

THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

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EXHIBIT A-3

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28 October 1987

Dear Mr. Hodel:

I am writing in reply to your letter of 21 October 1987 requesting the Commission consider the addition to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial of a statue representing women who served in the armed forces in Vietnam.

The Commission met to consider this project the following day. Our deliberations were preceded by extensive testimony both for and against this proposal and a site visit by the members of the Commission to see the specific location that had been proposed. As a result of these deliberations, I regret to report that the Commission was unable to approve the addition of another statue to the existing memorial.

Our reasons are essentially two-fold:

First and foremost, the Commission views the memorial in its present form as complete, and thinks that any new element will only serve to diminish the overall impact the memorial now has.

The Memorial bears a dedication specifically to "the men and women of the armed forces of the United States who served in the Vietnam War." When the issue of adding statuary to the basic memorial first arose, the proponents of this addition were faced with the obvious question of how all the component groups, the several branches of service, the multiplicity of occupations, and ethnic and physical types could ever be literally represented. The only answer of course was that they could not, and that symbolism, with the part standing for the whole, was the only solution. Although many lives were lost in other areas of the military conflict none bore the brunt of battle more than the infantrymen who fought in the jungle; thus they were chosen to represent all those who participated in the war effort. I am sure you will agree that the three foot-soldiers in combination with the names on the wall make a very powerful and moving statement. If we are now to begin a process of recognizing other individual groups (and no one knows where the end would be) the Commission feels that each addition will further dilute and weaken the great strength now expressed in the design.

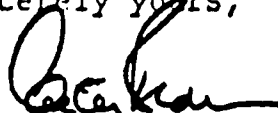
Secondly - the Commission believes that any added elements such as the proposed statue will have the appearance of an afterthought no matter how carefully designed or located, and that they would more than likely prove to be anticlimactic and disappointing, which would be a very sad thing.

In the current proposal, this probability is further heightened by its location and its weak relationship to the main path of visitor circulation. As a result of the need to prevent the new statue from conflicting either with the wall or existing statue of the three soldiers, a site was chosen that in fact does not connect to the natural flow of people, but is off to the side on a walk that leads away from the memorial; the statue would thus be isolated with little physical or emotional connection to the other elements.

We support the recognition of women's contributions to the Vietnam war, and can only urge that everyone put their efforts into creating a memorial, not only to those who served in Vietnam, but to all women who were engaged in our military conflicts over the course of this country's history.

Appropriately, with your personal support and that of the President and the Congress, the authority already exists to erect such a memorial, and I hope the considerable energy and dedication of those supporting the recognition of the role of women in Vietnam can be directed to this larger effort of honoring all women who have served.

Sincerely yours,



J. Carter Brown
Chairman

The Honorable
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