

NEH Application Cover Sheet (FEL-257329)

Fellowships

PROJECT DIRECTOR

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Status: Senior scholar
Field of expertise: Art History and Criticism

INSTITUTION

University of Maryland
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APPLICATION INFORMATION

Title: *Contemporary Monuments to the Slave Past: Race, Memorialization, Public Space, and Civic Engagement*

Grant period: From 2018-01-01 to 2018-12-31

Project field(s): Art History and Criticism; U.S. History; African American History

Description of project: My digital publication investigates how we visualize, interpret, and engage the slave past through contemporary monuments created for public spaces. In the past twenty-five years, there has been an upsurge in the building of three-dimensional monuments that commemorate the Middle Passage and slavery, the resistance to enslavement, the Underground Railroad, the participation of black soldiers in the Civil War, and emancipation and freedom. From Mississippi to Illinois to Rhode Island, governments (local, county, state), colleges and universities, individuals, communities, and artists are in difficult conversations about how to acknowledge the history and legacy of the slave past and its visual representation for their towns, cities, states, and higher educational institutions. These monuments and conversations are the subject of *Contemporary Monuments to the Slave Past: Race, Memorialization, Public Space, and Civic Engagement*.

REFERENCE LETTERS

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Research and contribution

I seek funding for a digital publication that investigates how we visualize, interpret, and engage the slave past through contemporary monuments created for public spaces including parks, city centers, civic spaces, and campuses. In the past twenty-five years, there has been an upsurge in the building of three-dimensional monuments that commemorate the Middle Passage and slavery, the resistance to enslavement, the Underground Railroad, the participation of black soldiers in the Civil War, and emancipation and freedom. From Mississippi to Illinois to Rhode Island, governments (local, county, state), colleges and universities, individuals, communities, and artists are in difficult conversations about how to acknowledge the history and legacy of the slave past and its visual representation for their towns, cities, states, and higher educational institutions. These monuments and conversations are the subject of *Contemporary Monuments to the Slave Past: Race, Memorialization, Public Space, and Civic Engagement*.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, artists have memorialized the slave past through public monuments made of steel, bronze, stone, and living materials such as trees. The visual languages of these monuments have been diverse including abstraction, figural representation, and the built and natural environment. At their core, these contemporary monuments represent a visual record of the slave past despite the fact that slavery remains a contentious and painful aspect of U.S. history that is directly in conflict with our national story of freedom and liberty. How then are institutions and communities to memorialize the slave past when it is hard to talk about? How can meaningful conversation be had around this subject? How are artists to visualize the sensitive subject of slavery, which has the potential to produce feelings of shame and hostility? How is the black body to be made visible in public space when it is often invisible in daily life? What is the role of these monuments in the lives of citizens? Can monuments to the slave past prompt individuals and communities to become civically engaged? These questions are at the heart of my research.

My study examines an array of these contemporary U.S. monuments within the context of race, memorialization, public space, and civic engagement. I consider why governments, educational institutions, communities, and individuals are concerned with understanding the slave past in the present. My approach is multipronged: I document how the objects are commissioned and how various constituencies determine how they should look; I analyze the visual language of the objects and the artists' conceptualizations (often divergent from the visions of these constituencies); I interpret the various and conflicting meanings of these monuments at the time that they were commissioned; I evaluate the new meanings created over time that are often resistant to the original intentions and result in the transformation of public spaces; and I reflect on the role such monuments play in present-day conversations about race, social justice, and history.

The germination of this project began in 2009 when I was asked to contribute a state of the field essay about American sculpture for the journal *American Art*. The editor requested that I write on Meta Warrick Fuller, the subject of my book-length study. I proposed that I write something different, an essay entitled "Slavery and Its Memory in Public Monuments" (2010). Over the next several years, I presented various parts of my research on public monuments and slavery at the American Historical Association, College Art Association, and smaller symposia. I also published several articles related to memorialization, public space, and community engagement including "The Challenge of Memorializing Slavery in North Carolina: The Unsung Founders Memorial and the North Carolina Freedom Monument Project" (2012); "Commemorating Black Soldiers: The African American Civil War Memorial in Washington, D.C." (2013); "Communities in Conflict: Memorializing Martin Luther King Jr. in Rocky Mount, North Carolina" (2014); and "Commemoration, Race, and World War II: History and Civil Rights at the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site" (2015).

I am indebted to a group of art historians and historians who have written on art, monuments, slavery, and memorialization. They include Ana Lucia Araujo, John Bodnar, Julian Bonder, Huey Copeland, Erika Doss, Cheryl Finlay, James Oliver Horton, Stephan Palmié, Kirk Savage, Paul Shackel, Dell Upton, Deborah Willis, and Marcus Wood (Bibliography). Although writing about topics other than slavery, the scholarship of John Bodnar on official and vernacular forms of public memory,

commemoration, and patriotism; Annie Coombes on visual culture and public memory in South Africa; Patrick Hagopian on the Vietnam War, memorials, and healing; and James Young on Holocaust memorials and memory provide important theoretical frameworks for my thinking through the memorialization process in relation to specific historical moments (Bibliography). I consider my research to be in dialogue with and complementing this range of scholarship; the digital publication also will appeal to a general audience because of its local focus. My project fits within the parameters of NEH's "The Common Good: The Humanities in the Public Square" and "Standing Together: The Humanities and the Experience of War" (my section on black soldiers and the Civil War).

Methods and work plan

My research is predicated on the idea that the memorialization of the slave past is plural, multivocal, and based on local, regional, and national contexts. I do not offer a comprehensive survey. Rather, I focus on a selection of monuments that tell a diverse story about our contemporary engagement with the slave past. I begin the digital publication with an introductory essay, outlining the project and my main arguments. I then arrange it thematically through six digital "case studies" that include monuments to the Middle Passage, slavery and the university, resistance to enslavement, Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad, black soldiers and the Civil War, and emancipation and freedom (Appendix). In total, I examine and interpret twenty-three memorials located in the South, Midwest, and Northeast.

Because of the richness of my topic, I conceived of *Contemporary Monuments to the Slave Past* as a digital publication. Early on, I planned to use the open-source, scholarly publishing platform, Scalar. Scalar allows me to create a digital publication that includes textual information (general research and archival), photographs of the monuments, 360-panoramas of the sites, artists' interviews in short videos or audio files, timelines, and geospatial mapping of the monument sites and their relationship to neighborhoods, towns/cities, and states. A Scalar born-digital project can best show the media-rich nature of my project and will allow me to take advantage of the broad capabilities of digital writing including non-linear and nested formats. Scalar can also be linked to content outside the digital publication such as related websites or supplemental images (an important update in the 2.0 version). A traditional paper publication simply cannot integrate the various components I have outlined above.

Given its breadth and ambition, I will complete my project in two years, at the end of 2019. Currently, I am working on the Harriet Tubman and Underground Railroad section of the digital publication and will complete it in Scalar by December 2017 (see Competencies section). With a NEH-Mellon Fellowship for Digital Publication, I propose to work full-time on three case studies/sections of the project during 2018: slavery and the university; resistance to slavery; and black soldiers and the Civil War. I have completed significant research on these sections including visual documentation of the memorials and have published two articles on material related to the sections on slavery and the university, and black soldiers and the Civil War. This April, I hired a graduate assistant to upload and document my images in Omeka, using standardized data. Scalar now allows you to import information from Omeka, so I will be able to easily export my images as well as the metadata from this platform.

I will apply for a second-year of funding to complete the research and digital components of the sections on the Middle Passage and slavery, and emancipation and freedom.

Competencies, skills, and access

I am an art historian of the art of the United States, whose scholarship focuses on sculpture and public monuments. In 2016, I wrote a bibliographic essay entitled "Visual Representations of Slavery" for the scholarly online site, *Oxford Bibliographies*, so I am up to speed on the current literature in this content area. I have read widely on the subject of memory, public monuments, and space. Community engagement and reception have been at the core of my research into monuments and the slave past. Recently, I have begun to think about and consider the differences between community reception and civic engagement, which I define as the way in which individuals come together to address issues of community concern and to dialogue in order to make change. Because the ideas of civic engagement are

quite different from community reception, I will assemble and read a bibliography on civic engagement over the summer.

I am fortunate that the University of Maryland is dedicated to the digital humanities. The Michelle Smith Collaboratory for Visual Culture (the Collaboratory), Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH), and African American History, Culture, and Digital Humanities (AADHum) initiative are located on campus. In 2013-14, my academic department (Art History and Archaeology) through the Collaboratory launched a mapping initiative and a series of digital art history projects created by our graduate assistants. As the advisor and coordinator of the graduate and teaching assistants, I worked closely with the assistants on their projects, whose content included mapping, video production, micro-blogs, and visual networking. I have also attended two introductory sessions on Omeka and Scalar sponsored by the Collaboratory. Recently, I served on Cecilia Wichmann's M.A. thesis committee in which she created a Scalar digital publication, "Sound and Documentary in Cardiff and Miller's Pandemonium." It serves as an engaging example for my own thinking about my digital publication (<http://scalar.usc.edu/works/pandemonium/index>).

Currently, I am participating in a series of incubators on "Race + Place + Space," sponsored by AADHum. In these interactive workshops and tutorials, we are introduced to general theoretical ideas related to digital humanities and to several online mapping platforms including CARTO and ArcGSI (Story Maps). It has been a great opportunity to sample different mapping platforms. For example with the incubator related to Story Maps, we were given a group of twenty-one archival documents, told to select a few of them, and create a story map. I was impressed at the ease of this platform but also struck by its linear and limited format that forced information and storytelling into a one-way flow. Scalar's structural flexibility interests me even more after attending these incubators.

In June 2017, I will participate in The Summer Institute on Objects, Places and the Digital Humanities at the National Humanities Center, a two-year workshop. The focus of my project for this summer institute is entitled, "Remembering Harriet Tubman: Public Monuments to the Underground Railroad," which is one section of the larger digital publication. To date, I have gathered photographs of memorials in Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New York, archival images related to Tubman, maps of Tubman's routes, and primary and secondary textual sources. The Summer Institute will allow me the time to further engage the theory and practice of the digital humanities and to gain some hands-on training with a range of digital tools. This summer, I will continue my training in Scalar by enrolling in the "Introduction to Scalar" and "Intermediate Scalar" webinars. As I proceed with my digital publication, I will be able to consult with the staff of the Collaboratory, MITH, and AADHum.

Final product and dissemination

I will publish *Contemporary Monuments to the Slave Past*, using the open source, publishing platform Scalar. The intended audience for the digital publication is wide: scholars, educators, students, and the public. In order, for this to happen, I believe my project must be widely accessible on the Internet.

(b) (4) has expressed interest in the project, but as a traditional book. I will approach the (b) (4), and is using Scalar for born-digital publications. (b) (4) is also another good option. I also would like to think outside the box in regards to its dissemination. My project fits within the scope of the mission of such organizations as the (b) (4) and (b) (4); I will discuss with them the idea of placing a link to my digital publication on their websites. I also plan to begin a conversation with state historical societies as the project has a strong regional focus. I can imagine such groups linking to my digital publication as well as disseminating information to their members about it. Another location for the digital publication will be my Academia.edu page in which I have made available digital copies of my scholarship. The sustainability of this project is important to me. In the future, I plan to use Omeka for various online exhibitions of the monuments and will continue to add monuments to my collection. More importantly, I know that as I continue to work on these monuments I will need to update/add/modify the digital publication in Scalar.

Bibliography

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- Lossau, Julia and Quentin Stevens, eds. *The Uses of Art in Public Space*. New York: Routledge, 2015.
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- Palmié, Stephan. "Slavery, Historicism, and the Poverty of Memorialization." In *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, eds. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz. New York: Fordham U Press, 2010.
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- Savage, Kirk. *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.
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EXPERIENCE

- Associate Professor of American Art, Department of Art History and Archaeology, University of Maryland, 2009–present.
- Assistant Professor of American Art, Department of Art History and Archaeology, University of Maryland, 2002–09.
- Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Art History and Archaeology, University of Maryland, 2000–02.
- Assistant Curator of American Art, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1999.
- Adjunct Professor, Academic Studies, Corcoran College of Art and Design, Washington, DC, 1998–99.

EDUCATION

- Ph.D., Art History, University of Maryland, 2000. Dissertation: “Race, Gender, and Nation: Rethinking the Sculpture of Meta Warrick Fuller.”
- M.A., Art History, University of Maryland, 1993. Thesis, with distinction: “Image, Text, Sound: Aaron Douglas's Illustrations for James Weldon Johnson's *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*.”
- B.A., Art History, Oberlin College, 1987.

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

- General Research Board Summer Research Award, The Graduate School, University of Maryland, 2006, for *Remaking Race and History: The Sculpture of Meta Warrick Fuller*.
- National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship for University Teachers, 2004–2005, for *Remaking Race and History: The Sculpture of Meta Warrick Fuller*.
- Henry C. Welcome Fellowship Grant, Maryland Higher Education Commission, 2002–03.

PUBLICATIONS

Books

- Ater, Renée. *Keith Morrison*. The David C. Driskell Series of African American Art. Vol. 5. San Francisco: Pomegranate Books, 2005.
- Ater, Renée. *Remaking Race and History: The Sculpture of Meta Warrick Fuller*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011.

In-Progress Digital Publication

- Ater, Renée. *Contemporary Monuments to the Slave Past: Race, Memorialization, Public Space, and Civic Engagement*

Articles, Essays, Chapters

- Ater, Renée. “Making History: Meta Warrick Fuller’s *Ethiopia*.” *American Art* 17, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 12–31.
- Ater, Renée. “Creating a ‘Usable Past’ and a ‘Future Perfect Society’: Aaron Douglas’s Murals for the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition.” In *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist*, ed.

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 - Braddock, Alan and Renée Ater. “Commentaries: Art in the Anthropocene.” *American Art* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 2–8.
 - Ater, Renée. “Fuller, Meta Vaux Warrick.” *American National Biography Online*, April 2015. <http://www.anb.org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/articles/17/17-01997.html?a=1&n=fuller&ia=-at&s=10&ib=-bib&d=10&ss=17&q=26>
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 - Ater, Renée. “Visual Representations of Slavery.” *Oxford Bibliographies*, June 2016. <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/>
 - Ater, Renée. “‘Horses by the hundreds lying scattered over the fields’: *Trossel’s House, Battle-Field of Gettysburg* and a Photographic View of Equine Death in the American Civil War.” In progress.

OTHER RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

- Omeka, beginner knowledge: “online primary source collection” of artist interviews, maps, archival documents, and photographs and 360 panoramas of public monuments related to Harriet Tubman, a section of my larger DH project.
- Participation in “Race + Place + Space,” African American History, Culture and Digital Humanities (AADHum) Incubator Sessions, University of Maryland, February, March, April, and May 2017. Introduction to CARTO and ArcGSI (Story Maps).
- Participation in Summer Institute on Objects, Places, and the Digital Humanities, National Humanities Center, Raleigh, North Carolina, June 19-23, 2017.

Appendix Case Studies

Middle Passage and slavery

- Mike Walsh, *Middle Passage Monument*, 1999, located at the bottom of New York Harbor
- Rodney Leon, *“The Ark of Return”: The Permanent Memorial at the United Nations in Honour of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, 2015, United Nations, New York City
- The Whitney Plantation, 2014, Wallace, LA
 - Rod Moorhead, “The Field of Angels”
 - Woodrow Nash, “The Children of the Whitney”
 - Allées Gwendolyn Midlo Hall (slave memorial)
 - Ed Wilson, “The Longboat”

Slavery and the university

- Do-Ho Suh, *Unsung Founders Memorial*, 2005, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Martin Puryear, *Slavery Memorial*, 2014, Brown University, Providence, RI
- Meejin Yoon and Eric Höweler, *Memorial for Enslaved Laborers*, in process, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA

Resistance to slavery

- Ed Hamilton, *Amistad Memorial*, 1992, New Haven City Hall, New Haven, CT
- Erik Blome, *The Edmonson Sisters*, 2010, Edmonson Plaza, Alexandria, VA
- Ed Dwight, *Denmark Vesey Monument*, 2014, Hampton Park, Charleston, SC

Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad

- Ed Dwight, *Underground Railroad Memorial*, 1994, Kellogg House Park, Battle Creek, MI
- Fern Cunningham, *Step on Board*, 1999, Harriet Tubman Park, Boston, MA
- Alison Saar, *Swing Low: Harriet Tubman Memorial*, 2007, Harriet Tubman Memorial Plaza, New York City
- Susan Geissler, *Freedom Crossing Monument*, 2009, Lewiston, NY
- Mario Chiodo, *Unwavering Courage in the Pursuit of Freedom*, 2012, Tubman-Garrett Riverfront Park, Wilmington, DE

Black soldiers and the Civil War

- Ed Hamilton, *“Spirit of Freedom”: African American Civil War Memorial*, 1998, Washington, DC
- D.J. Wilkins, *Memorial to the 2nd Regiment Infantry, U.S. Colored Troops*, Centennial Park, 1998, Fort Meyers, FL
- Kim Sessums, *African American Monument*, Vicksburg National Military Park, 1999, Vicksburg, MS
- Ed Dwight, *Soldiers Memorial*, 2007, Lincoln University, Jefferson City, MO

Emancipation and freedom

- Dorothy Spradley, *African American Monument*, 2002, Rousakis Plaza, Savannah, GA
- Corinth Contraband Camp (six-life size bronze sculptures,) 2008, Shiloh National Military Park, Corinth, MS
- Preston Jackson, *Knockin’ At Freedom’s Door* 2008, Peoria Civic Center, Peoria, IL

- Mario Chiodo, *The Path of Thorns and Roses*, 2014, Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery Memorial, Alexandria, VA
- Ed Dwight, *African American History Memorial*, 2001, South Carolina Capitol Grounds, Columbia, SC, and the *Texas African American History Memorial*, 2016, Texas State Capitol Grounds, Austin, TX

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