NOTES

The ideas in this essay are expanded in my forthcoming book *The Lure of the Local.*

1. Lawrence Grossberg, quoted in George Lipsitz, *Time Passages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. 22.

2. Ibid., p. 24.

3. Kenneth Helphand, in Kenneth Helphand and Ellen Manchester, *Colorado: Visions of an American Landscape* (Boulder, Colo.: Rinehart, 1991), pp. xxiv, xxv.

4. Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1986), p. 22.

5. Jeff Kelley, "Art in Place," in *Headlands Journal* (San Francisco: Headlands Center for the Arts, 1991), p. 34. Although I was working on this subject before I read Kelley's work on place, I have gained many insights from this important essay and its longer unpublished version.

6. John R. Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America, 1580 to 1845* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 45.

7. Rosalyn Deutsch, "Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City," in *Out There*, ed. Russell Ferguson et al. (New York: The New Museum, 1990), p. 119.

8. See, for instance, Jack Weatherford's books, including *Indian Givers.*

9. Mary Ann Bonjorni, *Leaving Is Becoming About* (Carson City, Nev.: Western Nevada Community College, 1989), n.p.

10. Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," in Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 164–65.

11. James Baldwin, "A Talk to Teachers" (1963), in *Graywolf Annual: Multicultural Literacy,* ed. Rick Simonson and Scott Walker (Saint Paul, Minn.: Graywolf Press, 1988), p. 8.

12. Lucy R. Lippard, "The Dematerialization of Art," in *Changing* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1971), p. 255.

13. Lucy R. Lippard, "Hot Potatoes: Art and Politics in 1980," *Block,* no. 4 (1981), p.17.

14. In her brilliantly concise article "Debated Territory: Artists' Roles in a Culture of Visibility," NACA Journal 1 (1992), Suzanne Lacy has offered another approach to the spectrum, diagramming practices from private to public, from artist as experiencer to reporter to analyst to activist. Of course these are not mutually exclusive, and no activist is effective unless s/he goes through the whole spectrum, beginning with lived experience.

15. In my columns devoted primarily to this subject matter in the *Village Voice*, *In These Times*, and *Z Magazine*.

16. Helen Mayer Harrison, at the symposium "Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art," organized by the California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland, November 14, 1991.

17. Lynn Sowder, at "Mapping the Terrain" symposium.

18. The title comes from a course founded at Dartington Hall in Devon, England, in the early '80s; the idea is now defunct, but it has spread to North American colleges, including Carnegie-Mellon University, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and the California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland, among others.

WHOSE MONUMENT WHERE? PUBLIC ART IN A MANY-CULTURED SOCIETY

Judith F. Baca

Using the term "public art" in an audience of many cultures brings different images to mind in each of us. Perhaps some of us envision the frescoes and statues of the Italian Renaissance or Christo's umbrellas, while others see the murals of Los Tres Grandes or the ritual sand paintings and totems of Native peoples. Someone said that the purpose of a monument is to bring the past into the present to inspire the future. Monuments may be like the adobe formed from the mud of a place into the building blocks of a society; their purpose may be to investigate and reveal the memory contained in the ground beneath a "public site," marking our passages as a people and re-visioning official history. As artists creating the monuments of the nineties, the ultimate question for us to consider is, What shall we choose to memorialize in our time?

Over the past twenty years as a public artist, I have been struck by how our common legacy in public art is derived from the "cannon-in-the-park" impulse, which causes us to drag out the rusty cannons from past wars, polish them up, and place them in the park for children to crawl over at Sunday picnics. The purpose was to evoke a time past in which the "splendid triumphs" and "struggles of our forefathers" shifted the course of history. These expositions were meant to inspire an awe of our great nation's power to assert its military will and prevail over enemies. Running our hands over the polished bronze, we shared in these victories and became enlisted in these causes. Never mind if for us as people of color they were not our forefathers, or even if the triumphs were often over our own people.

A more contemporary example of displaying cannons in the park occurred during the promenade of military weapons on the Mall in Washington, D.C., immediately after America declared victory in the Gulf War. In an exhibition prepared for American families in the adjoining Smithsonian Institution Hall of Science, a grandfatherly voice (sounding

remarkably like Ronald Reagan) soothed us into believing the war was a bloodless, computerized science demonstration of gigantic proportions. Young American men with adroit reflexes trained by a video-game culture demonstrated our superiority as a nation over Saddam Hussein through video-screen strategic air strikes.

From the triumphant bronze general on horseback—the public's view of which is the underside of galloping hooves—to its more contemporary corporate versions, we find examples of public art in the service of dominance. By their daily presence in our lives, these artworks intend to persuade us of the justice of the acts they represent. The power of the corporate sponsor is embodied in the sculpture standing in front of the towering office building. These grand works, like their military predecessors in the parks, inspire a sense of awe by their scale and the importance of the artist. Here, public art is unashamed in its intention to mediate between the public and the developer. In a "things go down better with public art" mentality, the bitter pills of development are delivered to the public. While percent-for-art bills have heralded developers' creation of amenable public places as a positive side effect of "growth," every inch of urban space is swallowed by skyscrapers and privatized into the so-called public space of shopping malls and corporate plazas. These developments predetermine the public, selecting out the homeless, vendors, adolescents, urban poor, and people of color. Planters, benches, and other "public amenities" are suspect as potential hazards or public loitering places. Recent attempts in Los Angeles to pass laws to stop or severely restrict pushcart *vendedores* from selling *elotes*, *frutas*, *paletas*, and *raspados* made activists of nonaggressive merchants who had silently appropriated public spaces in largely Latino sections of our city. *Vendedores*, loved by the people for offering not only popular products but familiar reminders of their homelands, provide a Latino presence in public spaces. Any loss of *botánicas*, *mercados*, *vendedores*, and things familiar reinforces segregation, as ethnic people disappear to another corner of the city.

Los Angeles provides clear and abundant examples of development as a tool to colonize and displace ethnic communities. Infamous developments abound in public record, if not consciousness—Dodger Stadium,

which displaced a historic Mexican community; Bunker Hill, now home to a premier arts center, which displaced another; and the less well documented history of how four major freeways intersected in the middle of East Los Angeles's Chicano communities. One of the most catastrophic consequences of an endless real estate boom was the concreting of the entire Los Angeles River, on which the city was founded. The river, as the earth's arteries—thus atrophied and hardened—created a giant scar across the land which served to further divide an already divided city. It is this metaphor that inspired my own half-mile-long mural on the history of ethnic peoples painted in the Los Angeles river conduit. Just as young Chicanos tattoo battle scars on their bodies, the *Great Wall of Los Angeles* is a tattoo on a scar where the river once ran.[1] In it reappear the disappeared stories of ethnic populations that make up the labor force which built our city, state, and nation.

Public art often plays a supportive role in developers' agendas. In many instances, art uses beauty as a false promise of inclusion. Beauty ameliorates the erasure of ethnic presence, serving the transformation into a homogenized visual culture: give them something beautiful to stand in for the loss of their right to a public presence. Two New York–based artists were selected to decorate the lobby of the new skyscraper of First Interstate Bank in downtown Los Angeles. To represent multiculturalism in Los Angeles, they chose angels from the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli near Assisi, Italy. They then tacked ethnic emblems onto the European angels, "borrowing" the pre-Columbian feathered serpent Quetzalcoatl from the Aztecs, the crowned mahogany headpiece from Nigerian masks, and the eagle's wings from our Native peoples as "emblems of a variety of cultures." These symbols replaced the real voices of people of color in a city torn by the greatest civil disorder in the United States in decades. At the dedication, which took place shortly after the rebellion (the Los Angeles riots of 1992), black and Latino children unveiled the angels in an elaborate ribbon-cutting ceremony. Hailed by the developers as a great symbol of "unity," these artifacts stood in for the real people in a city terrified of the majority of its citizens. Tragically, the $500,000 spent on this single work was more than the whole city budget

to fund public murals by ethnic artists who work within Los Angeles's diverse Chinese, African American, Korean, Thai, Chicano, and Central American neighborhoods.

No single view of public space and the art that occupies it will work in a metropolis of multiple perspectives. While competition for public space grows daily, cultural communities call for it to be used in dramatically different ways. What comes into question is the very different sensibilities of order and beauty that operate in different cultures. When Christo, for example, looked for the first time at El Tejon Pass, he saw potential. He saw the potential to create beauty with a personal vision imposed on the landscape—a beauty that fit his individual vision of yellow umbrellas fluttering in the wind, marching up the sides of rolling hills. The land became his canvas, a backdrop for his personal aesthetic.

Native people might look at the same landscape with a very different idea of beauty, a beauty without imposition. They might see a perfect order exemplified in nature itself, integral to a spiritual life grounded in place. Nature is not to be tampered with; hence, a plant taken requires an offering in return. Richard Ray Whitman, a Yaqui artist, said, "Scientifically cohesive—I am the atoms, molecules, blood, and dust of my ancestors—not as history, but as a continuing people. We describe our culture as a circle, by which we mean that it is an integrated whole."[2] Maintaining a relationship with the dust of one's ancestors requires a generational relationship with the land and a respectful treatment of other life found on the land.

Or perhaps Native peoples could not think of this area without recalling Fort Tejon, one of the first California Indian reservations established near this site in the Tehachapi Mountains, placed there to "protect" Indians rounded up from various neighboring areas, most of whose cultures have been entirely destroyed. In Christo's and the Native visions we have two different aesthetic sensibilities, as divergent as the nineteenth-century English manicured garden is from the rugged natural New Mexican landscape of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

Perhaps a less benign implication of Christo's idea is that landscape untouched by man is "undeveloped land." This is a continuation of the

concept of "man over nature" on which this country was founded, a heritage of thought that has brought us clear-cutting in first growth forests and concrete conduits that kill rivers as an acceptable method of flood control. These ideas find their parallel in the late modernist and postmodernist cults of the exalted individual, in which personal vision and originality are highly valued. As a solitary creator the artist values self-expression and "artistic freedom" (or separateness rather than connectedness). He is therefore responsible only to himself rather than to a shared vision, failing to reconcile the individual to the whole.

When the nature of El Tejon Pass—a place known to locals for its high winds—asserted itself during Christo's project and uprooted an umbrella planted in the ground, causing the tragic death of a woman who had come to see the work, Christo said, "My project imitates real life." I couldn't help musing on what a different project it would have been had the beautiful yellow umbrellas marched through Skid Row, where Los Angeles's 140,000 homeless lie in the rain. Art can no longer be tied to the nonfunctionalist state, relegated by an "art for art's sake" tyranny. Would it not have been more beautiful to shelter people in need of shelter, a gesture and statement about our failure as a society to provide even the most basic needs to the poor? Why is it not possible for public art to do more than "imitate" life? Public art could be *inseparable* from the daily life of the people for which it is created. Developed to live harmoniously in public space, it could have a function within the community and even provide a venue for their voices.

For the Mexican sensibility, an important manifestation of public art is a work by Mexican artist David Alfaro Siqueiros on Los Angeles's historic Olvera Street. This 1933 mural, painted over for nearly sixty years by city fathers because of its portrayal of the plight of Mexicanos and Chicanos in California, is currently in restoration. Siqueiros depicted as the central figures a mestizo shooting at the American eagle and a crucified Chicano/Mexicano. While this mural is becoming *museo*-fied, with millions of dollars provided by the Getty Foundation for its preservation and re-presentation to the public, it is important to recognize that the same images would most likely be censored if painted today on Los Angeles's

streets. The subject matter is as relevant now, sixty years later, as it was then. Murals depicting the domination of and resistance by Los Angeles's Latinos or other populations of color provoke the same official resistance as they did in 1933. Despite these struggles, murals have been the only interventions in public spaces that articulate the presence of ethnicity. Architecture and city planning have done little to accommodate communities of color in our city.

As competition for public space has grown, public art policies have become calcified and increasingly bureaucratic. Art that is sanctioned has lost the political bite of the seventies murals. Nevertheless, a rich legacy of murals has been produced since *America Tropical* was painted on Olvera Street by the maestro. Thousands of public murals in places where people live and work have become tangible public monuments to the shared experience of communities of color. Chicano murals have provided the leadership and the form for other communities to assert their presence and articulate their issues. Today, works appear that speak of children caught in the cross fire of gang warfare in the barrios of Sylmar, the hidden problem of AIDS in the South-Central African American community, and the struggles of immigration and assimilation in the Korean community. These murals have become monuments that serve as a community's memory.

The generations who grew up in neighborhoods where the landscape was dotted by the mural movement have been influenced by these works. With few avenues open to training and art production, ethnic teenagers have created the graffiti art that has become another method of resisting privatized public space. As the first visual art form entirely developed by youth culture, it has become the focus of increasingly severe reprisals by authorities who spend *fifty-two million dollars* annually in the County of Los Angeles to abate what they refer to as the "skin cancer of society." It is no accident that the proliferation of graffiti is concurrent with the reduction of all youth recreation and arts programs in the schools.

Working with communities in producing public artworks has put me into contact with many of these youths. On one occasion, I was called to a local high school after having convinced one of the young *Great Wall* production team members that he should return to school. The urgent

message from the boy in the principal's office said, "I need you to come here right away because I'm going to get thrown out of school again." My deal with the boy, formulated over a long mentorship, was that he would not quit school again without talking to me first. I arrived to find the principal towering over the young *cholo*, who was holding his head in a defiant manner I had seen over and over in my work with the gangs. This stance, reminiscent of a warrior, called unceremoniously "holding your mug," is about maintaining dignity in adverse circumstances. The principal was completely frustrated. "You've written on the school's walls and you simply do not have respect for other people's property. Tell me, would you do this in your own house?" I couldn't help but smile at his admonition, despite the seriousness of the situation. This boy was an important graffiti artist in his community. I had visited his house and seen the walls of his room, where every inch was covered with his intricate writings. Two different notions of beauty and order were operating, as well as a dispute about ownership of the school. The boy's opinion was that he had aesthetically improved the property, not destroyed it.

At this time the conditions of our communities are worse than those that precipitated the civil rights activism of the sixties and seventies. Fifty-two percent of all African American children and forty-two percent of all Latino children are living in poverty. Dropout rates exceed high school graduation rates in these communities. What, then, is the role of a socially responsible public artist? As the wealthy and poor are increasingly polarized in our society, face-to-face urban confrontations occur, often with catastrophic consequences. Can public art avoid coming down on the side of wealth and dominance in that confrontation? How can we as artists avoid becoming accomplices to colonization? If we chose not to look at triumphs over nations and neighborhoods as victories and advancements, what monuments could we build? How can we create a public memory for a many-cultured society? Whose story shall we tell?

Of greatest interest to me is the invention of systems of "voice giving" for those left without public venues in which to speak. Socially responsible artists from marginalized communities have a particular responsibility to articulate the conditions of their people and to provide

catalysts for change, since perceptions of us as individuals are tied to the conditions of our communities in a racially unsophisticated society. We cannot escape that responsibility even when we choose to try; we are made of the "blood and dust" of our ancestors in a continuing history. Being a catalyst for change will change us also.

We can evaluate ourselves by the processes with which we choose to make art, not simply by the art objects we create. Is the artwork the result of a private act in a public space? Focusing on the object devoid of the creative process used to achieve it has bankrupted Eurocentric modernist and postmodernist traditions. Art processes, just as art objects, may be culturally specific, and with no single aesthetic, a diverse society will generate very different forms of public art.

Who is the public now that it has changed color? How do people of various ethnic and class groups use public space? What ideas do we want to place in public memory? Where does art begin and end? Artists have the unique ability to transcend designated spheres of activity. What represents something deeper and more hopeful about the future of our ethnically and class-divided cities are collaborations that move well beyond the artist and architect to the artist and the historian, scientist, environmentalist, or social service provider. Such collaborations are mandated by the seriousness of the tasks at hand. They bring a range of people into conversations about their visions for their neighborhoods or their nations. Finding a place for those ideas in monuments that are constructed of the soil and spirit of the people is the most challenging task for public artists in this time.

NOTES

1. The *Great Wall of Los Angeles*, painted over a nine-year period by a team of inner-city youths (over 350 have been employed), is a community-based model of interracial connection, community dealings, and revisionist historical research. Each panel depicts a different era of California's history from the perspective of women and minorities. When completed, the mural will extend over one mile in the Los Angeles flood control channel.

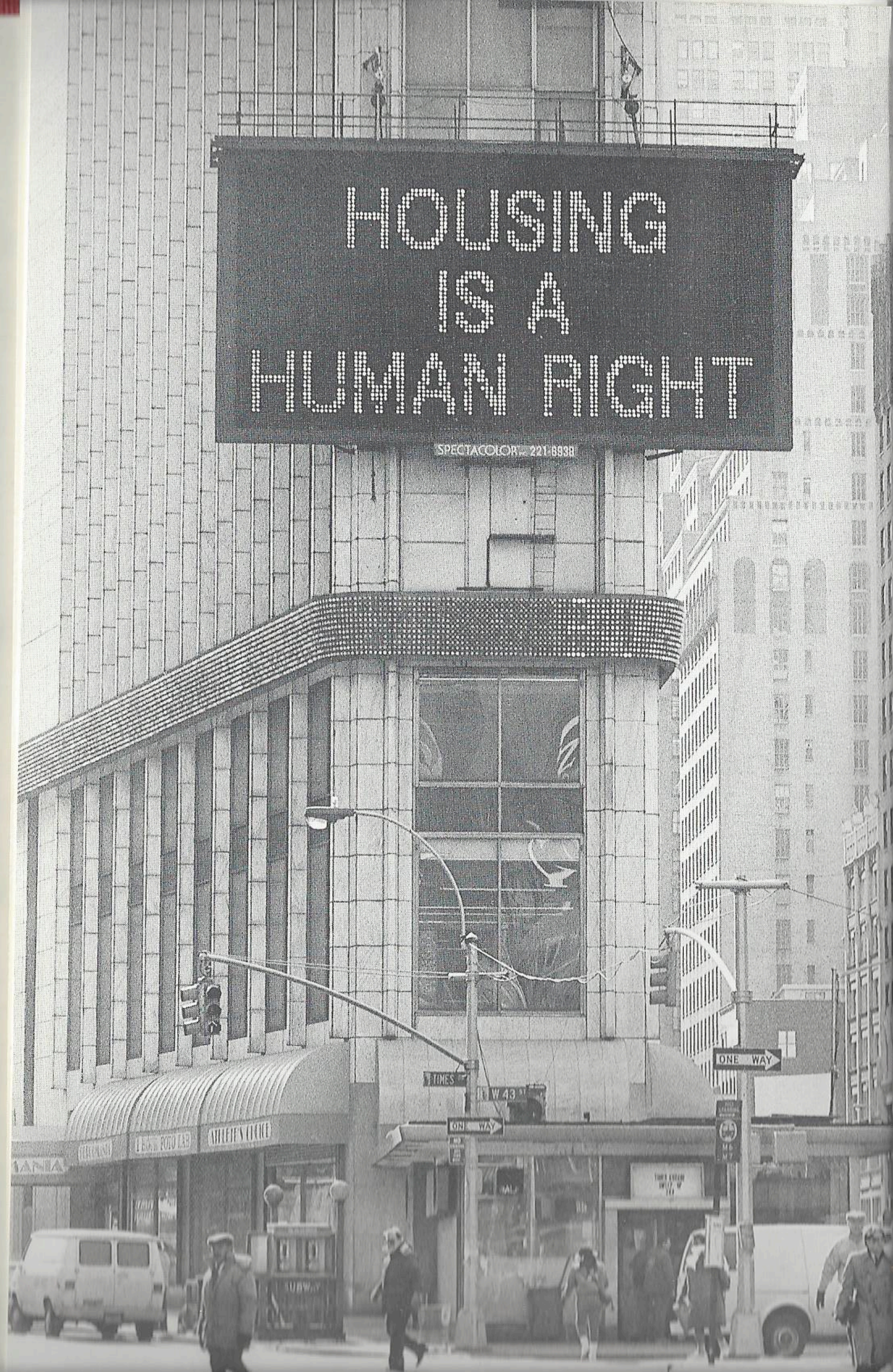
2. Richard Ray Whitman, quoted in *El Encuentro* (Venice, Calif.: Social and Public Art Resource Center, 1992).

COMMON WORK | *Jeff Kelley*

Over the past decade, those of us interested in a serious and challenging public art have heard often of the benefits of collaboration between artists and architects. The conventional wisdom is that artists bring a fresh, unencumbered sense of design to architectural projects, and that the peculiarities of the artist's ego-center somehow enliven the otherwise conventional, corporate*esque* environments architects come up with too much of the time. The artist is assumed to be freer than the architect, and freedom is assumed to be art. The architect is regarded as a relative technician by comparison, constrained as he or she is by the legal, fiscal, and material limitations of the trade. The idea is that as artists and architects "collaborate" architecture will be made more human, or at least more art-like. Art-likeness is assumed to be more humane.

Conventional wisdom aside, true collaboration among artists and architects rarely happens. Given the stereotypical ways in which we see each other, it's no wonder. What passes today for collaboration tends in fact to be a frustrating process of compromise and concession. The architect is almost always in charge, and artists, who are paid very little for their services, often must fight for recognition as members of a "design team." Moreover, in our society the conditions are not usually safe for collaboration to occur. The loss of professional identity is at stake, and in corporate America, professional identity is often all one has. Given this territorial antagonism and the bureaucratic hassles of the public sector (which is usually the designated "client" in a public art/architecture project), many artists have simply given up and gone back to the studio.

Perhaps the most typical misunderstanding architects have about artists is that they want to build "art" into the project, or that they want to make the architecture itself; that is, that artists want to *play* at being architects. There is some truth to this. Perhaps the most typical misunderstanding



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