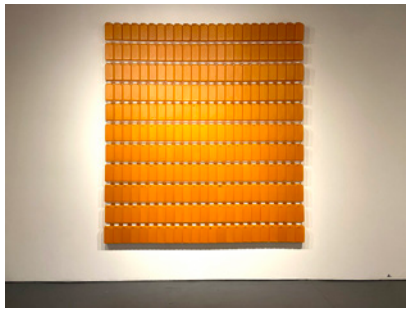
As we contemplate these photographs, we work to understand the symbolism of the red line, which extends fully across the photograph, beyond the contours of the page. Is it a mark of shame, a cut, a burn, a wound, a trauma, a redaction?... a sunspot caused by blindness, a warning sign, a warming, an homage to our flag?...a visualization of the White House administration's so-called red wave?

Marisa Williamson's *Monuments to Escape* is a map and audio guide to 12 imagined monuments along New England's Scenic Trail. The monuments memorialize the smaller and more painful histories of everyday people who live(d) and work(ed) in cities and towns across the region. The stops include a monument to America's

5 Young, James.*The Texture of Memory*:7.

obsession with guns, a monument to native corn, a monument to the landscape of abandoned and poisoned elementary schools, and a monument to the archive of Black female pain. Given their unique, contemporary and difficult content, these stories do not exist in our memorial landscape, and likely never will. Using storytelling as a vehicle for these stories' unearthing, commemoration and preservation, Williamson reimagines a monument as a form that can live inside our bodies and be maintained through persistence, the will to self-publish, and the oral tradition. She created this work while she was the Artist-in-Residence on the New England Scenic Trail, a 215-mile path that stretches from the mouth of the Connecticut River to the border of Massachusetts and New Hampshire, and intersects with sites along the Underground Railroad and the Connecticut Freedom Trail. Designed in collaboration with a multidisciplinary group of artists, (whose names are recognized in the guide), this project draws attention to the impossibility of one monument serving all people.

Cassils's *PISSED* is a wall of orange medical bottles that commemorates the life and trial of Gavin Grimm, a transgender youth activist who fought for his right to use the bathroom matching his gender identity. Grimm's case was accepted and quickly rejected by the Supreme Court, and a staying decision by the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals prevents Gavin from using the boys' bathroom to this day. To produce this work, Cassils reenacted the physical burden placed on an individual body when bathroom access is restricted by discriminatory policy, collecting their urine in these cannisters over the course of 200 days. They stored these cannisters in friends' refrigerators, involving them as collaborators and co-conspirators in the work. Cassils invited an audience to witness the intimate completion of the performance at Ronald Feldman Gallery, where, standing on top of a pedestal, the artist publicly drank water and urinated into a bottle. The original presentation included a four channel audio installation, which traces the legal battle of Gavin Grimm, all the way from parent teacher meetings to the Court of Appeals, showing how ignorance and bias run through every level of our judicial system.[6] This performance remnant is imagined as a monument that visualizes



6 Cassils. Message to Sarah Fritchey. October 6, 2020. E-mail.

legalized forms of gender discrimination, the power of witnessing, and the act of testifying against the state. The QR code that accompanies this work links to a 50-minute documentary that tells Gavin's story, provided to us by the artist.

The scene of this summer's Black Lives Matter protests demonstrated how people can come together to provide witness and testimony that stands up to the size, scale and volume of the state. Their messages covered the surfaces of national monuments across the globe, including most famously the contested statue of Robert E. Lee. Pictures of the Lee monument at night epitomize the way in which new generations can turn a monument against itself. Historian James Young explains, "once created, memorials can take on lives of their own, often stubbornly resistant to the state's original intentions. In some cases, memorials created in the image of a state's ideals actually turn around to recast these ideals in the memorial's own image."[7]

Several artists in *Statues Also Die* play with the mercurial nature of monuments, offering new ways of thinking and producing monuments that rely on community participation:

Nick Cave's *Augment* is a mobile monument to joy that features a mashup of collective cultures, traditions, identities and faiths, represented by an array of inflatable holiday and lawn ornaments, hand-sewn together. This section is one part of a larger 56,000 square foot sculpture that the artist installed in Boston's Cyclorama with the help of the local non-profit Now + There. Cave worked with Now + There's staff to organize a three-mile parade route for Boston residents and performers that crossed over Melnea Cass Boulevard, a four-lane street known as the dividing line between the city's racially and economically segregated north and south ends. They installed the monument at the end of the parade route in a vacant bank building in Dorchester, allowing it to be seen and enjoyed from the street. Cave worked with his studio assistant, Bob Faust, to wrap the building in massive wheat paste collages, created by Boston residents in workshops leading up to the parade (seen in the video accompanying this work). This sculpture imagines a monument that is flexible, jubilant, and light enough to be carried on foot and brought anywhere with relative ease. It reallocates investment into the hands of the people who show up to use it, be part of it, and assemble around it in public space.

7 Young, James:3.

Paper Monuments' ***Open Call for Public Proposals*** was conceived as a way to involve the residents of New Orleans in the decision of what, if anything, would replace the four Jim Crow monuments removed from public space in 2017. These monuments were removed via the longstanding efforts of local Black activists, and their removal revealed deep-seated divisions in New Orleans's communities. The design team made an open call that invited the community to engage in a participatory process for developing new ideas, grounded in local storytelling and exchange. Participants were invited to describe and sketch a monument that commemorated a person, place, event or movement that deserved recognition. Their open call spanned the course of two and a half years and resulted in the collection of over 1,100 contributions, some of which were installed as massive broadsides in public space. They organized a formal report, which they submitted to the Mayor's office (and is on display here). We invite visitors to participate in an extension of this project by filling out an empty open call form, located on the blue table, and imagining a monument for your own town or city.

Lee Mixashawn Rozie's sonic monument to life in Hartford, titled, ***Quannatuckwa aka ct***, stretches us to imagine what a monument can be. Real Art Ways commissioned the artist to make this work with an open-ended prompt to create a monument that could reside on the site of the building. His response was to make an open score that mixes the roots of jazz with the traditions of indigenous music and could be played again in a different way by another musician. His work frames music as a vehicle for collecting, remembering, repeating, and passing on memories and histories from generation to generation. Made up of a personal lexicon of notes, phrases and symbols, his score speaks without relying on language. This work pushes us to think about what a monument is at its absolute essence, at a space of feeling and being, when monument becomes a conceptual form.

The artists in *Statues Also Die* craft strategies for departing from our reliance on traditional monuments to tell our stories. These new concepts and forms are living, growing, ephemeral, mobile, and flexible, or as Elizbeth Alexander put it, signifiers of the ways in which "one life grows out of another." Their stretch and scope branch out like a tree, un-privatizing the process by which monuments are typically conceived and built. They embrace materials that germinate with the pace, poverty, richness, and wellspring of human life, and acknowledge how memory is always socially determined, formed primarily through our membership in religious, national and class groups, while allowing participants to gain a sense of common history that celebrates their difference. They push us to reflect on our current memorial landscape and consider what is lacking - objects and environments that are tender, fragile, caring, small, and human.

So, where do we go from here? How do we understand the concurrent values and threats posed by monuments written with a national agenda pose? How do we make time and shared space for reflecting, grieving, mourning, anger, and eventually rebuilding? How can we make monuments that offer us space for sharing memories, without forcing us to subscribe to the same narrow historic narrative or sense of shared identity? Could our common history be one of difference? Could new monuments be designed with the idea that one day they will dissolve back into the earth and be a source of nourishment?[8] Perhaps one step is to admit how profoundly personal politics are, how stunning it can be to experience a moment of personal awakening… to see yourself reflected in a bronze statue that names you, assigns you value, or very possibly doesn't acknowledge your existence at all…and to say back, "I have the power to end you."

8 Galanin, Nicholas, panelist. Panel discussion. *As the Statues Fall: Conversations about Monuments and the Power of Memory.*




About Real Art Ways

Real Art Ways is one of the leading contemporary arts organizations in the United States, with a record of linking artists, innovation and community. Programs include visual arts, with exhibitions, public art projects, and artist presentations; cinema, with independent and international films seven days a week; music; performance; literary events; community and educational programming.

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