

Evoking History: Listening Across Cultures and Communities

Introduction

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Charleston is a city rich in history, yet there are aspects of history that remain little known, even to longtime residents and like everywhere else, personal and social circumstances play a role in creating meaning. In a strange way the evidence of history is both visible and invisible, depending on who's telling the story and to whom it is being told. One gets the sense that there is a lot that still remains unsaid for many reasons, one of which is grief. For African-Americans, it is the grief for suffering the Middle Passage through slavery, while for the white Southerners, as Neill Bogan comments here, it is for the Confederate dead.

On the surface, the city seems to be sanitized from its contested history of violence and brutality. This grief remains unacknowledged and hardly is articulated in a manner that addresses the deep scares felt by many Charlestonians. This unresolved historical legacy has become hereditary, differences and inequalities have become an unquestionable reality that for many seems to be tradition now. The path to changing these attitudes is a long and narrow one, it needs sensitivity and patience. It is no accident that art has been used as a tool to initiate ideas and communication across race, gender, and ethnicity. **"Evoking History"** has adopted the approach of listening across cultures and communities as a way to engage these diverse histories.

For the 2001 Spoleto Festival USA and on the occasion of the festival's 25th anniversary, "Evoking History," a three-year initiative was launched. Its first year centered on three projects, each based on personal narratives and manifested in a play, workshops and exhibitions, installations and a garden. In each instance, the lead artist, selected and commissioned by the festival, enlisted a team of community persons to collaborate with them.

Ping Chong's *Secret Histories* explored the effects of history and the displacement of peoples through contemporary testimony. Its genre of documentary theater was developed around five Charleston-area women who are not actors by profession but who stepped on stage, moving out of their ordinary roles, to share extraordinary stories from their own lives. During the collaborative process, Chong, as director, and Talvin Wilks, as playwright, interviewed nearly thirty members of the community; each individual came from a different background, embodying in his or her own unique way, the complexity of cultural identity in today's world. Arriving at the final casting, the content and subtexts their individual narratives

evoked were interwoven, drawing parallels and resonances among their experiences. In offering a different perspective on the history and culture of Charleston, their compelling stories of real-life experience became the start of a community dialogue—spoken and unspoken—between the actors and audiences. This production became at once a transformative experience on both sides of the theater—as actor Luanne Edwards writes the experience, "validated myself by claiming it publicly," or as spectator Kendra Hamilton realized, "that experience seems to have completely healed the wounds that I've been carrying around in my heart from growing up in that sick and seductive city since childhood."

In a different scenario, **Lonnie Graham**—and artist, photographer, and educator—developed the *The Heritage Garden Project* on Charleston’s Eastside at Wilmot J. Fraser Elementary School. Honoring the rich agricultural history and its African roots, Graham collaborated with horticulturalist Harry Noisette whose vast knowledge about plants, together with his passion for and willingness to share his knowledge, made a the garden a place attracted a wide range of people. As teacher La’Sheia Oubre shared: “He was the embodiment of the garden; he possessed all that the garden had to teach us.” Guided by Noisette, the children planted traditional crops such as corn, beans, radish, peanuts, and okra from a variety of heirloom seeds from the eastern part of the United States. Endowing the garden with historical significance, they worked with the school children and local residents to cultivate food-stuff for the purposes of educating and developing intergenerational dialogue between youth and adults that continues to grow, making this a story only partly told. Furthermore, this project was developed into a living laboratory for the teaching of science, math, English, and history. Its historical significance was intended to impart a deeper knowledge on the connection between the Lowcountry and the African continent and this will be undertaken in Year II of “**Evoking History**” through a cross-continental e-mail exchange.

Graham furthered explored the theme of the Middle Passage was further explored with an installation linking the formal dining room with slave quarters at Historic Charleston Foundation’s Aiken-Rhett House, an urban plantation built in 1818 that is a complete document of antebellum life. The work, entitled *A Recollection of Tomorrow* was an act of acknowledgement to those ancestors who came to Charleston and found themselves in servitude to others. Their dreams, according to Graham, have become our reality, the present becomes a dream of the past. By projecting images of contemporary Charlestonians and Ghanaians on to the layers of history still evident in the walls of this house, Graham metaphorically connected Charleston’s historic legacy to the history of the African Diaspora. A red cascading velvet drape

puddled onto the floor, evoking images of blood and beauty. Underneath it laid the dreams: simple, elegant blue sheer curtains embroidered with the design of the constellations of the Northern Hemisphere, to which many looked for freedom and hope. This work in a second phase became collaboration with Jerushia Graham and a nearby community of quilters; they are transforming this luscious drapery into a commemorative quilt, appliquéing the dream designs of Fraser School students.

Finally, Graham completed his trilogy with a work entitled *Sentinel* at Drayton Hall, an outstanding example of Palladian architecture in America and one of the oldest surviving plantation, completed in 1742 and built by both European and African slave craftsmen. Here he invited self-trained artist Thaddeus Mosley to create an installation in an unmarked slave cemetery; he created an installation of memorial markers recalling the carved pole figures found in burial grounds in Zaire and Africa-American slave grounds in Georgia. In the accompanying words of scholar James Wylie, they “represent our eternal legacy.”

Historical legacy in Charleston is made visible by monuments, but they only celebrate and commemorate the history of white Southerners. Writer-artist **Neill Bogan** approached the difficult subject of monument making and its function as civic marker. His collaborative project *Rehearsing the Past: Looking at the City from Another Direction*, undertaken with nine area-artists, a poet, architect, video maker, and youth educator, was aimed at providing new visions of monuments and memorializations in the city through multiple modes of expression. Bogan workshopped the project over a six month-time period, leading group discussion on a myriad of related ideas. The creative group became charged with reinterpreting Charleston’s past through their own works. Over the course of their meetings, they continually challenged each other with questions surrounding the use of public space for memorialization in Charleston—“Who deserves monuments? Who decides? And how does your family reference the past?”—which were core to understanding the political nature of making monuments.

The responses presented included a storefront exhibition of artworks; broadsides with questions, dialogue quotes, jokes, poems, and statements on present and future expressions of Charleston’s past which were placed throughout the city; a movable wall that allowed passersby to examine the nine familiar Charleston sights in a new way; community conversations about the changing demographics within the peninsula; and tour on the Schooner *Pride* to look at the city from another direction, revealing views and visions for Charleston’s rich harbor and long history with the sea. Bogan believes that a significant cultural barrier exists in America in how people honor and formulate the

past. This project aimed, on the one hand, to expose the problem of creating exclusive histories through commemorative symbols and, on the other, to imagine something more.

“Rehearsing the Past,” Frank Martin has written, “thrust the spectator into a philosophical and speculative quagmire for which,” he feels, “the American educational system has failed to prepare its general public. There is no answer to such a question; the point of this exercise is in the simple contemplation of the question; its consideration becomes its value.”

Histories, like art, changes meaning over time, from person to person and place to place. The artists this year—lead artists **Ping Chong** and **Talvin Wilks**, **Lonnie Graham**, and **Neill Bogan**—came from different artistic traditions and modes of expression. Yet they brought to this investigation a common artmaking process that enabled a wide and uncommon spectrum of individuals to become engaged in art and ideas. Critical to this process was the ability and interest to listen and to reflect in communal ways—through art and dialogue—upon these issues of heritage today which “**Evoking History**” projects continue to explore.

A companion aspect to “Evoking History” was a series of “Stakeholder” Forums. A curious appellation, yet one that well describes the urgency with which persons in the Charleston area are invested in their place, its meanings and heritage, its need for exchange and change. They were joined last spring by national stakeholders, professionals from outside the region who share, in their work and in their communities, many of the same goals. An excerpt from one of these forums—a discussion that took place at I’On in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, at the conclusion of the festival—gives some insight into the vitality of these dialogues. *And they continue...*

The Chain of Memory Is Not So Long: Violence, Democracy, and Monuments in Charleston

NEILL BOGAN

*Dedicated to the memory of John Ryan Seawright**

MEMORY AND VIOLENCE

Southern hearts are pleasure-loving, time-taking, sweet-talking. But there comes a time. Our culture, in one part of its heart, is a violent one. As I write, young black and white Americans, a disproportionate number of them Southerners as always, are trying like the devil to kill Osama Bin Laden. We are filled with grief over the deaths and the missteps that will happen; we see the chance of a disastrous world war. But we were raised that there is a time to fight. It's no accident that the first American killed in Afghanistan was a professional soldier from the hills along the Alabama/Georgia line.

So this well-spring of violence and its grieving memory continues to be a crucial part of the function my region takes on in the United States. It may be useful to take a closer look at forms of behavior surrounding sites of grief and violence in the South. As it seeks to create a new framework for encouraging democratic speech and expression across cultures, the "Evoking Histories" program also can bring nuanced local knowledge on these subjects into the national arena.

One of the cultural boundaries to be crossed is regional. Like other parts of the South, Charleston continues to have a sense of being outside; the city's rulers did try to get loose from of the rest of the U.S. through that artillery barrage in 1861, and it seems to regard the partnership with suspicion still. Under its sun-touched flowers and porticos there is that other thing that comes from Charleston's depths; an awareness of grief that sweats out even as people try to lock their throats to prevent giving voice to their grieving. This is an enormous set of interlocking griefs—the grief for the suffering of The Middle Passage, for the Confederate dead, for lost wealth and the lost idea of nation, for the disappointments and false promises of freedom.

Never acknowledged grief is one of the things that Southerners are rushing to share with New York this fall. The destruction of 9/11 will end at least part of the regional resentment that Southern towns leveled and stunted in 1865 have held for New York ever since; the resentment that the survivor of violence has for the unscathed. When Columbia school-children return the gift of a fire truck to New York, it's not just a sentimental moment.

One thing that connects lowland Charleston to my upland South is an enormous, pathologically silenced grief on the part of the proudest white people over their history. Grief is different than guilt, which everyone calls pointless. It is what creates the guilt, as well as the violent denial of guilt. It is unvoiced, denied, and so drives all manner of turbulent, violent acting out. John Seawright traces such reactions from low-country to hill-country, especially the use of violence to conduct affairs of business, the state, and the heart, in his extraordinary account of the Georgia branch of Charleston's Alston family, "The Sorrows of the Alstons." *



This acting out feeds the survival of anti-democratic traditions of violence that are also part of my region's heritage. It's no accident that the chief suspect in mailing hundreds of fake anthrax doses to abortion providers is from the same hills as that young man dead in Afghanistan, just on the other side of the state line. Southern ways of violence are based in personal codes of behavior going far back into the past. The lines between public violence and private violence; between public accommodation of private violence; and private accommodation of public violence have remained blurred. Racial violence is only one subset of this personal/public complex. The other day I was reminded that Strom Thurmond's father had killed a man in a personal dispute mixed up with politics, had never been tried for it, and indeed risen to become a major force in the state. Such election-time gunplay, happening almost casually from the removal of Federal troops near the end of Reconstruction into the 1920s, is one of the least-known chapters in the history of the major parties in our country.

Gwylene Gallimard,
Shoreview Homes
for *Rehearsing the Past*

The chairman of the Denmark Vesey monument committee in Charleston, history teacher Henry A. Darby, is also the coauthor, with Avery Institute curator Curtis Franks, of a crucial document: *The Execution of Two Liberty Hill Negroes: Alchrist Hill and Cyrus Pinckney*. This booklet (self-published, like the work of many Southern silence-breakers) articulates the sense of fear and unknowing experienced from within a community forced into private accommodation of public/private violence. Darby and Franks describe the reluctance of Charleston people familiar with the Grant/Pinckney case to even speak about the incidents when questioned almost forty years later. . They document directly the way that one type of silence is an enforced product of violence.

The tradition of force that insists on and defends democracy isn't easily separable from the violence that drags it down. I believe my own grandfather felt the same sense of duty that took him through heavy combat in France in 1918, carried him into resistance to the Civil Rights movement in Mississippi in 1964. At times of crisis, people look again to tradition. The chain of memory is not so long; these are things we are not far past. But the chain has many places to hold, and there are other traditions at hand. One thing exchanged tentatively across cultures in "Evoking Histories" has been traditional knowledge on surviving violence and grief. Wiley indirection; strategic silence; well-timed testimony; stoic acceptance; and even denial, two-edged sword that it is, have all been demonstrated as working strategies within the artwork, dialogue, and new relationships produced. Also raised up are traditions of life over death: bravery, constancy, the Freedom Struggle, joyful mourning)

In a city heavy with monuments to violence, we as artists have looked away to sources of survival and then back: to growth of the soil in gardens; to the exchange in neighborhood storefronts; to the autonomy of a man in his own boat; to a circle of secret-tellers. These things bring us to the grounds and practices of culture that rescue memory from violence. As I do return my gaze to the piles of Confederate stone, I allow myself to wonder: Before they fall down, can they be forgiven? Before we pile up new monuments, should we forgive ourselves in advance? I wonder if tracking responses to the current crisis will allow us to see more clearly the path by which historic sites of violence have been reinterpreted in ways that treated not the demands of historic truth but the needs of the survivor in control of the site.

DEMOCRACY

Democracy is energized speech with a structure that ends in action. In these States it has always been tempered by violence. The silence that became a core subject of the “**Evoking Histories**” program is a symptom and result of violence; it is also its goal. Silence removes voices from the forum of democracy. It simplifies things and makes them more manageable.

Silence has its reasons, seasons, and uses. The silence encountered in Charleston encloses forms of knowledge that represent crucial resources for survival for those who hold them; potentially for others, if they can be voiced and shared. One is a long tradition of sophisticated strategies for skirting and transcending violence of different kinds. This engages perpetrators as well as victims, onlookers as well as actors. Secret knowledge on survival and grief arises on all sides of violent equations. My work with Charleston artist Aaron Baldwin in the “Rehearsing the Past” workshop touched on family ways of speaking and not speaking about violence. After thinking with Aaron about ancestors, I reflected that the grief of old white men, grave-bound and furious in their determination to keep secret, remains an unseen force in the region. “**Evoking Histories**” participants took part in an effort to create a space safe enough in which to speak and to share across existing boundaries such as closely held secrets. They spoke about the past in a context of acknowledgment of suffering and of joy at transcending it.

Such speech about the past is crucial to envisioning the future. To take the lead in the conversation about your own history is to find new sources of power for yourself and your community. To mark your own struggles and victories is to be able to move on for a time from struggles to other realms of life. To leave it to others, to experts, to movies, to textbook buyers, and museum builders, is to give away part of your power. It isn’t a rights-based power like the power to vote, but it’s as basic—the power to speak, to be seen, to name, to visualize, to create our picture of the world.

PROVOKED

Public sites of memory in the Deep South are still shaped by the racialized coercion of bodies in space. Where one may walk, speak, live, open a business, go to school; all these things are touched in the relationship between the individual and any state. In my region, that relationship is not yet separable from cascading histories of violence and many people do not encounter authority without still fearing it. Forty years isn’t enough to quiet human memory. Coercion based on the memory of violence becomes another kind of violence.

Our workshop became centered on one question: What does it take for African-American memory to find a physical space to show itself on the peninsula of Charleston? This question turned toward changes currently happening there—the explosive gentrification and displacement transforming the peninsula over the past ten years. The question soon transformed: What will space for African-American memory mean in a locale in which there is no more space for African-American life? This really became a core question of the workshop participants and their products. **Gwylene Gallimard** proposed a monumental remembrance of a destroyed low-income housing complex doomed by its million-dollar marshward “viewshed.” **Dave Costopoulos** looked at threatened neighborhood businesses as hubs of memory, in which invisible but permanent monuments of talk have built up. **Colin Quashie** commented on the interplay between the built and unbuilt, the lasting and the destroyed, the public and the secret monument. **Laverne Wells-Bowie** and her students proposed a system for “public access” to the existing John C. Calhoun statue, in effect making Calhoun’s body a space for African-American memory. **Jean-Marie Mauclet** and **Rob Dunlap** proposed reclaiming the open water, from which all the area’s cultures emerged, as space for memory, action, and a new vision of the city.

My last morning in Charleston capped a weekend-long rolling conference of the “**Evoking Histories**” program that moved across a variety of 21st-century tourist sites that also happened to be sites of violent incidents taking place in centuries between the 17th

ION DISCUSSION

Andrew Pekarik For me, the idea of the South is a foreign territory. It’s a “country” I don’t visit. I’ve felt it to be distant, something else. Being here, that’s changed for me—on an emotional level and an intellectual level. I suddenly realized that although I have always felt very negative toward the confederacy and its values, that is just what America is in 2001. Kendra Hamilton said to me the other day, “we won the war but lost the peace”. When I look at so many aspects of American contemporary life, a lot of them are the values of the secessionist’s movement. We live by the idea that all the ugliness can be put aside and ignored; the idea that we can live off the suffering of other people outside of our sight, outside of our mind. In the same way that I was willing to make everyone[of the antebellum South] complicit in the act [of slavery], I ask myself, “aren’t I complicit in the same act in 21st century America?”

and 20th. I woke up to find an account in the paper of the rally in support some black longshoremen indicted for their role in a violent incident that took place a few blocks from the heart of the historic district.

The charges against the longshoremen stem from a riot January 20, 2000, the worst labor disturbance on Charleston's waterfront in decades. Dockworkers were upset that Nordana Line, a Danish ocean carrier, used non-union workers to load and unload containerized cargo. Several previous protests had led to violence and vandalism, and authorities stationed about 600 officers in and around the State Ports Authority's Columbus Street Terminal. Dockworkers said they felt provoked by the large police presence, and just after midnight several hundred stormed out of the union hall on Morrison Drive and charged toward the police line. Protesters hurled rocks, bricks and debris, tore down temporary lights and clubbed police. Police beat back the protesters with batons, tear gas and guns that fired bean-bag projectiles. At least 10 people were injured. (Tony Bartleme, *Post and Courier*, 6/09/01, pg. A1)

8 **That word "provoked" has a deep echo**, as in my father's "Now I'm provoked. Go get me a switch." It means that somebody has crossed a line. What provoked this attack by men in some ways comfortably fixed—holders of what have been for more than a century "the city's best Black jobs"—a few short blocks up Morrison Drive from the new Aquarium? A mix of economic militancy and ancient codes of personal honor? The ongoing closure of the waterfront to African-American life? The sense of having been herded, corralled, rounded up? I don't know the answer, but the question will shape my thinking about Charleston for some time to come.

I had heard there was some trouble around a strike the year before and read in the paper about "the melee" that broke out one morning. But the account that appeared this morning in the *Post and Courier* was beyond anything I'd imagined and beyond anything described or hinted at by people in various positions who either suggested that I "talk to the Longshoremen" or who fell silent when I mentioned them.

In our rolling conference the day before, we had discussed the maddening politeness of Charleston people on social questions as a combination of strategic silence and skillfully managed indirect speaking. The motivation for this practice, I thought, was the avoidance of confrontation in a tiny, crowded place where it could be so readily available—and in a culture where confrontation, once begun, held a place for words only as the ceremonial initiators of actions. Like it says in the old country song, "Everybody's doin their best to act just right/cuz we're going to have funeral if somebody starts a fight."

MONUMENTS

The process of monument making is a kind of speaking about the past in which politics, religion, ethnicity, and real estate intertwine. It is dominated by voices from fields of expert knowledge like design, planning, and religion. Groups of stakeholders, those closely associated with the sites or events treated, find their way into the conversation, but through a process loaded with its own imbalances and conflicts. To try to create a space in which broader and broader circles of citizens can hone their ideas and skills as they begin to speak on monuments, within a context of recognized community institutions, is to try to add another level plank to democracy's rough floor.

One study of our workshop in Charleston was the modest, gravestone-shaped plinth marking the Septima P. Clark Expressway, honoring the city native who originated the voter education movement and spread it to organizations like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) through her citizenship schools. The citizenship school itself stands as a model for programs like ours, and Clark's techniques—small group contact, the self-creation of local leaders, incendiary power of basic knowledge—retain significance for both democracy and the arts in an era of mass culture.

Monuments are boundary markers between the physical and the political world, linchpins attaching the world of ideologies and symbols to the world of stone and grass. They are, first and foremost, signs of the control of territory (or partial control—witness the size of the existing Clark monument). To place a monument is a sign of victory, or at least of being the last one standing. When art creeps in to the process by luck or stealth, monuments can become something more, allowing fuller aspects of human life to be inscribed on the landscape. In every case they involve the viewer in a complex web of social and physical relationships that shape identity.



Daniel J. Martinez **Michael Brenson asked how do we move past a rhetorical position of a kind of linguistic claustrophobia that we face when we are bought together in this kind of circumstance? I would suggest that perhaps we've been asking the wrong questions. Quite honestly, for me, Charleston is nowhere, and it is everywhere. What we're really looking at is a conflation of the local and the global. Everything that's taking place in Charleston I find happening in Los Angeles, in Mexico City, in a whole variety of other contexts. It's the same social constructs along the lines of issues of race and class.**

1 to r.: Albert Alston, William R. Gignilliat, III, and Tumelo Mosaka at I' On

Near the heart of our dialogue in Charleston remained one other existing monument and one still unbuilt that also mark local knowledge of national significance: the statue of John C. Calhoun that has stood the main square of the city since the nineteenth century; and the statue proposed and resisted in several locations (and now apparently on its way to realization of the executed slave-revolt leader Denmark Vesey.

This significance of Calhoun is not just in his shaping the legal philosophy of slavery that underpinned Secession, or his constructing of apparatus like the Bureau of Indian Affairs. It is also in the dynamic he helped perfect through which, ever since his era, the region has extracted accommodation from the federal system, especially through Senate seniority rules. First with slavery, then with Jim Crow, more recently with matters like organized labor and welfare reduction, the region's senators have kept our traditions on the national agenda until other, often cataclysmic events forced them off, In a period in which scholars like Augustus Cochran are tracking a new period of national dominance by Southern politicians, ideas, and practices—including anti-democratic ones like the vote-suppression still practiced reflexively in regional politics but highlighted in Florida 2000—Calhoun is a figure whose very statue continues to bear watching.

The unbuilt statue of Vesey contains layers of meaning. One pegs the national history of violent panics against people of color back to the periodic "slave panics" among whites over rumors of insurrection, especially in majority-African districts like the Carolina Low Country. Such panics, arising usually after a period of change and crisis, were ripe for manipulation within existing political and economic currents. In a new study of Federal roundups of Southern blacks during the opening weeks of U.S. involvement in WWI, Theodore Koenwiebel, Jr. connects actions of local officials, private militias ("home guards"), and Federal investigators in majority-black counties to lore arising in slave panics only seventy-five years earlier. He concludes that "Such events across the South in the spring of 1917 resembled ancient fears of Nat Turner and John Brown," and finds a direct correlation between the number of U.S. law enforcement actions in Southern counties and their level of black population. Local officials deftly turned federal resources to their own end: slowing out-migration of black labor.

The Southern blurring of public/private force is precisely the tradition invoked by the use of secret detentions and tribunals. Last year in Mississippi I taught a workshop with community organizer Hollis Watkins. In 1963, as a young SNCC worker, Watkins was secretly detained, charged, given a summary trial, and tortured—by officials of the state of Mississippi—for helping others register to vote after he himself was trained in a citizenship school set up by Septima Clark. Mr. Watkins never spoke of these events around me; I

thought I knew his name, but had to look him up when I got home. In our session on memory, Mr. Watkins spoke with quiet relish about the rural life he led as a youth and pride in his accomplishment as an agricultural champion—at picking cotton. It was a self-aware performance of joyous survival, and of reclaiming memory from violence.

In the months since "**Rehearsing the Past**," the Mayor of Charleston has announced that a large monument to Septima Clark will anchor the newly designated Liberty Square fronting a National Parks Service site and departure point for boats to Fort Sumter; it may someday border a museum on the slave system in the United States. This monument to Clark will stand as a victory marker for those engaged in the Freedom Struggle and, so, for the spirit of joyous survival represented by Watkins and thousands of others. The process that will erect such new monuments reflects the continued circulation of local voices deep in knowledge of traditions that rescue memory from violence—the traditions that produced Septima Clark and her methods. By bringing art in to join those voices, the "**Evoking Histories**" program can help the process go further.

Art creates space for empathy. It calls for seeing and listening: activity in which one person contemplates the inner life of another. The events of 9/11 open up a window back onto horrific events of the past like the Middle Passage, the Civil War, and Jim Crow coercion, allowing us to sense their true scale and impact. Art will take us back through that window in a deeper way, into contexts in which we could not place ourselves. Through truth-telling, art can demand acknowledgment of the way things have been. This opens the way to reflection, and through reflection we realize how much was survived before. We are able to rework shame, grief, and the sense of powerlessness. This reworking can provide an avenue away from silence both enforced and pathological...

Daniel J. Martinez **The only thing I see here is what I see in the streets of Los Angeles. If you think the civil war is over, you must be kidding. What is about to take place is going to make the last civil war look like a field day. We are at equally the same brink of rupture. Each level of this discussion will get increasingly more difficult. The questions that you ask, I think about all the time.**

Those issues of race and class are predicated on particular types of histories that we believe are fundamental to the development of certain ideologies that we believe are important. So we have a set of histories that we want to identify, that have been excluded since the beginning of this country. But we have difficulty when we try to weave them together because they come in direct conflict with each other.

As politico-religious constructs, monuments provide a sign of victory, of survival, of permanence on the land. When art is allowed to steal into the monument, the possibility of genuine grieving, genuine triumph, a genuine sense of power is made available to all those involved in the web of monument making and viewing. For this reason monuments will remain dangerous and forever subject to contentious argument, agrievement, and civic maneuvering; in short, to all the characteristic forces of democracy.

Charleston has a heightened sense of the monumental that is a resource for the rest of the U.S. By making itself the sacrificial lamb of secession, it created the Confederacy and, hence, the modern South. By self-consciously repositioning and marketing itself after defeat as the grieving-place, as the sepulchre of the Confederacy's memory, it unintentionally created the opening for outsiders to enter into and deal with the subject of grief. If approached respectfully, with listening, it may continue to be a place that offers "secret knowledge" to the nation on subjects like grieving, resenting, and surviving. By continuing to develop through structures like the "Evoking Histories" program, the city may be able to offer approaches to this knowledge through new voices and visions that cannot be grown in other soil, with other water.

COLIN QUASHIE,
participating artist, *Rehearsing the Past*

Often times, when required to submit biographical information for exhibition catalogues, my embarrassing lack of art education and exhibition resumé forces me to seek shelter under the vague umbrella of the "Artist's Statement." As of late, a paragraph from Joseph Conrad's preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* has provided the most obscure façade behind which to hide.

Sometimes, stretched at ease in the shade of a roadside tree, we watch the motions of a laborer in a distant field, and after a time, begin to wonder languidly as to what the fellow may be at. We watch the movements of his body, the waving of his arms, we see him bend down, stand up, hesitate, begin again. It may add to the charm of an idle hour to be told the purpose of his exertions. If we know he is trying to lift a stone, to dig a ditch, to uproot a stump, we look with a more real interest at his efforts; we are disposed to condone the jar of his agitation upon the restfulness of the landscape; and even, if in a brotherly frame of mind, we may bring ourselves to forgive his failure. We understood his object, and, after all, the fellow has tried, and perhaps he had not the strength, and perhaps he had not the knowledge. We forgive, go on our way, and forget.

And so it is with the workman of art."

As a resident artist in Charleston, I was selected to participate in the portion of the Spoleto Festival USA's "Evoking History" program entitled, "Rehearsing the Past." When asked to submit a review of my thoughts about the exhibition's effectiveness and subsequent impact on the community and myself, I once again found Conrad's words deceptively appropriate.

Each year, millions of tourists find themselves stretched at ease in the shade of Charleston's historic roadside oaks. For nearly three weeks in the late spring, Spoleto Festival USA takes center stage. Many who come curiously watch Charleston, much like a laborer in a distant field, and after a time, begin to wonder languidly as to what the city may be at. Charleston resi-

(2 views) Quashie Colin, *Portal* at Southwest Corner of President Street and the Crosstown Expressway (Septima P. Clark Expressway) for *Rehearsing the Past*



dents are disposed to condone the jar of agitation orchestrated by city officials and business owners upon the restfulness of the landscape on behalf of the visiting crowds. Those looking with a more real interest clearly understand the purpose of Charleston's exertions. Anything that may add to the charm of an already charming place, ensures tourists spend dollars rather than idle hours.

Prerequisite to the exhibition, the participants were required to participate in workshops, expertly moderated by Neill Bogan, and prompted to discuss and debate the nature of monuments. In my humble opinion, in the city of Charleston, not unlike the rest of the Deep South, monuments are represented less by physical structures (as they are in the North) and more by institutional constructs—Slavery, Jim Crow, the "Good Ole Boy" network, The Citadel and the Confederacy—bases firmly rooted in tradition, honor, and lineage. Through the use of an artistic object, we were commissioned of sorts to examine and make real these intangibles, give meaning to innuendo and, in so doing, voice the disparate attitudes brought about by monuments.

In the end, I created **The Portal** which, in hindsight, stood as a monument passing judgement on places lacking monuments. I attempted to entice the visiting and resident audience to look with a more real interest at the transient nature of monuments. Through the use of carefully selected quotes at each site, **The Portal** posed a series of questions to each viewer designed to sound the depths of their collective psyche concerning the nature and purpose of monuments. In so doing, I unwittingly became the laborer in that distant field. **The Portal**, weighing in at more than 250 pounds and standing 6 feet tall, was monumental in appearance. As I often times struggled to move the piece from location to location, many curiously watched the movements of my body, the waving of my arms, they saw me bend

down, stand up, hesitate, begin again. On two occasions, **The Portal** was moved to locations in the historic districts where residents tended to look with a more real interest at my efforts and, subsequently, called the police to inquire as to the purpose of my exertions. Had they known I was trying to lift a stone, to dig a ditch, to uproot a stump, perhaps they would have been disposed to condone the jar of my agitation upon the restfulness of their historic landscape.

Half a year has passed since the exhibition and, of the locations identified by **The Portal** as places with a past—those I felt evoked enough history to merit monuments (nine locations in all)—not one has been attended to in any way. The Mosquito Fleet Landing is still a chain-linked and padlocked storage site. The Slave Mart remains closed to the public. Mr. Whaley's grocery store remains empty. In February 2002, The Beach Company plans to start pre-selling condominiums where The Shoreview low-income apartment community displaced more than 400 families. Dedicated in her honor twenty-five years ago, The Septima Clark Expressway is still labeled "The Crosstown" on street signs and city maps. I have yet to meet anyone who can tell me why they call the tree dividing Ashley Avenue, "The Hanging Tree" when no one was hung there.

As for **The Portal**, it now lays on its side in the dark underneath my house. Every now and then, someone will approach me on the street and congratulate me on being chosen to participate in the Spoleto Festival. More often than not, they will apologize for not being able to actually see **The Portal** at any of the locations, but remember reading about it: if in a brotherly frame

of mind, we may bring ourselves to forgive his failure. We understood his object, and, after all, the fellow has tried, and perhaps he had not the strength, and perhaps he had not the knowledge. We forgive, go on our way, and forget.

Once again I am reminded that the place I chose to hide so long ago remains secure.

"To arrest, for the space of a breath, the hands busy about the work of the earth, and compel men entranced by the sight of distant goals to glance for a moment at the surrounding vision of form and color, of sunshine and shadows; to make them pause for a look, for a sigh, for a smile, such is the aim, difficult and evanescent, and reserved only for a few to achieve."

Joseph Conrad, 1897

FRANK MARTIN

What role can art play in determining the way we understand history? Art contextualizes history. Art—the product of culturally specific conceptualizations stemming from multivalent motivations—emerges from specific human experiences and moments in time. The “meanings” of artworks are not only transformed by the perceptions of each viewer, but also are changed by the passage of time. Our understanding of a particular moment in the evolution of the common human condition is often crystallized by an artist’s work, which may offer insight and empathetic or sympathetic extension into the experiences, viewpoints, and attitudes of individuals, other than ourselves. The communicative power of the indigenous art of a given culture at a given moment in time is its inherent documentary presence; it uniquely provides a semiotic signifier for a particular aspect of humanity. But is “art” an effective agent for social change? If our query were about “history,” the answer would be a resounding “yes,” so completely evident and obvious is history’s effect on society. Yet, on a most fundamental level, “art” is “history”: both suggest a form of symbolic narration, and writing, like visual art forms, generates mental images.

Thus, “Evoking History,” as a concentrated assessment through art, of Charleston’s significance as a port city, former slave center, economic force, and cultural arbiter, was a work of enormous importance because it looked to the macrocosmic implications of this microcosmic cross section of the American tapestry. Balancing the dual intentions of providing the participating artists with occasion for presentation of expression in diverse media, and facilitating dialogue within the Charleston community concerning the issues of local history, “Evoking History” explored longstanding issues of power, race, economic inequity, and intentional miscommunication, or lack of communication, regarding social order, cultural infrastructure and “standards” within the Charleston community, within the state of South Carolina, and within the region of the great American South.

An exceptionally successful, culminating element of the experience of “Evoking History” was the performance of *Secret Histories*, personal stories of five women from the Charleston area whose lives were codified into “art.” Staged by performing artists, Ping Chong and Talvin Wilks, their reduction of the years of experience of these five subjects into a theatrical presentation of ninety minutes served to amplify our insight into the quotidian experiences of its creators and the sensual, visual, expressive, tactile, and conceptual achievements and shortcomings to which they were subject. Invasive yet inviting, intriguing if intrusive, the audience as voyeur was given a disturbingly satisfying glimpse into the experiences of victimization and triumph by various criteria of separation: race, speech pattern, sexual orientation, birth, and nationality. Yet, by the end of this collective experience via “art,” the audience

seemed curiously unified through the recognition of differences, which were accepted in this theatrical context. “Art” and “life” are separable, and this event, with its post-performance discussion, implied that what was presented on the stage was acceptable...even laudatory. One wondered if each audience member would willingly undergo such personal scrutiny or wish such profound consideration to be placed upon members of their own families...I doubt it.

A more difficult to gauge, abstruse and rarified aspect of the “Evoking History” project was approached by the artists of *Rehearsing the Past*. This project, while quite brilliant in its various incarnations, may have demanded a more complex emotional, mental and physical participation for its full appreciation than the average member of the available public may have been willing to proffer. However, the dedication and profound conceptual richness of the works offered by the artists made this project one of the most meaningful, serious, witty, and truly holistic in its social consciousness of all the “Evoking History” undertakings. While the depth of the diverse works clearly merited thoughtful, indi-

vidual consideration, they also interacted in a form of community dialogue, providing complementary intra-group responses to issues, ideas, allusions, and conceptions concerning what monuments in the Western tradition seek to memorialize and how they may achieve their aims. These ideas are extremely important in the realm of art because of the implied permanence of monuments in our culture. They contribute to our common cultural standards...or do they?

Whose history is commemorated by public monuments or by memorials of any genre? Commemoration automatically may imply that it is “our” history...that of all of us...but each commemorative act excludes some aspect of the population. Why does a community become involved in the process of commemoration? Human beings want to acknowledge their transient consciousness. We have a desire for a life beyond the momentary; we yearn for immortality, continuing to live in the consciousness of others. Commemoration is generally a political action. What is commemorated, when, and by whom? Why do we want to remember? Was it so wonderful? So horrible? From whose



LaVerne Wells-Bowie on Schooner Pride for Rehearsing the Past

LaVerne Wells-Bowie I must say that I don't agree that everyplace is like Charleston – everyplace is like everywhere else but Charleston has its own fundamental kind of ways that takes a long time to understand. The past is dwelt upon and it's unfair to say that we can't dwell on it. It will be needed until certain people have understood that their past is acknowledged in the right way and that certain wrongs have been remedied and that there's been a dialogue whether it's verbal, visual or textual and that dialogue has achieved a coming to terms on both sides of the fence. Then you can't say lets not dwell on the past because it's not fair to not acknowledge those pasts.

David Levi Strauss The question comes up as to “what can art do to transform”? How can you treat a trauma that is this large? The untreated trauma of America. If you talk about single points like monuments, or memorials, that doesn't seem like an allopathic treatment to me, like trying to find a pill that will change it. Whereas a lot of what I see going on here is more homeopathic, more traditional where it is approached on a lot of different levels at a lot of different points at once.

perspective? September 11, 2001 brings these questions to the fore with exceptional clarity. The American families devastated by the loss of their loved ones may find it difficult to extend their grief to the families of the young men whose violent act precipitated this loss...but those events demonstrate that "otherness" is a point of perception which may shift due to circumstances...the vilification of one depends, in this instance, upon the martyrdom of the other.

In begging the question, "**Are monuments appropriate symbols of the acknowledgement of history?**", *Rehearsing the Past* thrust the spectator into a philosophical and speculative quagmire for which, I personally feel, the American educational system has failed to prepare its general public. There is no answer to such a question; the point of this exercise is in the simple contemplation of the question; its consideration becomes its value. The American mind, if such a popular cultural entity could actually exist (and I feel more and more that it cannot), does not reflect upon itself in search of its own process. The American mind wants a definite answer to a given question. Open-ended questions, such as that posed by this project, seem to sometimes, baffle, intimidate, frighten and threaten many viewers, who, then sometimes respond with bitterness, cynicism, indifference, or fear. At times the response is simple avoidance which, throughout our discussions of the project, was referred to as "silence". Silence is a wonderful, open, expressive thing, and rarely means nothing. Indeed, in South Carolina, "silence" means a great many things. There were many silences in response to *Rehearsing the Past*: silences of incomprehension, fear, suspicion, evasion, ignorance, feigned indifference, distaste, admiration, acceptance, even of tacit understanding.

Many of us have become so imprisoned by the perceptual, political, and cultural contexts of what we euphemistically, may call our "history", that we are rendered incapable of examining our interpretation

of events as something distinct from our roles within them. It would appear that part of the intention in *Rehearsing the Past* was to advocate for persons perceived by someone (selected artists within the group) as disenfranchised, excluded, or silenced. But the simple fact is that there are no fixed "appropriate" symbols to acknowledge history. "History" is not...cannot be..."objective"; history is an interpretation of specific aspects of undifferentiated events by someone and that interpretation is inherently subjective and liable to the biases, individual conceptualization, limitations, deletions, omissions, and imperfections of the interpreter. Irrespective of contemporary technical achievements pertaining to development of documentary devices (cameras, satellites, etc), we are limited to physical positioning, linear time constraints, that frame the vantage point, from which an event may be perceived and from which a "point of view" is established. Monuments remain limited to the point of view of their conceptualist fabricators and the technical, political, and economic constrictions imposed upon them; we may respond to the resulting imperfections as "art".

Doomed to error, we could fail to create monuments. Yet, it is within our collective propensity for error that we may discover our redemption; our stimulus for dialogue. Commemoration requires the presence of an audience. Community is the audience before whom commemoration is conducted. In this manner, the commemorative act is made capable of including "all" by establishing the possibility for response and dialogue. Excluded, we may still voice our objections and, thus, enter into a dialogue. Universal human truth may not reside within what we say as individuals, but rather may exist between our statements, made one to another. Thus, "truth" emerges from among the various monuments that exist—in all of their diversity—which serve as a collective commentary upon our common human condition.

ELIZABETH ALSTON
historian, educator, and Board Member, Charleston County Schools

For a native of Charleston like me, seeing *Secret Histories* was definitely enriching and empowering. To see these women on stage share their life histories as an artistic expression, raised my awareness of the unlimited potential of what art can do. As an educator, it's fundamental to incorporate self-expression into the learning process as a way to encourage tolerance and respect for difference. *Secret Histories* clearly portrayed this in a manner that related to everyday life, which was very important to me. I was moved to witness the understanding and respect these women commanded, and the way they captivated the audience through telling their stories.

Most folks think of the South as an area of oppression, more like the old segregated days. Of course, since then we have seen changes, but racism is very much alive and, in many instances, it is combined with economic disparity between the races. There is not only racial difference but class discrimination, too, that has forced the greater majority of black people out of the city. Yet, I have often made the statement that "I would rather be a lamp post in Charleston than mayor of Dallas or Chicago." To me, the quality of life is better here—it's better for middle class blacks than any other city I have seen in this country, but this doesn't mean that I am satisfied with that level. The irony is that even though many outsiders think we are backwards, they come here to settle. They find the quality of life here to be attractive creating a new pattern of migration to the South; today South Carolina has the fifth largest retirees' population. *What does this tell you?* The unfortunate part is that, with time, these new arrivals adopt the same traits they abhor in traditional South Carolinians. The result is: things stay the same.

It's more complicated than a black and white story. When people come to Charleston, they are surprised by the manner in which black Charlestonians view themselves. For instance, middle-class black Charlestonians have their prejudices, too. Like prominent white families, this is because of the prestige based on family roots. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Charleston had the largest free-black population. Mulatto families that emerged in society, led to an elite black class. They gained greater social acceptance in comparison to blacks in other American cities that a large free-black population existed. As others arrived

on the scene, irregardless of their wealth, they remained outside high society if they did not have Charlestonians blood; they would always be "com' latelys."

This goes deeper, too, because Charlestonians are very self-centered and think of themselves different from others in the state. This attitude has its roots in history, too, when in the 17th and 18th centuries Charleston was the political and economic leader of the state and the South. This superior attitude lingers into the present day amongst many Charlestonians. But, the fact of the matter is that, as Charlestonians, we have to realize many parts of the state are progressive, having surpassed Charleston; it's time we woke up and participated in the real world. So, change is difficult because many law makers here feel they are right to maintain the traditional way of doing things, the way they have been; these state legislators feel they stand alone, just as they did in 1860 when they formed the Confederate States of America. This type of thinking is still alive today. *Why do you think the Confederate flag is still such an issue?* It's precisely making that point of resistance towards unification. It is a reminder of what the South used to represent and continues to represent.

Art-as-education has a place in interrogating these issues. In the past the arts has been a luxury for the idle rich; people who are struggling to put food on the table did not have a chance to become interested in the arts. By putting art in schools and in public spaces, we can begin to think about how art can play a part in addressing these issues. Where art history classes may be remote from students' intellectual experience, becom-

ing engaged in the process of art—through *The Heritage Garden Project*, for example—they are able to find another a way to express themselves. With *The Heritage Garden Project* children and teachers applied plants to their curriculum, fusing the knowledge gained from the garden to everyday life without being artists. But it was *through* art that this was made possible. This is why I am so fascinated by art as an educational tool. As an educator, I can interact with artists and learn even more about the art world, so that it can infiltrate other aspects of educational processes.

Art is a vital vehicle for enhancing education in the public schools: it *definitely* has a role, but unfortunately our public schools in this state have not caught onto the possibilities that art can offer. The reasons, again, are historical and political. But the lawmakers in the state legislator have become victims of their own historic attitude—feeling indifferent to the outside world—and not caring about the rest of the world, they do not see that their laws affect the entire economy of the state. Their worldview remains myopic and leads to failure, which translates into: our schools continue to perform poorly. And in these schools, most of the students are black. The result is keeping blacks uneducated, so that they can be easily exploited. It's as if there was a master plan designed to keep things the same for centuries. The lack on the part of legislators to realize that the public schools are the cornerstones of American society is a failure of nation building. This unraveling one of the basic institutions of American society—the public school system—should be considered a crime. I have fought for the County School system as chairperson for the school board and we have had some victories. Yet schools remain in disrepair because most politicians don't really care since their own children are getting the best education in private schools.

The apathy and passiveness amongst black people here is the result of constant betrayal by politicians and lack of education. We know that when African ancestors were brought here through The Middle Passage, they were not a part of the American dream. They came to work in fields and plantations, while their labors benefited and supported the life style of their masters. What

we see today is a continued form of subjugation through poor education. The prison system today in the US has tourism industry today has become the new plantation.

The fact of the matter is that people need to be empowered and in the rise of republicanism in South Carolina, this has become more critical. True empowerment is based on the understanding of the vote because this is where changes are made and not until people realize that economic empowerment starts at the ballot box, not much will change. For a state that puts more money in the prison system than education, repression and commitment to maintaining the status quo prevail. This is by design. The quality of life that could be had by all starts with education—or at least having the opportunity to become educated—so that people become effective members of a global society. I feel that we are failing.

We need to find ways in which people can be enlightened and art can be a vehicle. Art is able to communicate across diverse communities; it can speak to all. For art to live in the public, it must embrace the entire public and modify itself to be easily accessible. In other words you shouldn't have to go to a museum to view art. I think that projects, such as "Places with a Past," have demonstrated that art can address a public. Artist's projects such as the David Hammons's *House of the Future* on the Eastside exemplify the experience of accessible and meaningful art. By bringing the art world to the ghetto, so that it no longer is limited to a canvas but takes on a physical aspect of Charleston single house, allows it to be identified with the community—and for the community to identify with it. That's a key example of how art has transformed itself from the elite galleries/an elite audience class to a broader public. Spoleto has gone a step beyond by bringing art to the public and I have become enamored with this type of art. I have been able to incorporate it, too, into my preservation and educational work. We need people who can keep a focus on the totality of life. Artists seem to have the language and capacity to evoke and inform our consciousness towards the hope and potential for what we can achieve as human beings.

HENRY A. DARBY
educator, Burke High School and Chair, Denmark Vesey Monument Committee

I was first introduced to Vesey in 1971 when attending Morris College in Sumter, South Carolina. Before that I had known nothing about the man and was inspired to learn more about his contribution. I wept when I read what he had done in the city of Charleston. Since then, I have wanted to do something for Denmark Vesey in show of appreciation; the attempts to create this monument would definitely resurrect him from the gallows of history and to place him in a true, historical perspective.

The idea to create a monument to Vesey came out of the negligence toward African-American history. What you find is the persistent ignorance and continued amnesia about slavery in the South, specifically, and the United States, generally. Unfortunately, this is something that we continue to face and struggle with in our everyday lives in Charleston. In a city such as Charleston I felt it my duty, as an African-American, to get involved in re-writing my own history. This way I could contribute toward recognizing the contributions of our ancestors. That is where the idea for the monument came from.

A monument is something that represents permanence as well as holds a lasting impression. In Charleston there are no black monuments in spite of the numerous ones to the Civil War. We, the Denmark Vesey Committee, would like to be included within the history of monument-making, alongside those testaments to J.C. Calhoun and Robert E. Lee. We want something symbolic of the black presence here in the United States. Septima P. Clark, honored by a new fountain at Liberty Square, is a beginning; a monument to Vesey would continue a new tradition.

The reason the committee chose Vesey as a symbol is because of his sacrifice in Charleston. A monument would an appropriate, long-lasting remembrance of what he attempted to give to his people. Many people don't realize that Vesey was the one who lit the fuse to Fort Sumter. It was not Gabriel Prosser, Nat Turner, or John Brown. It was Vesey who divided the city by putting slaveowners on the defensive; he posed a threat to the white establishment, so much so that still today he is hated by some whites; he brought about disunion between the North and South. But this disunion

Michael Allen **We've been talking in the last few days about issues and problems that I deal with 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We're in this fight together, and I will say fight because it is a crime, that's the reality. But we know we can be victorious if we continue to work together and stay connected. There's always been the great secrecy in Charleston. People don't act because they don't speak about issues and if they don't speak about them they can't act.**

Daniel J. Martinez **If this process of mining places like Charleston is predicated on the notion of a monument then it seems to me that rather than building a monument to a past (even though we see that as fundamentally necessary in terms of building an immediate presence) we reside in the past. The histories of those pasts stop us from being able to imagine a future. If we want to use history as a model, why do we not use that to imagine something that doesn't exist rather than literally drowning ourselves in a manner that does not allow a kind of thinking that remains outside of the parameters of where we think we might go.**

contributed towards my freedom today. When Frederick Douglas was recruiting black soldiers, his motto was "Remember Demark Vesey." It is because of people such as Vesey that I am a free black man; I have to give him some credit. His contribution teaches us many things about giving and the need to have the spirit of giving today in terms of our time and money to assist the poor and needy. Denmark Vesey could become an inspiration and motivational icon for many African-Americans.

From my perspective, there is and have always been a "negative peace" in Charleston as opposed to "positive tension." Unlike Birmingham or Selma Alabama, Jackson, Mississippi, and Albany, Georgia during the Civil Rights Movement, Charleston did not experience extreme conflict. Of course, we had our protests and marches, but nothing like the aforementioned. We did not rid ourselves of tension, openly face the situation. We still live in a society where negative peace permeates. Without a positive position, there can be no growth.

Educating the masses particularly in the African-American community becomes key to progress. The story of education in South Carolina has been a negative one supported by the broader political and economical systems. In some districts, school systems are designed to fail. In Charleston, the main attraction is tourism; needs lead to the fostering of a serving class, not the promoting of a professional one. Many of our children are economically disadvantaged; many of them work because they have to support their households. This is a racial and a class issue: the two are inseparable. The plight of poor whites is similar to that of blacks, but it is unfortunate that you find the two fighting in a burning house, rather than trying to help one another. During the Reconstruction era, the blacks and poor whites had the opportunity to lead in the race relations of America. Instead, through politics and tradition, there was created a legacy of racial intolerance. Tolerance can mean progress. The tolerance of white

Southerners toward African-American history is one important step away from the tradition of marginalizing my history and education. If I can accept John C. Calhoun in Marion Square, who advocated slavery, why can't they accept Vesey whose goal was freedom? The two, in a strange way, represent freedom: for the former, political freedom and for the latter, human freedom. Of the two, which is more important?

It is not easy to bring about change and it does not happen overnight. Vesey gave his life to free others, knowing what the consequences could be; and that is why he is such a powerful symbol for African-Americans. White Americans have also selected black heroes; the media selected Dr Martin Luther King. But today I want to select my own hero. Vesey is considered an insurrectionist by the white establishment; I think he was freedom fighter. This difference of opinion is played out within the political and economic realms where the white establishment is able to control the placement of the monument because of the supreme power of property ownership. In this way, they tell us that Vesey can only exist within history in a circumscribed fashion. Part of the reason this happens is because blacks in Charleston are powerless or quasi-powerless. Unfortunately, there are so few black legislators who can make a difference that it feels meaningless. Until blacks become economically independent and politically unified, we will continue to live under these measures.

That is why we have to teach the youth today to be more independent and aggressive achievers. As a teacher, I try to teach my students how to have their own business rather than instructing them how to fill out applications to work for someone else. In the future, generations will rise and, like Dr. King said, this is when America will become a better place for all. To Frederick Douglas, this simply meant that African-Americans need to agitate, agitate, agitate!

DARRYL LORENZO WELLINGTON
poet

The work of artists dialoguing creatively with communities is a job that never ends. It is a tentative, precarious, experimental, and always ongoing process. The very fact that the length of time given for the whole of "Evoking History" to unfold is three years is acknowledgement that genuine community involvement isn't achieved overnight.

As a part of *The Heritage Garden Project*, Lonnie Graham constructed the first permanent slave memorial ever in a city that has an ugly history of denying its slave past. In a city that callously turns its eyes away from the issue of gentrification and housing disenfranchisement, we should congratulate Bogan's *Rehearsing the Past* for risking the issue with a vengeance. One piece—Gwylene Gallimard's *Shoreview Housing Complex*, a model of a destroyed housing complex—will now sit permanently in the new Charleston Humanities Foundation Building. Colin Quashie's *Portal*, a traveling picture frame placed around the city at various locations, insightfully and cleverly highlighted social and racial disparities; I personally thought it a marvel of artistry and ingenuity. An aspect of its glory was that the piece was incapable of being fully understood outside of a local perspective. This reaffirmed perhaps the biggest shift from the status quo: that the Spoleto Festival incorporated local artists in a major way, an unprecedented step for Charleston and an enhancement of community involvement.

One need only to have seen the enthusiastic audience response to Ping Chong's *Secret Histories*, a performance of Charleston locals sharing their hidden stories, to know that people outside the art circle sensed something different in the air, too.

While there was, particularly towards the end, an unfortunately concentrated presence of career administrators and critics from outside the area, their presence was hopefully balanced by an initial local "stakeholders" meeting that brought together many people

for the first time to discuss race and class in Charleston. I was certainly energized by the "stakeholders'" forum spirit of reform and progressiveness.

There were awkward steps, yes—perhaps inevitably so. But "Evoking History's" intent was not superficial and I don't think the results over time will be either. Grasping the Charleston situation, contending with its overwhelming depths, engaging a diversity of liberalizing opinions against forces so entrenched, takes time and patience.

Linda Downs **I think it is important in terms of making monuments to have that plaque, to have that face, to have the past represented in a recognizable way as well as to have the future represented in a collaborative way.**

Art is multifaceted. Art is historical and contemporary and looks to the future. When you talk about the efficacy of art and the reach beyond an aesthetic experience and its role in correcting history or adding to history, it's important to come outside of an aesthetic that is not shared by a lot of people. So I think of the monument project for the square in downtown Charleston with Calhoun 200ft in the air and then a holocaust memorial sitting next to it. It cries to a realistic monument to African-Americans.

Reflections on Spoleto's "Evoking History" June 2001

BARBARA KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT
Professor of Performance Studies, New York University

This intense weekend was an extraordinarily rich experience. I had many thoughts, thanks not only to the sites themselves, our eloquent guides, and the materials we received, but also from informal conversations with our insightful group. I would like to share them with you while the experience is still fresh.

DISPLACING THE PRESENT

One of the thorniest issues to arise over the last few days is the relationship between Charleston's past and its present. Every intervention into Charleston's past is also an intervention into the present. The past is everywhere and how it is produced at once displaces and produces the present. A prime mover is preservation/restoration (coupled with tourism), as an engine of gentrification. Gentrification inevitably destroys living environments of memory by displacing those who live there. Charleston's African Americans, both those who sell their homes to benefit from rising property values and those who can no longer afford to live in improved neighborhoods, are especially vulnerable to displacement. Gentrification linked to tourism produces distinctive lifespaces. With about 70,000 people living on the peninsula and some 3,500,000 tourists a year, the ratio of visitors to locals (many of the locals are themselves new to the city) is already 50:1. Tourists fill the spaces they visit.

HERITAGE AS LIFESPACE

There were several experiences—the Market, the Schooner Pride, I'On—where the tension between heritage space and lifespace expressed itself with special clarity. First, the Meeting/Market/King Street area has become a tourist zone, displacing not only whatever lifespace might have preceded it, but also any heritage environment it might have been capable of sustaining. Or, rather, it has become the lifespace, defined by the presence of tourists and indicative of the shifting demographics and living patterns of Charleston. The city has become a mecca for retirees who move permanently to Charleston or use their Charleston home for part of the year. They (and others) are candidates for the newly minted "heritage" environment of I'On. Heritage, in essence, has become a place to live. This is a prime site for artistic intervention.

Second, and somewhat ironically, while a protest was taking place at the docks over the Charleston Five (the longshoremen at the center of a labor and civil rights battle), we were on board the Schooner Pride discussing Charleston's maritime heritage. The city's proposal to convert Charleston's working port into waterfront redevelopment for tourism and move the container industry to a location outside the city came up. One of our "elders of the sea" stressed the importance of keeping the working dock in Charleston. While very much of the present and one of the few vital economic zones besides tourism, this industry is part of Charleston's long history as a major port.



Michael Allen, Education Specialist, National Parks Service, Sullivan's Island

Our discussion revolved around the following questions. Would the touristic development of the waterfront really generate more profit than the commercial port and is that reason enough to move the container business out of the city? What then would happen to the port? It could simply disappear into Charleston's long present. Or, it might become more profitable as heritage than it was as a functioning economy. The representation could displace the docks while they are alive (by moving them out of Charleston) or it might have to wait for them to die. Judging by the labor and civil rights protest going on during our discussions, one thing is clear. It is easier to control a representation of the port than to control the port as a living economy. Indeed, the port seems to be too vital to evoke the melancholy, the longing, or the nostalgia that are prerequisites for a heritage intervention. Rarely is heritage value conferred on a viable economy.

Nonetheless, there is much on the docks that lends itself to historic interpretation and artistic intervention. Allen Sekula's *Fish Story* comes to mind as one approach: "The thematic impulse behind *Fish Story* was to examine the contemporary maritime world, a world with an undeserved reputation for anachronism. How to counter the fantasy, common

Rebecca Keller I've been thinking, sooner or later it all comes down to real estate. One of the reasons that perhaps Linda Downs felt a strong instinct that people would want a traditional monument on that square facing John Calhoun is that for the last ten years, projects like "Places with a Past" and "Culture in Action" and others have been about a project of excavation, unearthing alternative histories. At a certain point people don't want to be alternative and people want to say "This is official history" and to have that history look like official history. And if official histories look like John C. Calhoun then maybe that's why people have so much support for a monument that looks like that. As long as a history remains alternative then museums can perpetuate the "been there, done that" attitude.

Maybe that's why the tool kits of contemporary art have failed to connect because they occupy a completely different discourse. Maybe that's one of the things that we're up against. Official history also has an official style and an official look. At a certain point people want to say it's not just African-American history, it's American history.

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among elites, that information is the crucial commodity, and the computer the sole engine of our progress? The sea may be a forgotten space, but it is not an irrelevant space, nor is it simply “in-between” space of global capitalism. The maritime world is fundamental to late modernity, because it is the cargo container, an American innovation of the 1950s that makes the global system of manufacture possible.”¹ The problem for Charleston’s heritage brand is precisely this. First, the dock is a vital economy (it would have to be dying for to qualify for reinstatement as heritage). Second, the dock is not consistent with Charleston’s heritage brand (that should make it an excellent candidate for artistic intervention). Third, the dock is even less compatible with the city’s mandate to “reclaim Charleston as a wonderful place to live.”

If keeping the docks in Charleston requires a persuasive economic argument, what then might it be? Some noted the importance of a diversified economy, as Charleston depends increasingly on tourism and tourism alone. How might artists help dockworkers make their case to the city? One approach would be to target the invisibility of city planning, which projects panoramically and years in advance. As Peter Stein noted in informal conversation, what might be the lasting impacts of such artists’ projects and how might such impacts be evaluated?

MILIEUX DE MÉMOIRE/LIEUX DES MÉMOIRE

Pierre Nora distinguishes living environments of memory from official sites of memory.² *Milieux de mémoire* are “real environments of memory.” In such environments, memory is part and parcel of everyday life, where it is embodied, narrated, and transmitted in the course of daily existence through “the warmth of tradition, in the silence of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral.” Embodied memory is what we were privileged to witness when we visited the legendary Phillip Simmons.³ *Lieux de mémoire* are sites of memory in the form of monuments, memorials, archives, libraries, and museums. Memory has been consigned or delegated to them. They are instruments (and instrumentalizations) of memory.

Gentrification destroys *milieux de mémoire* and heritage replaces them with *lieux de mémoire*, a process addressed in “What is the future of our neighborhood?” and “Rehearsing the Past: New Monuments for Charleston.” How might memorials/monuments address the tension between memory and history? An exemplary project for thinking about this issue is Sigrid Sigurdsson’s “In Face of The Silence” (http://www.keom.de/kuenstlertexte/texte_englisch/sigurde.htm), a permanent installation and ongoing collaboration at the Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum in Hagen, Germany. And, the “theatre archeology” of Michael Shanks and Michael Pearson, who work with Brith Gof <http://www.theatre-wales.co.uk/a-z/brithgof.htm> in Wales on site specific performances in landscapes that have buried history. They have performed memory at the sites of villages buried under reforestation projects that first hide and, twenty-five years later, after the trees are harvested, reveal history.⁴ Both projects exemplify the workings of collective memory, a signal feature of *Secret Histories* and the audience’s responses to the five interwoven narratives.⁵

¹ Allan Sekula, *Fish Story* (Dusseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995).

² Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire,” *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory. (Spring, 1989):7-24.

³ See John Vlach, *Charleston Blacksmith: The Work of Philip Simmons* (University of Georgia Press, Athens, Ga. 1992).

⁴ See Michael Pearson et al. “Theater Archeology,” *TDR The Journal of Performance Studies* 38, 4 (T144) (Winter 1994): 133-161.

⁵ See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) and Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

THE LONG PRESENT

The Civil War brought an end to a way of life predicated on slave labor and came to serve as a kind of threshold for what the heritage industry constructs as “outside history.” That which is outside history becomes part of the long present. If the end of the plantation economy signaled the end of Charleston’s Golden Age, the “heritage” of that period is at the center of the city’s recent revival and its “Palm Springs economy” (or was it Palm Beach?) The 140 years between the Civil War and today is a long present, either outside or not yet history or, at the very least, not yet heritage. How might artists’ projects address the long present? What does the long present mean both to those who lost the Civil War and to those who gained their freedom?

HERITAGE APARTHEID

The African American presence in Charleston, a focus of *Evoking History*, faces particular challenges in the heritage brand that has become Charleston. While slavery is the bedrock of antebellum Charleston, the history of slavery—and above all the terror of slavery—are all but invisible. Within Charleston’s heritage brand, such sites fall into the category of what Dean MacCannell has dubbed negative sightseeing.⁶ A former slave market has become a parking lot, without so much as a marker indicating what was once there. The glories of antebellum architecture, often without surviving slave quarters, are preserved, commemorated, and celebrated as monuments to Charleston’s antebellum golden age and self-sufficient agrarian economy with little if any reference to the slave labor that produced and sustained them.

Where does this place the efforts to evoke silent, invisible, secret, or otherwise unmarked histories? Will there be an apartheid of histories—one white and the other black, each on its own track, each with its own monuments, separate and (un)equal? Ed Ball’s tour (and his books) are extraordinarily important and moving. Courageously starting with his own family, he confronts the entangled history of white and black. Andrew Pekarik’s question—When does your history become my history?—goes to the heart of the matter.

Michael Mercil I’m still hoping there’s a way to go from either/ or to both/ and. I’m half serious about my proposal to melt down John C. Calhoun and turn him into Denmark Veysey. I’m wondering is if there’s a way that we could construct a mirror and that those two individuals could be allowed to face each other and that Charleston could be allowed to face its past. And that those two histories could not only stand side-to-side or back-to-back but face-to-face.

Daniel J. Martinez This dialogue has heightened my concern about what we believe, fundamentally, the role of art is what is it able to do, who it is able to speak to, and what in its current manifestation, is it able to accomplish? I think that the expectations are far too high about what art can do.

⁶ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Schocken, 1976; 2nd edition 1989).

JEWEL IN THE CRIME

During our visit to Fort Moultrie, a National Park Service site, Michael Allen captured perfectly the dilemma of reinterpreting icons of Charleston's heritage brand with his memorable slip of the tongue, "jewel in the crime." Just before we began our tour of one such jewel, Drayton Hall, Karen Nickless defined the interpretive challenge of such sites as treading the delicate line between Drayton Hall as a jewel of antebellum plantation architecture and landscape and Drayton Hall as a site of terror. Our tour guide, who was informative and interesting, brought us nowhere near that line. Consistent with what the brochure promised, we experienced the triumph of heritage over history: Drayton Hall's "mere existence proves its strength against the test of time and change, disuse and nature." This site was narrated from the perspective of those who understood themselves as the agents of history before the Civil War and the agents of heritage thereafter.⁷ In contrast, the Aiken-Rhett house did walk the line between splendor and terror—and did even more, in its own poetic way, thanks to the preservation of the slave quarters and evocative installations of Lonnie Graham.

Whose responsibility is it to address the secrets of history? The aggrieved alone? While it is courageous and honorable to seek redress, it is quite another matter to atone for what have come to be understood as crimes—even if one did not commit them oneself, but descends (or does not descend) from those who did. This is the challenge that faces Germans today in relation to the Holocaust and South African whites in relation to Apartheid. Kendra Hamilton eloquently characterized the situation as one where "the war was won, but the peace was lost." How might artists' projects address the lost peace, given the cultural value placed upon politeness, indirection, and the avoidance of confrontation? How might such projects work against an apartheid of tourism, with an itinerary of grand homes and gardens for the white market and sites of slavery, documenting both the terror and the heroism of the African American experience, for the black market?

LIMITS OF REPRESENTATION/CRITICAL REFLECTION

"Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past," in the words of Pierre Nora. To represent is both to say or image forth and to include (as in a representational democracy). The challenge, as we discussed, is to conceive of projects, among them memorials and monuments, so that they not only represent, but also do. In other words, to shift from the work as thing to the work as event, from "performances" to "performatives"—in a word, to works that set a chain of events in motion. Citing Nora again, "At the heart of history is a critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory." Art, like historiography, is a critical practice and can operate by "running a knife between the tree of memory and the bark of history." What are the limits of critical reflection in recuperations of desecrated memory and revelations of secret histories?

Contestations over Charleston's historical narrative, heritage landscape, tourism economy, and lifespace provoke critical reflection, as we were fortunate enough to experience throughout our roving seminar. As several people noted, however, we were a privileged group. How many visitors, not to mention locals, have such experiences? As Andrew Pekarik asked in informal conversation, are we underestimating our audiences? Given the emphasis of the Spoleto Festival on performance and ticketed events—the Piccolo component notwithstanding—anything else is a harder sell, even if it is free of charge. Judging from conversations with several locals and visitors, they came to Spoleto for the big ticket events, were less oriented to and less prepared for the visual arts, did not understand what the *Evoking History* projects were about, and did not build them into their total Spoleto experience.

FROM INFORMATIVE TO PERFORMATIVE HERITAGE

Contemporary art practice, which takes as its hallmark critical reflection, is an ideal medium for shifting normative heritage productions from the informative to the performative. That is, by reflecting critically not only on historical narratives, but also on the modalities through which they are instantiated, contemporary art practice can make the modalities "perform" themselves, thereby revealing not only how they "inform" but also how they produce their authority. If authenticity is really about authentication, then a performative (and not only informative) approach to heritage is a signal contribution that contemporary art projects could make.

This is particularly important in the context of tourism, which might be thought of as a museum of the consciousness industry, a place where old ideas find their final resting place. How else to account for the absence of any mention of slavery in the brochure for Middleton Place, "America's oldest landscaped gardens, celebrating 250 years?" Here,

Daniel J. Martinez **Art can do many things. Within the concept of radical beauty is the potential for transformation. Its tools are limited for it to become soluble within society. At the moment, art is limited to a small discourse. How wide is the discourse being carried. How many people are really going to museums? We are so fragmented.**

I would rather see art do what it does best and in tandem act with a series of other circumstances that could be constructed around that. Art seems to be losing what it does best it is a tool of absurdity, poetry, beauty.

I wonder in the current manifestation of art as we see it in the galleries and the museum, if it's possible to create an artwork that is both experiential and powerful. When does one actually have an experience that sustains itself within cultural memory, which is what we've been discussing cultural memory? How does cultural memory function within contemporary practice?

⁷ I discuss the idea of heritage as a mode of cultural production in "Destination Museum," in *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998).

as in brochures for related sites, the Confederacy lost the Civil War, but could be said to have won the heritage war: "Middleton Place...has survived revolution, civil war, and earthquake. The plantation economy is characterized as follows: "The blacksmith, potter, carpenter, and weaver recreate the activities of a self-sustaining Low Country plantation. Agricultural displays, together with horses and mules, hogs and milking cows, sheep, goats, and guinea hens, bring to life the rice and cotton eras." The same is true of such anodyne statements as: "Come visit Boone Hall Plantation and listen carefully; you may hear soft whispers of the bygone era of quiet elegance and gracious living of the Old South." There is no mention of slavery. Indeed, slavery becomes a kind of limit case for what this type of heritage modality ("bring to life") can and cannot do. What would be required to "recreate" and "bring to life" slavery, a defining feature of the plantation, assuming, that is, that anyone would want to do this?

Rather, these brochures exemplify the art of indirection. Such statements as "The art of sweet grass baskets continues at Boone Hall Plantation. This authentic African craft produced many useful utensils once essential to daily plantation life" makes no reference to African Americans or to slaves. It treats the "art" and "craft" of sweet grass baskets as an autonomous process. Agency resides in the art not in the artist, a photograph showing a pair of black hands weaving a basket notwithstanding.

RELATIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Two authors whose work bears on the issues we have been considering are Paul Gilroy, whose *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), speaks directly to the Middle Passage, next year's theme, particularly in the chapter "'Not a Story to Pass On': Living Memory and the Slave Sublime." The Old South is figured, through slavery, as the site of modernity—in the words of Toni Morrison, "modern life begins with slavery"—while Gilroy urges that we "rethink the concept of tradition so that it can no longer function as modernity's polar opposite."

What Gilroy calls "the sites of ineffable terror" are the subject of Saidiya V. Hartman's brilliant book *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997). Hartman offers a suggestive basis for reinterpreting historic sites and conceptualizing artists' projects by setting out to "illuminate the terror of the mundane and the quotidian rather than exploit the shocking spectacle," by examining "the diffusion of terror and the violence perpetrated under the rubric of pleasure, paternalism, and property." This is her strategy for exploring how "the enactment of subjugation" figures in "the constitution of the subject," both black and white.

How do autobiographical narratives illuminate the enactment of subjugation and its role in constituting the subject through what Paul Eakins calls relational autobiography. All autobiography is relational because a sense of self always emerges in relation to others, as does the narration of that self.⁸ We saw this idea in action during Ed Ball's account of his own family and in the five autobiographical strands that were woven together in *Secret Histories*. For those of us not from South Carolina, it was especially important to see *Secret Histories* with people who shared the experiences narrated from the stage.

Both events raised important questions about the nature and efficacy of artistic mediation in self-narration. How do narratives of the self, through repetition, develop a canonical form and kind of completeness, even for the narrator? Revealing histories that have hitherto been kept secret is itself a major achievement. But, is it possible to disagree—to reflect critically—on personal truth and the language in which it is expressed? Michael Brenson, in informal conversation, encouraged us to examine our vocabulary and in particular the term "community." Many other terms that we have come to take for granted could be added to the list, including "identity" and "heritage."

Michael Mercil On the one hand, I'm very excited by discussing the potential of what art can do and on the other, I'm aware that contemporary artists are often times asked to carry a burden that is impossible for art to carry. The metaphor I've been looking for is "the looking glass". It is the work of art that is perhaps the looking glass that we go through to an other experience.

As an artist I'm asking myself what are the limits in my practice? Some of the things that I do and believe in are off the map for a huge group of people. So then I'm faced with the question of what is my responsibility when people want to put a face on a monument. Can we make a memorial an action rather than an object? And what use is something like ironic distance, which is one of the tools in my box? If I'm not going to use that tool, then I don't want to use sentimentality. That's what the whole tradition of contemporary art comes out of is a struggle against middle class sentimentality. By distancing myself, I'm going to lose half of my audience. So what's the point of contact? But irony was meant to bring about contact; it wasn't meant to distance people from their emotions or their intellect but rather from the individuality of their own circumstance.

Linda Downs It's very important to have people see themselves in works of art, in a realistic way or an abstract context. There has to be some immediate connection. The discussion about the monument in Columbia is a good example of that and it harkens back to the question of whose history is it? To have an inclusive history means to have recognizable monuments for people who aren't in this group, who don't have an aesthetic education.

⁸ Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999).

STRUCTURES OF FEELING

Some of us were struck by the sensibility (what Raymond Williams would call “structures of feeling”) in the performances of self at the center of *Secret Histories*. Indeed, it could be said that one of the great challenges facing *Evoking History* projects is the role of shame in dealing with history and heritage, particularly when for so long it has been possible to keep secrets and deny terror. I am struck by the responses, both expected and unanticipated, of *Crimes of the Wehrmacht* in Germany and Vienna. Both are spaces purged of Jews but still inhabited by those responsible for the genocide or by their descendents and they differ in the degree to which they hold themselves accountable.⁹

As Andrew Pekarik commented so artfully in informal conversation, “Charleston is saturated with pain. It is a human geiger counter to suffering. What is my responsibility to that now? The tourist stuff is an exorcist movement that lets us cleanse ourselves by going shopping. How might the economy of tourism heal the wounds of Charleston? What would it take to make Charleston a destination for African American tourists?”

⁹ See http://www.historyonline.de/press/war_e.htm, which describes the exhibition (it was accompanied by a catalogue that has been translated into English). See also *East of War*, a documentary shot in the exhibition itself when it was in Vienna, by experimental filmmaker Ruth Beckermann (1997).

LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES OF ART

Daniel Martinez opened our final discussion by calling for art to be left to do what is good at. It cannot be all things to all people. It can not do everything. One person, during our Saturday discussion, dared ask “Do we even need an artist?” At several points—particularly in front of the home of Denmark Vesey, which was part of the Tour of Slave Sites—we began to explore different approaches to monuments. Someone noted that monuments, which are generally crystallizations, could serve as a call to action, as beacons rather than tombstones. In an informal conversation, Michael Mercil noted that monuments are about adhesion. They attract stories and stories have a way of sticking to them. What about the aesthetics of monuments? Should they look like other monuments in Charleston so as to enter the official heritage landscape of the city? Or, should they challenge the entire genre? Are any monuments created within the historical genre doomed to be “bad art”? How might a more experimental approach produce an effective and affecting monument, while departing from the expectations of what a monument should look like?

From *Places with a Past* to *Evoking History*, a ten-year trajectory, Mary Jane Jacob has succeeded in raising the bar for what public art can be and do when it attends closely to local situations and issues of burning concern to those who live there, encourages wide-ranging conversations and collaborations, supports an extended process, takes risks, and makes critical reflection a priority.

LA'SHEIA OUBRÉE
educator, Wilmot T. Fraser Elementary School

The Heritage Garden Project at the Fraser Elementary School, where I am a teacher, is a multi-educational program that incorporates the entire learning curriculum with gardening activities. Subjects such as math, writing, English, social sciences, art are all integrated in a way that provides a holistic way of learning. For instance, poetry and story writing about aspects of the garden have enhanced writing skills. The children are so proud of their garden. They have established a garden club that initiates activities outside classroom time. Recently, we have had to limit the number of children in the club, just to keep it to a manageable size for teaches. The 5th and 6th-graders have provided a lot of guidance; the little ones have an overwhelming passion for the garden. During harvest season, we developed several recipes and tested our culinary skills. Students learned about the different vegetables, then the insects. Now our second graders have become insect experts: they can explain the metamorphosis process and describe the body parts and differences between insects. Being outside with the children, touching the soil, watching the colors change as days go by, has provided me with ideas for lesson plans, which I would not have thought of in the classroom.

More importantly, the garden has affected the teaching of the social sciences, locating history and geography through the study of plants. Issues such as the Atlantic Slave Trade have been incorporated into the curriculum in a manner that evokes strength and energy out of a subject of adverse horror. This is our history and it needs to be confronted. The garden, in this way, has become an enabling tool for teachers and students to learn about their past and present history. To me, this project is a work of art, but it goes beyond just art. I don't see *The Heritage Garden Project* as a separate entity, as distinct from what we are trying to achieve in education. It has the capacity to reach out and inform, educate and liberate our ideas about the world we live in. And this is one of the important lessons we try to teach our pupils in school.

This garden is a metaphor for life. We are now in winter and beans are still growing. It never stops as long as there is commitment to nurture and encourage the seeds to grow. The notion of birth, life, and death are all implicated. As an elementary school, we try to nurture the early phase of life which is very fragile and needs a lot of attention. The magic occurs when the children begin to understand that they need to respect each other and to learn from each other, as well

as from us, in order to succeed in life. By having the children help care for the plants, we can begin to instill a sense of responsibility necessary for civility. As the garden keeps growing, the students' knowledge grows, too.

Besides the educational aspect of the garden, its beauty and tranquility has had an impact on the Fraser family. To enjoy it, you have to be in that space, to smell and be transported by the visual beauty of the site. Transforming a barren lot into something beautiful and useful for everybody has been a tremendous achievement that we should be proud of, thanks

Lonnie Graham,
The Heritage Garden Project featuring
La'Sheia Oubree
and students of
Wilmot J. Fraser
Elementary
School



to Spoleto Festival. Being located on school property makes it belong to the Fraser family. We have ownership and control over what happens in the garden. This is important both for us the teachers to feel that it's available for our use and for the students to feel connected to the garden. When artists work in communities, they need to consult the people in that community. Nobody asks educators; our pool of knowledge is never tapped. But working with Lonnie Graham was great because he solicited our ideas and implemented what we suggested in a way that got everybody involved. Taking this approach allowed difference to be accommodated; working this way gave the project a scope broad enough for us to share our resources and learn from each other. By enjoying all the different aspects of this garden, we at Fraser School have learned to come together as one family.

Having to grow these ordinary plants has transformed not only the teachers and students, but the neighborhood, too. Parents and community members have shown a keen interest in our vegetables and, from time to time, we distributed vegetables to our neighbors. Thus, the school's relationship with its community has been strengthened. Parents are now willing to volunteer in the garden. They help care for the garden—this occurred *even without us asking*. I think everyone understands that this project is not only about the school, but also about the parents and the community. It's everybody's work and a work of art. The garden has transcended into something totally beyond our imagination. *Who would have thought that this might happen?*

Whether you want to think of it as art or something else, the garden has had an effect and it quickly exploded into many directions, opening up new possibilities and ideas for teachers, parents, and neighbors. Every time people think about our neighborhood, it's always in the negative terms, but this garden has proven that there is more to the Eastside than guns and violence. There is beauty and calmness, too, and this gives us reason to be proud. Imagine, before there was nothing and now we have created something beautiful that can be enjoyed by all. *Is this not amazing? Isn't creativity about giving life and enriching the soul?*

Hopefully, the arts can bring people together in this community. I would like to see different cultures come together, especially in our community, where race and economics play a role in the segregation. Transcending these social barriers begins with education and is most effective with the young ones who are open to new ideas. The future is with them. It is important to expose our children to as many diverse things in the world as possible, so that, when they become adults, they can make informed decisions about their lives and not repeat mistakes of the past. Art is a good way to accomplish this because art can't be confined to one definition, but opens us up to different possibilities. Then, as adults, it is important to have the opportunity to discuss our ideas with each other, even if we have differences of opinion—to at least have the chance to have your voice heard rather than silenced. The art experience can bring together different viewpoints in a manner that is not confrontational and allows us to share experiences in our own way as human beings.

There is no one thing that we can quantify as a final result of *The Heritage Garden Project*. Instead the garden continues to live on beyond its borders and to have effects in ways we cannot measure: Constant calls and contributions from our neighbors are testimony to the interest sparked; the willingness of parents to become involved is another thread to follow; the teachers' involvement and dialogues about the garden have created new relationships within the school; children who were quiet and shy in the classroom are, now more expressive after becoming involved in gardening activities. Everyday it is a struggle to get the children to leave the garden because they enjoy it so much. This artwork engages people; it relates to them because it was conceived with sensitivity to the people involved and shaped in manner that appeals to the senses. It feeds a hunger for knowledge and is a form of education achieved through listening, touching, smelling, tasting, and looking. Through the arts, we can begin to introduce our children to new ideas. The process set in motion by the garden has also pushed people in directions they didn't think possible or didn't want to go. But in doing so, it has re-awakened the spirit and revitalized our thoughts.

LONNIE GRAHAM,
Lead Artist, The Heritage Garden Project, photographer, and educator

The way I work in a community is to ask the people there what their major concerns are. Then in some fashion, on some level, I start to try and address those issues by simply listening to what these people have to say. These individuals become involved in the process. So, by taking the first step and collaborating on a purpose, the work becomes inclusive—not just of individuals and selected groups, but inclusive of different ideas and philosophies. Those who are included take on a responsibility for shaping the project.

When we spoke to the people at Fraser Elementary School about *The Heritage Garden Project*, we understood there were certain deficiencies and certain issues about which they felt strongly. Reading, writing, and math scores were poor and there was a lot of pressure on teachers and administrators to make major improvements. To alleviate this strain and, perhaps, assist with this task, something fun and educational needed to happen. The garden seemed a suitable vehicle; at the same time, it served as a fundamental aspect for basic human needs. It could be a facility aimed to provide for basic human sustenance and, at the same time, we could apply math and science to the activity of work. Writing essays improved their use of English and writing skills. We could even go further and talk about culture and heritage by choosing certain crops and seeds to plant in the garden, describing what people are doing, and reflecting on these activities.

Over time, we employed other people with specialties to work with the students. A market manager, Felder Freeman from the "Roots and Shoots" program, helped students understand how they can sell their products. A poet, Darryl Wellington, ran a workshop on language and poetry reflecting on the local experience of place. Harry Noisette's, as horticultural specialist, made the greatest and most effective and greatest contribution towards reaching the community. So, this very simple garden became a cornerstone for a very subtle social change and a kind of a catalyst for social gathering.

Enrichment and enlightenment stem from aspects that concern our essential being. In my work I address those issues relevant to basic human needs of the mind, body, and spirit. We can't continue to be so eccentric and exclusive about the process of artmaking. Today, old ways of working,

communicating, and sharing the world are most important. Basic human contact is important to continue to keep cultural mores intact for the betterment of civility. This garden—as a project created by many people around something as fundamental as food—is a fertile place, flexible enough to accommodate the broad range of ideas and activities. Students see the whole process and become familiar with how growth and change occur in the world. I am not sure what

Lonnie Graham and Harry Noisette,
The Heritage Garden Project,
Wilmot J. Fraser Elementary School



other activity we could have engaged in at the school which would have addressed so many different kinds of issues and offered such long lasting effects.

Speaking to each other face-to-face is a means of fostering the common goal of human understanding. Collective ways of making art allow people to be supportive of each other on very basic levels that have been important since the beginning of civilization. I prefer to work collaboratively so that the possibilities of articulating critical issues become diverse: the more people involved, the greater the contribution to solving some of key questions.

An important level of success for such a project is seen in the level of ownership: when those who contribute, collaborate, participate, feel the project to be their own. This happened during the course of the project with the teachers. They developed their own projects around the garden; they referred to *The Heritage Garden* as their project. The value of work is equal to the value of

the contribution and it can be only be as rich as our spiritual investment in it. *The Heritage Garden Project* speaks to the teachers and students because they have an invested in the project. In this way we begin to share knowledge and to invest in ourselves for [what will be] the future.

In *The Heritage Garden Project* and the two companion works at the Aiken-Rhett House and cemetery site at Drayton Hall, I aimed to acknowledge neglected and forgotten histories central to the American story. Bringing vitality to and breathing life back into that memory, it can continue to live on. We are indebted to the contributions made by so many people before us who have gone unacknowledged. People sacrificed so that we could have a better future. This memory is to be valued. This is fundamental to some cultures, but we have sacrificed such a large part of who we are as human to technological advancement and commerce. I would like to see something that helps people get back to who they are as human beings.

LUANNE EDWARDS
performer in Secret Histories

I participated in Secret Histories and claimed my identity with this Spoleto event. In a simplistic stage setting I revealed my life journey. I validated myself publicly on the stage night after night as I shared my story. My past unfolded and liberated the present.

I grew up in the South, suppressing my sexuality because of the belief system I was raised to embrace. I belonged to a sector of society that can closet their difference and live a double standard. One standard is heterosexual and the other homosexual. Many gay children grow up in small towns of the South thinking there is something desperately wrong with them. The message is clear throughout mainstream society that being homosexual isn't a valid life. For so many it is an acceptable prejudice.

The feelings I had as a child were suppressed because those like me were not visible. Discussions about "queers" revolved around perversion. There was no history on the subject. I had no access to ancestral knowledge about my sexuality. I just knew I had two cousins that no one talked about except in hushed tones. So my life began as one who must live in the closet at a very young age.

As an adult I began the process of accepting myself for who I am. I struggled with my belief system and conquered it realizing that I had been created just as I am and that I am a valuable human being. The process is ongoing with each individual to whom I come out. Relating my story was an avenue that I could use to share who I am.

I came to realize that not only was I liberated by sharing my story, but many of the audience members could finally release some of their steadfast assumptions about gay people. After each performance I was greeted with teary-eyed people who wanted to share with me their own stories about this subject. Many told me they had never known a gay person. This statement alone tells us how far we have to go on this issue because there isn't a person alive who hasn't known a gay person. They are our teachers, accountants, bankers, neighbors, family, and friends.

Charleston is the resting place for tradition and at the same time is commencing change. The gay voice grows stronger as many embark on changing the prejudice to acceptance. One avenue to create this environment is through the arts. In the artistic environment, originality, honesty, and emotion poke their heads through dated traditions.

"Evoking History" is a proper name for this Spoleto event because I summoned my truth, shared it, and validated myself by claiming it publicly. Maintaining secrets is like chaining creativity. What was hidden in the past, out of fear or shame, flowed melodiously in southern tones. The truth divulged is transforming and benign to social judgment. Claiming yourself is

Michael Mercil **When does your history become my history? If I stay isolated in my individuality and can't create some sort of mirror to slip through and find a kind of independence that allows me to create new contexts, new histories, then I'm always holding a mirror up to the past. Then we ask How do we create that mirror that slips us towards the future?**

Al Alston **We've got to start looking beyond Fort Moultrie and beyond Ion and start thinking what else could be. This place, Ion, is the same way the white person would have lived in the 1800s. Art needs to have enough wisdom to highlight what has happened in the past**



like snatching back the lunch money the bully has been stealing from you for years. With your lunch money, you can obtain sustenance for growth.

Sharing a life story is history in the making. In the past historians have suppressed information about diverse groups of people. This has denied these groups to claim their past in order to defend themselves better from present day oppression. Sitting on the truth has allowed the prejudice ample growth and made the closet [an] the only option for many.

Diversity makes life interesting and challenging. Diversity is a fact of life. This is a beginning of a voice in Charleston that states unequivocally that masking us in well-dressed prejudice has not worked. Foiled by dated tradition and furtive social maneuvers, a large portion of our gay society has suffered the dimming of personal validity. May the light shine on us all for who we really are and not on what the labels have dictated thus far. Evoke the true voice of history.

L. to r.: Luanne Edwards, Barbara Sprinkle, and Cathy Nelson, Secret Histories

Kendra Hamilton

Notes on a return to my native land

While an afternoon cloudburst drummed a loud tattoo on the roof of our shelter at Middleton Place, Jeffrey Day, a journalist from The State newspaper rose to his feet and delivered a passionate speech on the evils of “separate but equal” monuments. Rattling off a list of ugly public works and citing exactly how each had failed in conception or execution, he stabbed the air with his finger as he wound up to his conclusion.

“They’re planning the Denmark Vesey monument now—and I know it’ll be a realistic monument, a feel-good monument. And nothing will change!”

As he spoke, my surroundings faded to grey and the image of the Arthur Ashe memorial on Richmond’s Monument Avenue flashed bright before my eyes. Yes, the Ashe memorial, the crystallization of all that Jeffrey had described with such scorn. It’s a hideously ugly piece of work which Ashe—a man of impeccable taste—would never have approved, in which the tennis star wields a racket in one hand and a stack of books in the other while adoring children look up in wonder.

I’ve seen it only in newspaper photographs, but I vividly recall the viciousness of the infighting the statue’s design and its placement sparked. And I know—intellectually—that it was a “great victory” that a coalition of blacks and whites working together! in Richmond! was able to shove that statue down the throats of all those who had risen to oppose it. Monument Avenue is, after all, holy ground—a shrine in the cult of the Lost Cause, the place where “Marse Bob” Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and the rest of the gang face their bronze and stone mounts to the North, in vigilance, in defiance. And yes, it does send a thrill of spiteful glee down one’s back to imagine what that grizzled old crew and their loud young defenders are making of Arthur Ashe, honored on that avenue.

But even that frisson is not enough to assuage my general dismay over the Ashe memorial. The only words to describe it are “butt” and “ugly.” Ashe looks skinny and lifeless, the apotheosis of dork; the children are a needlessly cloying touch; and the manner of Ashe’s death—of AIDS—is treated with a deafening silence.

I recalled that statue and my mixed feelings about that statue as Jeffrey spoke, and I nodded my head—as so many around me were nodding their heads. He was right. So right. I thought we all thought so. Then Liz Alston rose to take the microphone. Liz is someone my family knows well, working in the Charleston school district’s ugly and incessant culture wars. Liz, as it happened, had served on the committees of each and every one of the monuments Jeffrey had denounced and, apparently, had liked each and every one of them just fine. Apologizing in advance for any hurt feelings she might engender, she said, “I was born and raised in Charleston, and people from Charleston have a saying: ‘I’d rather be a lamppost in Charleston than mayor of any of your cities.’”

She said a lot more—all of it delivered in a typically Charlestonian manner, with lots of roundaboutness and self-deprecating humor. But the message came through loud and clear. “We don’t care what you think.”

And just that quickly I saw the issue of memorialization, not from the perspective of an informed and cultured critic, but from the perspective of: Emancipation Day parades in the early sixties when bands from Burke and Bonds-Wilson filled the air with the blare of brass and the skirl of piccolos, the boys and girls in their crisp uniforms alternating the goosetstep with the boogie-woogie with a style that made the crowds holler for joy.

Or. Teas where perfect brown ladies with lavender hair slapped your fingers if you tried to snatch too many finger sandwiches and dabbed away tears with scented handkerchiefs when we closed the program with “Lift Every Voice and Sing.”

Or. The singing and hand-clapping every Sunday morning at my grandmother’s church in Monrovia—yes, named for the capital of Liberia, to which Charleston sent a boatload of émigrés after Reconstruction ended and white Redemption began...

So sure moments before, I was suddenly unsure.

and try to spring off to point to what could happen in the future. Individuals themselves are unable to take that step to the future. We’ve got to find a way to go beyond. The monument has to flair up something in the past and let a child now that one day he can live in a different way.

LaVerne Wells-Bowie **Thinking about the other ways that monuments could be made has triggered another tool. What I think that the Spoleto Festival does best is that it presents works that tend toward ephemerality. They come and they go. The power of the temporary is one that has an ability to transform. I think that what Spoleto does is that it creates the opportunity to give you an experience that transforms. That experiential transformation is in the power of it being ephemeral.**



Today it seems to me that Jeffrey and Liz were both right, and that that’s the very thing that makes the process of memorializing so fraught in this postmodern age. Those of us who’ve read our Barthes know that the subject is, if not dead, then so fractured that new forms, new rituals are required if we are not simply to repeat the mistakes of our forefathers—and in seeking to honor the past simply cast it in bronze. Again.

Those of us who live a place and breathe it, though now—those people know that the past is more than just the questions that outsiders, including artists, ask about it. And this is an inescapable, and troubling, dynamic. Artists and communities often end up working the same side of the street because our interests converge in the rather important matters of opposing gentrification and re-memorializing the past, but the devil is in the details.

David Hammons, House of the Future on America Street, Eastside community (1991 for “Places with a Past”)

To use Charleston as an example, the folks there would certainly think it a good thing to memorialize someone like, say, Alexander Crum—appointed Collector of Ports to universal handwringing in white Charleston by Teddy Roosevelt, then later to the ambassador’s post in Liberia. His life and works are forgotten today; the lot where his handsome mansion stood is now a College of Charleston parking lot near the corner of St. Phillips and Calhoun. So yes, Crum would definitely be an ideal vehicle for remembering and reinterpreting Charleston’s twentieth century past. But the community would not be satisfied unless Crum were wearing a suit and standing on a block of stone. And they’d want that block of stone to bear a tablet that would explain—not evoke, explain—his, and their, history.

And that desire is entirely justified. This is a community whose story has never been told, whose history has never had a monument, so it wants the kind of monument it understands. The kind that towers over Citadel Square like John C. Calhoun—that aims its guns at the crumbling battlements of Fort Sumter. Artists, a visually overprivileged lot, scorn such treatments as vacuous and perfunctory. Bedtime stories. War stories. Bah, humbug! We demand monumental art that fires the imagination the intellect...our imaginations...our intellects. But as David Hammons discovered in 1991 when the community objected to his vision for the *House of the Future*, what fires us quite often fails to speak to the people we’d most like to conceive as our audience.

I loved being a part of the Stakeholder’s Forum, talking with, laughing with, stimulated by people like Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Nina Felshin, Moshekwa Langa, and Andy Pekarik. I had arrived in Charleston as I always do—clenched, angry, insecure behind my

defenses, girded for battle. Seeing *Secret Histories* was like having my temples rubbed by the hand of grace. I felt peaceful, healed. And Thursday’s visits with Ed Ball and Al Alston only deepened the calm in my spirit.

But on Saturday—as in that quick exchange between Jeffrey and Liz at Middleton Place—I found myself challenged in ways I didn’t imagine and in assumptions I didn’t know I possessed. I don’t have the answers yet to the questions that were raised for me—but I do know this. The efforts of Spoleto to engage Charleston’s black community have touched lives that were meant to be excluded forever from the processes of myth—and meaning-making. And this has changed things—for the better—in a city that it’s easy to think of as cursed.

Al Alston is making art and speaking to neighbors who understand exactly what *Al’s Door* is saying. Harry Noisette—descendant of great 18th and 19th century nurserymen—is making the Eastside bloom. And people at the school district are talking to people at Drayton Hall are talking to people on the Eastside are talking to the Director of Spoleto. And no, none of it will stop the short-sighted development that’s turning one of the last pockets of Gullah culture in Charleston County into a version of Disney’s Celebration, U.S.A., on Daniel Island, but slowly, incrementally thought processes are changing.

We’re a biblical people in Charleston and there is an appropriate quotation for the processes Spoleto has set in motion: *by their fruit ye shall know them*. The seeds planted are taking root in sandy soil, fighting their way to the sun through a salt spray that kills almost everything it touches, and yet they grow. And still they thrive. And the fruit is good and sweet to eat.

GEORGE MCDANIEL
Director, Drayton Hall

The cemetery dedication at Drayton Hall, as part of Lonnie Graham’s project, calls to mind the power place. This place is a sacred African American historical site that has engaged the life of a part of the community. In this place, there was the mourning of loved ones as well as the celebration of life. These kinds of traditional practices can still be felt in the oral histories of Richmond Bowens, whose ancestors lived here, who worked here until 1997, and who died the following year and was buried in that cemetery.

Lonnie Graham, in his eloquent opening remarks, explained why he selected this place. It was because it symbolized the lives and works of thousands of African-Americans across the South and the nation whose work has gone unrecognized in so many respects. They were at the bedrock of the American economy, based in large part on the rice and cotton cultivation that built the South and the nation. To look at the landscape today is to see a blank page, but as you look harder and open your minds and ears, you begin to hear the stories. What Lonnie was talking about was the need to tell the story of those who have been forgotten and left out of history, and to pass on this story. The need to capture or document these stories is our responsibility and to see to it that they are, indeed, passed on. That’s what we witnessed on the site at the cemetery. Such places inspire us and equip us to tell stories in ways that books cannot.

The experience of the cemetery had an effect on everybody there. So as I look back at that event, the power of place that we collectively and individually shared was so important. In that moment at the cemetery, we became engaged participants contributing toward the making of the commemoration. Lonnie arranged for a group of grave markers, the sculptural work of Thaddeus Mosley, to be placed at the site. This art was the instrument that gave us something around which to organize. Its sculptural symbolism and simplicity, rooted in African traditions, helped orient us in a way that—without it—we would have not become drawn together in with a common purpose. Its implication for us was that it helped give voice to different perspectives of this place, telling a story that is monumental in an intimate way. It provided something to spark our imagination and reflect upon as a communal expression. It became a reason for us to gather on the site, and this further enhanced the meaning of the place through performance. And on that day, it took us to another level of experience, one which we hadn’t expected. Not everyone was moved in the same manner ; some people felt that the history of African-Americans buried there may not have been a part of their personal heritage. But as a

result of this event, people came away with a deeper sense of compassion. This was a very powerful tribute made possible by the art. And its multiple effects are something we cannot easily measure because the impact is not only temporal, but also life-changing.

This recent initiative at the cemetery has exposed us to different ways of engaging history—one that is contemporary and inclusive. The effort of interpreting and educating the public about the history of African-Americans on our site at Drayton Hall has been an ongoing project, involving oral histories from descendants, research of documents and photographs, and archeological excavations on the grounds of the plantation. We are presently involved in a state initiative to improve the teaching of history within schools by working directly with teachers. Our goal is inform teachers how to use their local cultural and historical resources in order to connect their students to their heritage. Art, cemeteries, oral histories, and historical buildings and landscapes will all serve as important references for how to do that. We will be having workshops with teachers, and the cemetery will remain one of those key resources to draw upon and will be used to illustrate

the information that is available in most communities throughout South Carolina. There are stories that need to be documented and passed on. One can see from just one event of "Evoking History" that there is a kind of rippling effect.

On another occasion in "Evoking History," during the floating symposium discussion aboard the *Schooner Pride*, Charleston harbor served as a beacon or blank canvas upon which others could paint different stories of history over time. Or, put another way, the harbor can be seen as a stage where theatrical scenes of the past could be acted out over time. If you looked at it as a landscape tableau of five hundred years ago, there would have been dugout canoes and the presence of Native Americans; in the 1700s you would have seen vessels coming from Europe and Africa. During slavery in Charleston, the vessels were piloted and crewed by African-Americans because they could read the water like a landscape. For many African-Americans, the water was a living landscape, not a blank canvas. My point is that there are a series of such stories.

A major aspect of that are the stories of African-Americans who have been displaced from the water just as they have been displaced from the landscape. In the Lowcountry, African-Americans people had access to the marshes and waterway as part and parcel of their culture. As a result of their displacement from their land holdings along the water, they no longer have the same access to the sea. In and around Charleston harbor one hundred years ago, one would have seen scores of African-Americans at work in boats, large and small, or on the docks, or building boats or making nets, but not anymore. In a way, this is a metaphor for what has happened over time: so many of the islands and communities in the area have been taken over by developers and turned into resorts or sub-divisions.

Hilton Head is a perfect example of the displacement of the traditional African-American community. Unfortunately, this history is fading fast as people move away and the old people pass on without their history being recorded. It's sad that oral history has the longevity of one generation because if it's not passed on, it dies with that generation. Oral history has to be passed on or documented in some way.

Creating monuments can contribute to keeping the memory of history alive. However, sculptural symbols are sometimes not effective. Speaking as a Vietnam veteran, the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* by Maya Lin has been much more effective than the figurative sculpture of soldiers created on the same ground marking the same event. Its abstraction has allowed for a more personal approach to commemoration. By making something symbolic, it can capture the spirit or mood of the place. For instance, the debate around Denmark Vesey: we have to acknowledge what preceded him—the Stono Rebellion and other slave rebellions, some of which may gone undocumented,—which played a role in creating the spirit of resistance that has continued to the present. To focus attention on only one man is limiting; Vesey needs to be seen within the larger history of resistance of which he was a significant contributor.

The struggle to broaden the meaning of monuments has no one answer yet is universal. In the South many people don't want to deal with this part of history, whether they are white or black. So what we have to do is to interweave different histories. Technology makes it possible, giving greater access to the story of a place from multiple perspectives. So, as we document oral histories passed down to descendents, we can develop oral tapes that comprise recollections of the same place from different points of view.

At Drayton Hall, we try to avoid putting African-American stories into a separate package. What we have been doing is to interweave the African-American story into the tours of the house, grounds, school, and public programs, and also into the staffing and gift shop. At the same time, we realize that the subject must be given more depth, so we offer a program twice daily of about 45 minutes focusing on the subject, beginning in Africa and tracing the evolution of African-American history up to the present, using artifacts, photographs, primary documents, and oral histories

specifically from Drayton Hall. It is necessary that we also develop networks with African-American organizations so that we can provide an experience that leads people elsewhere and thereby broaden people's perception of resources in their own communities and environments. People need to realize that African-American history is a part of their heritage, too, and we hope to inspire them to pursue this recognition of history within their communities. This is the story of the power of place which we were inspired to tell, and we hope that it can be passed on.

John Ploof **As we come up with different equations for what art is and what it does best we'll develop a new understanding to look toward the future.**

What if, what art does best is to allow us to consider the conflagration between white supremacy, between capitalism and patriarchy in ways that we couldn't see those things happening? What if art is the mechanism that allows our society to go there in a way that it couldn't before? Is that the art that we know? Is that what art could do best? Is that the potential that we can focus on and develop over the term of programs like this that extend over a period of time that hold within them the capacity to be developed.

What if, what art can do best is to develop a stronger critical epistemology? To look at those things in all of us to look at those things that we all have, no matter how educated we are? How do we cultivate that? It seems to me that those are the most urgent questions.

Something that Nina Felshin said yesterday was that we need to have educators involved in the development. I think that one of the moments that has stuck with me over this weekend was our brief meeting with educators. When we got on the bus and we left the educators at the meeting, I wanted the teachers to come with us and have a much longer in-depth discussion. Because then, when we're looking for community-based artists or for people who have a deep relation to the community, it's those teachers that know the stuff. They know everything about class and race, they know everything about the relationships between teachers and students and administrators. Those are the people that can really connect with young people in a way that can have a deep impact on culture in our society.

Conversation

Michael Brenson and Mary Jane Jacob

February 22, 2002

Mary Jane Jacob Our way of working seems to not be a common practice or even a known one to students today. That is, to begin by talking to an artist about what matters to us and to citizens in the given context in which we are to work; we start by engaging this, aiming for it to work for the artist and the work of art as well as for us as professionals in the art world and for the community.

Michael Brenson We have been living in the most institutional moment I can remember. In an atmosphere of so much institutional control, so much fear of artists, so much fear of the public masquerading as populism, an engagement with artists and with community and an eagerness to follow the processes shaped by those engagements, which seem to me built into a project like yours, have little chance. There is now this disconnection.

Jacob Why are we working this way? Why are we making it in the form of exhibitions? A criticism put forth to curatorial students is that their exhibition concepts appear to be a book or essay ideas instead of an exhibition, but I think the concept of "exhibition" is not open enough. Why can't something that is deep and intellectual, and multi-layered be an exhibition, of course it should exist in writing too, but why shouldn't it exist as an exhibition, too? Is an exhibition just objects and descriptions of those things, and not a platform for ideas? An exhibition can be complex, and from that complexity you can pick up threads and follow them through the reception and experience of the art. From ideas, unresolved questions, a curator seeks to manifest ideas in the form of an exhibition—an exhibition is a forum for exchange—a forum for learning and looking and thinking that is different from the essay because we have added a big component: the art experience.

For instance, a person may come to a site where there is an art project because they used to live in that neighborhood; they move into this work because they're connected to this neighborhood; if, as a curator, you're listening to them—listening is the next part of exhibition-making in order to get to reflection—you are going to be able to find something to connect to other ideas; others will start at another point, but the possibility for audiences to criss-cross in the art experience and perceive the complexity of art in context is great. I believe in Charleston that we are living in a community where people believe in art, in large part due to over twenty five years of the Spoleto Festival, and its high bar, of high quality. They also believe in their history, and the more I am there, I realize it is not a romantic fixed history, there of course are those who do want that, and many of those are people who aren't from there but maybe live there now. But it is history as power in the present that is important to them.

Brenson Their belief in art is probably connected to their sense of its ability to actually deal with or accommodate that history. Is it possible to believe in art, and to get at the basics of art, without dealing with history and stories? Isn't the necessity of art still tied up with its ability, somehow, to make room, in an unpredictable, poetic and transformative way, with where we come from and what we have been and what we need to do? When you said the people of Charleston believe in their history, that is part of it: they believe in its inescapable relationship to their present and future, so for them to keep struggling and imagining and re-imagining themselves and their worlds, there have to be ways in which they can

continually work with that history and explore and expand it. Art can be indispensable here. Particularly your way of working because within the complex textures of historical situations it makes room for process. It encourages not holding on to one's history for dear life but exposing as well as asserting it, letting one's responses and beliefs be engaged by others and also testing it and stretching its limits so that it is possible to grow.

Would you say that the discussion that took place over two or three hours on the porch last June was an art experience?

Jacob No, I don't think that was an art experience, did you? It was an experience.

Brenson It was an experience, and it was made possible by art. We needed to pass through Lonnie Graham, Neill Bogan, and Ping Chong. Their engagements with the amazing and often painful histories of Charleston, and by implication of the United States, created a ground or texture that allowed this opening up and this beginning of trust to happen. It didn't feel to me fundamentally different from a really important art experience. I don't know where I would draw the line and I'm not sure I want to.

Jacob The experience was enabled by that art, because each one of those projects was struggling with a lot of things those mattered—things that were connected within the project and across projects. So we had something to really talk about.

Brenson I don't know how convincing the projects were in themselves for me, but other people were moved, particularly by the Ping Chong performance, and I took those responses seriously. What was most important to me about those projects was the willingness to think about very difficult, often hidden realities and, by so doing to open up the difficulties and possibilities embedded within them. There was an effort, at least, to locate the traumatic and to begin to speak what had not been said. Together the projects let it be known that here is all this material that has been repressed and here is a curatorial project that can provide a forum in which it is welcome.

The affirmation of the weight and repressiveness of certain histories, and the willingness to begin to deal with them, brought people together in some possibility of community because everyone lives with some history, or histories, that they can never get out from under, never make their peace with. Part of the interest for me in your curatorial project is that I think the culture we are living in is, once again, one of denial. It is so controlled; what our government, media and corporations are willing to speak and think is so limited. While the internet, controlled by global corporations, with millions of people in their rooms alone, has been encouraged to open up, there is pressure on almost every other form of communication to close down. That you as a curator value an experience in which the primary gesture is one of personal and collective opening that can give hope for community and the political is terribly important.

Jacob Can you talk a little more about hope for the community and the political?

Brenson During the last decade I have constantly asked myself: what is possible in terms of community? What do we owe one another as human beings? What do we want from one another? What can I give to those who share roughly similar values? What does it mean to be consistently self-conscious and yet fight for what one believes in? It seemed to me that there was a possibility of really talking, of real dialogue, real communication, among the people who came together in Charleston. There was some point, some space, where all these histories could intersect without erasing any of them. Then I wondered where you could go from there? Could this develop into a situation where the people who were there could listen to one another and fight for one another in a more sustained sense? What would that fighting for one another mean? I don't know the answers. At the very least, the hope that a certain level of communication among people from such different backgrounds is possible, and the knowledge that there is a profound need for it, felt necessary.

What was so moving about that last conversation was the sense that so many people there needed insider-outsider divisions dissolved. That need for real communication among people in an actual place is widespread, I think, maybe even desperate. The culture as a whole is so much about disconnection, so much the kind of Enron, market-driven, "To hell with you! Where can I get mine." The ability of a group like that to come together, to exist in some space that doesn't have to do with the market at all, that doesn't have to prove itself to the market, seems intrinsically important now. One of the questions you were often asked about "Culture in Action" was: if it only makes a difference to 12 or 15 people, is the project justified? Right now, it would be completely justified. We are at a point of basics. In order to even get to the political, we have to first understand what need many people there felt, and how to respond to it, and what kinds of artistic and interpersonal acts make responding possible.

Jacob While the youth fellows this year are composed of only fifteen juniors and seniors, I think it will be a really important program. To do it well, we have to really invest, and that takes money and that takes time, but the effects can be manifold.

Brenson Education in museums, the way I understand it, is, by and large, a misnomer. Education departments, and we know how many good people work in them and how many visitors have been helped by them, are first of all propaganda programs. Their job is to provide information that makes it possible to appreciate the art within the institution. Within museum education, there is a whole lot of stuff that can't be questioned, that has almost no chance to be opened up, although some heads of education do find ways, in their public programming, to bring in eloquent voices and ask profound questions. Are the funders of these programs even interested in basic questions like: how do people really get affected by art? What does it mean for someone to have an experience that changes them? How can that experience be made available to them in such a way that they can make maximum use of it? What does it mean for an individual to own his or her art experience?

How much does the frame of the institution determine—and how much should it determine—that experience? If you really believe that the art experience can allow people to engage profound questions about history and power and the construction of the self and the construction of society, then you have to consider the complex, mysterious, multi-layered ways in which art works, and you have to be willing to engage in a dynamic relationship with institutions, one that is smart and respectful about what they provide but also analytical about the political and social interests they serve and why institutions support certain kinds of art, in certain kinds of ways. If you are interested in real growth and change, then you have to invest in the possibilities of thought and poetry outside institutions. And you have to stop being afraid of investing in the individual voice.

I just came back from London, where I finally saw the Tate Modern, which is almost a paradigm of the kind of museum that is so completely plugged into the culture industry, the tourism industry, the real estate development industry, every kind of industry you can imagine. It is a museum that does not seem to have any stigma of elitism, but seeing the arbitrariness of the installations and the streams of people pouring through those galleries, this endless conveyor-belt circulation, I wondered about the possibilities of intimacy and thoughtfulness and self-recognition there, and what kind of impact the mass culture museum can have on an individual life.

Jacob What about museums that are based on profound experiences, like the Holocaust Museum?

Brenson Having visited Auschwitz and Dachau and thought about the Holocaust most of my life, I have not wanted to visit the Holocaust Museum and be directed through that past as an over-determined museum experience. I did just visit the Jewish Museum in Berlin, which is probably similar to the Holocaust Museum in that its architecture and displays offer carefully framed experiences. It has clear stories that it wants to tell, and it has clear emotions that it wants people to feel and hold onto. Those stories are important, and I'm glad the museum provides a place to go for people looking for certain kinds of information. But the art it commissioned is pretty limited, and there's so little energy outward, so little room to imagine or dream. What you're trying to do in Charleston seems wary of that kind of control. When museums try to create intense but narrow experiences with loaded histories, which are usually themselves defined by horrible constriction, I wonder if they don't end up creating as much resistance as sympathy.

Jacob To imagine something different as a museum, I could see us taking that up as a touchstone for next year's "Evoking History" since a museum of slavery is in the air in Charleston...to imagine something different. In Charleston, one faction says we don't need to build a building, we have everything right here, so let's create the threads. Another contingent says: we're going to have a building, but let's let it be an open process with things that move in and out, and also connect with different social classes and time periods and it's not just a slavery museum where the museum becomes a site for family reunions, a community space, along with other kind of archival functions.

Brenson We're talking about agency aren't we? We're talking about the possibilities for agency—for ways to allow unscripted notions of power, relationships and connection to develop.

Jacob That other people can have power and their own self-agency within the institutional identity.

Brenson I think most institutions are terrified of that. I think that almost everything about corporate museum populism seems to be designed to create some kind of ersatz notion of agency that's controlled by institutional thinking.

Jacob Which is why we need to engage the notion of institutions by thinking of our work as part of that subject and not as outside it, as alternative or anti-institutional.

Brenson Absolutely. Institutions are too important. Too many indispensable people work in them. They make too much possible that we can learn from and build on. I prefer the word non-institutional to anti-institutional.

Jacob Sometimes it's extra-institutional, that has to do more with physical siting, having a broader view and application. So, museums are only one place where art happens.

Brenson I understand your reluctance to move into that anti-institutional framework, but if you don't use the term anti-institutional, are you willing to use the term resistance? And if it is resistance, doesn't it also have to be anti-institutional? Where's the line?

Jacob Resistance is an important word, a word that has meaning for the people involved in "Evoking History" in Charleston because it is about not erasing history. It connotes reform, it can transform. It is "other," imagining and opening up other sites of culture.

Brenson What you want is constructive. It's about appreciating multiple voices and opening up possibilities, and responding to life and death needs. What do you think about the possible ramifications of these projects? Do you have an idea what you would like to have result from them five or ten years down the road? Or do you think about simply making them work in the present?

Jacob I think that there is a real worry that this place will be erased and it will become like any other place. There's something amazing because Charleston is a peninsula—not quite an island, but not just land either—and because there is a great sense of continuity in this place. The memories of these people and the connections they have with the past don't have sufficient voice.

Brenson You're talking about erasure, real erasure, real obliteration. I was just thinking as you were speaking about the notions of survival and loss that are embedded in the history of Modernism. You certainly dealt with them in your Magdalena Abakanowicz, Gordon Matta-Clark and Christian Boltanski

exhibitions. And the shift—and here we're back to museum limits—from dealing with survival and loss through objects whose content and existence struggle against forgetting to interventions in which you are working to actually affect history, rather than presenting material which people can look at and study to find personal ways of dealing with loss. It's a logical development.

Jacob What I would like is for Charleston's story to be understood as a national story, even an international story, and I don't mean because national events, like the beginning of the Civil War happened there, I mean the resonance of its story. So, part of our task is to stop the bulldozers, part of it is to honor the people who were there, and part of it is to show that art can be a way of representing and also thinking about this larger subject.

Brenson Paul Virilio talks about the destruction of the here—which for him is connected to the body—for the complete and absolute presence of the now. To resist this erasure, the here, and with it the sense of place, is crucially important. He talks about the importance of making contact. "To regain contact," those are the words he uses after he talks about supersonic planes crossing vast spaces so quickly that we are losing the size of the world and, therefore, feel increasingly imprisoned in it. You talk about conversations. It's amazing that making contact with real people, with actual bodies, in real time, in historically loaded situations, has become a radical act. The conversations you developed in Charleston, with people from around the country and abroad, both revealed and created Charleston's story as a national and international one. The revealing and creating have to continue, deepen.

In that passage Virilio spoke about losing "the size of nature."

A lot of people know that the way the earth is treated has had broad political ramifications, and that there is a connection between the way human beings treat the earth and the way they treat one another and memory and history. The Bush administration's ecological insensitivity is part and parcel of its arrogance and privilege and its mentality of denial.

Jacob We're talking about something that doesn't get summed up in a year, in a single show, but our funding support systems don't allow us as artists and curators to undertake an open-ended investigation over long stretches of time. Yet the struggle in undertaking these questions is worthwhile and arriving at clarity of questions in the time we have is at least some success.

Brenson Free space where people are free to engage and be engaged—that's so important now.

Jacob Well, just to use that word *free* is very interesting: to bring that into this place, where emancipation and freedom have meant so much. How do you connect those concepts? I think we can do that.

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