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THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

Washington, D. C.

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The Commission of Fine Arts convened at 10:20 a.m., Tuesday, July 7, 1981, at 708 Jackson Place, N. W., Washington, D. C., J. CARTER BROWN, Chairman, presiding.

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT:

J. CARTER BROWN, Chairman

~~EDWARD D. STONE, JR.~~

SONDRA G. MYERS

ALAN R. NOVAK

WALTER A. NETSCH

~~JOHN S. CHASE~~

~~HAROLD BURTON~~

STAFF PRESENT:

CHARLES H. ATHERTON, Secretary

DONALD B. MYER, Assistant Secretary

JEFFREY R. CARSON

SUE KOHLER

~~MAUREEN GORMLEY~~

~~KAREN O'MEARA~~

RICHARD RYAN

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access or OSHA access to the apartments?

MR. MOORE: Correct. We have to meet handicapped requirements.

MR. NETSCH: I think the elevation is an improvement -- the simplification.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: Fine. Can we consider it approved? Fine. Thank you.

MR. NETSCH: I understand the materials will be submitted later?

CHAIRMAN BROWN: They have to be.

We move back on track to the agenda and start with the National Park Service Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

MR. MYERS: We have the Vietnam Veterans Memorial shown here as located between the Lincoln Memorial and Constitution Avenue.

The authorizing legislation, Senate Joint Resolution 119 of the 96th Congress, passed just about a year ago. Today we have the preliminary design.

We have representatives of the National Park Service present as well as the designer, and I would like to introduce Bob Dubek who is Executive Director of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

MR. DUBEK: I am very pleased to be here today to

have the opportunity to present to you our design concept for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

As you know, this design concept is the result or the product of a national competition which we conducted which was concluded on May 1st. With me is Mr. Paul D. Spreiregen, a Washington, D. C. architect and planner, who served as our professional advisor to the competition who will explain more about the jury.

Maya Ying Lin, the winning designer, will explain the design concept.

Before I introduce them, I wish to tell you a bit about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. The Fund is a non-profit foundation which is tax exempt as a charity. It was founded by John C. Scruggs of Columbia, Maryland, who, in April 1979, -- Mr. Scruggs, in 1970, at age 19, served in combat in the Vietnam as Army Infantry.

The fund's sole purpose is the establishment of the national memorial to Vietnam veterans, and once the project is completed, the fund will be dissolved. The purpose of the memorial is to acknowledge and recognize the men and women of the Armed Forces who served in Vietnam. It is to honor their service and sacrifice. It is not to make any political statement or statement regarding the U. S. policy in conducting the

war.

The fund is directed and largely staffed by Vietnam veterans. Mr. Scruggs is President. Colonel Donald Schale, who retired from the Marine Corps, is Executive Vice President.

Our fund raising has been directed in-house by experienced fund raisers. Total contributions have exceeded \$1.5 million to date.

I myself am the Project Director. I am a Vietnam veteran and an attorney. I am experienced in contract law, corporate law and construction law. I am advised by volunteers, who include a professional engineer and a real estate developer.

At this time, I would like to introduce Mr. Spreiregen.

MR. SPREIREGEN: Mr. Chairman, members of the Commission, you know the design. I will be very brief. I want to make just three points regarding it. The first is that the question of an appropriate memorial that we felt was one that really deserved to be addressed by all Americans. Therefore, the competition was open literally to anyone, any American citizen 18 years of age or older was eligible to compete.

Regarding the design itself, the memorial fund, the jurors and yourselves, have really, I think, two major questions to ask. One is the selection of a design that is appropriate

to that site, something that is in context. In our design program and in the instructions that we conveyed to the jury, we asked them to be fully mindful of the visual presence of the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial which were not to be challenged.

The question of contextural architecture, which many are conscious of. More difficult is the third point, the question of what would be an appropriate memorial for this circumstance. Searching in history, there are, of course, memorials to soldiers, to soldiers who were lost, to tragedies such as memorials in the South to soldiers in the Civil War or World Wars I and II, memorials to tragedies such as monuments to the deported or indeed Hiroshima, more recently the memorial to the battleship ARIZONA.

There may be, but I have not been able to find, an example of a memorial that is a precedent for this one. Here is a problem of honoring the memory of young Americans, mostly young, who served their country out of a sense of duty, focusing more on those who died in service to their country in a cause that will remain a question probably forever.

One of the points that the jury made in selecting this design was -- one of the issues they deliberated was whether indeed any symbolic memorial would be appropriate, and

their answer was no, that a symbol tends, whatever it may be, representational or abstract -- that any symbol would tend to arrest thought rather than to arouse it and expand it.

With that in mind, we would like to introduce to you Maya Ying Lin, the winning designer of the competition, and to have her describe with some pictures how she saw this.

MS. LIN: I will read to you the statement I submitted along with the design. It is a walking experience.

Walking through this park, the memorial appears as a rift in the earth -- a long polished black stone wall, emerging from and receding into the earth. Approaching the memorial, the ground slopes gently downward and the low walls emerging on either side, growing out of the earth, extend and converge at a point below and ahead.

Walking into the grassy site contained by the walls of the memorial, we can barely make out the carved names upon the memorial walls. These names, seemingly infinite in number, convey the sense of overwhelming numbers, while unifying those individuals into a whole. For this memorial is meant not as a monument to the individual but rather as a memorial to the men and women who died during the war as a whole.

The memorial is composed not as an unchanging monument, but as a moving composition, to be understood as we move

into and out of it; the passage itself is gradual, the descent to the origin slow, but it is at the origin that the meaning of this memorial is to be fully understood. At the intersection of these walls, on the right side, at the wall's top, is carved the date of the first death. It is followed by the names of those who have died in the war in chronological order. These names continue on this wall, appearing to recede into the earth at the wall's end. The names resume on the left wall as the wall emerges from the earth back to the origin where the date of the last death is carved, at the bottom of this wall. Thus the war's beginning and end meet, the war is "complete," coming full circle, yet broken by the earth that bounds the angle's open side, and contained within the earth itself. As we turn to leave, we see these walls stretching into the distance, directing us to the Washington Monument, to the left, and the Lincoln Memorial to the right, thus bringing the Vietnam memorial into historical context. We, the living, are brought to a concrete realization of these deaths.

Brought to the awareness of such a loss, it is up to each individual to resolve or come to terms with this loss. For death is, in the end, a personal and private matter, and the area contained within the memorial is a quiet place, meant

for personal and private matter, and the area contained within this memorial is a quiet place, meant for personal reflection and private reckoning. The thick granite walls, each 200 feet long and 10 feet below the ground at their lowest point (gradually ascending toward ground level), effectively act as a sound barrier, yet are of such a height and length so as not to appear threatening or enclosing. The actual area is wide and shallow, allowing for a sense of privacy, and the sunlight from the memorial's southern exposure along with the grassy park surrounding and within its wall, contribute to the serenity of the area. Thus this memorial is for those who have died and for us to remember them.

The memorial's origin is located approximately at the center of this site, its legs each extending 200 feet toward the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. The walls, contained on one side by the earth, are 10 feet below the ground at their point of origin, gradually lessening in height, until they finally recede totally into the earth at their ends. The walls are to be made of hard polished black granite, with the names to be carved in a simple Trajan letter, three-fourths inch high, allowing nine inches in length for each name. The memorial's construction involves recontouring the area within the wall's boundaries so as to provide for an easily accessible

descent, but as much of the site as possible should be left untouched, including trees. The area should remain a park for all to enjoy.

MR. NETSCH: I have no questions.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: Do we have anyone who would like to speak to this from the community?

(Statement to be inserted by the Commission.)

CHAIRMAN BROWN: Do we have any other comments from the community?

Well there are three points raised in the last testimony that go to very specific elements, and perhaps we could ask the people submitting the design to address them, the question of houses, handicapped access and drainage.

Can anyone speak to those?

MS. LIN: As far as handicapped access, so far we have a 50-foot plateau, 150-foot slope. From 150 to 10 you have a one to 15 grade. Handicapped access is one to 12.

As far as the grassy slope is concerned, it is a very gradual descent meant to fit into the contours of the site. And I have been considering whether to put a path in, as to how heavy the grass will be, if it can withstand people walking through it. If not, to design a path into it so we will not have a mud slide.

As far as the top is concerned, yes, it is a problem. It is a 10-foot drop. There are ways in which you can create a physical barrier without making it into a visual barrier. As I was walking around by the Jefferson Memorial, I noted there is no ^awelling around the Tidal Basin and it is about a six-foot drop. So I feel something can be done, designed into the earth to stop someone, to make them aware of the stop. If

they wanted to jump over it, there is still nothing we can do.

MR. NETSCH: Do you mean a clevis adjacent to the wall, sort of like a ha-ha wall that would make you aware of the drop before you came to it? Is that what you were talking about?

MS. LIN. Yes. A physical barrier that is not a visual barrier, something that walks into the earth.

MR. DUBEK: It was the opinion of Mr. ^{Weiss} Weiss, one of our jurors, from his experience in Washington, the drainage problem could be solved either with existing -- I don't know the exact terms. But the difference in elevation or by perhaps a pump system. We have been in the process of putting together the professional team, and from our conversations with the two structural engineers, they do not see the drainage problem as one that is insoluble.

MR. NETSCH: We also visited the site and we, too, are aware of the access problem and believe you will have to come to us when you come with the final materials, if this is approved, with some means, I think, of being able to get a large number of wheelchairs down either through some kind of material that the grass grows through or in some manner, to the designer's and the Committee's acceptance. It is a design element and I feel we have to be a participant in that final

decision.

So I am asking, Mr. Chairman, is this what we call a preliminary presentation?

CHAIRMAN BROWN: It is conceptual approval.

MR. NETSCH: Having spoken to this, may I speak to that?

As we gather from the testimony we heard today, there is going to be multiple opinions about memorials, and ever since ^{Horatio Greenough} Harry Shogreno, we have had multiple opinions about memorials in America, especially in Washington.

I have to speak honestly as a member of the community who was opposed to this war, but a member of the Committee who also has great respect for those who were lost in the service of their country. I also have a feeling that of all the wars that we have ever been involved in, this is one in which enlisted men -- and as an enlisted man, I find the quiet symbolism of the P^FSC stripe extremely appropriate and not minimal or artificial or insignificant, subliminal reference, and I consider that a rather handsome recognition from the soldiers of Washington's time, to the Washington Monument, to the soldiers of the South and the North of Lincoln's time, for our catastrophe in the Civil War. So I do not think it is minimal or inappropriate. I think it is modest in those

marvelous ways in which modesty can be appropriate.

Those of you who have seen the memorial behind Notre Dame in Paris which ends down at the Seine, can realize that out of a very simple set of walls and a setting, a great ambience between the observer and nature can be achieved.

I think this selection is most appropriate and I think we will see this realized to accommodate the goals, and I wish to support both the designer and the jury for their thoughtfulness in the solution.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: Thank you very much.

Do we have other comments from members of the Commission?

MS. MYERS: I would just like to say it is an eloquent and beautifully simple design.

MR. NOVAK: I would like to congratulate the designer. All of us there today were struck by the way in which you do what appears to be a very simple solution, captured the problem of the site and also present something which we think, if the execution matches the concept, will really be a very moving memorial.

CHAIRMAN BROWN: I certainly concur with my colleagues. The word nobility was used in the comments that were given and I think that that is the great hallmark of this design. We do

not have an established religion so we do not have a Westminster Abbey. The closest thing to it is as the symbological heart of what this country is about is our National Mall. To have a site on that mall for a memorial which is near the other monuments and is as nice a piece of real estate that one could desire to have such a memorial on. It is an understatement of the sensitivity to which it recognizes both those monuments and has taken part in the landscape of Constitution Gardens and is highly commendable.

We look forward to pursuing the specifics further and we give the Commission's blessing to the jury and to the designer.

Thank you very much.

PADC - Intersection of Pa. & Constitution avenues

MR. ATHERTON: I thought we might take a look at the slides of the last presentation. I thought we might run through the slides and get the drawing out and then there will be a presentation by a representative of the architectural firm.

You will recall this is the initial solution. The principal feature of which was an island that extended out into the right of way of Constitution Avenue and carried a tree line on Pennsylvania Avenue across the vista of Constitution Avenue. A similar extension was made on Constitution