



Report

City of Toronto: A Monument for the Critical and Inquisitive

PREPARED FOR

ArtworxTO: Toronto's Year of Public Art

and

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Project Brief and Overview Summary

As a part of ArtworxTO: Year of Public Art 2021-2022, Monument Lab was invited to pursue an art and research process regarding the City's Public Art & Monuments Collection. Working in partnership with the City of Toronto's Arts and Culture Services, and curatorial collaborator ART+PUBLIC UnLtd., the process was intended to engage, gather, and reflect on local and regional commemorative practices. The focus of this engagement was to consider the holistic and overarching aspects of commemoration including acquisition, deaccession, disposal, and recontextualization of their monuments and/or public artworks. Monument Lab's process was designed to yield reflections for the City's Public Art & Monuments Collection around these pillars.

Monument Lab, a nonprofit public art and history studio co-founded by Paul Farber and Ken Lum, cultivates and facilitates critical conversations around the past, present, and future of monuments. Monument Lab defines *monument* as "a statement of power and presence in public." The research process included a week of engagement programs and story collection around Toronto; a collaboration with Toronto-based public artist and Monument Lab Fellow Quentin VerCetty; a series of monumental dialogues with memory practitioners, artists, and scholars; and background research and engagement analysis.

Monument Lab deployed VerCetty's *A Monument For The Inquisitive and Critical* as a vessel for public engagement, questioning, and reflection. Given the

project's specific timeframe and scope, the idea to pilot a "mobile monument" was an attempt to meet a variety of publics where they already gather – especially in civic spaces where commemoration and commercialization are intertwined. The collaboration with VerCetty served both as a prototype monument and also as a hub for public participation and discourse about these issues. VerCetty's role both as a visionary creator of public art in Toronto and his role as a Monument Lab transnational fellow made him an ideal choice to explore experimental approaches for this exercise.

From October 29 to November 3, 2021, Monument Lab moved *A Monument For The Inquisitive & Critical* through daily stops across the city at Nathan Phillips Square, RoundHouse Park, Cloverdale Common, Scarborough Town Centre, Wexford Heights Business Improvement Area, and Mel Lastman Square. At each location, a team of locally based Monument Lab researchers conducted an open engagement process with participants and passersby around two guiding questions: *What's next for Toronto?* and *What is a meaningful monument for the future city of Toronto?* The reflections from the week of activations and engaged research inform this final report.



Monument Lab Research Hub,
Cloverdale Common, Toronto, 2021.
(Andrew Williamson)

Reflections Toward Action

Across all our research, engagement, and analysis, the following reflections toward action have been defined to inform a thoughtful approach to future policy:

I. Acquisition ▼

Elevate Multiplicity in the public realm

No place has a single story. Look for opportunities to add narratives and respond to sites that are dominated by a singular archaic vision.

II. Deaccession ▼

Expand the practice of monumentality beyond “temporary” and “permanent”

There are no true temporal binaries of public art. Nothing is “permanent” in and of itself, and “temporary” projects can have lasting impacts. Expand vocabulary and practices that value the life cycles of public art.

III. Disposal ▼

Anticipate adaptation and repurposing as part of the process

Draw on models for adaptive reuse, recycling, and remediation with intentionality and creativity. Embrace artist and grassroots approaches to transitioning artworks.

IV. Recontextualization ▼

Embrace adaptation as an artistic practice that yields interpretation and enduring relevance

History can come alive more fully in moments of change. Treat interpretation not as a footnote but as a creative act of regeneration and response in and of itself.

Grounding I: What is a Monument?

by Ken Lum

- 1) A monument must have either physical or symbolic scale.
- 2) A monument imposes a consensus of values.
- 3) A monument projects eternal truths.
- 4) A monument is a unified entity that emphasizes its autonomy.
- 5) A monument is always in dialogue with all other monuments.
- 6) A monument displaces alternative readings.
- 7) A monument is myth within a system of representation.
- 8) A monument's values need to be maintained.



Quentin VerCetty, *A Monument for the Inquisitive and Critical*, Toronto, 2021. (Garcia Creative Media Inc.)

Our Process



Quentin VerCetty, *A Monument for the Inquisitive and Critical*, Toronto, 2021. (Garcia Creative Media Inc.)

As a research and curatorial team, questions are at the heart of Monument Lab's work. We believe that art is critical to how we understand, experience, and imagine the past, present, and future. We believe that wisdom and intelligence come in many forms, and that questions without simple answers can guide us toward greater forms of accountability and coalition building. We value process as much as outcome. We collaborate to make generational change in the ways art and history live in public.

Through exhibitions, research programs, and editorial platforms, we have connected with hundreds of thousands of people in person and millions online. In particular, those conversations with people influenced our approach – to ask questions of monuments and people around them. To not accept them as simply above us, frozen in time, but as parts of our civic landscape in a state of constant flux that we have the power to shape, iterate, and evolve.

When asked to conduct an engaged art and research project for ArtworxTO, we attempted to extend our site-specific work as a way to expand upon our core methodologies. This includes working with artists to build prototype monuments, conduct participatory engaged research, and share findings in creative and critical platforms.

Our grounding questions: *What's next for Toronto?* and *What is a meaningful monument for the future city of Toronto?* Initial discussions with local/curatorial collaborator ART+PUBLIC UnLtd led the project team to conceptualize the art-led engagement as a mobile unit. Our earliest conversations were around where such engagement should take place: should a project investigating monuments take place adjacent to existing monuments, or in an area where there are no monuments? This conversation ties intimately into the politics and funding structures behind the existing public art landscape in Toronto, whose ties to development see a huge concentration of public art and monuments downtown, and very little in the outer areas. This conversation gave way to the idea of a mobile monument that could exist both adjacent to and absent of existing monuments.

To commence our project in Toronto, we engaged Toronto public artist and Monument Lab Fellow Quentin VerCetty on a series of activations at sites of memory around the city through the mobile *A Monument For The Inquisitive and Critical* – a truck with a flatbed gallery space outfitted with 3D digital sculptures, collages, and maps inspired to summon the past, present, and future of Toronto's monument landscape. We followed guidance from ART+PUBLIC UnLtd on site selection across the city, looking to meet a variety of public participants where they gathered. Those sites included: Nathan Phillips Square, Roundhouse Park, Cloverdale Common, Scarborough Town Centre, Wexford Heights Business Improvement Area, and Mel Lastman Square.



Monument Lab Research Hub,
Nathan Phillips Square, Toronto,
2021. (Garcia Creative Media Inc.)

Criteria for site selection included finding a balance between sites already heavy with civic monuments and those without, social significance of the site (historical, community, civic), ability to leverage other planned activities to maximize foot traffic, and tie-ins to the larger ArtworxTO program (e.g., setting up adjacent to the ArtworxTO hubs at Cloverdale Common and Scarborough Town Centre).

According to VerCetty, “*A Monument For The Inquisitive & Critical* is the imaginative embracing and celebration of those who are critical and are pushing the conversation around equity, diversity, and inclusion for monuments of today and for the future. The art piece is also a welcoming encouragement for viewers and visitors to become such persons who seek the highlighted values of peace, love, equality, justice, harmony, and balance for decolonization and unification of a greater Toronto.”

To staff the mobile monument, we also hired a team of Lab researchers grounded in art, design, and public engagement: Stella Zhou, Ujwal Mantha, and Jennie Geleff. This group set up at each location with our research forms, clipboards, and pens. Over the course of a week, over 1,500 people engaged with the installation and we collected research forms from 103 people. Those forms were processed, transcribed, and analyzed by members of our research team. To complement the collection of forms, the group issued their own reflections (included in this report), and we held a day of public “monumental dialogues” to encourage discourse and exchange through the initiative.

Engagement Forms

At each site in which the mobile *A Monument For The Inquisitive & Critical* set up throughout the city, we collected engagement forms as a means of cultivating ideas and reflections of the project's central prompts. In total across the six sites, with over 1500 engagements, we collected a total of 103 forms through in-person engagements across the city of Toronto.

After collection, our research team processed these forms, read each carefully, and examined overview themes and patterns. You can view a gallery of forms [here](#).

Overview Themes and Patterns:

ELEVATING MULTIPLICITY:

Celebrating the diversity and different identities of Torontonians was a popular theme. Many participants also want to see monuments as a form of cultural and historical storytelling in public space. There is a strong desire to bringing people together in unity regardless of their differences and build a sense of community. The mention of connecting monuments to nature and wildlife also came up multiple times. People want more emphasis on Indigenous art and history along with actions of decolonizing monuments. Based on engagement observations, participants who filled out the forms are of diverse races, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender expressions, and age. Among the 89 participants that provided their age, 13 (14.6%) of them are seniors (65 and above), 40 (44.9%) of them are adults (31–64), 25 (28%) of them are younger adults (20–30), and 11 (12.3%) of them are teenagers or children (19 and under).



Monument Lab Research Hub,
Nathan Phillips Square, Toronto,
2021. (Garcia Creative Media Inc.)

CONCEPTING POSSIBILITY:

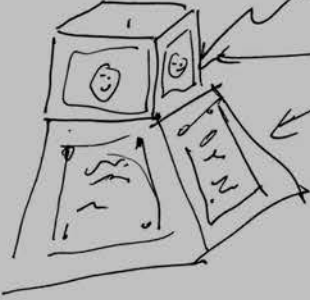
Instead of specific ideas about the physical appearance of their ideal monument, participants focused on the concepts and themes the monuments represent. This could provide future monument artists with more artistic freedom in how they want to convey the messages of the community through a monument.

BEYOND LANGUAGE:

More participants chose to describe their ideal monument in words than in drawings. Forty-seven of 103 (45.6%) participants drew images on their forms. Most of these drawings were complemented by written notes. Compared to seniors and adults, younger adults, teenagers, and children were more likely to include drawings on their forms. Twenty-two of the 47 (46.8%) forms that had drawings on them were filled out by participants age 30 or younger (34.9%).

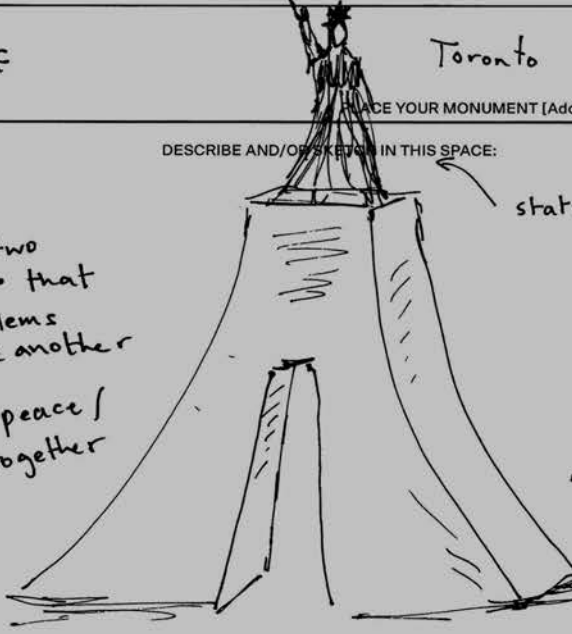


Monument Lab Research Hub, Scarborough Town Centre, Toronto, 2021. (Andrew Williamson.)

<p style="font-size: 1.2em;">Toronto Heroes</p> <p><small>NAME YOUR MONUMENT</small></p>	<p style="font-size: 1.2em;">Dufferin & Queen.</p> <p><small>PLACE YOUR MONUMENT [Address, Intersection or Neighborhood]</small></p>		
<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em;">DESCRIBE AND/OR SKETCH IN THIS SPACE:</p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: flex-start;">  <div style="margin-left: 20px;"> <p style="font-size: 1.2em;">local heroes.</p> <p style="font-size: 1.2em;">picture + why they are a local hero</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - nominated by neighbours for good deeds + neighborly activities. eg. food bank volunteer • awesome garden for butterflies <p style="font-size: 1.2em;">→ changes every month.</p> </div> </div>			
<p style="font-size: 1.2em;">M6R1H1</p> <p><small>YOUR POSTAL CODE</small></p>	<p style="font-size: 1.2em;">older</p> <p><small>YOUR AGE</small></p>	<p style="font-size: 1.2em;">Alison Gibbins @alivex on twitter</p> <p><small>YOUR NAME, @, AND/OR HASHTAG</small></p>	<p style="font-size: 0.8em;">RESEARCH ID</p> <p style="font-size: 1.2em;">TORP24</p>

<p style="font-size: 1.2em;">TBD</p> <p><small>NAME YOUR MONUMENT</small></p>	<p style="font-size: 1.2em;">North York Civic Centre</p> <p><small>PLACE YOUR MONUMENT [Address, Intersection or Neighborhood]</small></p>		
<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em;">DESCRIBE AND/OR SKETCH IN THIS SPACE:</p> <p style="font-size: 1.2em;">A series of temporary site specific projects that activate the environment & stimulate the community to engage & interact.</p>			
<p style="font-size: 1.2em;">M3H</p> <p><small>YOUR POSTAL CODE</small></p>	<p style="font-size: 1.2em;">60+</p> <p><small>YOUR AGE</small></p>	<p style="font-size: 1.2em;">bonnie.rubenstein@gmail.com</p> <p><small>YOUR NAME, @, AND/OR HASHTAG</small></p>	<p style="font-size: 0.8em;">RESEARCH ID</p> <p style="font-size: 1.2em;">TOMLS76</p>

WHAT IS A MEANINGFUL MONUMENT FOR THE FUTURE CITY OF TORONTO?

NAME YOUR MONUMENT UNION PEACE		PLACE YOUR MONUMENT [Address, Intersection or Neighborhood] Toronto	
DESCRIBE AND/OR SKETCH IN THIS SPACE: <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: flex-start; margin-top: 20px;"> <div style="width: 30%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Union of two places tho that have problems with one another - to bring peace / closer together - show peace! </div> <div style="width: 40%; text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="width: 25%; text-align: right;"> <p>statue of liberty in NY</p> <p>← liberty tower in Tehran</p> </div> </div>			
YOUR POSTAL CODE Barrie	YOUR AGE 34	YOUR NAME, @, AND/OR HASHTAG Hamidreza Naji	RESEARCH ID TONPS16

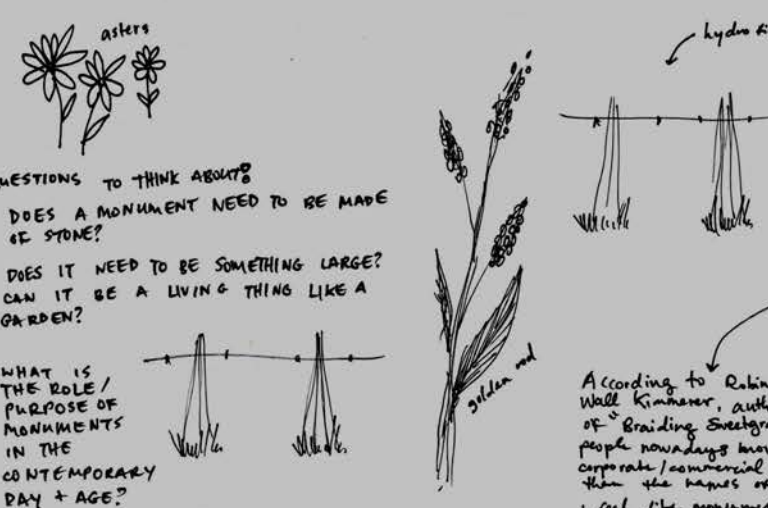
monumentlab.com

#monumentlab

@monument_lab

info@monumentlab.com

WHAT IS A MEANINGFUL MONUMENT FOR THE FUTURE CITY OF TORONTO?

NAME YOUR MONUMENT Golden Rod		PLACE YOUR MONUMENT [Address, Intersection or Neighborhood] The Meadowway in Scarborough THOMSON PARK	
DESCRIBE AND/OR SKETCH IN THIS SPACE: <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: flex-start; margin-top: 20px;"> <div style="width: 30%;"> <p>QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DOES A MONUMENT NEED TO BE MADE OF STONE? - DOES IT NEED TO BE SOMETHING LARGE? - CAN IT BE A LIVING THING LIKE A GARDEN? - WHAT IS THE ROLE / PURPOSE OF MONUMENTS IN THE CONTEMPORARY DAY + AGE? </div> <div style="width: 40%; text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="width: 25%; text-align: right;"> <p>I would like to see monuments of native plants with didactics about their medicinal properties, when they bloom, etc.</p> <p>WHY?</p> <p>In the Meadowway there's been a focus on planting native species, a lot of people are unaware of the medicinal properties of plants +/or their symbolism, significance to the seasons + passage of time. i.e. Golden Rod symbolizes / indicates a transition from summer to fall + is a symbol of hope!</p> <p>According to Robin Wall Kimmerer, author of "Braiding Sweetgrass" people nowadays know more corporate / commercial brands than the names of plants. I feel like monuments should honour teachers both human + non-human + reflect values we want to bring with us moving forward.</p> </div> </div>			
MIP3X5	23	Sylvie Stojanovski (@sylvie the artist)	RESEARCH ID TOWB63



On Focus: Monument Concept/Feature

As part of the forms' processing our research team identified the eleven most recurring themes and categories amongst all the forms gathered. These categories are represented in the infographic below as overarching concepts and features from the participant's proposed monuments:



Reflections on monument acquisition

- ▶ There is a desire for more monuments to represent Black, Indigenous, and people of color. Fifteen participants recommend focusing on BIPOC groups, especially Indigenous people, through public art and cultural and historical storytelling.
- ▶ Many participants appreciate having more monuments of animals, wildlife, and connections to our natural environment. They feel that there are already too many monuments of people in the city but not enough appreciation of wildlife and nature. Fifteen participants offered specific ideas for animal monuments they want to see, with thirteen forms hoping that a new monument could incorporate elements of nature.
- ▶ Some participants hope to see monuments that are more technologically advanced and use digital projection, lights, or digital screens to create interactions. At least five participants directly mentioned the use of digital technology.

Reflections on monument removal

- ▶ One participant made direct mention of removing certain monuments, specifically monuments that commemorate white settlers.
- ▶ At least three participants emphasized that there should be no more monuments built to glorify colonial settlers.

Reflections on monument recontextualization

- ▶ Many participants see monuments as a way of celebrating diversity and bringing people together as a community. Monuments should not only commemorate significant past events or notable persons, but also recognize present society and help foster social connectedness in the city. Fourteen participants want to see monuments that represent the diverse culture and history of Toronto, while thirteen hope monuments can bring people together and build a sense of community.
- ▶ Although there is no direct mention of keywords such as digital space, virtual augmentation, and virtual reality, some participants wish to integrate digital technology such as light projections and digital screens on monuments. Their purpose is to make monuments more interactive and changing in real-time as people engage with the physical space or the monument itself.

Lab Team Reflections *(Excerpts)*



Monument Lab Research Hub, Scarborough Town Centre, Toronto, 2021. (Andrew Williamson.)

During their days at sites, the Lab team offered reflections on their process. We view them as key interlocutors and practitioners. Below are excerpts of their internal reports to Monument Lab, included as part of our learnings that support future City of Toronto practices in this space.

How to engage the stakeholders?

- ▶ In order to engage stakeholders, we must first identify who the stakeholders are for any given monument. These stakeholders can be identified by geographical areas, such as a neighborhood or a municipality within the GTA region, or by demographic groups, because the monument may hold more meaning or have more impact on certain groups than others.
- ▶ When identifying which stakeholders to involve, both geographic and

demographic factors must be considered. Apart from local communities living near the monument and those who might visit the area most, the engagement process should involve people who have the most knowledge and personal connections, and those that may be most affected or uplifted by the monument. For example, if there is a new monument built to tell the history of local First Nations groups in Toronto, then all Indigenous groups who once resided on the land where the City of Toronto is situated must be engaged, even if they do not live within city limits or in the neighborhood of the monument.

- There should be a set expectation on the level of engagement for each monument, and the engagement process may be different every time. The International Association of Public Participation's (IAP2) [Public Participation Spectrum](#) is a good place to start when deciding what level of engagement should be carried out. For the Monument Lab's engagement project in Toronto, the field process was designed to inform and consult the public regarding what they think is a new meaningful monument for the city. Moving forward, the City may need to increase public participation if a new monument is to be built. A meaningful monument should have an engagement process that deeply involves local communities, or even be built in collaboration with community partners as a means to uplift and empower those who are most impacted.
- Since Monument Lab's engagement process for this project was a one-week field engagement at a different location each day, it was difficult to have in-depth discussions with people or to give them the dedicated space and time to think more about the topic. Being outdoors, the weather severely affected people's willingness to be engaged and many hoped there were more opportunities to contribute their ideas if the engagement process lasted longer at each site. The City could hold community-based workshops in various neighborhoods to further gather information and input. There should also be youth-focused workshops or consultations tailored for ethnocultural groups and other equity-deserving groups to ensure that their voices are not lost in the process. The instinct to spread out from downtown was accurate, but evaluating the length and strategies of engagement is needed for future meaningful explorations.

How can the public conversation around monuments be improved?

- Raise public awareness and curiosity about monuments, and use everyday language that is less academic and more public-friendly when discussing monuments. One of the biggest barriers in starting

a conversation around monuments is the intimidation of an unfamiliar term that people may not use in daily life. The term *monument* has to be brought out of the academic realm and into the community so people feel more related to the term and consider what it means to them.

- ▶ Understand the cultural difference in monuments and the public art creation process. In many cultures, *monument* is a very formal term and refers to something built only by authority or people in power. This requires a paradigm shift in how the public perceives monuments, and the city must break down walls around what a *monument* represents and means in our current society.
- ▶ During the summer months, the city can set up public feedback booths or stations in public spaces near current monuments to help stimulate conversations. Any visual cues such as public art or ground murals can also attract people's attention and willingness to talk about what they see or do not see in that space.
- ▶ Build public-friendly online platforms and foster virtual community discussions around monuments to encourage people to think outside the box and integrate monuments into digital space.
- ▶ Integrate monument planning policies into other larger City plans so it is not an isolated discussion but is always considered as part of a neighborhood's development process.



Monument Lab Research Hub,
Scarborough Tiwn Centre, Toronto,
2021. (Andrew Williamson.)

Additional resources on best practices for community engagement

- ▶ It is not advisable or practical to have the same engagement approach for all monuments, because different people and community groups are affected differently. Nonetheless, there should be some basic strategy guidelines to ensure accessibility and inclusivity of the engagement process. The following are a few toolkits and guides that the city can reference when planning for the engagement process of each new monument built.
- ▶ **[Framing Community: A Community-Engaged Art Workbook](#)**. This workbook designed by the Ontario Arts Council to help artists and art organizations deliver community-engaged art projects explains what community-engaged art projects are and why they are more effective and impactful. It also explores the relationship between art and social functions and focuses on how art can be made collaboratively by an artist and the community. Community-engaged art can help break down the elitism of art projects and make them more inclusive, equitable, and a tool of social change. The principles and processes described in this workbook can also apply to the creation of monuments.
- ▶ **[Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement](#)**. This guide developed by Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue focuses on more inclusive, equitable, and meaningful engagement processes. It describes eight fundamental principles with concrete strategies to help apply them in real-life engagement practices. There are many real-world case studies in this guide that demonstrate how these eight principles are effective in fostering equity, inclusivity, and accessibility. It also includes a list of resources that can be adapted to support inclusive engagement. The guide urges engagement practitioners to think critically beyond inclusion and implement strategies that are effective in promoting equity in public engagement.
- ▶ **[Healthy Community Engagement Action Guide](#)**. This action guide created by British Columbia Healthy Communities helps local governments incorporate equity-focused engagement strategies in their public consultation processes. Equity-centered inclusive community engagement can help local governments build better public policies that foster healthier and more accessible communities. Although the guide is British Columbia-focused, many of its steps and actions can be adapted for the City of Toronto's public engagement processes. It also includes a list of other engagement toolkits and can serve as a resource library to learn more about best practices for inclusive and effective community engagement in different areas.

Grounding II: On Public Art

by Ken Lum

The Story of Public Art

- 1) Art is a social idea.
- 2) Traditional forms of public art such as statuary were based on a set of monolithic cultural assumptions.
- 3) Monolithic cultural assumptions also applied to traditional architectural spaces such as town squares.
- 4) Over time, art and the notion of public art have become increasingly pluralized.
- 5) Given the process of pluralization, it is no longer viable to privilege a particular visual form as representative of the deepest values of a large social group.
- 6) Public art today is problematized by contesting dimensions of public space, public ownership, public representation, public interest, and the public sphere.
- 7) It is impossible for public art to satisfy all these public dimensions.
- 8) Public art today can at best satisfy a subset of these dimensions, not the dimensions in their entirety.
- 9) This is the reason for the immense variety of forms that public art today takes.



Hank Willis Thomas, *All Power to All People*, Philadelphia, 2017. (Steve Weinik.)



Hank Willis Thomas, *All Power to All People*, Philadelphia, 2017. (Steve Weinik.)



Hank Willis Thomas, *All Power to All People*, Philadelphia, 2017. (Steve Weinik.)



Karyn Olivier, *The Battle is Joined*, Philadelphia, 2017. (Steve Weinik.)



Karyn Olivier, *The Battle is Joined*, Philadelphia, 2017. (Steve Weinik.)



Karyn Olivier, *The Battle is Joined*, Philadelphia, 2017. (Steve Weinik.)

- 10) Public art today has become less engaged with abstract concerns of total consensus and representations of wide swaths of community.
- 11) Public art today more favors ephemeral interpretations of site, memory, and meaning.
- 12) From the post-World War II period through the 1970s, modernist formal aesthetics dictated a narrow idea of public art.
- 13) During that period, public art emphasized site specificity in the sense of spatial and architectural concerns rather than specific meanings.
- 14) The emphasis of formal aesthetics displaced the concern for social content.
- 15) During that period, public art became an object in public space and nothing more.
- 16) Public art today has become much more relational.
- 17) Public art today emphasizes the contingencies of site as opposed to the architectural and spatial dimensions of place.
- 18) All this said, the public's sense of public art continues to hold to romantic ideas of public art that are based on a set of monolithic cultural assumptions.

Civic Benchmarks



Quentin VerCetty, *A Monument for the Inquisitive and Critical*, Toronto, 2021. (Garcia Creative Media Inc.)

Cities are densely populated by public art and monuments, as well as people. The existence and upkeep of public art in urban centers has been the task of local councils and bodies of governance for decades, but recent and widespread protests have raised important policy questions surrounding the acquisition, deaccession, and recontextualization of their contents. The following are examples of ways that cities have approached these processes and incorporated them into guidelines for future practice.

To be clear, there is no single answer to the monument question. In fact, we are weary of reducing this work to a monument “question,” controversy,” “debate,” or “problem,” as it fails to contextualize this as a challenge of power brokers past and present to respond to the connections between symbols and systems of justice and democracy.

In terms of the work ahead around commemorative policy and practice, the City of Toronto is certainly not alone in its efforts to bring redress and

reimagination. We have gathered peer municipal approaches as a means to uphold local contexts while building broader standings across regions.

Acquisition

The acquisition of monuments and public art for a city can take multiple forms, including open or limited competition, direct purchase, exchange, gift, or bequest. In most cases, however, several factors are consistently included in the criteria. These concern artistic merit and originality, the durability of materials used, projected maintenance costs, and site suitability. While community support and input are occasionally referenced, reliance on expert advisory panels, local art councils/organizations, and consultation with municipal officials to make key decisions is the norm.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that public engagement is taking an increasingly significant role, with community consultation and commitments to diversity and inclusion being listed under criteria or stated as a strategy.¹ What form this type of engagement might take however is not always specified. The City of Chapel Hill (North Carolina, USA) for instance recently issued a resolution that all Percent for Art selections made by the city “shall include opportunities for public comment and participation,” but no detail is offered on how.² Chicago (USA) offers more information, listing “public support” as a criterion of selection and stating that it is the responsibility of the local alderman to notify and identify key organizations and local residents to establish community interests.³

The need for proposed works to relate to the site, whether in terms of subject or spatial awareness, thus remains a key way in which relevancy is determined in public art/monument policy. In some cases, this requirement has even been applied retroactively and led to the relocation of existing works.⁴ In particularly monument-rich locations such as Washington, DC (USA) and the City of Westminster (London), this attentiveness to site has also resulted in prohibitions. Westminster institutes a saturation zone that prohibits the placement of new monuments in the royal and governmental regions of the borough, while in Washington, DC the Commemorative Works Act of 1986 also introduced restrictions on the placement of monuments in particular areas (known as “reserve” areas/no-build zones).⁵ In order to secure a prominent place in the US capital, the work proposed must be perceived as having national significance.

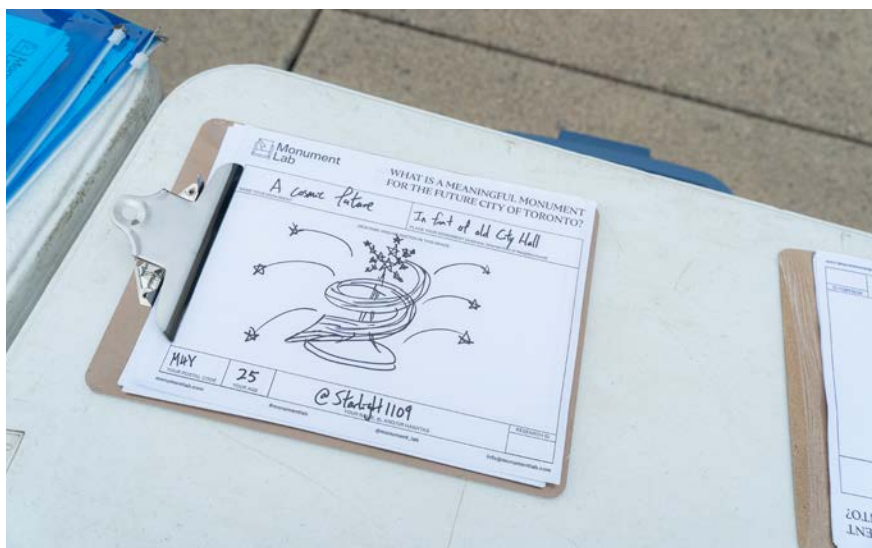
Another way in which the subject or theme of a commemorative work is considered at the point of acquisition is through the use of moratoriums. Moratoriums prohibit the erection of commemorative monuments until a certain period of time has elapsed, whether it be from the death of the

person being commemorated or the significant event. The duration of moratoriums varies, even between districts of the same city. The Borough of Camden in London has a twenty-year principle, for example, while nearby Westminster requires only ten. In exceptional circumstances, these moratoriums have been reconsidered, but temporary memorials are often favored in the interim. Although they are preventive measures at first, moratoriums are nevertheless key shapers in acquisition policy.

In recent years, the significance of site suitability in the decision-making process has led to new thinking in countries reckoning with histories of colonial exploitation of Indigenous land. Auckland (New Zealand) Public Art policy was developed in consultation with Mana Whenua to ensure that Maori culture remained visible and valued throughout the commissioning process. The policy also stipulates that local boards be established covering a three-year period to investigate the priorities of the local communities. Iwi and Hapuu representation is also mandated on the Public Art Panel of the Hamilton City (New Zealand) Council.⁶

Deaccession

Deaccessioning public artworks and monuments is usually financially motivated or precipitated by concern for public safety. Common to most deaccessioning policies are the following: damage, failure of structural integrity, excessive restoration/maintenance costs, no longer suited to site, aesthetically compromised (forgery, duplicate), or the artist's request. In some cases, like the city of Walla Walla (Washington State, USA), adverse public opinion and potential inconsistencies with the "commission's mission to support diversity, equity, and inclusion in its collection" are also listed as valid reasons for deaccessioning.⁷



Monument Lab Research Hub,
Nathan Phillips Square, Toronto,
2021. (Garcia Creative Media Inc.)

The intention that all public artworks be subject to regular review is occasionally referenced in deaccession policies, although the intervals between review periods vary among cities (every five years is a common aim).⁸ Timeframe plays a part in the likelihood of deaccession in other ways as well. The cities of San Francisco (USA) and Portland (Oregon, USA) stipulate that, in general, works of art will not be considered for deaccession within ten years of their acquisition. In Vancouver (Canada), the minimum is seven years, and in the state of Florida (USA), it is at least five. Other cities such as Minneapolis (USA) assign life-spans to their works, while Edmonton (Canada) takes account of a work's life cycle.⁹

If, following an evaluation process, deaccession is decided, then the artist and sponsor (if living) are notified and the future of the work is negotiated. Common options include return to artist's estate, exchange, relocation, repurpose, sale, or destruction.

Recontextualization

New attention is being given to deaccession policies in light of recent protests surrounding certain monuments, but significant thought is also being accorded to the processes and policies of recontextualization. While deaccession chiefly refers to the removal of works from a collection, most recommendations for recontextualization might be described as additive measures. From the addition of placards and plaques to the creation of new (counter-)monuments, these methods vary in their ability to account for change.

In 2021, the government of the United Kingdom announced a “retain and explain” policy geared toward maintaining the status quo. This policy has been adopted by the national heritage body, Historic England, and has contributed to the centralization of decision-making over controversial monuments. It ensures that monuments may be granted legal protections whether or not they are listed on the latter's historic register. While exact details on what form the “explain” aspect of this policy will take have not been forthcoming, the addition of contextualizing plaques has been inferred by commentators.¹⁰

In 2018, the Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments, and Markers in New York (USA) published its findings, which recommended the commission of “new permanent monuments and works about history to begin a proactive, additive process that rebalances and/or creates a more representative collection” as well as the “commission of new temporary artworks” to foster continual public dialogue.¹¹ The drive to create new public works has also contributed to the revision of acquisition policies,

including the lifting of moratoriums in certain places such as the South Carolina statehouse grounds.¹²

Resignification through renaming is another method of recontextualization that has risen in appeal. Higher education institutions have been at the forefront of policy revision in this area. In 2016, Yale University (USA) issued a report outlining a set of key principles on honorific naming. It recommends that a formal process for renaming requests be established that, if warranted, would lead to the involvement of advisors and consultation with campus community.¹³ Like calls for the removal of monuments, the committee note that some may fear that renaming is tantamount to “erasure” and suggest that the organization’s museum-like display, signage, art installations may also be merited.¹⁴ The need to discern a figure’s “principal legacies” is also identified as an important step in decision making and a way of recognizing the multiplicity of a figure as well as their lasting impact.

As the available documents on recontextualization show, formal efforts to address controversial monuments in public collections remain largely in the realm of recommendations with policymakers in mind.¹⁵ It goes without saying then that the civic benchmarks gauged here are by no means fixed and that this review is, of necessity, only a snapshot of a far larger vista.

¹<https://www.camden.gov.uk/documents/20142/2205925/Final+Artworks+and+memorials+in+parks+9+sept+20.pdf/083e94b3-83f9-3be8-f1b3-ffe6a810ca19?t=1599743958352>, <https://www.edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/C458D-Public-Art-to-Enhance-Edmontons-Public-Realm-Policy.pdf?cb=1649242967>, https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/dca/Public%20Art/PublicArt/Policy_Statement-for_Public_Art_Proposals.pdf

² <https://www.chapelhillarts.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/PFARESOLUTION2018.pdf>

³ https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/dca/Public%20Art/PublicArt/Policy_Statement-for_Public_Art_Proposals.pdf

https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dca/supp_info/public_art_program.html#projects (See section 4c)

⁴ <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/media/document/statues-and-monuments-in-westminster>

Retroactive application is not the case in all instances, e.g. Edmonton. <https://www.edmonton.ca/public-files/assets/document?path=PoliciesDirectives/C459.pdf>. Camden, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Chicago all reference site suitability.

⁵<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/media/document/statues-and-monuments-in-westminster> and <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R41658.pdf>

⁶<https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/plans-projects-policies-reports-bylaws/our-policies/Documents/public-art-policy.pdf> and <https://www.hamilton.govt.nz/our-council/policies-bylaws-legislation/policies/Documents/Final%20Monuments%20and%20Memorial%20Art%20Policy%20-%20Nov%202021.pdf>

⁷<https://www.codepublishing.com/WA/WallaWalla/#!/WallaWalla02/WallaWalla0242.html#2.42.040>
Also, Anchorage and Portland https://www.muni.org/Departments/Public_Works_Administration/PublicArt/Documents/PolicyManual5.14.09.pdf, <https://racc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Deaccession-Guidelines-2021.pdf>

⁸https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/6814/maintenance_decommissioning_and_relocating_public_art_policy, <https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/blobdload.pdf> Both Birmingham (UK) and Mill Valley (CA, USA) give 5 years.

⁹<https://www.edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/C458D.pdf?cb=1649242967>

¹⁰<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-legal-protection-for-england-s-heritage>, <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/statements/contested-heritage/>, <https://theconversation.com/statues-the-uks-plan-to-re-tain-and-explain-problem-monuments-is-a-backwards-step-156430#:~:text=Unhappy%20about%20the%20way%20some,to%20be%20provided%20about%20them.>

¹¹<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/monuments/downloads/pdf/mac-monuments-report.pdf> p.11

¹²<https://law.justia.com/codes/south-carolina/2013/title-2/chapter-1/section-2-1-240/>

¹³<https://ogc.yale.edu/governance/historic-documents/renaming-procedure>

¹⁴https://president.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/CEPR_FINAL_12-2-16.pdf p.22

¹⁵ For example: https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/309241384/Guidance_for_public_bodies_reviewing_contested_heritage_2_.pdf and <https://www.ibanet.org/contested-histories>

Grounding III: Considerations relating to public art and monuments

by Ken Lum

- 1) Consider the public. What kind of public is constituted by the space in which the work is or will be sited? The public is a multilayered term and not at all monolithic even in the most apparently uniform spaces. Yet, a public must still be thought of. That public must be a negotiated term by the artist.
- 2) Consider an imagined space, especially in the context of a possible community social space. Space in urban settings today is marked by occupation not just in economic and political terms, but by a corresponding cultural code that reaffirms those economic and political terms. Knowing that for any space, there are rules, unspoken laws, in terms of what can or cannot be said or enacted is important.
- 3) Consider site as a conduit, as a node of embodiment for artistic experience, as a potential narrative of the disenfranchised histories and voices that physically form the core of that site's "sociality."
- 4) Consider history, especially subjugated histories, especially as it was experienced within a social and public realm whether it be in this moment or in the past. Think also of the changes in the way histories are subjugated.
- 5) Consider the stakeholders, who can have conflicting and often compounding interests. For instance, public art programs in cities are centrally concerned with the project of preserving notions of heritage identity. The retelling of untold stories has become a trope of official public art. But even the untold story can't be told just in any way—it must be told in a way that preserves a dimension of the untold in respect to the question of what still can't be told.
- 6) Consider non-art forms that compete with art such as advertising or other creative manifestations that are attention grabbing yet not framed as public art.

- 7) Consider public art that can get outside the realm of institutionalization, that returns public art to some notion of the sacred that is connected to everyday space and time, everyday experience and ritual. Thinking of public art in terms of the sacred interjects the idea of public movement as a pilgrimage, as a negotiation between the sacred and the everyday. It is on one's way to work that public art exists.
- 8) Consider public art as a disjunctive force. Consider public art as an indeterminant term that defies being claimed, that plays off the heterotopias of the space and the various fleeting utopias that may circulate about the site. Public art is something shared in time and space, one which necessarily involves the sharing of anxieties.
- 9) Consider public art as an activating force of memory and imagination.
- 10) Consider what is not there. This can involve the idea of transitional or counter-monuments. Consider the public audience as a problem of imagined communities of fused individuals and the idea of a subject position that is doubly constituted by varying degrees of presence and absence from community.
- 11) Consider monuments as expressions of power. It is important to think of to whom the power is being exercised.
- 12) Consider monuments as accumulative in meaning in relation to all other official entities (e.g., City Hall, the most symbolically important city park, etc.) within a social environment.



Monument Lab Research Hub,
Nathan Phillips Square, Toronto,
2021. (Garcia Creative Media Inc.)

Credits

Artistic Direction: Paul Farber and Ken Lum

Featured Artist: Quentin VerCetty

Curatorial Collaborator: ART+PUBLIC UnLtd

On-Site Project Management: MASSIVart

Project Management: Debra Alleyne, Nico Rodriguez, Stephanie Garcia, Jessica Pignataro

Lab Team: Stella Zhou, Ujwal Mantha, and Jennie Geleff

Monumental Dialogues Participants: Rebecca Carbin, Mark Cheetham, Sally Han, Andrew Lochhead, Karyn Recollet, Randell Adjei, and hosted by Nico Taylor and Queen Kuyoyi

Design: Cheyenne Concepcion

Research Associate: Clare Fisher

Site Partners: Oxford Properties, QuadReal Property Group, and Wexford Heights Business Improvement Area

Supported by the City of Toronto, Hal Jackman Foundation, the Ouellette Family Foundation, and Paul and Emma Bain

About Monument Lab

Monument Lab is a nonprofit public art and history studio based in Philadelphia. Monument Lab works with artists, students, educators, activists, municipal agencies, and cultural institutions on participatory approaches to public engagement and collective memory. Founded by Paul Farber and Ken Lum in 2012, Monument Lab cultivates and facilitates critical conversations around the past, present, and future of monuments. Monument Lab defines monument as “a statement of power and presence in public.” As a studio and curatorial team, we collaborate to make generational change in the ways art and history live in public. Our approaches include producing citywide art exhibitions, site-specific commissions, and participatory research initiatives. We aim to inform the processes of public art, as well as the permanent collections of cities, museums, libraries, and open data repositories. Through exhibitions, research programs, editorial platforms, and fellowships, we have connected with hundreds of thousands of people in person and millions online. Monument Lab critically engages our inherited symbols in order to unearth the next generation of monuments that elevate stories of artists, educators, and grassroots coalitions.

About ArtworxTO

Signaling Toronto’s renewed commitment to public art, ArtworxTO: Toronto’s Year of Public Art 2021–2022 launches the city’s new Ten-Year Public Art Strategy and celebrates its internationally acclaimed collection of public art and monuments.

ArtworxTO: Toronto’s Year of Public Art 2021–2022 is a full year of public art programming unfolding across the City of Toronto. ArtworxTO is a legacy investment in diversifying definitions of public art and opportunities for artists and audiences to engage in art. Program implementation has involved over 1,400 artists and more than 300 new installations, murals, screenings, performances, and events.

ArtworxTO is a reflection of Toronto’s diversity and focuses on improving accessibility and engagement with public art right across the city. From Etobicoke to Scarborough, Downtown to North York, the program provides artists and institutions with a platform to create more groundbreaking work for all to enjoy.



Thank You