

New Monuments Taskforce is a fantastical municipal agency formed by Bay Area artists, organizers and cultural workers. NMT is engaged in the dialogue, design and development of new monuments in the Bay Area. We strive to broaden understanding of our inherited monuments and memorials. We create space for critical conversations, radical research and experimenting with new ways of memorialization. NMT is part of the Shaping the Past Initiative, supported by Monument Lab & the Goethe Institut. The Taskforce's first initiative is "The Relic Report (SF)" a two-part publication that evaluates the city's public art and its intersection with our country's racist history. | www.newmonumentstaskforce.org



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The Relic Report

An unofficial municipal study of SF's Monuments

Before the toppling, vandalizing and collective re-evaluation of monuments from the past, these artifacts scattered our urban landscapes with little regard. Before the Relic Report and the City's parallel study on the 87 civic monuments under their jurisdiction, these art objects often went unnoticed, felt unrelatable and invisible to many. It wasn't until 2020's global pandemic; the death of George Floyd; and the frustration of timeless injustice bestowed on marginal communities; that pushed our society into a collective state of reckoning with of our systems and all that upholds them – monuments included.

With the Relic Report, New Monuments Taskforce set out to do just that: re-examine our civic monuments and the systematic themes which they uphold. In doing so, the Relic Report spurred a public conversation; asking Bay Area residents to reflect on their relationship to monumental relics and what a new wave of monuments could and should look like. We learned that many believe monuments should in fact not be removed, but instead recontextualized in creative ways. We learned that many often feel disconnected to these antiquated memorialization styles. We learned that there is an overwhelming need to continue having critical conversations like this one.

Most importantly, we learned *what* the people of San Francisco (and beyond) want to see in their new monuments. They want to see more diversity in allegory, artistic style and representation. They want monuments that make our shared history visible, not just the dominant version. They want to see more monuments that celebrate community efforts not just the accomplishments of prominent men. They want monuments that are dynamic, temporal and everchanging. They want monuments that are honest; ones that address trials and not just triumphs. They want monuments that make you stop and think twice.

Notes on new monuments

ABOUT THE REPORT

The Relic Report is an unofficial municipal study of San Francisco's monuments and memorials and their intersection with our country's racist history. Self-commissioned by New Monuments Taskforce, the two-part publication documents a playful investigation of public monuments in the city's civic art collection. Part one was released on Oct. 5th, 2020 and kicked off a month-long "Public Comment" survey that asked Bay Area residents to reflect on their relationship to monuments and what a new wave of monuments could or should look like. The responses and reflections donated by citizens on these monuments have been curated and compiled into this booklet, Relic Report Vol. 2, concluding NMT's inaugural initiative.

ABOUT THE PROCESS

The Relic Report was designed to initiate a critical conversation on SF's civic monuments. The 87 monuments in question are those in the civic art collection, they are preserved by the city and therefore, our tax dollars. The idea for the parallel report came after the SF Mayor's office announced that they'd be crafting a report of their own on the same monuments. The idea was simple: mirror the city's municipal processes but do it in an irreverent, artistic, approachable, and community driven way. Monument Lab co-founder and taskforce member Paul Farber says it best, "Even when a city runs official oversight and keeps data on its own public monuments, we rely on artists and critical thinkers to push those civic processes – to draw out potential connections, complex motifs and timely entry points for further action."

The Relic Report engages a critical conversation in order to unpack what our relationship to monuments are today. It speculates on how we can build on these learnings for tomorrow. The goal in the distant future is to have a shot at re-dreaming, re-designing and re-building new monuments and memorials, and the Relic Report is intended to be the first step in that direction. Organized by survey questions, each of the following sections display public comment responses that have been curated by New Monuments Taskforce to spotlight notable themes amongst the donated reflections. This booklet concludes with **6 Recommendations for New Monuments**, which the Taskforce discussed and created over two curatorial meetings. All illustrations are by illustrator Geon Joo Shin. Graphic Design and text was written and compiled by artist and designer Cheyenne Concepcion.

ABOUT THE TASKFORCE

New Monuments Taskforce is a newly formed gathering of artists, organizers and cultural workers engaged in the dialogue, design and development of new monuments in the Bay Area. We strive to broaden understanding of our inherited monuments and memorials. We create space for critical conversations, radical research and experimenting with new ways of memorialization. NMT is part of the Shaping the Past Initiative, supported by Monument Lab & the Goethe-Institut. Taskforce members include: Xavier G. Buck (Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation); Cheyenne Concepcion (Artist/Designer); Anna Lisa Escobedo (YBCA); Paul Farber (Monument Lab); Elizabeth Gessel (MoAD); Lian Ladia (Curator/Organizer); Natalia Ivanona Mount (ProArts); Dyan Ruiz (People Power Media); Barry Threw (Gray Area); Shamsher Virk (Zero1); Brenda Zhang, BZ (Artist/Designer)

FINDINGS & TAKEAWAYS

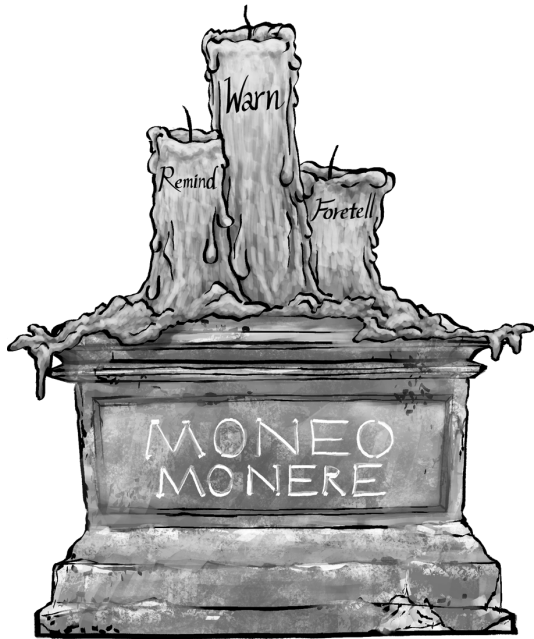
The "Public Comment" Survey initiated by The Relic Report was 100% qualitative. Qualitative data is important when assessing art objects as well as assessing systematic failures. Our relationships to monuments and to place cannot be quantified or tallied. However, some numerical findings were collected:



What do monuments represent in your opinion?

What function do they have?

Like anything else that is human, monuments are social constructions that tell us more about the people who allowed for them than anything else. Interestingly, the Latin root for “monument” – moneo, monere – does mean “to remind,” but it also means “to warn” or “to foretell.” *A “monument” to a particular moment in time and space, then, links us—in the present—both to the past and to the future.* The function of monuments, then, is as a primary document, to be plainly read as a **cultural statement of power and value**, to remind us of the past, to warn and foretell about our future.



The idea of monumentality inseparable from the funerary. The Latin origins of the term implies **'that which remains visible.'** The monument is intended to stand as an eddy within the flow of time, resisting material decomposition and remaining visible.



Monuments are meant to **inform and inspire** people. They highlight an abstract idea in a physical way and encourages us to think deeply about such ideas and how we can further society. They may also represent people or groups that have furthered such an idea, although everyone knows that human beings are imperfect and therefore *must continue to analyze and improve upon the actions taken by those who came before.*

Ideally they help create room for *public remembering* and passage of historic memory to new community members or generations. **In function they have tended to focus on a narrow kind of triumphant and totalizing narrative** that upholds war, white supremacy, colonization, misogyny, and interrelated social forces. This manifests in form, selection of that which is memorialized, and the inability for the classic memorial to grow to meet current dialogues.

Monuments to individuals seem to me to **perpetuate the lone genius myth**, that all great achievements were made by a person action alone, *rather than as a part of a community or collective.* Even the Harvey Milk monument misses the point that he was an individual who represented a population and a movement. I believe a Maya Angelou monument would probably make the same mistake. I think most monuments to individuals are erected to remind people of ideals they should strive for and how they should live their lives. They are based on idealisms, and the problem with that is no one lives a life free of mistakes or transgressions, and as the world changes so does the lens with which we judge the individuals of the past.

What aspects of this study stand out the most?

Challenging monuments altogether and their relevance in modern day. The groupings are clever, and demonstrate how single-track monument creation has been in the past. *Society is hyper-focused on celebrating individuals or groups, elevating those individuals above all others for their achievements, but is there another way to go about this form of public recognition?*

The thing most evident to me is the years of **fear based judgement** that guided the selection process at the art commission. It's possible to imagine a monument as a space for reflection, a moment of novelty, whimsy, wonder, mourning. But allow artist to express this in more nuanced and profound ways. Not just in marble or bronze! Seek courage and *have faith in artistic expression to reach beyond the obvious symbolism.*

It interests me how the problem of historic monuments and historic memory will be resolved in such a diverse country. How much a populist approach versus a deep analysis will be applied? **How the US will confront historical truth versus its national myths?** What kind of art/action work could be done using the troubled monuments?

I think the very last segment when you begin asking questions for the future. Because I have similar questions: how do we begin to envision new kinds of approaches to memorial, materially, in process, in subject? **The underlying, only indirectly asked question of whether it is possible (and of value) to create new kinds of memorials, feels very present.**



My takeaway from your report is that you want to provoke reaction and response to your assertion that SF needs to rethink its conception of monuments. and if more monuments are to be constructed, they need need to reflect the **zeitgeist**. One of your criticisms is that the SF decision makers who influence the creation of monuments is too narrow and non-representative of the community, that the monuments only honor achievements of white males and reflect a certain hierarchy of who and what deserves to be honored by the collective. *Another implication of the report seems to imply that the potential of monuments and public art in 3-dimensions can occupy public space in way that can be significant and unite the community.*

As a black native San Franciscan, nothing in this study stands out, and I am here to be UNAPOLOGETICALLY BLACK with my answers. **As someone who was born and raised in this city, I never saw a monument that represented me or anyone else I know.**

It's beautiful. I love how the report helps to lower the volume of triggers blatant in colonial history. The report is straight-forward and offers relief to examine objects meant to dehumanize other.

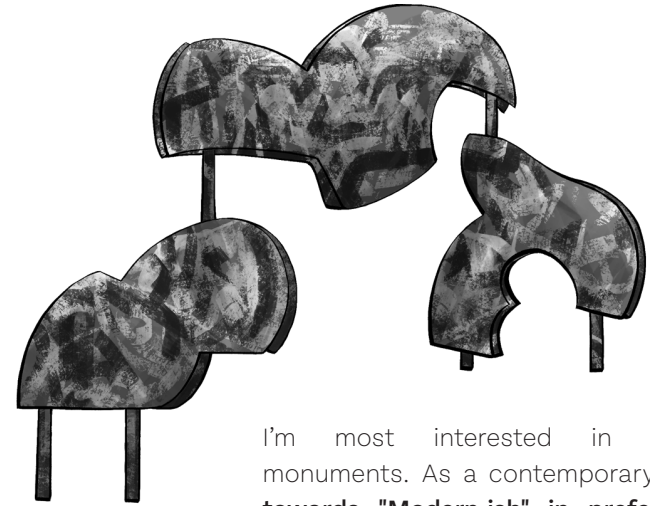
Which grouping of monuments is most interesting to you? Why?



Ideally they help create room for public remembering and passage of historic memory to new community members or generations. In function they have tended to focus on a narrow kind of triumphant and totalizing narrative that upholds war, white supremacy, colonization, misogyny, and interrelated social forces. **This manifests in form, selection of that which is**

The Boys Club portion stood out to me the most. Even as someone who considers themselves to be pretty aware of their cis-male gender, *I had not considered statues and their gender.* I think this is because we view things like, statues, buildings, objects etc, as "lifeless". But this report helped remind me that these relics only further perpetuate every inequity.

memorialized, and the inability for the classic memorial to grow to meet current dialogues.

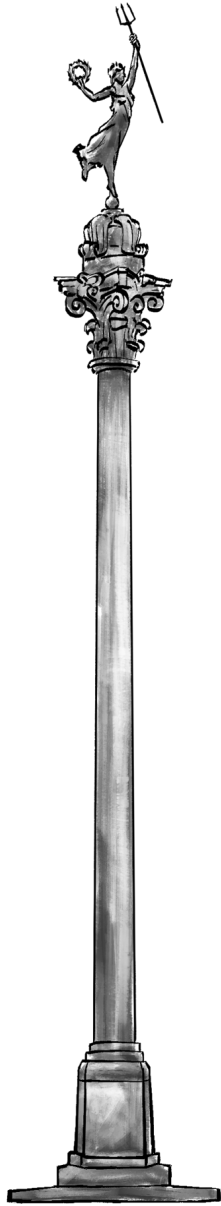


I'm most interested in contemporary monuments. As a contemporary artist, **I lean towards "Modern-ish" in preference.** #66.

Movement: *The First 100 Years* is one of my favorite sculptures in the city and I can navigate based on seeing that as a landmark. **I prefer those monuments that do not depict individuals to begin with, but rather consist of experiences one can share.** Two SF monuments I can think of that were not offered in the "Modern-ish" section, but if they had been considered would most likely belong in that section. The Martin Luther King Jr memorial at Yerba Buena is a beautiful example of an experience. The water falling is powerful, loud and imposing like the cry of many voices. Its hard not to walk through it and not be moved with emotion. Another is Ruth Asawa's San Francisco fountain at the Hyatt Hotel. **She included sculptures that children had made in the fountain, and to me it represents a Chinese American community very powerfully and at a height where children can enjoy the work.** The most powerful monument I've ever experienced personally is the Vietnam Memorial by Maya Lin in DC, where the viewer has a physical experience that reveals the number of lives lost to the war. **I want more memorials such as that. We need fewer statues and more places where we can experience the events and achievements for ourselves.**

What Remains - it directly questions what, if any, impact monuments have on people's worldview at all.

Do you have a relationship to any of the monuments in the study? Which ones? Why?



The Dewey monument and all the other military monuments that celebrate the colonization of the Philippines (Philippine American War). Since there is a significant Filipino American community in SF, it's a painful reminder of how the US has subjugated the Filipino people.

The one's that were toppled because I can relate to what taking them down meant.

I don't have a personal relationship to any of the monuments. I'm not a huge fan of monuments per se, but I think they are a necessary part urban landscapes and important elements in creating civic consciousness and civic engagement.

Yes. I have fond memories of discussing with my father who James Garfield was and the reasons why his contemporaries felt he was a figure worth memorializing. I also have fond memories of the multiple monuments that adorned the general vicinity of the Music Concourse when going to visit the neighboring museums as a child.

They added to the sense of knowledge and understanding furthered by those instructions, before some of them were violently removed by vandals earlier this year.

#40--Volunteer Fireman Memorial, only because of its location in centrally located Washington Square in North Beach. I would like to see the statue to the firemen **moved up to Coit Tower** to replace the (now removed) Columbus statue. **This frees space in Washington Square for an eight sided kiosk.** With eight sides, multiple groups can get recognition on one structure: Native Americans, Italian-Americans, African Americans (two panels), Women (two panels), Asian Americans, and Latinos. I have expressed my opinions to the African American Arts and Culture Committee, Italian-American Social Club, and Association of Ramaytush Ohlone. I believe they are receptive. I am hopeful that funding may be sourced from the Maya Angelou project.



The Holocaust Memorial (69). I have never seen it in person, but it relates most closely to my history. I guess its the personal, whether through experience or culture, memory that makes a monument relevant to me. the literal sculptural interpretation reads most vividly. its like a movie set or a theme park, it has the ability to put you in another place and time. it forces you to have empathy and to imagine what that time may have actually been like. it calls on visceral memory.

The only one in this study that I have a relationship with is #66, Movement: The First 100 Years. I didn't know until now, upon researching the

sculpture that it commemorated an idea or movement and a community. Its always appealed to me because of the scale, the material, and the composition as two links that are open on one side. I walk by it on my way from work to the subway, and I've always loved it. It seems monumental in scale and yet delicate in that the bond it represents could easily be broken. **The statement is powerful and doesn't need explanation or context to understand its meaning.** It seems to share a value and message that is universal and appealing to many different kinds of people. It seems timeless. Its inviting- soft and warm and not imposing the way a man in a tall plinth can feel.

...If you do not have a relationship to any of these public monuments, explain why that might be:

for me it is being an active observer in my public spaces and being attuned to how what is in our public spaces effects what we think is possible in those spaces or our lives.

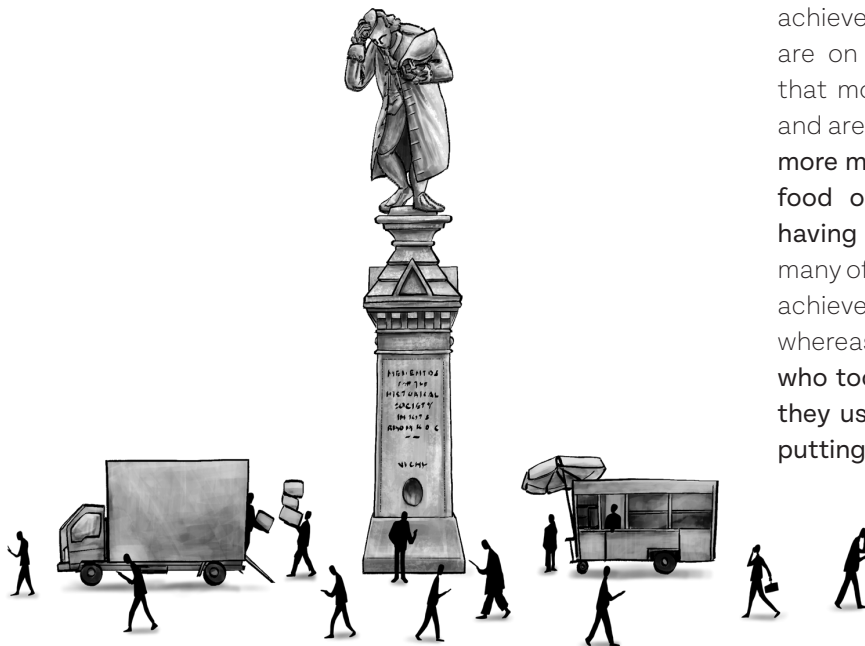
Honestly, I tend not to pay attention to monuments unless I am on vacation. *I am mostly tired of seeing the same type of person represented.*

be experienced in person. I cannot imagine a digital "monument" having anything like the same effect, so if the pandemic never ends, perhaps we'll never bother with monuments again!

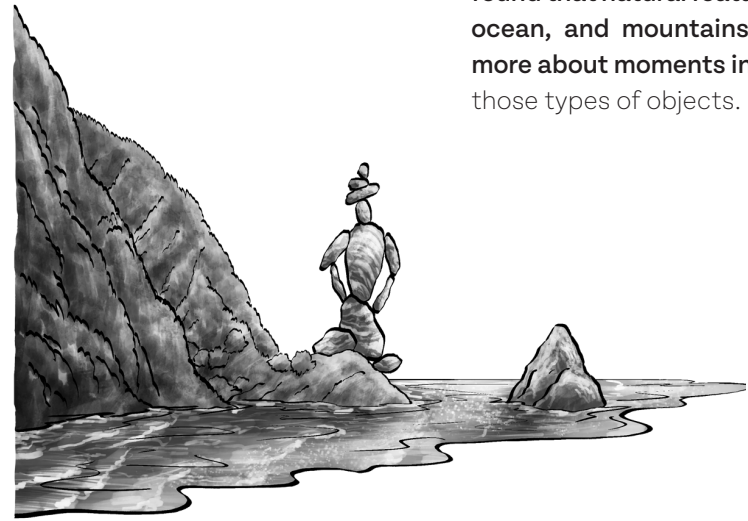
I don't think the purpose of monuments is to "have relationships" with them.

They are usually too far away: in history, in aesthetics, **in the sentiment that erected them.**

Monuments, by definition are (usually) larger-than-life, **so a physical interactive relationship seems key...**they should



I don't think I've ever really paid attention to monuments. Being raised in Hawaii, **I found that natural features like cliffs, the ocean, and mountains made me think more about moments in time** rather than those types of objects.



Where is the "every day human" in our monuments?

We are so focused on a few "key" figures that we neglect the majority in our quest to celebrate the top 5% of achievers among us. Not all of us are on such a quest for success that monuments tend to applaud, and are **instead tasked with solving more mundane needs** (e.g. putting food on the table, paying rent, having a worthwhile career). So many of us cannot think beyond Maslow's basic hierarchy of needs and achieve self-actualization, which 'good' monuments tend to celebrate; whereas "politically incorrect" monuments may highlight individuals who took greed-drive actions or had a skewed moral compass that they used to their advantage to find success while simultaneously putting others down. It's obviously hard to relate either way!

Most were not made for me. That isn't necessarily a bad thing when it's not part of a racist sexist colonial pattern.

All of them.
Thrown into the sea.

Which monuments should be taken down?
Where should they go?



I think all monuments should go through a **10 (or 20, or 30) year renewal process**. Some get to stay, some get changed, some get put in cemeteries, some get melted down.

James Phelan was a monster with his white supremacy policies and should be decommissioned immediately. **King Carlos III** should be decommissioned for racist genocide policies against Indigenous people in the Americas. *They should be used to seed coral reefs off the coast.*

Columbus, Junipero Serra, and others engaged in genocide/slavery should go. Also ones honoring "settlers" and "pioneers" and anything depicting Indigenous people without approval from their tribe.

I would love to see a section of a public park dedicated to the statues we took down, off their plinths and keeping any damage they sustained when removed. I visited a park in Russia that was full of the removed statues of Stalin and it was a good way to preserve the monuments of the past and as a warning about the ideas and time period they represented.

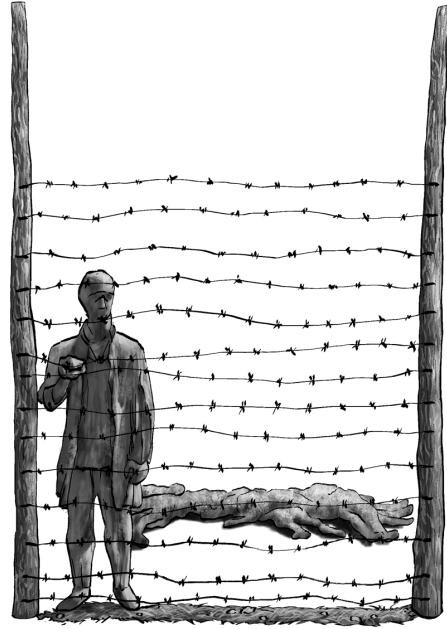
Monuments that memorialize the racist violence of the settler-colonial state and the exclusivity of private land ownership should absolutely be taken down. *I do not believe they belong in a museum any more than they belong on plinths, as a display case would materialize the same implicit positivity inherent in the framing.*

none. they should all stay. history has shown that *people who aim to destroy monuments are dangerous narcissists.*

None should be taken down, but if they must, they should go into museums. The better solution is to have

a broader diversity of historical figures and have better interpretive signage explaining who or what the monument is meant to memorialize and why. One could make the argument that the vices associated with the monument should also be explained, but this hardly fits the intent of memorials to evoke positive sentiments, rather than focusing on any perceived wrongdoing that may be associated with the person or its idea. Many different people can be celebrated through monuments, the erection of a new monument that captures contemporary feelings and leaders need not replace another, it is complimentary.

How can we find a better way to cope with the past, present and future through monuments and memorials? What does our relationship to monuments tell us about that?



More education in the physical space and signage. I also think that **monuments should be made to make people stop and think twice.** These styles have become normalized into our landscape to the point where people are not critical of what they stand for. This requires us to engage on another level with these monuments.

Technology! Temporal installations, projections, urban sidewalk art. **Narrative is so important,** more so than the monument or memorial itself which should be designed in such a way to tell the narrative (**a monument of a single individual is out of context, and hard to fit into a story**)

We should *re-think the kind of things we want to memorialize.*

it would be smart to focus less on defying imperfect individuals and more on **visualizing ideals of where we want to go.**

Stop calling them monuments, memorials, **find new words to represent new markers to contemporary moments.**

To examine our relations of power - as a first step. If we can articulate equitable understandings of power, how does creative agency transform into the shaping, placing and making of monuments.

We have to start from the ground up and ask ourselves why we need monuments in the first place. **We have to re-define what a monument even is.** Putting up a monument is now our knee-jerk reaction to a question we have stopped asking ourselves. **Is a traditional monument the best way to accomplish our aims?** Maybe, sometimes. But not always.

ments be voted on by city voters (both to install and to renew after they expire)? Are monuments passe? Can a monument be an experience? Do we even need monuments? (Memorials are where it's at.)



The radical nature of having monuments of white supremacists littered throughout our nation needs to be **matched with those of racial justice, gendered justice, science, and art.** I want to see monuments of my first grade teacher. I want to see monuments of Nia Wilson (permitting her family is fine with this.) I want to see monuments of E-40. I want to see monuments James Baldwin. **My relationship to monuments is one of fear or disgust. I want monuments who wouldn't spit on me as I pass them.**

Our "monuments" need to be **dynamic and ever-changing.** Our stories can't be solidified into stone or bronze. They need to be performed and re-performed so that they can shift with our culture.

Could monuments expire? Could there be a monument moratorium for 25 years? Could there be a Monuments Vetting Committee? Could monu-

If we were to start over in SF, what function should monuments have? What must they represent?

In such a multicultural city, the common monuments could represent human diversity, solidarity, unity etc. **I'm afraid that in this situation when a monument must please everyone-** monuments will be transformed into public art/sculpture and decor.

How are we to get around the history of monument rooted in 2000 years of human history--monuments are about authority and power? **So I've been thinking of spaces that allow for gathering around ideas and dialogue--**I'm

intrigued with the development of "talking park benches" places where we can have sustained, civil conversations. Or alternatives to monuments such as the labyrinth as non-religious contemplative space. Monuments will always foster controversy as they function to present consensus when in fact of understanding of the past is always polyvocal.

Art and beauty should be an emphasis. Democratic distribution of who and what is represented by monuments.

Recognizing (and teaching youth) that history is constructed by groups in power and is not absolute (i.e. our views of what happened change over time), and monuments are a part of that constructed narrative. **We are in a great time of awakening around this in the US as monuments come down and people reject this narrative through direct action.** Now, we need to continue to re-envision what and who we honor and how, and open the process to great collective input.



I think this question is not constructive. **Monuments should function as they always have: as a reflection of San Francisco,** showcasing the individual histories and interwoven experiences of those living in the city. Monuments of war and peace were erected because all of San Francisco lived through the former and celebrated the latter. *The monumental landscape is dominated by white men because they were the ones allowed to achieve things deemed worthy of remembrance by other white men* and, perhaps, the women who did not question them. Pioneers, presidents, missionaries, landowners and philanthropists were memorialized in stone because public education has traditionally been tied to patriotism and the richest among us have always been the loudest.

We know better now. So the question shouldn't be how to start over, removing old monuments to make way for new monuments, **it should be what can we add to reorient the narrative, catching up with a more enlightened view of ourselves** and our shared history. Because history is layered and if you compromise the foundation of its house by removing stones selectively, the upper floors will never be level and it just might come crashing down.

ments to **represent ALL people who are part of the society, past, present, and to a certain extent future; not only the majority.** To put it simply, a city as rich as San Francisco, shouldn't only (primarily) harbor neoclassical representations of a white American or European-descent historical figure.

To tell stories on a community/family level. New, dynamic monuments need to be counter-universalizing in nature, emphasizing the experience of SF residents as the central thematic function.

At the very least, **they need to address and acknowledge the wounds (most prominently colonization) that undergird the city.** If a memorial's role is to make visible and create space to hold histories and ensure that they are not so easily forgotten, **we should be prioritizing the histories and people whose stories continue to be erased.**

Two things. I'd like monuments to be a **celebration of our society's artistic creativity,** in all its diversity and historic fluctuations. Secondly, I'd like monu-

1. New monuments must expand public knowledge.

2. New monuments must not be on the side of oppression.

3. New monuments must disrupt old ideas of what monuments can be.

4. New monuments must be dynamic and everchanging.

5. New monuments must tell stories on a community level.

6. New monuments must challenge observers to stop and think twice.