



The 9-11/World Trade Center Memorial

By Jesse Kaddy

The University of Tampa
Vol 2, Yr 2007

Most agree that the destruction of the World Trade Center on Tuesday, September 11, 2001 requires some form of a memorial. On this day, the Twin Towers and all other buildings associated with the W.T.C. toppled to the ground as hijackers slammed American Airlines flight 11 (8:46 a.m.) and United Airlines flight 175 (9:03 a.m.) into their targets, the North and South World Trade Center Towers. The massive loss of life resulting from the incidents totaled 2,749 people. This figure includes people who worked in the buildings, as well as visitors, tourists, and—tragically—many of the rescue workers who arrived on the scene to help.

The selection of a memorial concept and design has required an international search. Artists from all over the world submitted more than 5000 entries. Ultimately, a jury selected Michael Arad's design for the memorial, which is currently under construction and due to be completed in 2009. The competition for the design, however, and the design itself, sparked significant controversy across the nation. The goal here is to describe the temporary W.T.C. memorials that preceded the selection of Arad's design, the competition for the permanent design, and the debates surrounding Arad's specific project. ¹

The earliest vestiges of what can be called a memorial emerged the day the attacks occurred. In the hours and days following the destruction, thousands of people in downtown Manhattan frantically posted photocopied pictures of their missing loved ones in hopes of locating them. The first official memorial was seen a few blocks north of what has come to be called Ground Zero from March 11th to April 13th 2002. Called *Tribute in Light* (Fig. 1), this memorial consisted of 88 separate beams of light that combined to form two pillars that projected towards the sky and resembled the towers themselves. So intense were the pillars that they could be seen from outer space. This temporary installation was widely praised and viewed as an appropriate and uplifting memorial.

Although *Tribute in Light* was aesthetically pleasing and universally appropriate, it could not match the scope of what happened on September 11th. Citing the need for an integrated revitalization and reconstruction of lower Manhattan, New York State Governor George Pataki and then-New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani created the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation. The primary goal of the L.M.D.C. is to ensure that "Lower Manhattan recovers from the attacks and emerges even better than it was before," including the building of a permanent memorial to the events of September 11.

The most important effort put forth by the LMDC, as stated on their website, is the "creation of a permanent memorial honoring those lost, while affirming the democratic values that came under attack on September 11." ² The LMDC appointed a diverse jury to choose an appropriate memorial. This jury included artists and collectors associated with public art, including Chinese-American artist Maya Lin, art consultant Nancy Rosen, Public Art Fund president Susan Freedman, Studio Museum in Harlem director Lowery Sims, and sculptor Martin Puryear. Julie Menin, a downtown resident, Paula Grant Berry a representative for the victims' families, and city and state officials Patricia Harris and Michael McKeon were also on the jury. Others included the historian for the memorial James E. Young, architects Enrique Norten and Michael Van Vakenburgh, and the president of the Carnegie Corporation Vartan Gregorian, who also served as the chair and the spokesmen for the jury.



Figure 1

Tribute in Light, Various Artists

This jury decided to set forth several guidelines for those interested in submitting designs for the project. The jury specified the following criteria in their mission statement: “space must be provided for contemplation”; there must “be a separate resting place for unidentified remains”; the tower footprints must be “made visible”; the memorial’s subject and audience must “be defined and honored as explicitly as possible”; each victim must “be recognized individually”. 3

At a public forum to discuss these guidelines, representatives of firefighters, office workers, local residents, and victims’ families all called for separate forms of recognition for their respective parties. As might be expected, the proceedings of the forum were filled with strong emotion and personal opinions. This outcry foreshadowed the controversy and criticism surrounding the winning entry in the months to come.

What followed was broadly described as “the biggest design competition in history” 4 as over 5000 entries from 63 countries were reviewed. To keep the jurors mentally and physically focused on the task; a press embargo was imposed during the extent of the deliberation. It is approximated that the jurors spent “several hundred hours” 5 reviewing submissions before they came to a decision.

Although the deliberation process was arduous, the jurors reached their desired outcome. They chose the design of a “young unknown who could be seen to be independent of all power politics and financial interests.” 6 The winning design was that of a 34-year-old native Israeli, Michael Arad. Arad’s winning design *Reflecting Absence* (Figs. 2, 3) features two reflecting pools recessed 30 feet below surface level in the footprints of the towers with water cascading down the vertical walls. Arad proposes that the names of those lost in the attacks be inscribed randomly on short walls surrounding each footprint in order to suggest the indiscriminate way in which they died. Vartan Gregorian, the chair of the LMDC jury, commended the design’s capacity to “make the gaping voids left by the Towers’ destruction the primary symbol of loss.” 7



Figure 2 Reflecting Absence, Arad/Walker

Those who visit the site will descend below ground via ramps running parallel to each footprint. This will allow visitors to look through glass walls for a view of the falling water and the world above. An update to the original design includes an underground “interpretive center” 8 which will house relics from the attacks, including a crushed and charred fire truck, mangled pieces of reinforced steel, and surreal photographs of the events. Other undergrounds elements include a sky-lit room directly under the north reflecting pool, as well as a room holding the remains of unidentified victims.

On the west side of the site will lie a ramp that leads 70-feet down to bedrock, another feature requested by the public. On this bedrock rests the slurry wall, the only remaining structure of the W.T.C. This remaining foundation wall will allow visitors to envision the enormous size of the tower buildings.

Among many problems cited in the original design, the landscaping looked decidedly sparse. To fix this issue, renowned landscape architect Peter Walker was brought in to completely rework the greenery. Walker’s design calls for a lush grove of deciduous trees to form a vast park encompassing the four-acre memorial. The jury praised Walker’s work, saying that the greenery symbolizes “Consoling Regeneration.” 9

Contrasting Peter Walker's known professionalism is Michael Arad's relative inexperience. The only architectural design experience he held prior to becoming the memorial's lead designer was a three-year period at Kohn Peterson Fox Associates. Arad was born in Israel and raised in Israel, the U.S., and Mexico by his father, who was the Israeli ambassador to the United States. After finishing his tour of duty with the Israeli defense force in 1991, Arad moved to the United States where he went to Dartmouth College before studying architecture at Georgia Technical Institute. Arad now resides in lower Manhattan.

When *Reflecting Absence* was publicly unveiled as the winner of the design competition, Arad looked visibly star-struck at the site of the Governor and Mayor, his deeply modest nature leaving him the perfect candidate for the barrage of media coverage that would follow. His young and optimistic nature makes him perfectly suited to lend his abilities to creating a memorial that does not serve a third party's agenda and is universally appropriate. However, simply because Arad had impeccable credentials did not ensure that his design would be well accepted.



Figure 2 Reflecting Absence, Arad/Walker

Criticism arose immediately after the public unveiling of *Reflecting Absence*. The day following the presentation, a local, albeit unscientific, poll showed that thirty-nine percent of New York City residents supported the statement “I don’t like it at all—they should start over.”¹⁰ Even when *Reflecting Absence* was one of eight semifinalists, former mayor Rudy Giuliani requested that the jury should “Start again from scratch.”¹¹

What was it about all eight of these designs, and specifically Arad's design, that garnered such public outcry? Is it our modern idea of what a memorial should be? This all may have started with Maya Ying Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (1982, Washington, D.C.). The name-inscribed wall requires visitors to “possess the skills of a census taker”¹² in order to understand it, due to its comprehensive listing of names of all of those who either died or who were missing in action during the Vietnam War. Following the construction of this memorial came many others that utilized the same approach. For instance, the New England Holocaust Memorial (Boston; Stanley Saitowitz, 1995) provides the six million names of those who died during the persecutions that occurred during the Nazi regime. The *Oklahoma City National Memorial* (Oklahoma City; Butzer Design Partnership, 2000), provides the 168 names of those who lost their lives during the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building Memorial in 1995. The Pentagon Memorial (Washington, D.C.; Julie Beckman and Keith Kaseman), which remembers those who died during a separate airplane strike on the same day as the attacks in New York City, will open in 2008 and will include 184 names. Now, the World Trade Center Memorial will show 2,982 names.

The trend with today's monuments, obviously, is to try to recognize each of the fallen individually instead of expressing a powerful, uplifting, message as seen in most monuments of old. Consider the grandeur of the *Washington Monument* (Washington, D.C.; Robert Mills, 1885) and the *Lincoln Memorial* (Washington, D.C.; Henry Bacon and Daniel Chester French, 1922). These monuments celebrate these two former presidents through powerful architecture, and there is no hint of mourning their death, despite the fact that Lincoln, at least, died a tragic death at the hands of John Wilkes Booth. By contrast, *Reflecting Absence*, in this author's opinion, functions as a cemetery. When visitors arrive at the site they will be confronted by a memorial that emphasizes the loss of life. They will understand the deep scars the city of New York has suffered, but they will not be shown why the events of 9-11 occurred. Nor will they be told all that we are doing as a country to prevent such things from occurring again, including tightening airport security (indeed tightening security across the board), and searching out known terrorists worldwide. Overall, uplifting messages—such as one of hope for a safer future—will not be included.

Not all criticisms of the design involve its meaning, however. In May 2006, the LMDC announced that the design would cost upwards of \$972 million dollars. This sparked a fury of media coverage that almost unanimously opposed the cost. In reaction, Governor Pataki of New York and Mayor Bloomberg of New York City initiated a cap of \$500 million dollars to complete the project. In July 2006, after cutting costs of the project proved to be exceedingly difficult, the LMDC handed construction duties over to the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the actual owners of the W.T.C. site. The Port Authority said they would stay on to construct the design so long as the LMDC is devoted to keeping the cost below \$510 million dollars.

To shore up construction costs a number of changes were made to the site. The overall feel of the memorial remains the same, as Arad's signature footprint waterfalls were required to stay largely intact. There are, however, modifications to the site that do differ from the original vision. The main differences include the drastic downsizing of the museum that was set to be part of the memorial, simplification to the layout of the visitor's center, and the relocation of name inscriptions of those lost in the attacks from underground to street level. The accumulated changes to the design are said to keep the budget in check and maintain the completion date of September 2009.

In conclusion, the LMDC jury has stayed firm in their decision to construct *Reflecting Absence*. They have made their own decisions and will not stall on the construction of the memorial. As jury member James E. Young acknowledges, "The question of whether it's too soon to build on ground zero is moot." ¹³ Since he recognizes that memorials only have a lifespan of one or two generations, they need to be built sooner rather than later. Ultimately, it may take years to flesh out the overall meaning of *Reflecting Absence* and the effect it will have on the public. Without the physical memorial, the meaning cannot be derived. Thus, the LMDC pushes on with their plan to finish by 2009.

1. This paper draws on the following sources: John Bacon and Judy Keen, "Port Authority Takes over 9/11 Memorial," USA Today (July 7 2006): 3; J.E.C. "New York Remembers with Two Temporary Memorials," Architectural Record 190.4 (2002): 28; Paula Deitz, "Down at the W.T.C.: Dissident Thoughts Amid the Fanfare and Boosterism," Architectural Record 192.2 (2004): 53-54; Deborah K. Dietsch, "9/11 Memorial Designs Lack Vision, Inspiration," USA Today (December 11 2003): 23; Richard Korman and Debra Rubin, "W.T.C. Memorial's \$972-Million Price May Prompt Redesign," Engineering News-Record 256.19 (2006): 13-13; Sam Lubell, "Reflecting Absence Chosen as World Trade Center Memorial," Architectural Record 192.2 (2004): 21-21; Peter Plagens, "Light From Ground Zero," Newsweek 139.11 (2002): 11; and Nancy Princenthal, "Absence Visible" Art in America 92.4 (2004): 39-45. In addition, a complete account of the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation's vision for the renewal of the World Trade Center site, including a description of *Reflecting Absence* can be found at www.renewnyc.org. Additional websites of interest include: New England Holocaust Memorial website: <http://www.nehm.org>; Oklahoma City National Memorial website: <http://www.Oklahomacitynationalmemorial.org>; Pentagon Memorial website: <http://memorial.pentagon.mil>; and Vietnam Veterans Memorial website: <http://nps.gov/archive/vive/home.htm>.

2. Lower Manhattan Development Corporation: <http://www.renewnyc.com/AboutUs/index.asp>, paragraph one.

3. Princenthal, 40.

4. Princenthal, 40.

5. Princenthal, 40.

6. Princenthal, 40.

7. Lubell, 21.

8. Princenthal, 39.

9. Princenthal, 39.

10. Princenthal, 41.

11. Princenthal, 41.

12. Dietsch, 23.

13. Princenthal, 42.