

E Pluribus Unum

In trying to get a sense of Indianapolis for this commission I drew from my own experience of extended visits to the city while creating my exhibition at the Indianapolis Museum of Art in 1993. During those visits I did informal research on its history, and talked with many of its residents. During my more recent visits to Indianapolis I focused on The Trail and its neighborhoods, trying to get a sense of the city's overall physical organization from a city planning perspective. In a very unscientific way I tried to discern the matrix of the landscape of cultures and communities. I became interested in how all these environments were or were not connected to the downtown city center at this moment in time, and in the past.

From the beginning, the project was a conceptual one. My memory of The State Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument became a focal point for my artwork. When I think of Indianapolis I think of its war memorials and monuments, particularly The State Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument (hereafter called: The Monument). These stone and bronze memorials are landmarks that distinguish Indianapolis from other cities, in my mind. The Monument is a marker, from which I could get my bearings as I moved in and around the city. I could not help but juxtapose the historic Monument against the contemporary communities of Indianapolis. Due to this, perhaps, I became interested in the representations of history and humanity, valor and heroism, contained in The Monument.

I could not help but notice the African American man depicted on the memorial. As far as I am aware he is the only representation of a Black person of (literally) heroic proportions, if not stature, in the downtown area. His presence on the monument was less a symbol of Black pride as a symbol of Indiana's glorious part in the Civil War. In such a diverse city with a complex American history and a multitude of monuments, his lone presence seemed unfortunate, though not surprising. American monuments of this period rarely depict Blacks (good, bad, or indifferent). Here in a city of monuments it seemed like a gap, and for me, an opportunity.

Rather than creating a statue of a contemporary person as the "new heroic African American" for Indiana, it was more interesting and appropriate to reanimate the existing image. I wanted to give this nameless man a purpose and his own place in Indianapolis. It is also a vehicle for the populous to notice him, ask the questions I have asked, and to ponder the history of Indiana and Indianapolis. I'd like all to realize that monuments represent the past, but they also represent the present if the present is not addressed in a city monument. It is my hope that my sculpture would encourage the citizens of Indianapolis to decide for themselves what would best represent "Black Indiana" to the world, in future monuments.

I wanted to juxtapose a new and contemporary meaning for the Black character: instead of sitting beneath the other figures, chains dangling from his upraised arm, he would sit alone with his

upraised arm holding a flag. The flag would be a collage of the many flags of Africa and the African Diaspora. It would be a new design referencing both African American quilts and African fabric, where all flags would be abstracted together. The work would be titled "E Pluribus Unum" which is on the shield behind the original Black figure, but for my sculpture the phrase would reference Africa and the Black Diaspora. It is one of the reasons that I was thrilled with the proximity of the location to the original monument downtown. A grand statement in the idiom of the original was needed to foster a thought-provoking dialogue with the grand statement of the Monument.

My sculpture, "E Pluribus Unum", is about an obvious shift in meaning. It is a way for Indianapolis to acknowledge that symbols matter. This artwork symbolizes that Indianapolis is different now than it was then. It brings African Americans to the center of the city as full partners. As the flag reveals, it connects the African Americans of Indianapolis with the rest of the world, as well.

The site is currently empty and is in need of a point of interest. Due to the scale and style of the site's municipal building the empty site calls out for a major statement. "E Pluribus Unum" is sited so it can be viewed prominently from all directions. As you pass by it on The Trail it will serve as a visual and physical respite point. There is seating already in place at the site, with nothing to look at. "E Pluribus Unum" will have seating of its own as well, surrounding the sculpture, also acting as a pedestal. The pedestal will share the design idiom of the site. The three-tier pedestal will rise approximately six feet above ground and support the limestone base and figure (*see computer renderings for scale and orientation*). It will be sheathed with the same granite tiles that currently cover the site. A lighting scheme is being developed around the site to illuminate the sculpture. "E Pluribus Unum" will become a familiar sight during the day and a majestic one at night.

The sculpture will be made of Indiana limestone, to mimic the original and reinforce the relationship with its history. I had pictured it in the exact scale of the original, but I reduced the scale to four times life size due to the budget and to a degree, the site. The flag would be designed by me, but made by professional flag makers. Though sturdy, I would have several made so as the flag wears another could replace it. The Marine Corps War Memorial (also known as the Iwo Jima Memorial) inspired the design and placement of the flagpole. I find it fitting that this monument's flagpole be designed and fabricated by the same foundry in Brooklyn. Should additional funding become available and the sculpture graduates to monument status, the base is engineered with removable pieces of granite slabs. These slabs can be removed; etched or sandblasted off-site and replaced with little effort.

My vision for "E Pluribus Unum" is that it becomes a living part of the community. To that end, I have developed a series of programs and projects that will involve the community in the process

of creating a monument that will be empowering and engaging while infusing a sense of ownership.

The first step in this process was to conduct outreach to the African American community through a variety of cultural and institutional organizations throughout Indianapolis. Some of these institutions included the Bethel AME Church and other religious institutions, Indianapolis Urban League, NAACP Greater Indianapolis, Madame Walker Theater, Indianapolis Black Chamber of Commerce, Indiana Black Expo, Freetown Village and the Indianapolis Museum of Art whom I have a relationship with and is interested in collaborating with me in some capacity of this project.

The community, once identified, will be invited to a series of presentations and discussions about my work, the sculpture and the role monuments play in our society. The first of this type of presentations was conducted in February 2009. Though well attended, the African-American community was under-represented in the audience. This experience has taught us that outreach is paramount. We have increased our efforts and will repeat the presentations at diverse venues in the late fall of 2009.

Subsequent workshops will be held in February, March, May and July '10 depending on the level of participation and outcome of the discussions. These discussions will begin to define "Fallen Heroes" and who or what types of persons might garner such a distinction in the African American community. For instance, the names of Indiana's fallen African American war heroes, both unsung and well known, who fought in the name of freedom at home and abroad, or a local community advocate whose extraordinary sacrifice was instrumental in creating better living conditions could be etched onto the base. Thus creating a memorial in the vein of the other monuments.

Like any public artwork with strong community participation it is hard to determine the outcome of the discussions. My hope is that as a group, the community will identify preliminary names of "Fallen Heroes" that will become the first set of names to be etched into the base. The memorializing aspect of this project is not bound by the fabrication and installation schedule. This process was designed to work independently and therefore can take place after the sculpture is completed and installed.

As continued interaction and community involvement with this monument is important to me, I imagine that each year the community would come together to select a new "Fallen Hero" which will be etched into the base of the sculpture making it a living memorial. This annual event would perhaps occur during Black History Month, which takes advantage of the heightened awareness of the accomplishments of African Americans. A second component, a flag, can reflect the selected hero. Through collaboration with the Indianapolis Art Museum a request for proposal

can be distributed to local artists and designers to design a flag, which will replace the original flag created by me for a specific period of time during the year. After such time this flag could hang in a designated part of the community thus reinforcing the connection between the monument and the community.

I fully expect "E Pluribus Unum" will become a welcome addition to the family of monuments in Indianapolis. It will focus attention on the historic monuments along the Trail's route, and amplify the complexity of the African American Experience in relation to those monuments, as well.