

KING MEMORIAL

Artist Proposals for an Outdoor Memorial on the Boston Common

ABOUT THE KING MEMORIAL

In his sermon, “The Drum Major Instinct”, delivered February 4, 1968 - just two months before his tragic assassination - Martin Luther King, Jr. expressed hope that his legacy would serve as a call to action for the pursuit of justice. To honor his wishes and sacrifices, MLK Boston, in partnership with the City of Boston, commissioned a permanent work of art on the Boston Common commemorating the legacies of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King. This memorial project honors their profound impact upon the world, our nation, and our city, where they met and fell in love as students.

In December 2017, the City of Boston, via the Boston Art Commission, and MLK Boston released an international Request for Qualifications, asking artists, designers, and other creatives to submit their visions. At the same time, over a dozen community meetings were held with enthusiastic civic representatives, activists, youth leaders, and other residents throughout the city.

As a result of these meetings, the project vision was expanded from a single memorial site to three components: (1) an outdoor memorial on the Boston Common; (2) a dynamic program, headquartered in Roxbury and in partnership with leading local stakeholders, that oversees civic, educational, and economic equity programming, and (3) an endowment, in partnership with Twelfth Baptist Church, to educate and train nonviolent activists. This expanded vision, we hope, reflects our deep desire to live up to Dr. King’s challenge when, in 1965, he returned to the city where he and Coretta Scott forged their union, declaring that “Boston must become a testing ground for the ideals of freedom.”

OUTDOOR MEMORIAL PROPOSALS

Five exceptional artist teams developed proposals for the outdoor memorial component of the project over the summer of 2018. Their renderings are on display here and on MLKBoston.org for public comment September 18 through October 16. Here are the five finalists:

Adam Pendleton and Adjaye Associates with Future/Pace and David Reinfurt
Barbara Chase-Riboud
Hank Willis Thomas with MASS Design Group
Wodiczko + Bonder / Maryann Thompson Architects, with Walter Hood
Yinka Shonibare

SELECTION PROCESS

The MLK Boston Art Committee will review public comments and consider the following selection criteria:

The proposal acts as a call to action and addresses issues of social justice, militarism, resilience, racial equity, community service, commitment, education, racial and economic injustice, and activism.

The proposal honors Coretta Scott King's and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s relationship and contributions to the City of Boston and reflects and incorporates an understanding of Dr. King and Coretta Scott King as visionary thinkers on justice, democracy, and peace.

The proposal speaks to the memorial's significance to Boston and responds to the Boston Art Commission's Curatorial Mission to commission and approve innovative and transformative artworks that:

- Engage the community*
- Enrich and enliven the urban environment*
- Are driven by a clear artistic vision*
- Enhance the diversity of the existing collection*
- Respond directly to the specific environment*
- And possess durability appropriate to the lifespan of the work*

Which proposal best meets the selection criteria? Why?

Write your comments here or share them at MLKBoston.org

PROPOSALS

Wodiczko + Bonder / Maryann Thompson Architects, with Walter Hood

Pull quote:

“The ultimate goal of the design scheme is to activate a complex public space in order to inspire learning, dialogue, and activism now and later.”

The project has embraced the historic and unique task of creating a monument not to a single hero but to a partnership of two extraordinary people. It is designed as a living memorial that must be continually reanimated and repurposed by the people who engage with it.

The proposal uses the Common to embed this dual monument in a deep history of activism, signaled by the memorial to Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, and to carry that meaning and purpose into the future.

The site organized by a mound on the east side and the Beacon Towers, on the west side. The Beacon Towers are designed to combine symbolism with action. They symbolize the continuing presence and inspiration and impact of the Kings’ moral and social leadership, while at the same time — through the sounds of specially designed bells and the pulses of light-monitoring — they continually inform the visitors on the current state of the emancipation process, globally, nationally, and in Boston. In this way the two Beacon-Towers encourage and inspire experiences, resolutions, and actions of the people who visit it.

Emanating from the Beacon Towers, in the surface texture of the Memorial Ground, are ripples that evoke the “ripple effect” of the words, actions and leadership of The Kings. The Mound creates a journey “to the mountaintop” culminating in a deliberately empty and shaded platform conceived to bring into being a public community of engaged visitors. The amphitheater area at the edge of the Mound, along with other zones and the cyphers within the Memorial Ground, create a variety of scales and experiences for human interaction, fellowship and community.

An important part of the Memorial is the ‘bridge’ leading from the 54th Memorial across the Common past the Beacon Towers rising from below. The Bridge is inscribed with a chronology of emancipatory events beginning with abolitionism in the 19th century and leading to the struggles for justice and equality in the 21st century. In this way the Kings’ lives are set into a larger story that remains unfinished. Below the bridge, a glass wall offers a more intimate and self-reflective encounter with written and spoken texts that teach and inspire. The reflective surface of the glass allows for the visitor to see themselves within the context of the inscribed words, and in the company of ‘others’.

This project proposes to both celebrate Martin Luther King & Coretta Scott King -their lives and accomplishments- as well as to invite present and future generations to see them as catalysts for an ongoing process of emancipation and transformation. This new public space and forum for engagement, nested in the Boston Common, is created in order to inspire learning,

dialogue, and activism now and later. It is not only a symbolic ground for public assembly, for civic celebrations, for cultural activity, individual and group reflection and discussion but also a socially engaging interactive environment, which -as an affirmation of life, love, fellowship and community- will embody a welcoming message, in and from Boston, for generations to come.

Yinka Shonibare

Pull quote

“Peace, the cornerstone of their values, is central to the design of this monument.”

Avenue of Peace is a memorial walkway, sculpture, and water feature set within Boston Common to honour and celebrate the lives and values of Dr. Martin Luther and Coretta Scott King. As pioneers of the Civil Rights Movement and advocates for justice, they championed non-violent protest and worked towards peace. This interactive memorial engages the public with the story of their lives and mission, through a series of 22 inscribed benches and an app that visitors can download. This memorial is not a singular sculpture, but rather a site for public contemplation and understanding. Peace, the cornerstone of their values, is central to the design of this monument.

The public is invited to take a journey along the avenue. Stone benches, where people can sit and learn about the couple and their histories, will line the walkway. A mixture of evergreens and seasonal deciduous trees will be interspersed between the benches. A fastigate cultivar of the White Pine, called the “Tree of Peace” by indigenous peoples of New England, will symbolise the couple’s enduring values, whilst deciduous trees will mark the passing of time by changing colour with the rest of the park.

Toward the centre of the avenue will stand a tall fountain (14 inches depth x 10 feet wide x 30 feet high) covered in colourful mosaic, set in the middle of a continuous oval pool (120 feet long x 25 feet wide) lined with black granite. The mosaic design incorporates the couple’s names alongside olive branches that will remind viewers of peace as mosaic’s reflection shimmers in the pool.

The space around the mosaic fountain and pool serve as an area for gathering. The public are invited to sit, reflect, learn, and contemplate on the lives and values of the couple, in a moment of stillness. They can watch and listen to accounts of some of the key moments in their life together, from crucial events in the Civil Rights Movement, such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, to their visits to India where they met and studied with direct disciples of Gandhi.

Approaching the avenue, visitors will see information posts which will ask them to download the app. As visitors approach from the east side, they begin to learn about Coretta’s life, beginning with her childhood growing up in Alabama, to her love of music which ultimately led her to Boston where she studied at the New England Conservatory of Music. As visitors get closer to the mosaic fountain, the narrative switches to her life after Dr. King’s assassination and her continued work with human rights movements. The west side of the avenue narrates

Dr. King's early life and the journey that took him to Boston. The memorial as a walk will evoke the long marches they both made for peace.

Avenue of Peace will inspire visitors to learn, converse, and carry on Dr. Martin Luther and Coretta Scott King's legacy.

Adam Pendleton / Adjaye Associates / David Reinfurt / Future\ Pace / Gilbane Boston

Pull quote

"We envision the King Memorial not as a static monument, but as an active civic experience that honors the past and inspires Boston's current and future generations."

In 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his final speech, "I've Been to the Mountaintop." Delivered in support of striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee, the speech is driven by a spatial metaphor: the mountaintop, the point of view of the struggle from which one can see the history of past struggles, as well as a future community to come. King imagines taking a panoramic view of human history and argues that the present is the crucial point, the point at which a Promised Land has become visible on the horizon.

As a metaphor, the mountaintop crystallizes a moment of possibility. It informs our proposed design for Boston's King Memorial: an overlook in black stone, projecting out from Beacon Street to embrace and overlook the Common below. From the summit of the memorial, visitors are invited to regard America's oldest city park and new mountainous sculptures below, which together compose a radical amphitheater. The open structure bridges over the Common's walking path, spanning between the sidewalk and a landscape berm on the far side of the path. It is accompanied by a gentle handicap-accessible ramp which leads visitors from the upper street-level down to the lower-level of the existing walking path. On the lawn beyond, sloped stone sculptures engraved with the words of Coretta Scott King and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. act both as terrain as well as provide seating for the public.

The memorial is woven into Boston's existing urban environment: parallel to Liberty Mall, its ramp and overlook continue the trajectory of the path that leads from the State House's John F. Kennedy statue across Beacon Street, opening up to the Common. This northeast side of the park is steeply sloped and is currently not accessible from Beacon Street other than via a handful of stairways. The memorial's gentle ramp provides much-needed handicap access and ensures that this historic place becomes a site for all.

As an immersive record of the Kings' vision, the top surfaces of the stone memorial are engraved with text from their speeches. A custom typeface, designed

specifically for this memorial, emulates the typed manuscripts of the era, and visually brings the Kings' voices to life. In addition, an integrated passive digital platform for mobile devices provides annotated transcripts and audio of the Kings' speeches, along with images, unlocking a deeper dive into the Kings' powerful messages.

In keeping with the Kings' commitment to equality, activism, and social mobilization, we conceive of the memorial as an open site, much like the Boston Common itself: a public space to be used for gathering, assembly, and public programming, as well as for contemplation and reflection. Not solely recapitulating the past, nor solely honoring two monumental lives, the memorial will embody a broader sense of urgency and solidarity in the present.

Barbara Chase-Riboud

Pull quote

"For the Boston public, I hope that my monument will stand as a historical reminder to early biographical landmarks for both MLK and CSK."

Claude Levi-Strauss stated that "art is the only proof that anything has ever happened in the past." To me, this is one of the most provocative and truest comments on the role of art. Everything else is hearsay. I believe in the power of art and have devoted my career to sculptural embodiments of historical figures like Marian Anderson, Martin Luther King Jr., Alessandro de' Medici, Alexander Pushkin, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, Mao Tse Tung, and Malcolm X.

My memorial dedicated to Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King is made of light, stone and bronze. The truncated stone pyramid represents their mission and collaboration, and the searchlight beacon represents their message from the top of the mountain they climbed together. The Memorial is inspired in part by a 17th century carved wooden pulpit, likely resembling the pulpit of the first Martin Luther, which I saw in 2014. This extraordinary object gave me the idea of an empty pulpit to symbolize Martin Luther King Jr.'s silenced voice. From the empty pulpit, the searchlight beacon pierces the darkness. The Indian granite serves as homage to Gandhi's non-violence movement and inside the passageway is engraved a historic lineage of the diaspora. The floor under the arch repeats the iconic "We shall overcome" slogan. On the back of the monument carved out of the bronze in full view is their most powerful quote: "I have decided to stick with LOVE, HATE is too great a burden to bear..."

Surrounding my memorial will be a series of undulating landscaped "waves" – green rolling hills amongst which the public can roam and wander. Additional MLK and CSK quotations will be strategically placed, embossed on bronze plaques embedded in the green slopes and vales of the hills. These bronze plaques – which the public can sit beside, contemplate, and touch – will reflect both MLK and CSK's most famous and significant quotations, ranging in subject or topic from Vietnam to the March on Washington, to Selma, to Birmingham, and the Nobel Peace Prize.

For the Boston public, I hope the monument will stand as a historical reminder to early biographical landmarks for both MLK and CSK. Boston is where MLK studied for the ministry and CSK studied music at the conservatory; they met in Boston, and their lives forever forward were entwined. I hope it will serve as a destination for reflection, relaxation, education, and inspiration.

This communion with MLK and CSK will be a powerful, cognitive force. It also serves as a warning and an example. The warning embedded and embodied not just in the forms but also what they are made of – ephemeral light and imperishable stone and bronze. MLK whose stilled voice rises from the empty pulpit in a column of light which is almost solid, that illuminates the sky and rolling landscaped hills below.

Hank Willis Thomas with MASS Design Group

Pull quote

“By highlighting the act of embrace, this sculpture shifts the emphasis from a singular hero worship to collective action, imploring those curious enough to investigate closer.”

Protests bring us together. Our convictions lead us to physical proximity and together, we are powerful in defense of our principles.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King understood the power of physical collectiveness in advancing our fight against injustice. As we reflected upon the King legacy, one image—one idea—emerged above the others: Embrace.

On multiple occasions, the nation witnessed the Kings locked together at the frontlines of a march. A monument that captures this embrace declares that love is the ultimate weapon against injustice. In evoking the love shared between the Kings, their commitment to each other, and their ideals, The Embrace is overwhelmingly simple and accessible: it is about what we share, not what sets us apart.

Beneath the 22-foot-high arms of Dr. King and Coretta Scott, passersby will be reminded of our shared human connection. This memorial will envelop participants, allowing them to be simultaneously vulnerable and protected. The memorial will solidify the ideals of inclusion that the Kings defended in their united life of activism. We seek to call people into the act of empathy, an idea Coretta Scott captured when she spoke about the power and accessibility of unconditional love, which when embraced, impels people to go into their community, take risks, and change others' lives for the better.

By highlighting the act of embrace, this sculpture shifts the emphasis from singular hero worship to collective action, imploring those curious enough to investigate closer.

The materiality will further encourage introspection and action. In contrast to the patinated bronze memorials in the Common intended to be observed from afar, The Embrace will be a mirror finish bronze, reflecting the changing natural environment of the park and the viewers themselves. As an inhabitable space, it will be impossible to remain disengaged.

Located at a crossroads in the Common, the landscape around the memorial leverages a gentle incline, forming two spaces. The northern plaza faces the Capitol Building, Shaw Memorial, and Black Heritage trail. The southern amphitheater embraces the Parkman Bandstand where King addressed the Common on April 23, 1965. Each space can accommodate large or small gatherings and multiple types of engagement.

Together, the Capitol, The Embrace, and the Bandstand create an axis that leads to the proposed King Educational Center in Dudley Square. A wall bearing the iconic image that inspired The Embrace will accentuate the exterior facade and mark the gateway to Dudley Square. The path connecting the memorial and education space implores visitors who have experienced the emotion of The Embrace to travel to the neighborhood where King began his historic march on the Common and engage in the activism and hope the Kings embodied.