

THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

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THE PENSION BUILDING
441 F STREET, N.W., SUITE 312
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MEETING OF THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

19 September 1991

The meeting was convened at 10:40 a.m. in the Commission of Fine Arts offices at the Pension Building, 441 F Street, N.W., Washington, D. C., after a tour of project sites.

Members present: Hon. J. Carter Brown, Chairman
 Hon. Neil H. Porterfield, Vice Chairman
 Hon. Adele Chatfield-Taylor
 Hon. George E. Hartman
 Hon. Robert A. Peck

Staff present: Mr. Charles H. Atherton, Secretary
 Mr. Donald B. Myer, Assistant Secretary
 Mr. Jeffrey R. Carson
 Mrs. Sue Kohler
 Mr. Jose Martinez-Canino

National Capital
Planning Commission
staff present: Mr. Patrick Tribe

I. ADMINISTRATION

A. Approval of the minutes of the 25 July 1991 meeting. The minutes were approved without objection.

B. Dates of next meetings. Approved as:

24 October 1991 (changed from the 17th)
21 November 1991
19 December 1991

II. SUBMISSIONS AND REVIEWS

A. National Park Service, National Capital Region

1. CFA 19/SEP/91-1, Vietnam Women's Memorial. Preliminary design. (Previous: CFA 19/APR/90-2.) Before the discussion began, Vice-Chairman Porterfield said he would abstain from voting on the project, since he was chairman of the Landscape

Architecture Department at Penn State University and the landscape architect for the project was a faculty member in the department.

Staff member Sue Kohler recalled the last submission of the project, in April 1990, in which a number of sites, within the Vietnam Veterans Memorial precinct, were discussed. The members agreed that either Site 1, southeast of the Wall and on the north side of an existing path, or Site 2, on the south side of the path, seemed most promising. The National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission had previously expressed its preference for Site 2. Later in the year the sponsors had held a one-stage, open competition for the design and had selected two first-place winners, one a landscape solution and the other a statue of a woman in military dress; the two winners were asked to get together and combine their designs. This had not worked out, and one of the honorable mention winners, sculptor Glenna Goodacre, was asked to develop her competition entry. Mrs. Kohler said this was the design to be presented to the Commission at this meeting. She introduced Glen DeMarr from the Park Service to begin the presentation.

Mr. DeMarr noted that the design had the approval of the National Park Service, on whose land it would be built, and had in the preceding week been approved by the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission. He then introduced Diane Carlson Evans, founder and chairman of the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project.

Ms. Evans said she believed the design chosen embodied the criteria of the competition: to express the bravery, courage, compassion, strength, skill, and selflessness of the women who served in Vietnam, and to enhance and complement the existing elements of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. She introduced sculptor Glenna Goodacre to discuss her work, a bronze sculptural piece with four figures--a woman holding a wounded soldier, a second woman, standing and looking up to the sky, and a third, kneeling behind the soldier and holding a helmet.

Ms. Goodacre said she had made a study of the various roles women played in the Vietnam War before undertaking her work. She noted that her competition entry had showed a woman holding a child; that had not worked out and she had developed a new design following suggestions made by the sponsors. Turning to a large maquette, she said the work would be about 6 1/2 feet high and would sit on a 6 to 8 inch stone slab. She showed how it would be seen as one approached the memorial area, but she said it could be seen to advantage from any angle. She said the standing figure could be interpreted as looking for the arrival of a medevac helicopter, or looking to God for help. The kneeling figure expressed the frustration and anguish of war and completed the circular shape of the grouping. Ms. Goodacre said she thought each observer would bring his own interpretation to the work.

Landscape architect George Dickie, representing Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum, was asked to continue the presentation with a discussion of his site design. He recalled first that he had worked on the design for Constitution Gardens, and said it had originally been designed as a park but now had other uses as well. He said he wanted to keep the park character in his site design--the paths and openness--and noted the two basic topographical divisions within Constitution Gardens: the bermed-up, man-made landscape around the perimeter (in the Vietnam Memorial area this would be to the northwest), and the lower area in between, with a "necklace of trees" along the paths. He said he would build on this "necklace" with his design for the memorial site. Drawings showed a subordinate path leading to a rectangular plaza, paved with flame-cut granite, with the sculpture in the center. Inserts into the paved area contained trees, planted to form a circular pattern, echoing the form of the sculpture, with groundcover (cotoneaster) beneath to soften the geometry. The island formed by the main and subordinate paths would also be planted with trees and cotoneaster; the trees would continue along the existing path for a distance on both sides of the memorial area. Additional trees and shrubs would be added behind the memorial to fill out the existing landscaping. Mr. Dickie said a decision had not yet been made on the kind of tree to use, but red oaks, willow oaks and little-leaf linden were being considered; he said he would discuss the choice with the Park Service. Commenting on the paved area, he said it had been made a little larger than first intended to accommodate those with cameras, particularly video cameras; he said he had noticed at the Hart statue that picture-takers had difficulty backing away far enough from the statue.

Lighting engineer John Coventry discussed his plans for illuminating the memorial. He said the Washington globe lights along the existing path would provide general illumination; they would be supplemented by a four point lighting scheme placed in the trees, varying between spot and flood lights to bring out the form of the sculpture and provide a soft glow.

The last speaker was Vietnam veteran Tom Corey. He said he saw the sculpture as an appropriate way to honor his sister veterans who had given of themselves so unselfishly during the war, and he recalled his personal experiences and how he saw them reflected in the sculpture. He asked the Commission to listen to the Vietnam veterans, approve the memorial, and "welcome our sisters home".

The Chairman said he liked the sculpture, noting its centripetal strength. He was concerned, however, about the rectangular geometry of the plaza and whether it was appropriate in the park setting; he thought the circle of trees was better integrated with the surroundings. Mr. Hartman agreed, adding that the relationship of the path to the memorial would be more comfortable with a circular-shaped plaza. He thought the notches

in the paving tended to isolate the sculpture from its setting, rather than helping the two to flow together.

Mr. Dickie said the cotoneaster would break over the edge of the inserts and diminish the rectilinear aspect of the plaza. Mr. Hartman thought that further softening of the outline was needed and suggested taking out a few stones around the edge to get a more irregular effect. The Chairman noted that the whole concept of Constitution Gardens was to break away from the formal geometry of the rest of the Mall area. He observed, however, that this was only a preliminary design, and the architect would have the benefit of the Commission's comments for a future design development submission.

Ms. Chatfield-Taylor said she was among those who had felt that the original Vietnam Veterans Memorial was sufficient in itself, but after the first sculpture was added the threshold had been crossed. She considered the women's memorial, as presented, appropriate. She observed that the additions worked by themselves, too, as well as in not interfering with the Wall. She thought this would be a good time to rework the landscaping around the Hart statue so that the entire memorial area would appear as a whole. She commented on the lighting proposed for the women's memorial, saying that its design would be of utmost importance.

Mr. Peck agreed with Ms. Chatfield-Taylor's comments. He added that he thought the Commission was right in 1987 when it said there should be no further additions to the memorial, but since Congress had decreed that there would be a memorial honoring women veterans, the Commission would have to work with it. But he thought there is something wrong when each group feels it has to be singled out--he saw this as happening all over the world. He said he hoped that the Mall would not become a monument to the God of War. Turning to the submission, he said the Commission had said it would prefer something non-figurative, and did not get it; but he thought the sculpture was good, and he was happy to see that there was not too much detail in the figures and the uniforms. He said he hoped that planners of future memorials would consult with women and ethnic groups at the beginning of the design process.

Ms. Chatfield-Taylor said she thought it should be made clear that the Commission was not encouraging any more memorials on the site. Mr. Hartman agreed that the original design was so good that it did not need any additions, but he thought this memorial was well-designed and worked out.

Vice-Chairman Porterfield echoed Mr. Peck in recalling that the Commission had made it clear it did not want a figurative memorial in this case. He agreed with the other members that the original memorial should have been left alone, and he said the Commission would look at future memorials very carefully. The Chairman recalled his testimony at a congressional hearing on the

women's memorial, in 1988, when he said the Commission would keep an open mind on the basis of what was presented to it, and urged that any legislation passed should not be specific in referring to the new memorial as "a statue of a woman". He pointed out that the earlier submission had been in the form of an amendment to the original design. The present submission comes as a separate memorial, with Congressional backing, and a new design on a new site.

The Chairman called for a vote, and the memorial was approved, with Vice-Chairman Porterfield and Mr. Peck abstaining. Exhibit A

2. CFA 19/SEP/91-2, Black Revolutionary War Patriots Memorial, Constitution Gardens across from Signers' Memorial. Revised design. (Previous: CFA 15/MAR/90-1.) Staff member Jeffrey Carson located the memorial on a map and recalled that when the first design was reviewed, the Commission had been concerned with the scale and the design in respect to Constitution Gardens as a whole, particularly with the way the thirteen, larger-than-life free-standing figures would break the horizon line. Mr. Carson then introduced Glen DeMarr from the Park Service, who said the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission had reviewed the new design recently and had been pleased with the direction; the proposed use of granite sets for the paving had been the only concern, because of the difficulty in walking on them.

The next speaker was Maurice Barboza, president of The Patriots Foundation. He said this should not be considered a war memorial; it was intended to honor the vision, effort, and extraordinary courage of the black people who served during the birth of our country. He said theirs was a dream that was not realized until two hundred years later. He noted that the sculptor working on the memorial, Edward Dwight, had started out as a bat boy, was educated as an engineer, and was a test pilot for the Air Force and the first black astronaut, before returning to his early love for art and embarking on a career as a sculptor. Mr. Barboza then turned the presentation over to architects Marshall Purnell, from the firm of Devroux & Purnell, and Mary Konsoulis from Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

Mr. Purnell said that after the Commission's comments on his firm's first design, they went back to the beginning and reduced the memorial to the three basic elements of sculpture, structure, and text, following the Commission's recommendations regarding the nature of Constitution Gardens and the relationship to the Signers' Memorial. He showed a plan of the memorial, which consisted of three curved walls and a paved plaza: a bronze sculpture wall, nearest the lake; the plaza, a low seating wall, and farthest to the south, a granite wall for inscriptions. Access would be primarily from the east and west, along Constitution Gardens paths.

Mr. Purnell said he wanted to give the memorial its own strength and integrity; it should not have to shout across the