

LETTER FROM CLAY TO WATT

# LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE MAGAZINE

1190 East Broadway, Louisville, Kentucky 40201

(502) 589-1110

Grady Clay, Editor

December 1, 1981

Hon. James G. Watt  
Secretary of the Interior  
Department of the Interior  
C Street between 18th and 19th Streets  
Washington, D.C. 20204

Dear Mr. Secretary:

It is my understanding that you have inquired about the jury and about our process for choosing the Vietnam Memorial design to be built in Washington, D.C.

I was elected chairman by that Jury, and have been authorized by them to prepare this statement to you. On behalf of the jury, I am writing to assure you of the integrity of the process by which the Memorial jury selected the design.

The winning design is a great one. We believe it should be built as designed. It reflects the precise nature of the site designated by Congress. It is aligned beautifully with the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument...a unique horizontal design in a city full of vertical "statements". It uses natural forms of earth and minerals, without attempting to dominate the site. It invites contemplation and a feeling of reconciliation. The design, by creating a place of utter simplicity and serenity, is a work of art that will survive the test of time.

Let me say at once that we the jury enthusiastically accepted the responsibility for professional judgment when asked to serve by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF). This was a rare privilege and solemn obligation for each of us. I speak for each of the eight jurymen in saying: We believe this was a great opportunity to honor those who served their country, and those who gave their lives in Vietnam.

This was a momentous occasion for us all---to undertake the professional week-long task of examining and judging 1421 entries in the Competition---the largest number in the history of design competitions.

The procedure followed is a model of its kind; and should serve as an outstanding example of a carefully-organized competition.

We approached this occasion soberly, with a profound sense of dedication. Each of us accepted the Purpose of the Memorial, as set forth by VVMF, "to recognize and honor those who served and died".

We were chosen by the directors of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, with the advice of their Professional Consultant, Mr. Paul Spreiregen, F.A.I.A, of Washington D.C. Each of us has extensive professional experience in the judging of works of art in architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design. Several have specific experience in creating and in judging works of sculpture. (Our professional biographies are attached).

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Prior to being accepted for jury service, each of us was interviewed by directors of VVMF so that they could share with us their hopes and enthusiasms for this Memorial.

Next we received--well ahead of our jurying--a packet of books and documents selected by VVMF officers, dealing with the war in Vietnam and particularly with the personal experiences of American soldiers. Reading these was part of our self-preparation for jury duty.

Prior to judging, each of us received and studied with care the fundamental documents governing the competition:

1. The Rules Booklet, which included "The Purpose and Philosophy of the Memorial"
2. The Design Program, an 18-page document containing a detailed description of the site, and design criteria set by VVMF.

These, together with supplemental maps, form a most specific set of guidelines for all entrants in the Competition. They established clearly the "rules of the road"--for both the entrants and for the Jury.

All of us know from prior jury service that a competition stands or falls on the lucidity of the program and the integrity of the judging. This Program, in our professional view was a model of clarity. And the VVMF's answers to entrants' questions were unequivocal and direct. Every entrant received a compilation of the questions and the answers. In our view, this process left no opening for any disgruntled competitor to claim later--after the fact--that the program was flawed.

Next, on April 26, ~~we~~ met with the directors, staff and volunteer advisors of VVMF in Washington. They emphasized to us their hopes for the Memorial, and the importance of our task.

On Monday, April 27, we the jury assembled at Hangar 3, Andrews Air Force Base, where the 1421 entries were arranged in long rows, each on one or more four-foot panels hung at eye level for easy viewing. Each bore a number. None was identified by name.

To give you an idea how systematically and seriously we approached the judging process, we devoted our first hour together to a review of The Program requirements. This gave each juror a final reminder of the principles by which we would be guided in our decisions.

In light of the program requirement that the memorial "will make no political statement regarding the war or its conduct" we were particularly careful to exclude any political discussion or criteria from our decision-making.

Four days were occupied with viewing, comparing, eliminating, and selecting. Each of us viewed each of the 1421 exhibits several times during this four-day process.

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By the middle of Day 2, each of us had selected a number of entries (generally less than 40) to be gathered for further examination. These, totaling 232 entries, were segregated into an enclosed section of Hangar 3 for further scrutiny.

At this point, we assembled as a group and walked slowly past each entry, pausing for discussion. As soon as we arrived at a consensus, the entry was marked for rejection or further consideration.

By this process of comparison and elimination, we had narrowed the choice to 39 entries on Day 3. These were then assembled into a group for final judging.

As we discussed and debated their comparative merits, I recall distinctly that one juror thrust his finger at one drawing and demanded "What's that?" His finger identified three capital initials drawn upon some paving blocks - in flagrant violation of the Program rule that prescribed complete anonymity of design. At once, we discarded that entry.

Our fourth day we spent in a careful discussion of the final choices - first, second & third-place winners, plus 15 Honorable Mentions required by the Program.

During this entire period (Day 1 thru Day 5) I carefully noted the significant comments of the jurors so that we would have a record of our decision-making process. (Enclosed are selected comments.)

By carefully comparing the 18 final entries, we soon arrived at a focus on three, which became clear when I polled the jury. Each of the three was quite different. At this point, we again referred to the printed Program, to be certain that our choice was in keeping with both its letter and spirit. Among the top three it had become clear, in the final hour's discussion, that "Number 1026" (which turned out to be Ms. Lin's entry) was clearly superior to the rest. It was wholly unique.

During our close study of the finalists, we read each entry's text carefully. When I read aloud the statement of Entry #1026, one juror observed, "He really knows what he is doing." This statement later turned out to be Ms. Lin's.

Before reaching a final verdict I again polled the jury, soliciting final comments. At the end of the discussion, we agreed unanimously on Winners 1, 2 & 3.

Finally, (on Day 5) I went back through my notes, extracted a cross-section of the jurymen's comments on the past four days, and wrote a first draft of our Report to VVMF. The jury considered and revised the draft, which we presented to the VVMF directors following lunch at Hangar 3. During this presentation, I read to the directors the cross-section of jurymen's quotes; and other jurymen gave their own explanations of our decision. I also read Ms. Lin's handwritten text.

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Our decision was given an enthusiastic reception by the VVMF directors. Their feelings were summed up by Mr. Jack Wheeler, a director of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, who congratulated the jury for choosing "a work of genius." When asked his opinion, Mr. Jan Scruggs, president and founder of the Fund, whole-heartedly voiced his approval.

We recommended that the realization of the design be supervised by expert engineers and others as required.

All the foregoing, Mr. Secretary, we offer to you as evidence of our dedication to the task of choosing a great memorial from the entries in this extraordinary and historic competition.

Sir, we knew the risks. In all competitions, few can be chosen, and many are the losers. Not all who lose can do so with grace. Not all winning designs can please everyone. But great art will survive.

Having given this competition the best of our professional judgment, we urge you, Sir, to do all you can to ensure the completion of this unique tribute of memorial art. Those who served and those who died in Vietnam deserve nothing less than the best.

Yours truly,



Grady Clay, Chairman

for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Jury: Costantino Nivola, James Rosati, Pietro Belluschi, Richard H. Hunt, Garrett Eckbo, Hideo Sasaki, Harry Weese