

ART HISTORY RESEARCH PAPER

**THE *VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL*:
ART AS SOCIAL CATHARSIS**

Submitted by
Jean L. Jones
Department of Art

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
Colorado State University
Spring, 1993

THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL: ART AS SOCIAL CATHARSIS

The story of the creation of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, from its conception to its dedication, is one of steadfast determination by a handful of dedicated people who understood the necessity for healing the psychological wounds of the Vietnam War. It is the end piece, and therefore, part of the historical era known as Vietnam. As elegant a Minimalist work as it is a Conceptual work, this environmental earth-art employs feminine structures in an un-self-conscious way to deconstruct the concept of the war memorial.

However, its most significant aspect, beyond its historical representation and its artistic analysis, is how it conveys meaning. The *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* functions as a place for healing, where society, both collectively and individually, can come to experience grief, let it go, and move away from death toward life. As such, it speaks to us about our spiritually bankrupt society's need for hallowed spaces in which to mourn and sacred places in which to celebrate; where we come together as a whole rather than as a polarized or fragmented nation. The "Wall" moves art out of the realm of connoisseurship and into that of spiritual ceremony.

In psychological terms, it is not trauma which causes our deepest wounds, but repression of, or lack of resolution for the feelings generated by trauma. Feelings not expressed are repressed. And while they may be expressed, in an unsupportive environment, they cannot be resolved. Only after their validation can we experience resolution and move past the trauma and into healing. The Vietnam war was a national trauma. Everyone, those who supported it, those who opposed it, and those who were ambivalent about it, suffered from it.

It is not coincidental that the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* addresses the psychological trauma of the war; such trauma served to spark its conception by Jan C. Scruggs, the veteran who first conceived it. After graduating from high school in his native Washington D.C., Scruggs went directly to Vietnam, where between the years of 1969 and 1970, half "of his company, the U.S. Army Light Infantry Brigade, was killed or wounded."¹ Scruggs himself spent two months in the hospital. When he returned home he enrolled in college and began studying psychology. He presented the findings of his graduate work, which dealt with the psychological adjustments faced by Vietnam veterans, to a Senate subcommittee in 1976.²

In March of 1979, after seeing *The Deer Hunter*, he experienced

¹ Hess, Elizabeth. "A Tale of Two Memorials." *Art in America*, April, 1983, p.121.

² Ibid., p. 121.

a flashback involving an incident in which many of his friends had been killed. When he came out of it he could not stop thinking of the faces of the men who had died, but he had forgotten their names. Realizing that the nation had forgotten them as well, Scruggs vowed to see a memorial built which would include the name of every American killed in Vietnam. Understanding the yearning for national recognition and closure to the war that he and his fellow veterans were experiencing, Scruggs knew that the memorial must be built soon.

In April of 1979, he established and incorporated the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. Its singular purpose was to build a memorial with private funds on public land, that would carry the names of all those who were missing or killed in Vietnam. It was to make no political statement, but to provide "a means to promote healing and reconciliation of the country after the divisions caused by the war."³ The Fund's goal was for the memorial to be built in time for dedication on Veterans Day, November 11, 1982.

The VVMF believed that location was one of the most crucial aspects of the memorial and would have a major influence on its effectiveness to promote healing. A memorial tucked away in Arlington Cemetery could be too easily ignored. The Fund decided that they wanted the two acres of land, allotted by the United States

³Scruggs, Jan C. and Joel Swerdlow. *To Heal a Nation: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1985, p. 16.

government to the Vietnam veterans, to be located in Constitution Gardens. "It was their one uncompromisable demand."⁴

Constitution Gardens lies on the National Mall, to the left of the Lincoln Memorial as one looks out of it toward the Washington Monument. Hoping to avoid the endless labyrinth of Washington bureaucracy, the VVMF decided to ask Congress directly "to pass legislation giving [them] a specific piece of land."⁵ Knowing how business was done in the Capitol, they asked for two acres at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial as their first choice and the land in Constitution Gardens as their second. It worked! In late 1979, Congress introduced legislation allocating land for the memorial in Constitution Gardens. President Carter signed the bill in 1980, which carried a proviso stating that:

... all considerations for the memorial - design, landscape, planning, esthetics - would have to be approved by the National Planning Commission (NPA), the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) and the Department of the Interior.⁶

As a means of choosing a memorial design, the VVMF decided to use the democratic process of a competition. Announced in October of 1980, it was open to all U.S. citizens over the age of 18. The Fund issued a statement expressing the purpose of the memorial.

⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

⁵ Ibid., p. 13.

⁶ Hess, 1983, p. 121.

After explaining what the average Vietnam veteran had endured, both during the war and upon his return home, it gave only the simplest instruction for the memorial's design:

"The purpose of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is to recognize and honor those who served and died. It will provide a symbol of acknowledgement of the courage and sacrifice, and devotion to duty of those who were among the nation's finest youth.

The memorial will make no political statements regarding the war or its conduct. It will transcend those issues. The hope is that the creation of the memorial will begin a healing process."⁷

Eight men were chosen to jury the competition, all with ties to the world of art and architecture. There were two landscape architects, Hideo Sasaki and Garret Eckbo; two architects, Harry Weise and Pietro Belluschi; three sculptors, Constantino Nivola, James Rosati and Richard H. Hunt; and Grady Clay, editor of *Landscape Architecture*, who became the jury chairman.⁸ Deliberation began on Monday, April 27, and continued through Friday, May 1. Anonymity was strictly observed. Because there were so many entries to view, 1421 in all, the VVMF arranged to display them in an empty aircraft hangar at Andrews Air Force Base. The jury awarded fifteen honorable mentions, and chose "a third place finisher, a runner-up

⁷ Scruggs, 1985, p. 53.

⁸ Hess, 1983, p. 121.

and a winner."⁹ They took two polls, each time the unanimous winner was Number 1026 (Figure 1). The chosen design took "at least five minutes of explanation."¹⁰ Defending the work, Grady Clay said:

"Great Art is a complex matter... All great works furnish material for endless debate. We are certain that this will be debated for years to come. This is healthy and ought to be expected. All knowledge cannot be self-explaining in two seconds"¹¹

Unexpected was the identity of the chosen design's artist, a twenty-one year old Yale undergraduate who was Chinese-American and female. Maya Ying Lin (Figure 2) was "born in 1959, the year of the first American combat casualty in Vietnam."¹² The daughter of Chinese parents who had fled mainland China when the Communists seized power in 1949, she had grown up in the small college town of Athens, Ohio. In 1981, Lin was enrolled in a design studio in funerary architecture. When her professor assigned designing a memorial for the Vietnam veterans as a class project she drove down to Washington with two of her classmates to look at the site. After a very short time an idea came:

"I had an impulse to cut open the earth... an initial violence that in time would heal. The grass would grow

⁹ Scruggs, 1985, p. 63-64.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 65.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 65-66.

¹² Ibid., p. 67.

back, but the cut would remain, a pure, flat, surface, like a geode when you cut into it and polish the edge... it was as if the black brown earth were polished and made into an interface between the sunny world and the quiet, dark world beyond, that we can't enter"¹³ (Figures 3 and 4).

Lin was "too young to [have been] involved with the politics of the Vietnam era."¹⁴ She thought this was an advantage. Since her inspiration for the memorial was unfiltered by political opinion, she was able to respond in a direct way to its original psychological concept. For someone so untouched by the era, she had an uncanny understanding of its losses. Even before construction had begun, Maya Lin sensed that the veterans only understood the recognition by the government that the memorial represented, not its potential psychological impact. When asked by a veteran what the public's reaction to it would be, she "swallowed and said something encouraging. She wanted to say, 'They'll cry'."¹⁵

Although Lin's original insight for the memorial came directly from the site, the details for the project were worked out in the studio. It consisted of two walls, each 246 feet and 9 inches long, constructed of polished, black granite panels (Figure 5) that would rise gradually to a height of ten feet where they would intersect and form an approximate 126 degree angle. The two panels to determine

¹³ Swerdlow, Joel L. "To Heal a Nation." *National Geographic*, May, 1985, p. 557.

¹⁴ "The 'Vasari' Diary": "Vietnam Memorial War." *Artnews*, Jan., 1983, p.11.

¹⁵ Scruggs, 1985, p. 111.

this angle were the only ones that would bear any dates. 1959 (Figure 6), designated as the beginning of the war, would appear at the top left of the right wall, while 1975 (Figure 7) the date marking the war's end, would appear at the bottom right of the left wall. The entire structure would act as a retaining wall, cut into and holding back a gently rising slope. The visitor would proceed along its face and down into the center of this slope to the chronological beginning of the war.

The inscribing of what has now become 58,183 names was to begin at the right wall directly under the 1959 date and this inscription:

In honor of the men and women of the Armed Forces who served in the Vietnam War. The names of those who gave their lives and of those who remain missing are inscribed in the order they were taken from us.

The names would proceed panel by panel to the end of the right wall until it diminished into the earth, then continue at the beginning of the left wall as it rose from it. Again, panel after panel would carry the names which would finally conclude just above the 1975 date and this closing inscription:

Our nation honors the courage, sacrifice and devotion to duty and country of its Vietnam veterans. This memorial was built with private contributions of the American people. November 11, 1982.

By the end of the first week of August, 1981, both the C.F.A. and the N.P.C. had unanimously approved the design. The architectural firm of Kent Cooper and William Lecky, who had also entered the competition, was hired by the VVMF. They hired Maya Lin as a design consultant. Approval by the Department of the Interior, however, was delayed.

Opposition to the memorial design came not from the anti-war movement, as the VVMF had expected, but from a group of supporters. Although difficult to confirm because of his political influence, Ross Perot, who had contributed \$160,000 to finance the design competition, was suspected by many to be the opposition's organizer.¹⁶ As feared, when he heard of the chosen design he was incensed, claiming the work was not heroic, but rather "'something for the New York intellectuals... twenty-first century art'."¹⁷

In early 1982, when Tom Carhart, a veteran and sculptor who had also entered the competition, called Maya Lin's design a "black gash of shame,"¹⁸ a number of Republican congressmen took up the cause. They too felt the design made "a political statement of shame and dishonor."¹⁹ Calling for a new jury to be appointed, they stated that they shared "the view that the memorial is a black ditch that

¹⁶ Hess, 1983, p. 122.

¹⁷ Scruggs, 1985, p. 68.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁹ Gabor, Andrea. "Vietnam Memorial meets snags that may prevent March groundbreaking." *Architectural Record*, Feb., 1982, p. 28.

does not recognize or honor those who served."²⁰

Suddenly, ideologies that had been polarized during the war erupted again over the memorial. The battle line was drawn between schools of art, Minimalism and Realism. The opposition hoped to block Lin's design entirely and replace it with an heroic and representational piece. The VVMF feared the project could be delayed indefinitely.

At a meeting of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs attended by the members of the VVMF, Perot and a group of decorated Vietnam veterans continued to refer to Lin's design as a 'black gash of shame.' If the opposition had to agree to the design, they insisted it be constructed of white marble. Finally, General George Price, one of America's highest ranking black officers said: "Black is not a color of shame. I am tired of hearing it called such by you. Color meant nothing on the battlefields of Korea and Vietnam. We are equal in combat."²¹ The VVMF could not have planned a more eloquent defense; the idea of making the wall white was never mentioned again.

However, in order to receive the desired approval for Lin's design from James Watt, then Secretary of the Department of the Interior, the conflict over the desire for an heroic, representational memorial had to be resolved. So that the memorial's construction

²⁰ *AIA Journal*, Feb., 1982, p. 13.

²¹ Scruggs, 1985, p. 100.

would not be delayed, the Fund, evoking the spirit of healing, compromised, and agreed to the placement of a statue and a flag somewhere on the site. On March 4, 1982, the N.P.C. okayed the plan but warned the VVMF that the location and design of the additions could neither "compromise [nor] diminish the basic design of the memorial previously approved."²²

The VVMF commissioned Frederick Hart, who had created the sculpture on the work that placed third in the competition (Figure 8), to design a representational piece for an undisclosed fee. In September of 1982, his maquette (Figure 9) for a statue of three nineteen year old soldiers caught staring into the distance, was revealed. Its placement was to be decided at a later date. Finally, the VVMF obtained the approval they needed to proceed from the Department of the Interior.

One hundred and forty black granite panels, seventy for each wall, quarried in Bangalore, India were shipped to the Binswanger Glass Company of Memphis, Tennessee, where, by the use of a process called gritblasting, the inscribing of the original 57,939 names began. As construction in Constitution Gardens started, a skirmish broke out in the press between the two styles. In response to a *Washington Post* article by Tom Wolfe which referred to Lin's design as "a tribute to Jane Fonda,"²³ Elizabeth Hess, writing for *Art*

²² Ibid., p. 105.

²³ Hess, 1983, p. 126.

in America, countered, "If Lin's memorial is a tribute to Jane Fonda, then Hart's is a tribute to John Wayne."²⁴

Frederick Hart, who had never served in the military, but claimed to have researched the veterans' experiences in Vietnam, argued that the former nineteen year old soldiers who had fought the war, were opposed to Lin's design, claiming the "piece rubbed them raw."²⁵ When asked if a representational piece was the only way to reach them, he answered that the "statue [was] just an awkward solution we came up with to save Lin's design."²⁶ He believed that what was taking place was an art war and saw her work as elitist and his own as populist.²⁷ Of her design he commented: "People say you can bring what you want to Lin's memorial. But I call that brown bag esthetics. I mean you better bring something, cause there ain't nothing being served."²⁸

Lin had very little input in the conflict resolution; she had been advised to keep silent. When she first came to the Capitol, she was surprised that no one would listen to her because she "had no power - no masculinity - their attitude was - O.K. you did a good job, but now we're going to hire some big boys - boys - to take care of it."²⁹

²⁴ Ibid., p. 126.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 124.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 124.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 124.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 124.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 123.

Feeling that the VVMF treated her like a child, she finally got upset. Commenting on Hart's work she called it "trite... a generalization, a simplification."³⁰ Commenting on Hart, she complained:

"He goes on and on about working with my piece rather than against it. But you can't really work with a piece if you don't have a dialogue with it. He claims that my memorial is "rude in its neglect of the human element." How can someone like that work with my design?"³¹

Defending her own design, Lin said it "will be serene, beautiful and graceful, not at all threatening or morose. In its simplicity it attains nobility."³²

Hart's statue, whose supporters proposed its placement at the center angle of Maya Lin's design along with an American flag, was finally sited, with its flag, in a grove of trees near the left arm of the memorial. It neither integrates with nor compromises Lin's design. The three figures face the "Wall" as if startled by it and its significance. Ironically, the "Wall" probably comes closer to saving the sculpture by giving *it* more meaning, than vice versa. Although visited by veterans, it receives no attention from the art world except in its relationship to Maya Lin's work. Hart was wrong as well, about Lin's design being elitist. While its noble simplicity continues to be highly regarded and the subject of art historians,

³⁰ Ibid., p. 123.

³¹ Ibid., p. 123.

³² Gabor, 1982, p. 28.

since its dedication on Veterans Day, 1982, it has become the most visited landmark in Washington D.C.

The *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* appropriately integrates the artistic languages of Minimalism, Earthworks and Conceptual Art, all of which employ simplicity and first emerged during the 1960's and 70's, the years of the Vietnam War. Its eloquence lies in the effective interaction of these three.

The memorial's Minimalist vocabulary consists of the two triangular retaining walls, the angle at which they intersect, and the inscribed rectangular panels of polished, black granite of which they are constructed. Its Minimalist nature acts to engage its audience in procession so that it may be experienced, not just seen. Elements of Earthworks in the memorial include the integration of the structure with the gentle slope on its two acre site, and the interaction of its reflective granite surface with the natural elements of the site. Its Conceptual content is its text, the names of those killed or missing in Vietnam and how their order and display give meaning to their appearance on the "Wall," promote healing, and facilitate a reconciliation of the divisions caused by the war. While the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* employs simplicity to achieve its goals, it is by no means simplistic in its ability to do so.

The overarching goal of the memorial for those who suffered the greatest loss is the recognition of the individuals who paid the

greatest price. All deaths are equal; since life is the greatest sacrifice, no one's is greater than another's. Therefore, the size of each name is the same. In order that the deaths at the beginning and end of the war bear no more importance than those in the middle, the memorial's procession of names starts at one end with the chronological middle of the conflict, places those of beginning and end together at the center angle, and concludes with more names of the middle at the extreme end. This chronological inscribing of the names engages the visitor's participation. Were the names to appear in alphabetical order, the viewer would more likely be numbed to their passage and the names would lose their unique and idiosyncratic quality. Those who might otherwise be lost in the telephone directory nature of alphabetizing (for example, sixteen men named James Jones died in Vietnam) can be recalled in all their individuality in the time specificity of chronological order (Figure 10).

Each granite panel has a justified margin, left on the right wall (Figure 11) right on the left (Figure 12). A "diamond denoting death, or a cross signifying a missing person"³³ follows each name on the right wall and precedes each name left (Figure 13). "Should a missing soldier return, a circle is to be inscribed around the cross."³⁴

³³ Blum, Shirley Neilsen. "The National Vietnam War Memorial." *Arts Magazine*, Dec., 1984, p. 126.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

If confirmed dead, the cross is to be changed to a diamond.

This shift in location of margins and symbols, in addition to the chronological listing of the names, emphasizes the passage of years and tells the story of the growing cost of the war. The granite panels bear a resemblance to pages in a book, the names to text on a page, the symbols of diamonds and crosses, its punctuation. The granite pages are numbered - 1E through 70E on the panels of the right/east wall, and 1W through 70W on those of the left/west. This book is a record kept by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Like other records of the war's equipment costs, it is not idealized. It is left for the viewer to draw conclusions.

The geographical location of the memorial also recognizes the sacrifice of the individual. In part, because the United States has no historical identification with a church, the National Mall (Figure 14) represents hallowed ground to most Americans. Its "primary axis, appropriately located in the capitol, runs invisibly through the Washington Monument and ends at the Lincoln Memorial. Its cross axis incorporates the White House and the Jefferson Memorial."³⁵ Constitution Gardens lies on a cross axis. The *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* symbolically becomes fully embedded in the history of the United States; the names on its surface are as equal to names symbolized by the other National Mall monuments of the past, as

³⁵ Ibid., p. 125.

they are to the institutions of the present.

In its effort to promote healing, the first task of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* is to create the realization of death. Death becomes a solid reality through the memorial's concrete elements: the names, the tapering granite walls, and the earth they appear to hold back. One veteran writes: "it is hard to remember that no one is buried there, that the long chevron of black granite is a memorial, not a cairn on a common grave."³⁶ He adds, "here is the mystery of death writ in stone [58,183] times."³⁷ Suddenly, life (Figure 15), as reflected on its polished surface is illusion, and death is reality.

Two books, one listing the names in alphabetical order, the other in chronological order, have been placed at either end of the memorial (Figure 16). Both give a name's location by signifying the east or west wall, and the numbers of the panel and line on which it appears. One must walk along its surface to experience it. One must search among its names to find those who are sought. When the names are found, the inscribed, cold stone mysteriously encourages touch. From the time of its completion, even before its dedication, visitors unexpectedly touched the stone (Figures 17 and 18). "The touches were more than soft. They were gentle, filled with feeling -- as if the stone were alive."³⁸

³⁶ Lopes, Sal. *The Wall: Images and Offerings from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. New York: Collins Publishers, 1987, p. 15.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

³⁸ Hess, 1983, p. 126.

Some visitors take rubbings (Figures 19 and 20) of the names. Others add to the offerings, a collection of "more than 80,000 individual objects,"³⁹ gathered twice a day by rangers of the National Park Service and stored in an Interior Department warehouse in Lanham, Maryland. Military paraphernalia are the most common items left: medals (Figure 21), POW/MIA bracelets, combat boots, and dog tags. Items both generic and personal make up the remainder of the collection: flowers (Figure 22), flags (Figure 23), photographs (Figure 24), cans of beer, locks of hair, and written messages, open and sealed.

The reconciliation of the divisions caused by the war requires the validation of both those who served and those who protested. The ceremony to dedicate the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* included a reading, at the National Cathedral, of the names it carries by 230 relatives and friends. It took 48 hours and 29 minutes. Shirley Neilsen Blum explains:

It is not the first time that Vietnam has been so remembered. A part of this moving litany was first heard in Washington in 1969 when the March Against Death recited the names of 40,000 who, by that time, had died in Vietnam.⁴⁰

In order to *honor* those who gave their lives to the war, the

³⁹ Larimer, Tim and Gayle Jo Carter. "Vietnam Honors: Gathered from the Wall, Tokens of Heartbreak and Healing." *USA Weekend*, Oct. 16-18, 1992, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Blum, 1984, p. 126.

memorial *borrow*s this listing of names from those who protested the war, translates it into stone, and simultaneously validates both. The memorial confronts us with the reality of human loss for a war not won. This is no victory celebration; it is a roll call of the dead.

The *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* is a visual poem to the resolution of opposites. Those who were ungratefully forgotten are recalled with honor. The very private ordeal of individuals (Figure 25), those who died and those who grieve, is addressed by a very public and collective monument.⁴¹ A geometric structure, constructed of natural stone manipulated by human means into more geometric units, is in harmony with the organic substance of the earth. The chaos of war and its turbulent era becomes an orderly chronology. The living and the dead meet at last on the shallow plane of the memorial's surface (Figure 26): those who breathe are reflected on the same wall upon which are etched the names of those who never again will.

The achievement of these goals is realized both symbolically and literally by archetypally feminine structures. Unlike the perpendicularly ordered, often phallic and authoritative structures generally associated with war memorials that reside in the town squares, parks and cemeteries of most nations, and imply, by their visual language, a domination of the earth on which they stand, the

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 128.

horizontal orientation of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* is an expansive delta form - its third side implied - humbly reconciled within the earth.

Although there is a physical hierarchy within the memorial (its entire structure, two walls, granite panels, names and finally its symbols), its reference is only a means of visual organization. It has no bearing on the names, which appear without military rank. Names that usually appear on the small white crosses that mark out the graves of war dead, which cannot be read and serve only to inspire us by their numbers, are identified, lifted up and placed on these two walls. This is no exclusive monument to military hierarchy; it is a memorial as inclusive of all the individuals it honors as it is of the audience it embraces.

Chief among its feminine structures, however, is the circle, which is relational by nature. Several circles are created by the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. Its two arms form the radii of a circle.⁴² Its right arm reaches toward the Washington Monument (Figure 27) as it reflects the Lincoln Memorial, while its left arm reaches out for the Lincoln Memorial (Figure 28) as it reflects the Washington Monument. Through the reflection of its polished black granite panels the memorial converses with the other monuments in a constantly changing dialogue as the viewer proceeds along its

⁴² Ibid., p. 126.

course.

The passage of time, another one of its themes, is reinforced by the circle. The beginning and end of the procession of names are joined and the middle, lost underground at one end, travels in an illusionary circle, to rise from the earth again at its extreme end. The figure eight, double circular symbol for infinity, can be experienced at the memorial's 126 degree angle, where the right wall reflects the left and the left reflects the right. Here also is an allusion to the four cardinal points (if somewhat skewed) and the three-dimensional circle of the earth itself. The memorial's chronology even involves the rotation of the earth on its axis and its relationship with the sun. Its right arm, which commences at the angle with its reference to 1959, reaches for the east and the rising sun and refers to our departure for Vietnam. Its left arm, which concludes at the angle with its reference to 1975, proceeds from the west and the setting sun and refers to our return to the United States. It is here that we make our conclusions concerning our involvement there.

The most tragic aspect of the Vietnam War is recast as a symbol for democracy, imparting the memorial's redemptive nature. It recognizes gender, race and ethnicity only so far as a name allows, and claims the equality and importance of each individual: the visitors it embraces as much as the missing and dead it honors. Thus the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* is an archetype for the American

ideal and takes its place in the architecture of the National Mall.

The ability of its surface to reflect (Figure 29) at the same time it is being read is perhaps the most crucial aspect of the memorial. It actuates a personal contemplation *within* the visitor about the only absolute we know of life, that life as we know it surely ends with death. In this, the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* transcends the specific and invokes the universal.

FIGURES

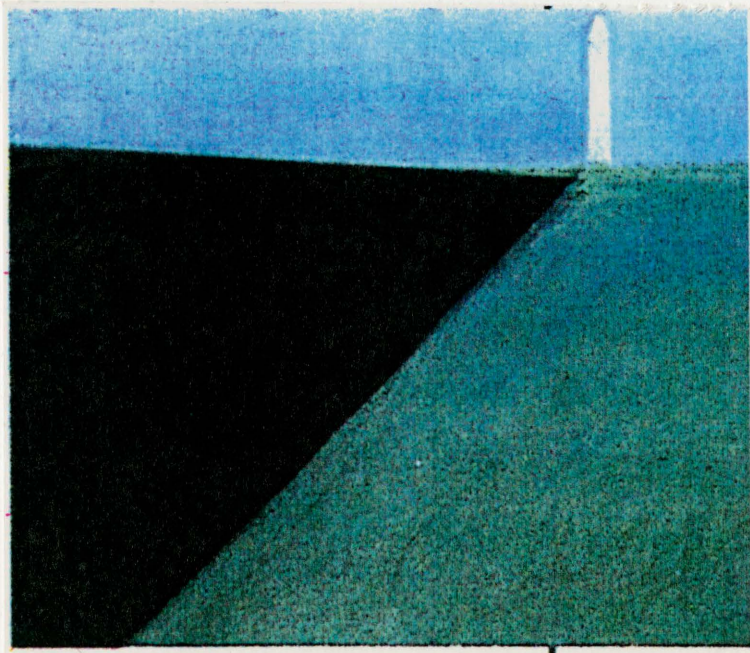


Figure 1.

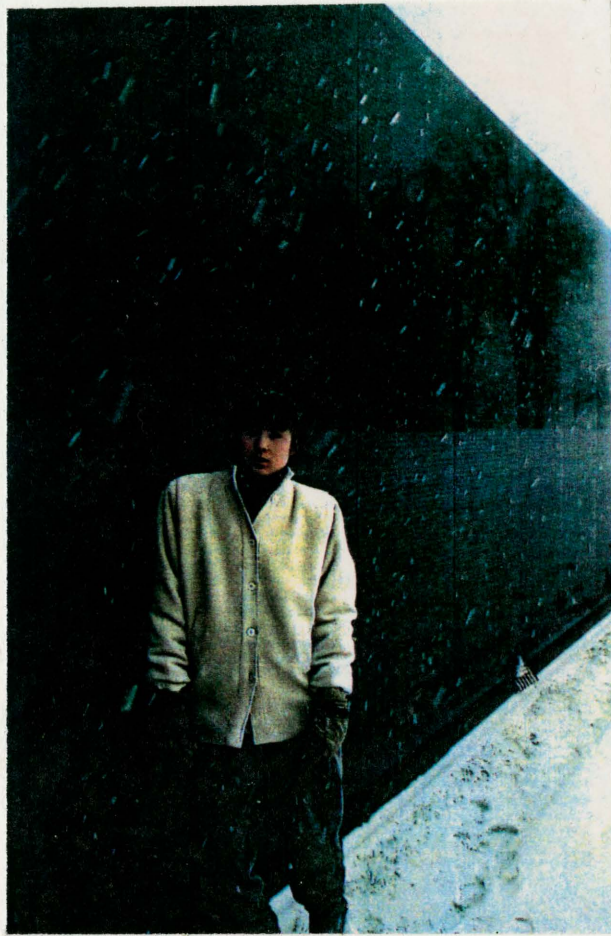


Figure 2.

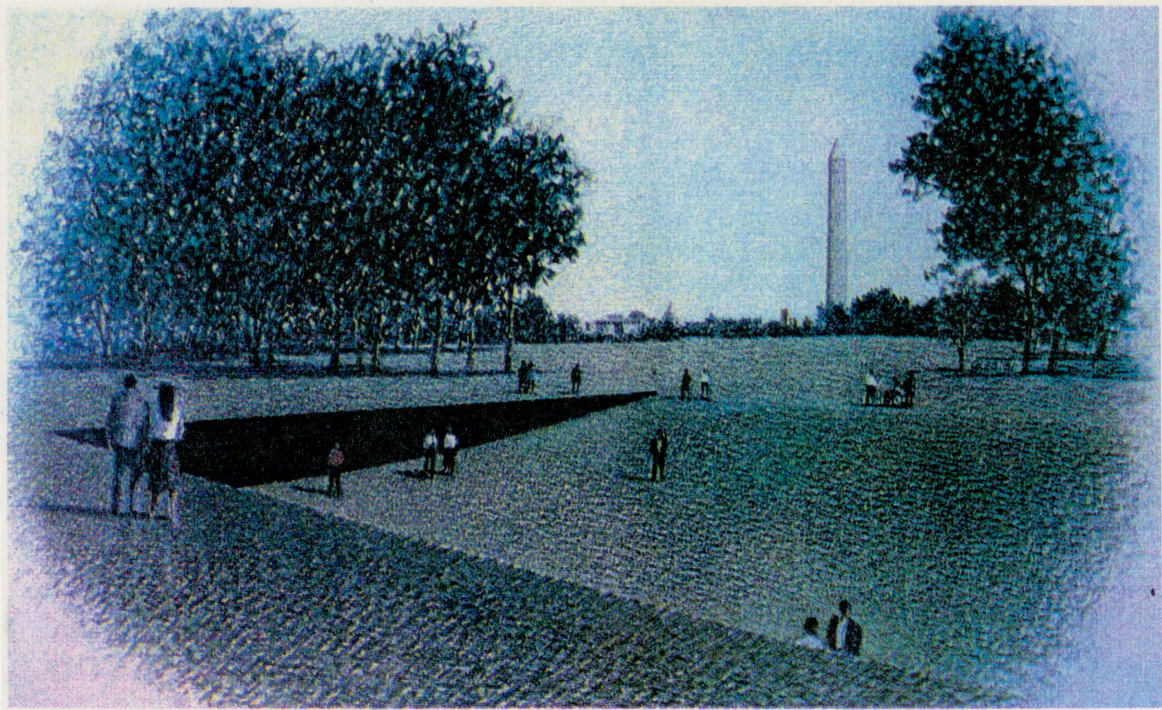


Figure 3.

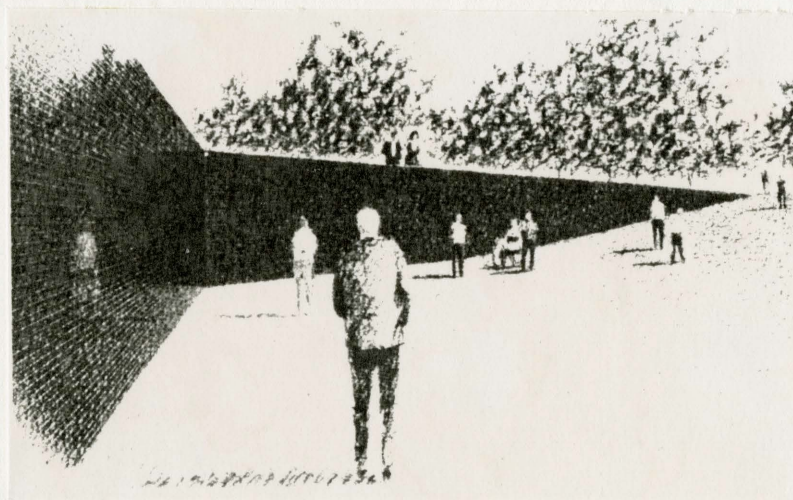


Figure 4.



Figure 5.

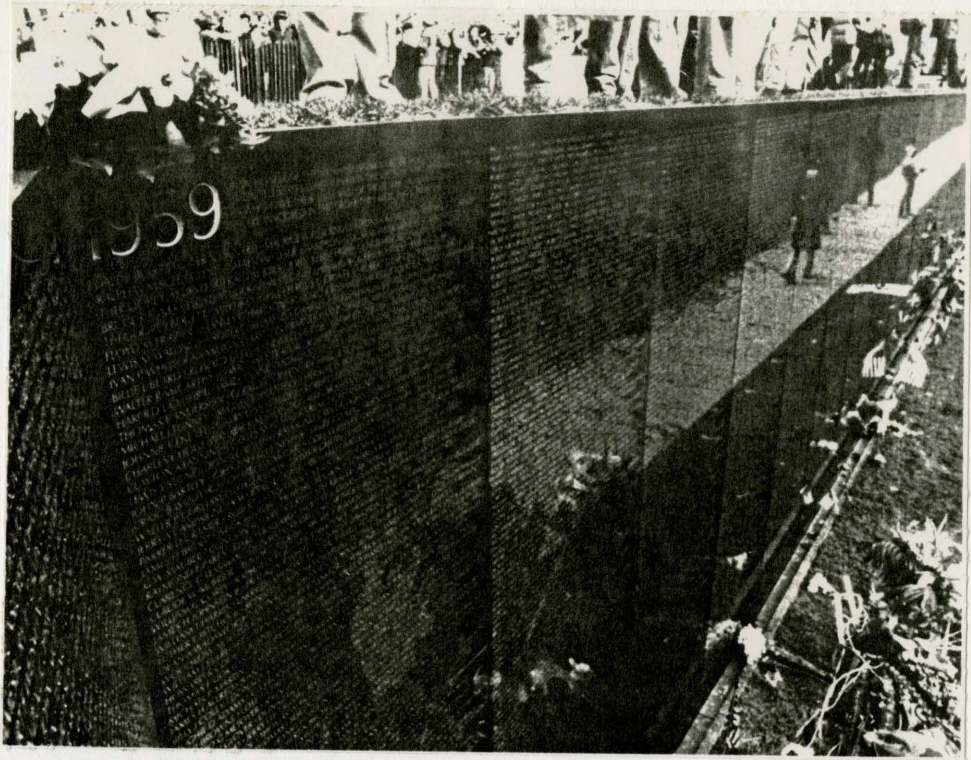


Figure 6.

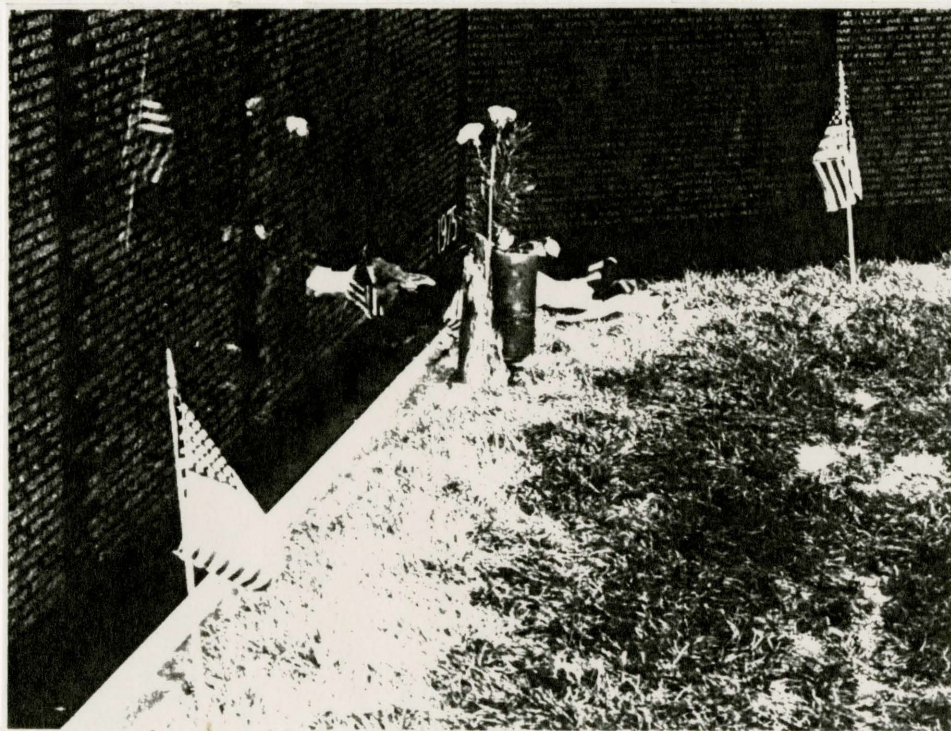


Figure 7.



Figure 8.



Figure 9.

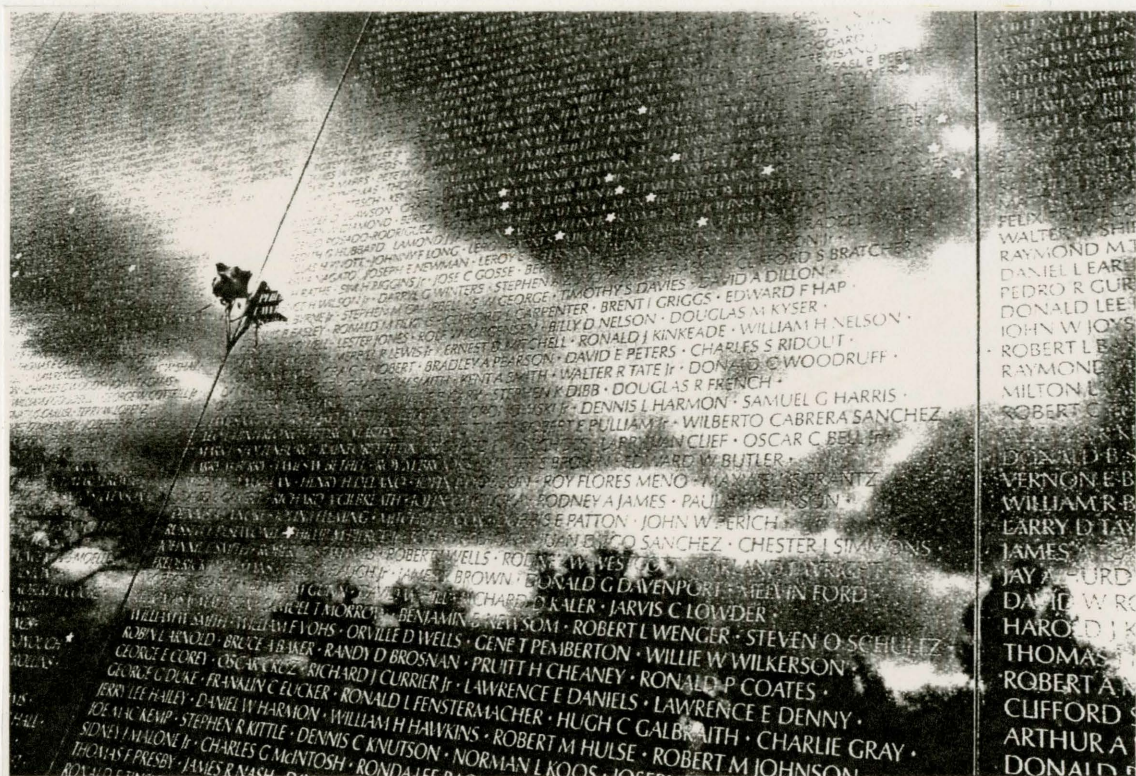


Figure 10.

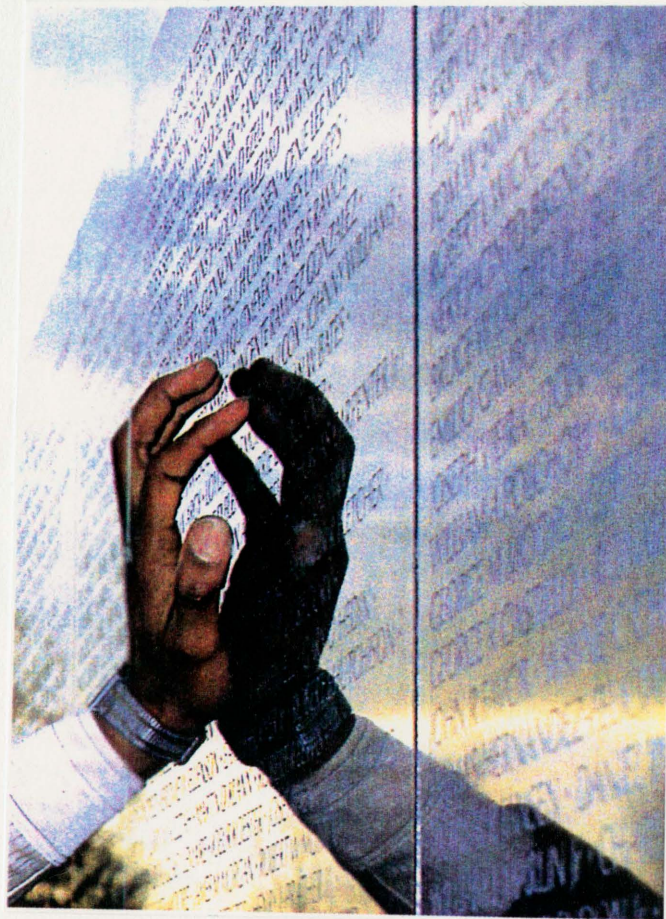
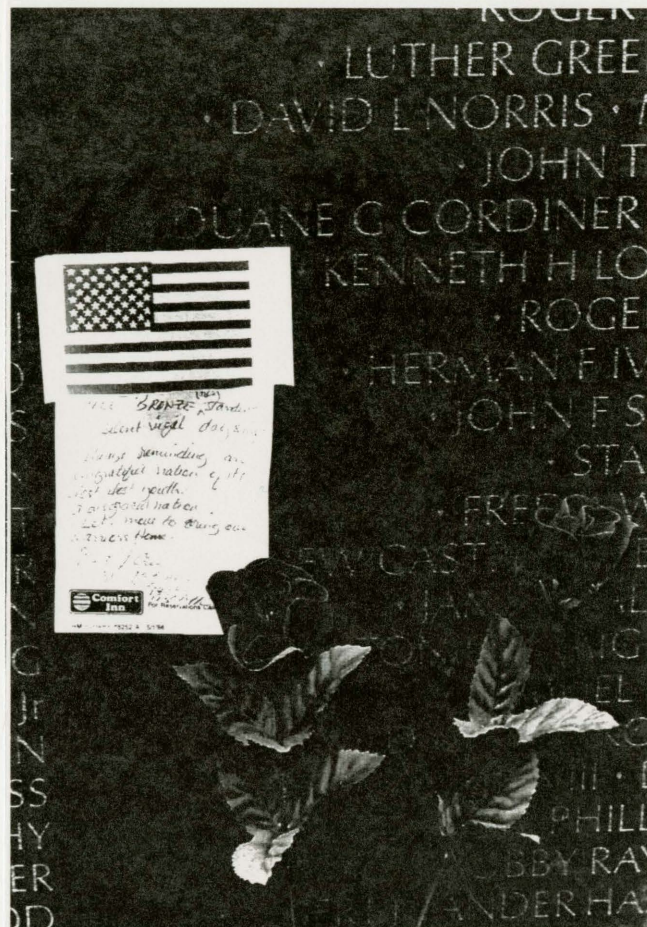


Figure 11.



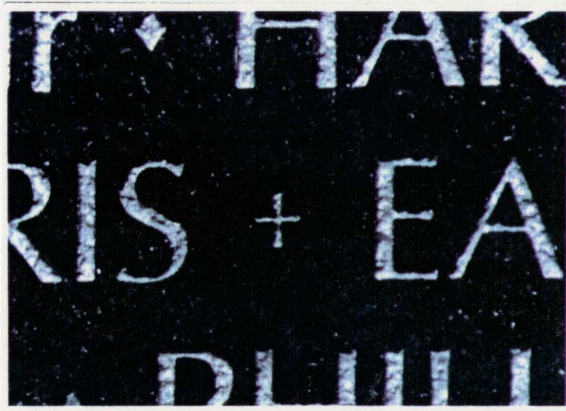


Figure 13.

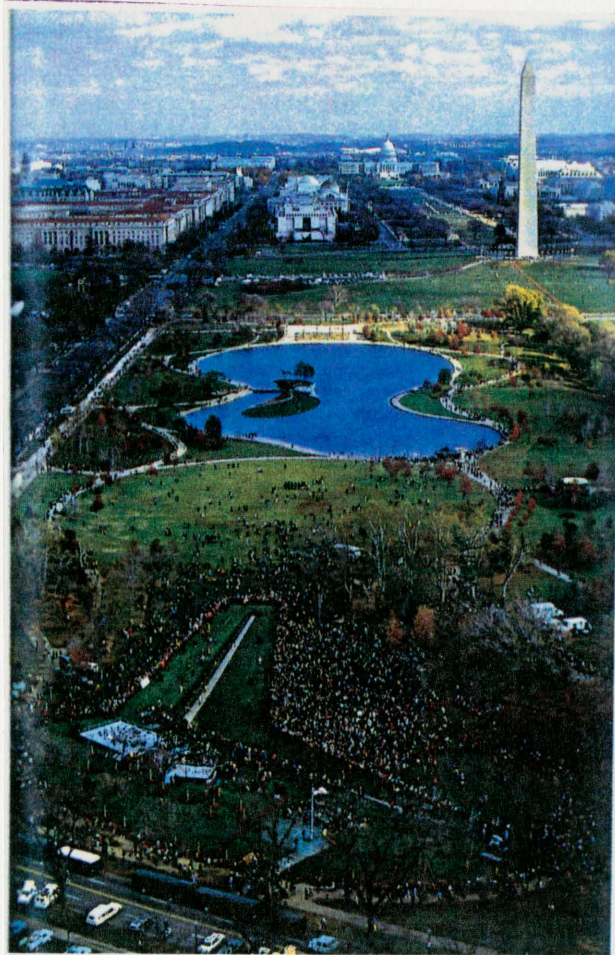


Figure 14.



Figure 15.

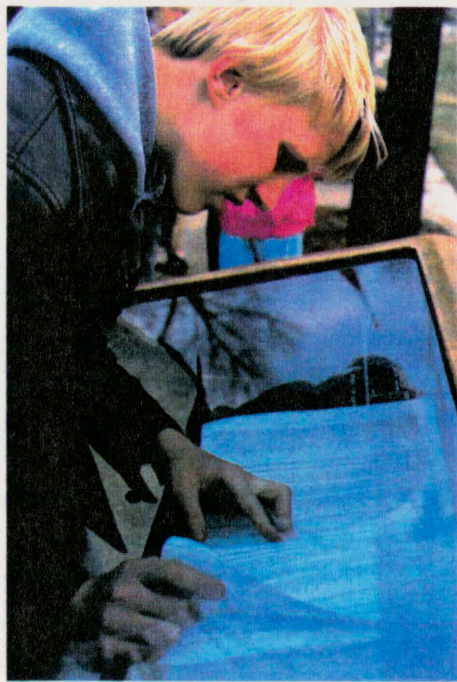


Figure 16.

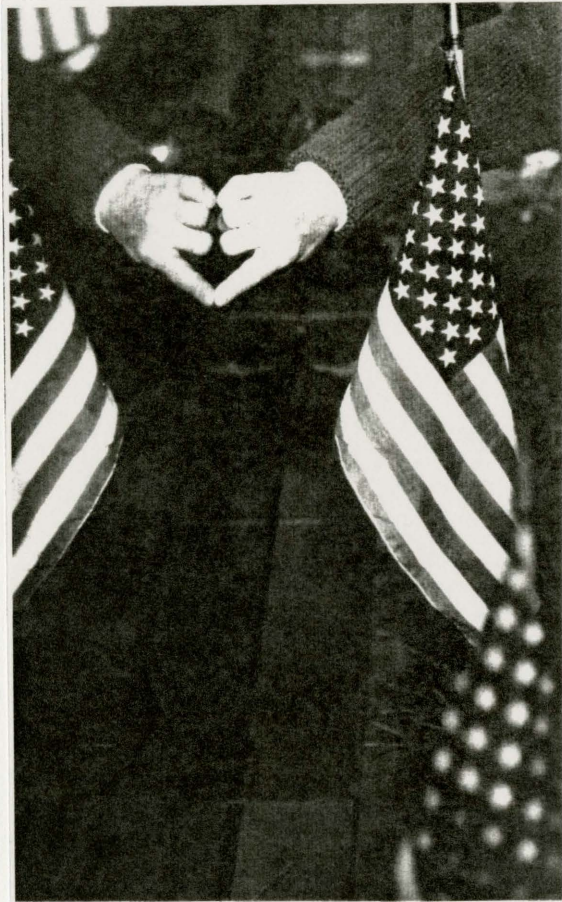


Figure 17.



Figure 18.

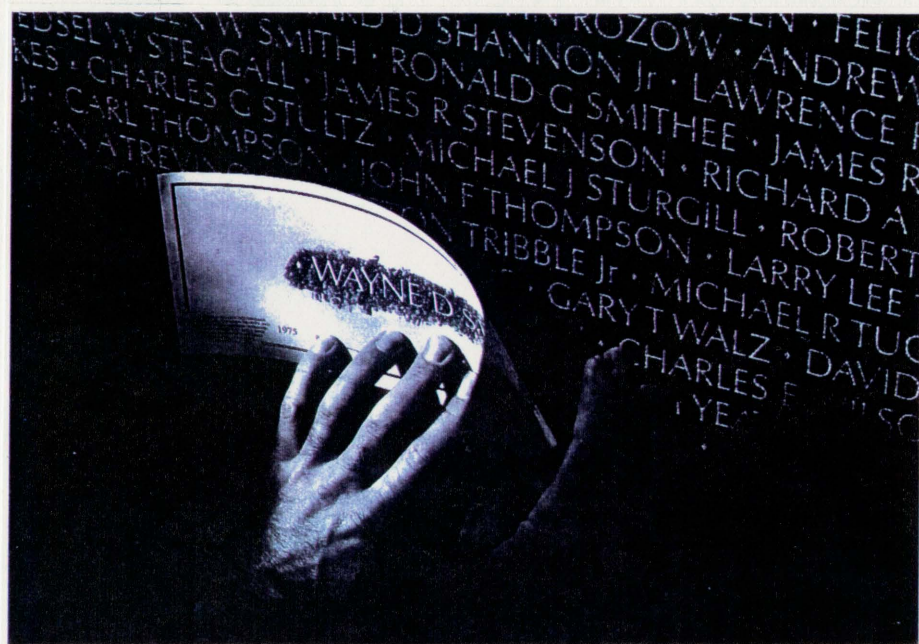


Figure 19.

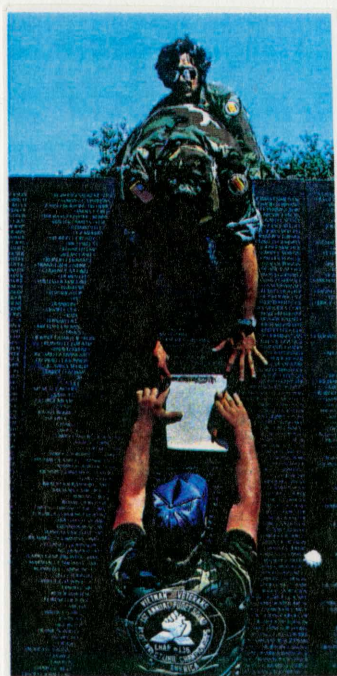


Figure 20.

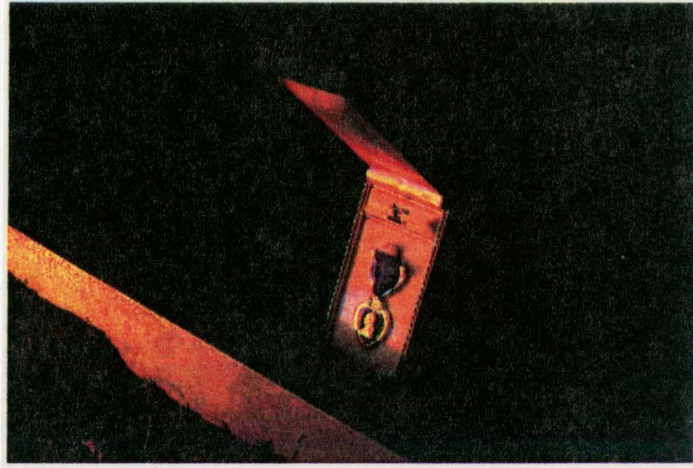


Figure 21.



Figure 22.



Figure 25.



Figure 26.

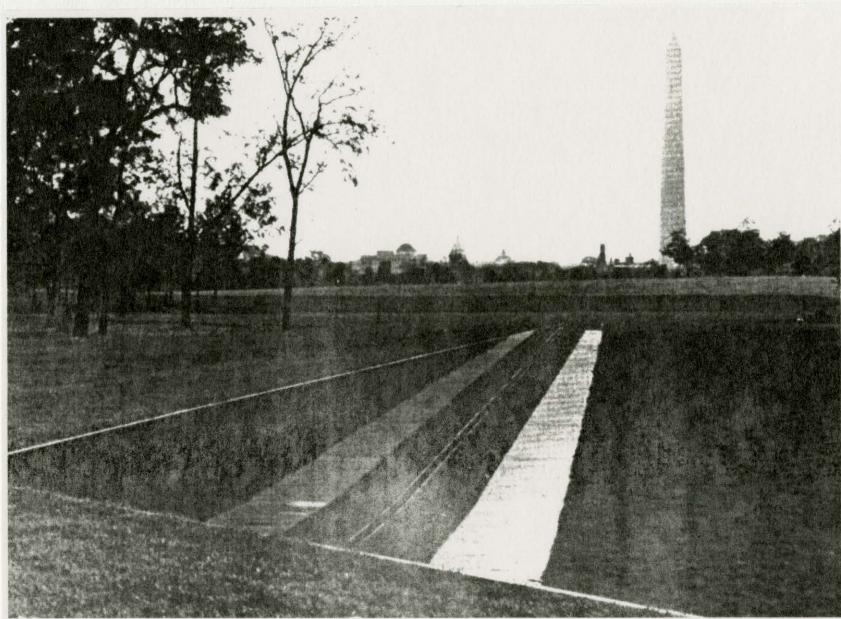


Figure 27.

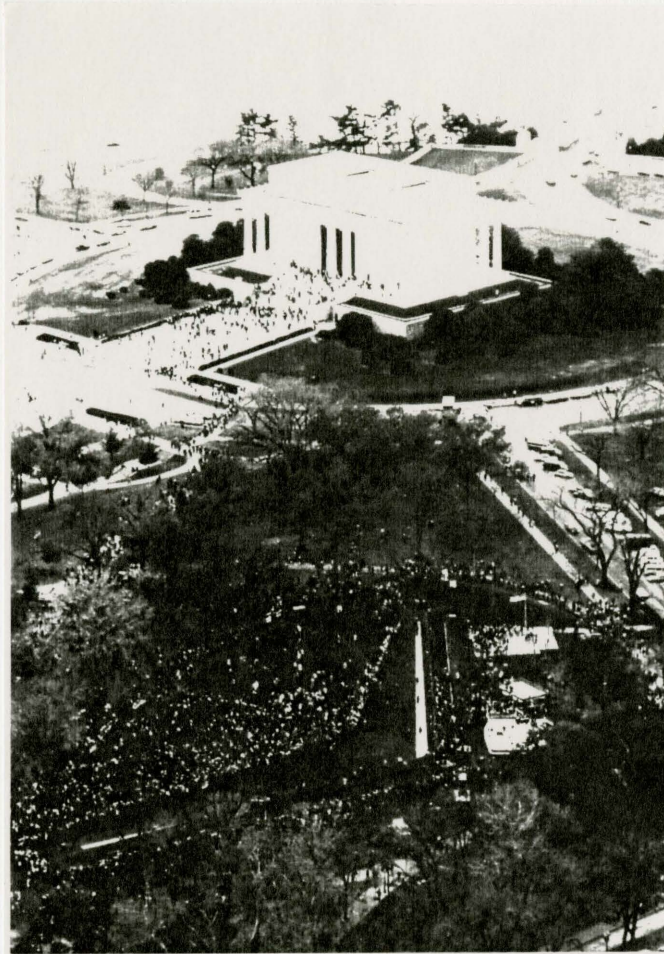


Figure 28.

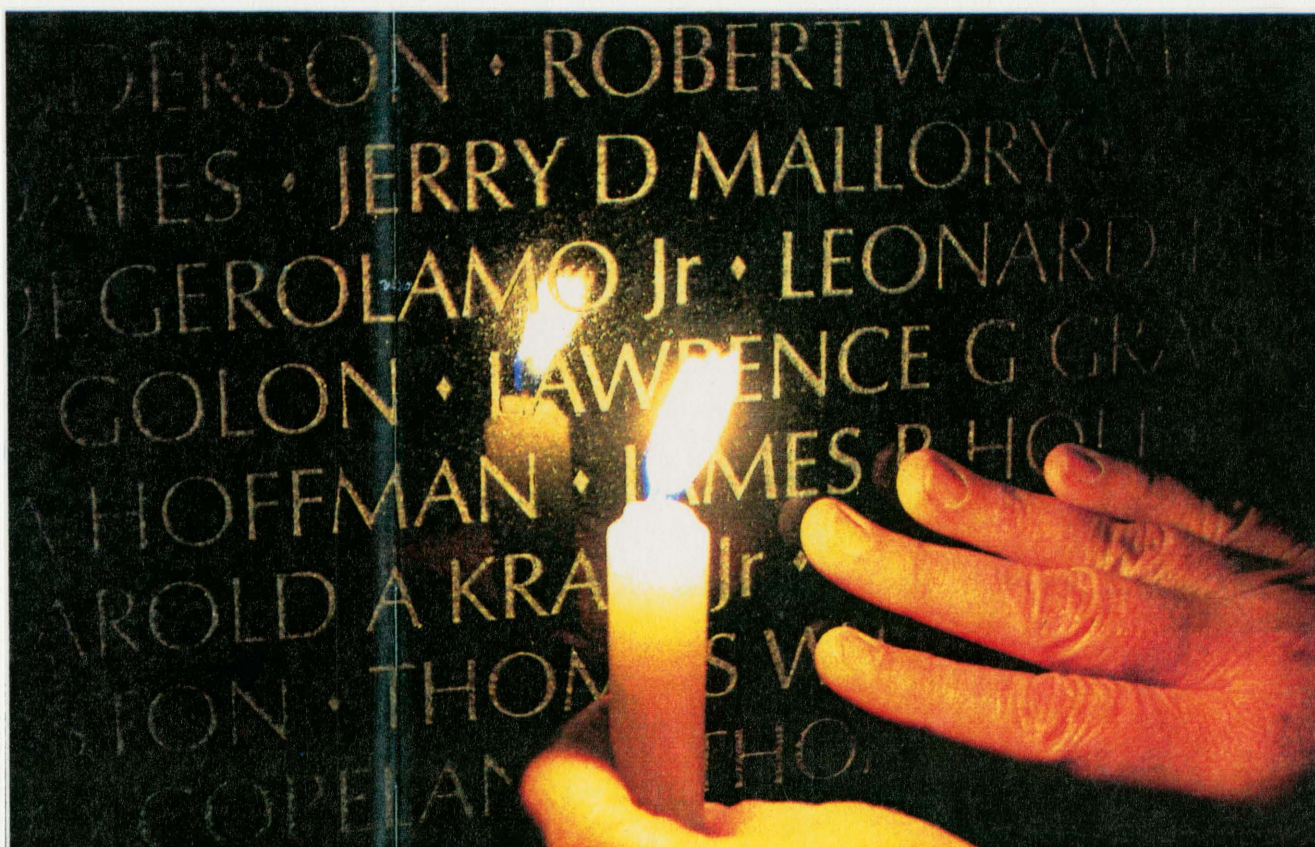


Figure 29.

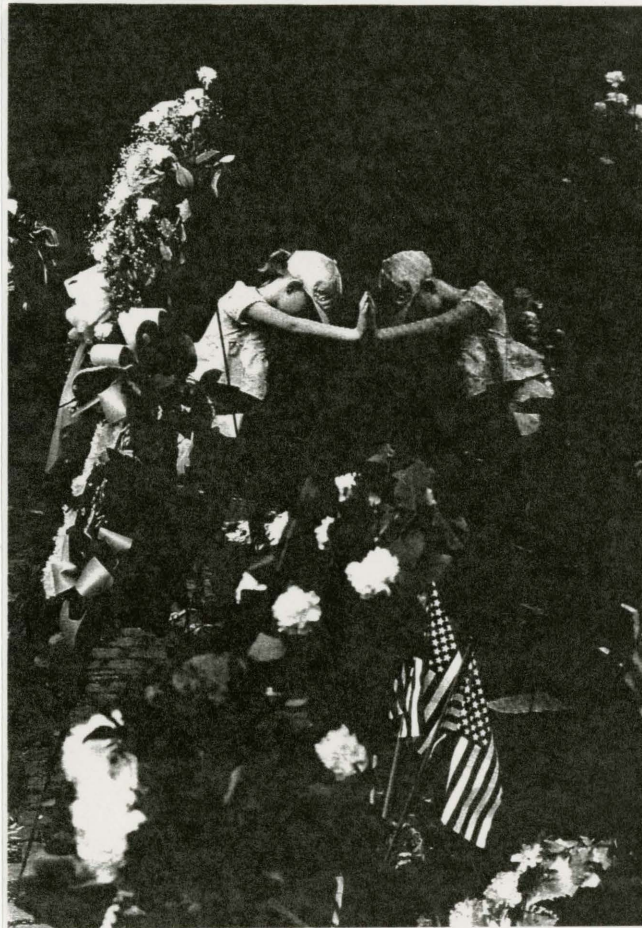


Figure 30.

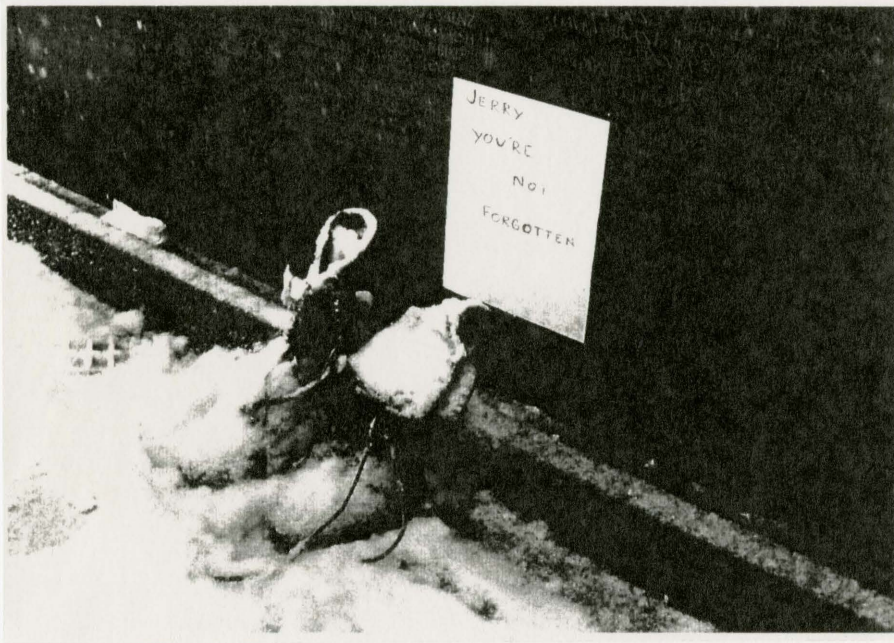


Figure 31.

LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1: Maya Ying Lin. *Pastel for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Design Competition*. Source: "To Heal a Nation," by Joel L. Swerdlow. *National Geographic*, May, 1985: p. 557.
- Figure 2: James P. Blair. *Maya Ying Lin*. Source: "To Heal a Nation," by Joel L. Swerdlow. *National Geographic*, May, 1985: p. 556.
- Figure 3: Steven Oles. After Maya Ying Lin's design for the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. Source: "An Extraordinary Competition," by Allen Freeman. *AIA Journal*, Aug., 1981: p. 47.
- Figure 4: Steven Oles. After Maya Ying Lin's Design for the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. Source: "An Extraordinary Competition," by Allen Freeman. *AIA Journal*, Aug., 1981: p. 47.
- Figure 5: Maya Ying Lin. *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. Source: *A Different War: Vietnam in Art*, by Lucy Lippard. Seattle: The Real Comet Press, 1990: p. 89.
- Figure 6: Maya Ying Lin. *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. Smithsonian Institution photograph. Subject: Location of the date - 1959. Source: "The National Vietnam War Memorial," by Shirley Neilsen Blum. *Arts Magazine*, Dec., 1984: p. 124.
- Figure 7: Maya Ying Lin. *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. Smithsonian Institution photograph. Subject: Location of the date - 1975. Source: "The National Vietnam War Memorial," by Shirley Neilsen Blum. *Arts Magazine*, Dec., 1984: p. 127.
- Figure 8: Frederick Hart. Subject: Sculpture on the design that placed third in the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Design Competition*. Source: "An Extraordinary Competition," by

Allen Freeman. *AIAJournal*: Aug., 1981: p. 50.

- Figure 9: Frederick Hart. Subject: Maquette for "Vets." Source: "The 'Vasari' Diary." *Artnews*, Jan., 1983: p. 11.
- Figure 10: Wendy Watriss. *Untitled* from the "Vietnam Veterans Memorial" series. 1982 (cat. no. 99). Subject: chronological order. Source: *A Different War: Vietnam in Art*, by Lucy Lippard. Seattle: The Real Comet Press, 1990.
- Figure 11: Michael Katakis. "Rose and note left for a loved one." Subject: Right margin, left wall. Source: *The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, by Michael Katakis. New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1988: p. 67.
- Figure 12: Sal Lopes. Subject: Left margin, right wall. Source: *The Wall: Images and Offerings from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, by Sal Lopes. New York: Collins Publishers Inc., 1987: p. 102.
- Figure 13: Jeff Tinsley. Subject: Diamonds and crosses signify the dead and missing. Source: *Reflections on the Wall: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, by Edward Clinton Ezell. Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1987: p. 149.
- Figure 14: James P. Blair. Subject: Aerial view of the National Mall. Source: "To Heal a Nation," by Joel L. Swerdlow. *National Geographic*, May, 1985: p. 563.
- Figure 15: Jeffrey Ploskonka. Subject: Reflection. Source: *Reflections on the Wall: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, by Edward Clinton Ezell. Harrisburg, PA: 1987: p. 5.
- Figure 16: Susan Meiselas. Subject: Searching for names in one of the directories. Source: *The Wall: Images and Offerings from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, by Sal Lopes. New York: Collins Publishers Inc., 1987: p. 80-81.
- Figure 17: Jeffrey Ploskonka. Subject: Touching the wall. Source: *Reflection on the Wall: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*,

by Edward Clinton Ezell. Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1987: p. top 67.

- Figure 18: Seny Norasingh. Subject: Touching the wall. Source: *The Wall: Images and Offerings from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, by Sal Lopes. New York: Collins Publishers Inc., 1987: p. 81.
- Figure 19: Michael Katakis. Subject: Rubbing. Source: *The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, by Michael Katakis. New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1988: p. xx.
- Figure 20: Sal Lopes. Subject: Rubbing. Source: "To Heal a Nation," by Joel L. Swerdlow. *National Geographic*, May, 1985: p. 565.
- Figure 21: Sal Lopes. Subject: Offering. Source: *The Wall: Images and Offerings from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, by Sal Lopes. New York: Collins Publishers Inc., 1987: p. 103.
- Figure 22: Eli Reed. Subject: Offering. Source: *The Wall: Images and Offerings from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, by Sal Lopes. New York: Collins Publishers Inc., 1987: p. 79.
- Figure 23: Tracey Eller. Subject: Offering. Source: *Reflections on the Wall: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, by Edward Clinton Ezell. Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1987: p. 14.
- Figure 24: James P. Blair. Subject: Offering. Source: "To Heal a Nation," by Joel L. Swerdlow. *National Geographic*, May 1985: p. 565.
- Figure 25: Sal Lopes. Source: *The Wall: Images and Offerings from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, by Sal Lopes. New York: Collins Publishers Inc., 1987: p. 113.
- Figure 26: Jodi Cobb. Subject: Reflection. Source: *The Wall: Images and Offerings from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, by Sal Lopes. New York: Collins Publishers Inc., 1987: p. 122.
- Figure 27: Maya Ying Lin. Subject: Reaching for the Washington

Monument. Source: "The 'Vasari' Diary." *Artnews*, Jan., 1983: p. 11.

Figure 28: Smithsonian Institution photograph. Subject: Reaching for the Lincoln Memorial. Source: *To Heal a Nation*, by Jan C. Scruggs. New York: Harper & Row, 1985.

Figure 29: Sal Lopes. Subject: Reflection. Source: *The Wall: Images and Offerings from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, by Sal Lopes. New York: Collins Publishers Inc., 1987: p. 114-115.

Figure 30: Michael Katakis. Subject: "Little girl and her reflection." Source: *The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, by Michael Katakis. New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1988: p. 3.

Figure 31: Michael Katakis. Subject: Offering. Source: *The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, by Michael Katakis. New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1988: p.75.

Bibliography

- Beardsley, John. *Earthworks And Beyond*. New York, 1989.
- Blum, Shirley Neilsen. "The National Vietnam War Memorial." *Arts Magazine*, Dec., 1984: 124-128.
- Campbell, Robert. "An Emotive Place Apart." *AIA Journal*, May, 1983: 150-151.
- del la Croix, Horst and Richard G. Tansey. *Gardner's Art Through The Ages: Eighth Edition*. United States: Harcourt Brace Jovanich, Publishers, 1986.
- Ezell, Edward Clinton. *Reflections On The Wall: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1987.
- Freeman, Allen. "An Extraordinary Competition." *AIA Journal*, Aug., 1981: 47-53.
- Gabor, Andrea. "Vietnam Memorial meets snags that may prevent March groundbreaking." *Architectural Record*, Feb., 1982: 28.
- Hess, Elizabeth. "A Tale of Two Memorials." *Art in America*, April, 1983: 120-127.
- Hunter, Sam and John Jacobus. *American Art of the 20th Century: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*. New York: Harry N. Abrams.
- Larimer, Tim and Gayle Jo Carter. "Vietnam Honors: Gathered from the Wall, Tokens of Heartbreak and Healing." *USA Weekend*, October 16-18, 1992.
- Lippard, Lucy R. *A Different War: Vietnam in Art*. Seattle: The Real Comet Press, 1990.
- Lopes, Sal. *The Wall: Images and Offerings from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. New York: Collins Publishers Inc., 1987.

Katakis, Michael. *The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1988.

Piper, David, ed. *The Randomhouse Library of Painting and Sculpture Volume 4: Dictionary of Artists and Art Terms*. New York: Random House, 1981.

"Politics Threaten to Engulf Vietnam Memorial Design " *AIA Journal*, Feb., 1982: 13+.

Scruggs, Jan C. and Joel Swerdlow. *To Heal a Nation: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985.

Swerdlow, Joel L. "To Heal A Nation." *National Geographic*, May, 1985: 552-573.

"The 'Vasari' Diary": "Vietnam Memorial War." *Artnews*, Jan., 1983: 11-12.