

107

The Fine Arts Commission must insure the public interest is protected, and the design excellence in the Federal City is preserved. Including the integrity of the Mall. This is the challenge you face, as we look to each of you for leadership. Expedience should not allow compromise of a process built on integrity and consensus among participants from beginning to end. We should not allow a patched up modified compromise memorial to be built.

The best design was selected, that is the design that should be commissioned. Our Vietnam Veterans fought, and many died for our democratic process. This same democratic process led to design excellence in the selection of the original design. Our Veterans deserve nothing less than excellence, and the public trust demands nothing more.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: Thank you very much.

The next speaker will be Paul Spreiregen, Professional Advisor for the Original Competition.

MR. SPREIREGEN: My name is Paul Spreiregen. I am an architect here in Washington. I was also the Professional Advisor to the Nationwide Competition which resulted in the original design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the work of Maya Ying Lin.

As for other credentials, really, except to the present matter, I have been a member of the Regional Planning and Design Competitions. I chaired the latter two. I initiated and developed the AIA National Program of Design in the sixties. I have had a deep interest in the planning of Washington, having come here originally as a designer for a downtown planning effort of 20 years ago.

I have taught as a visitor in schools of architecture, planning and landscape architect<sup>ure</sup> across the country, and I was an editor, a former member of this Commission. <sup>(not of the Commission of Fine Arts)</sup> My professional involvement with the competition ended in 1981, by which time the National Park Service, the National Capital Planning Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts approved the original design concept with considerable enthusiasm, as I recall, of deep gratification.

Since then I have been an observer, at a distance, to the memorial design development. While removed, I have been quite concerned over the events leading to this meeting.

I have come now to address the aesthetics and urban design merits of the proposed additions, the statue and the flag pole. In so doing, I will try to be precise and specific.

To address the merits of the proposed additions, without equivocation, it must be said that they are not at a

level of quality equal to the occasion. They are a distracting appendix to a design which operates fully only if it is unencumbered. They are a misunderstanding at least of reputation, at most.

The principles of design compromise the wall. They are incorrect. They are a diminution of the intending legislation. They are impractical in several aspects, and they are, as a result, an insult to the aesthetic spiritual sensitivity of Americans.

I will concentrate on the aesthetic aspects of honoring the memory of those who served and died. I do not speak lightly.

Equally, I do not enjoy attacking the work of any architect, or any group of people, particularly those who are here today, but in this case it is regretful.

Last spring, when the Vietnam Fund announced that a flag pole and sculpture would be added to the original design, I became quite alarmed. I knew that the background of that announcement, of the whole memorial design was in serious jeopardy, but I was also alarmed because even if construction of the original design might not be allowed to begin, which fortunately it was, the idea of a statue and flag pole addition was totally incorrect.

Only two weeks ago did I see the proposed statue at the Pension Building. A proposed statue design, incorrect in basic concept, serves only to prove that it is neither wanted or needed. Taken by itself, in model form, in uniform, in tiny scale, set in a pedestal indoors, the skill of the sculptor has powerful attraction, but the attraction is deceptive. Imagined in full size, or larger than life size, in real metal in its proposed location, opposite the two granite walls, and judge with real knowledge how the Mall operates, and how people experience it, and what they experience, the statue and flag pole proposal should be dismissed.

Just imagine visiting Arlington Cemetery, the uniform headstones by this Commission, establish this sense of purpose to the soldiers buried there. This establishes the sense to all our Nation's soldiers. It has an equal aesthetic partner, that is the breathtaking panorama of the Mall, the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial and all the rest together.

What we have in visiting Arlington Cemetery is the individual soldier bound up in comradeship into a hard purpose, and all of them together are bound into the glorious symbols of our Nation, the symbols so clearly arranged on the Mall.

We have the essence and spirit of the L'Enfant plan carried beyond its original design, the essence and spirit of that plan is to establish clear, visual relationships between the component parts of the city and nature, between its natural features, its symbolic features, its every day structures and its commemorative memorials. The visual relationships were designed to be comprehensible, to normal human beings, with normal human sensibilities and faculties.

The component features themselves are assigned, ranged in an easy progression of importance. Democracy and its sustained citizens are put into a clear and whole relationship working together visually all to achieve a higher sense of purpose.

The Lincoln Memorial is thus the better of things to the Washington Monument and vice versa. Both of these are better seen in relationship to the Capitol, and again vice versa. Yet all this works because there is no distracting clutter to interfere.

So with all the buildings and memorials on the Mall, each claim a degree of supporting role, each in a hierarchy, and each with different courses of success, of course. Each soldier's grave in Arlington gives special poignancy to the dearer cost of democracy. In one place ~~the~~ circling the base

of the Washington Monument, a bouquet of American flags serves as a special focus, not flags here and there and everywhere across the Mall, but in one unified ring.

But, come back to Arlington Cemetery for a moment. Suppose now what it would be like if we were to install here and there, in Arlington Cemetery, groups of larger than life soldier statues, in various historical combat outfits, winding their ways through the trees, coming upon the headstones. Suppose some well intentioned citizens proposed such a sculpture for Arlington Cemetery?

And, if not for Arlington, why for the Washington Monument? What would be wrong with having the fife player and the drummer boy marching up, larger than life, and how about some brigades fighting their way through the Lincoln Memorial?

The most you could say about such an idea is that it is a mediocre joke. In the hands of Saturday Night Live it might work up more of a laugh, because that is its practical intellectual level. This is precisely what is proposed.

Is this how you are supposed to honor the memory, with a parody? If you try to examine the President's program seriously, the statue and flag pole becomes serious mischief. The destructive effects are threefold.

First of all, both proposed additions, statue and flag pole, would serve to distract from the superb and essential visual relationships between the original Lin design and its two primary references, the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. The statue and flag pole would shortcircuit that essential linking relationship. We would honor the memory and service less.

Secondly, the statue group, with vertical massing, placed near a horizontal wall element would become the composition of focus, even placed a distance from the wall. Likewise, the flag pole near the apex of the wall would contend with the apex as the point of focus of the names.

In short, the statue and flag pole, at -- can neither support lead roles, nor do they contribute any compositional harmony. They only serve to throw the composition awry. You can take the statue and flag pole out of the composition, leaving the walls, but you can't take the walls away leaving the statue and flag pole. We would honor the memory and service less.

Third, and even more distressing, perhaps most distressing, a figure of representation of specific symbols will serve the limited and so reduce the vast array of patriotism on the part of Americans who visit the site. We would again

ws40

honor the memory and service less.

That week in April, a year and a half ago, during which the selection jury deliberated, was a high point in exercising artistic judgment for the Nation, and so of discharging patriotic disability. The eight person jury included former members of this Commission, they included combat veterans of two world wars. Neither, however, are the reasons that they served as jurors. They were asked to be the jurors because they were found to be the most able in exercising the most discerning judgment.

Vietnam Veterans made the decision to utilize the selection of these jurors. The jurors' names were made to the two approving agencies, lest there be objection to anyone. Similarly, the jurors' names were made known to the competitors prior to the commencement of the competition, and they were published in all the relevant competition documents.

In evaluating the some 1,420 or 30, I don't quite remember, designs, the jurors gave the most thoughtful consideration to all design possibilities, without bias, including designs that proposed the sculptural elements. There were numerous designs with figurative abstracts, intended sort of one figure or another. The jurors' contention was that no symbols were appropriate for the reason that they



would arrest a visitor's thoughts, rather than enlarge it.

The jurors reasoned that it should stimulate them in many areas. It should not tell you what to think, and feel, but make you think and feel.

The jury was concerned with thoughts and feelings, and not restrictions. How much more is an open-ended expansive design in any figure of a flag?

Starting from the Lincoln Memorial, then the Capitol Dome, and all the rest, it achieves that full power, only if it is unfettered. That is a way of honoring memory and service.

By adding anything, by, worse, a flag pole and statue, the vast array of possibilities are arrested in flight. Without these additions, I can well imagine present and future visitors to this memorial reflecting on so many aspects of patriotism, and the Veterans themselves will have their own memories to bring out. They don't need a statue.

I can imagine many aspects of patriotism being reflected upon the service of our citizens to our Nation, the bond our Nation has to its allies, our better intentions sometimes realized and sometimes thwarted, and yes, as we must, all those tragic aspects of Vietnam, in the lives given. Because all of that, and much more, has become

unavoidably avoided in the single work of Vietnam.

To attempt to unbalance that range in a memorial through a statue is to reduce the larger benefits which this memorial and recollection of Vietnam and our heroes of Vietnam stand to offer us.

In this, there is no question of right or wrong, but rather of problems, and that I think is a way of honoring memory and service.

To repeat a great work of art doesn't tell you what to think, it makes you think. A great work of art, and not a parody of one, honors the memory and service.

On a more practical level, the proposed statue and flag pole poses a number of problems. I suppose the cost of a Park Service person raising and lowering it isn't that great, but it will be something. The statue, in metal, will not protect itself against the foliage. Bronze would serve it better.

The statue group also has lots of protrusions, fingers, rifle butts and barrels, which are easily broken or bent. Particularly if they are reachable. The Ulysses S. Grant statue at the foot of the Capitol, is worth examining in that respect. Even though mounted on pedestals, its protrusions are broken. The Burghers of Caillaux, designed <sup>Colais</sup> designed

3

for placement at ground level is also a lesson in detailing. Its details are not prone to damage. The rifles in the statue furthermore, are prone to be vertical, while the rest of the statue group is level, this will distort the statue.

As to placement of the statue and the flag pole, it is not at all difficult to try to relocate it, either, one, 10 or 50 or 100 feet, and it would not make any difference. That they are arbitrary in their locations, shows that they are not necessary.

I would urge anyone to move the flag poles and the statue on the model, and see if it makes any difference. Time does not allow, but in the context of this examination, it could be helpful to examine the monument in Helsinki, the Hiroshima Memorial, the Memorial to the Departed in Milan, of course, the Washington Memorial, the Jefferson and the Lincoln Memorials.

The lesson was learned well by a flier who died in World War II, once wrote, if anything at all, perfection is achieved not when there is no longer anything which can be added, but when there is no longer anything which can be taken away.

One last point to you, the members of this Commission, if I may. It is a misconception, occasionally voiced, that

democracies are incapable of planning and building beautiful cities. Edinburg and New Amsterdam refute that, but no city is greater testimony than the one in which we now live. No democracy has created as expensive and artful a capital as has the United States. The roots of its plan are the gifts of Western Civilization, as are the plans' embellishment. It is predominantly classical architecture.

History and the present are able to stand comfortably together here. The credit for this lives in the magnanimity in the original plan and the stewardship of three agencies, the National Park Service, the National Planning Commission and you, the Commission of Fine Arts.

Through you, the Nation chooses its most important art, its most important art. Through you our Nation shifts its embodying symbols. Through a great plan, those symbols enlarge each other and us. Those democratic Nations which have made their capital cities as whole designs, one thinks of <sup>Canberra</sup> Candia and <sup>Canberra</sup> Brazilia, Candia was still under British authority. Little else comes to mind.

Even in part, where is there to compare? How much does London have, or Paris? A single building in most of those cases, tucked aside. No democratic capital expresses so much of its Nation as does ours. A great Nation is honored

only by great works of art. Great art, and only great art should honor great memory and great service.

Our Capital and our law are such great works of art, so can be the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in the original.

Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: Our next is Henry F. Arnold, the Designer of Constitutional Gardens.

MR. ARNOLD: Mr. Chairman and members of the Fine Arts Commission, when all the furor over the present controversy is forgotten, there are issues that are forgotten today, that will assert themselves in ever growing consistency. These issues deal with specific design context, and the aesthetic purposes of the park in relationship to this memory.

The civic design context of the Federal Mall has certain criteria which must be respected if we are to respect the Nation's front yard. The intrinsic suitability for art in the Nation's Capital must be judged by the highest standards of art. Appropriate relationships to elements of the place, how does it fit, is it complimentary to the surroundings?

Finally, the question of precedents. Do we want more of the same caliber of work that we are approving today to be built tomorrow? That is a challenge that must be