# AGAINST BRONZEWASHING

## CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS AND THE REMAKING OF MONUMENTS

SENIOR THESIS IN AMERICAN STUDIES
JEREMY LEE WOLIN AB/BFA '19

In this thesis, I framed the emergence of experimental monument exhibitions in the twenty-first century as the convergence of 1990s developments in the disciplines of public art and public history. Then, I examined these proposals and temporary monuments to understand how they confronted the problems of traditional monuments, which I termed *bronzewashing*.

### *Bronzewashing:*

1. the urge to clean monuments post-"vandalism"
2. the erasure of historical conflict in the name of consensus or community, often enacted by the creation of monuments.

### Lessons from 1990s Public Art + Public History

1. "public" as contested term
2. public space as inherently messy, unconstrained
3. celebration of vernacular forms + concepts
4. new structures of feedback + critique

See: Public Art + Public History Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain*, 1994; Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 1995; Mary Jane Jacob, *Culture in Action*, 1993

See: This Monument Moment Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 1997; Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 2010; Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars*, 2009

### Measures Against Bronzewashing

as demonstrated by the monument proposals, temporary monuments, and interventions studied here

| | |
|---|---|
| discursivity | ability to change |
| impermanence | immateriality |
| fragility | distributability/mobility |
| reflexivity | messiness |
| layering | collaboration/participation |

### Acknowledgements

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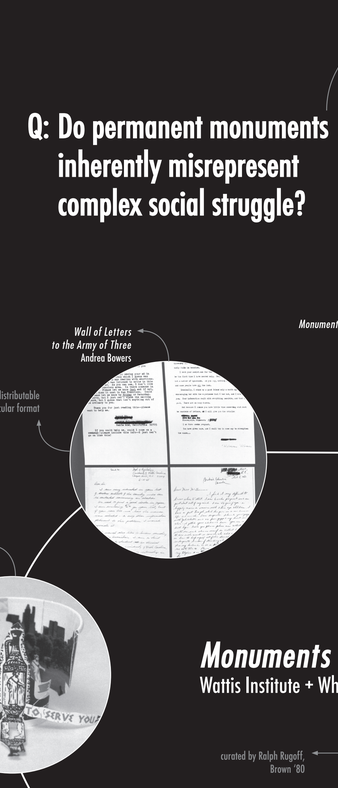


Q: Do permanent monuments inherently misrepresent complex social struggle?

(bureaucratically produced, officially supported, consensus-based works of public art)

*Embrace*
King Memorial Boston

*All Power to the People*
Citywide Exhibition, Monument Lab

Two civil rights monuments by Hank Willis Thomas

permanent
celebratory
colorblind/conciliatory
**bronzewashed**

temporary
confrontational
references Black Power
**against bronzewashing**

*Wall of Letters to the Army of Three*
Andrea Bowers

easily distributable vernacular format

*Monument to Pepper LaBeija*
Enrico David

*Proposal for White and Indian Dead Monument Transpositions*
Sam Durant

more inclusive public figure

complicates public space
critical over celebratory

Do monument proposals address these issues?

*Monument to Go*
Janine Antoni

fragile materiality
vernacular concept

### *Monuments for the USA*, 2005-06

Wattis Institute + White Columns

curated by Ralph Rugoff, Brown '80

a response to the renewed interest in building monuments post-Vietnam Veterans Memorial and 9/11

Do temporary monuments address these issues?

*On the Threshold*
Kaitlyn Pomerantz

*The Battle Is Joined*
Karyn Olivier

*Nos Seguimos Caminando*
Michelle Angela Ortiz

vernacular form
protest as monument

vernacular format
complex public space

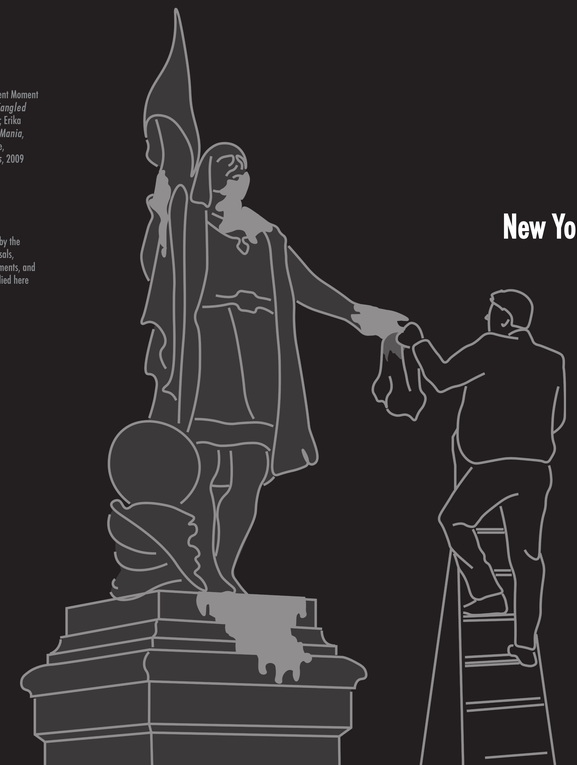
inclusive gesture
critical of existing plinth

### *Citywide Exhibition*, 2017

Monument Lab + Philadelphia Mural Arts Program

Co-founded by Paul Farber and Ken Lum, *Monuments for the USA* participant

Founded 2012-13, *Discovery Exhibition* mounted 2015



### New York, 2012-2017

*J Marion Sims Protest*
Black Youth Project 100 + East Harlem Preservation

*Discovering Columbus*
Tatzu Nishi

visualizes conflict
activates monument

de-monumentalizes figure
preservation + critique

Do monument interventions?

Can official monument creation learn from experimental monuments?

### Yes and no,

1. In 2017, the NY Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments + Markers recommends removing the Sims Monument and calls for a contemporary replacement.
2. In 2018, PAFA acquires *All Power to the People* + places it on view near its original site; Thomas creates a new version for the Africa Center of NY.
3. In 2018, SheBuiltNYC committee members advocate for group monuments to critique single hero narratives; NY Mayor's Office ignores suggestions and chooses 5 single women