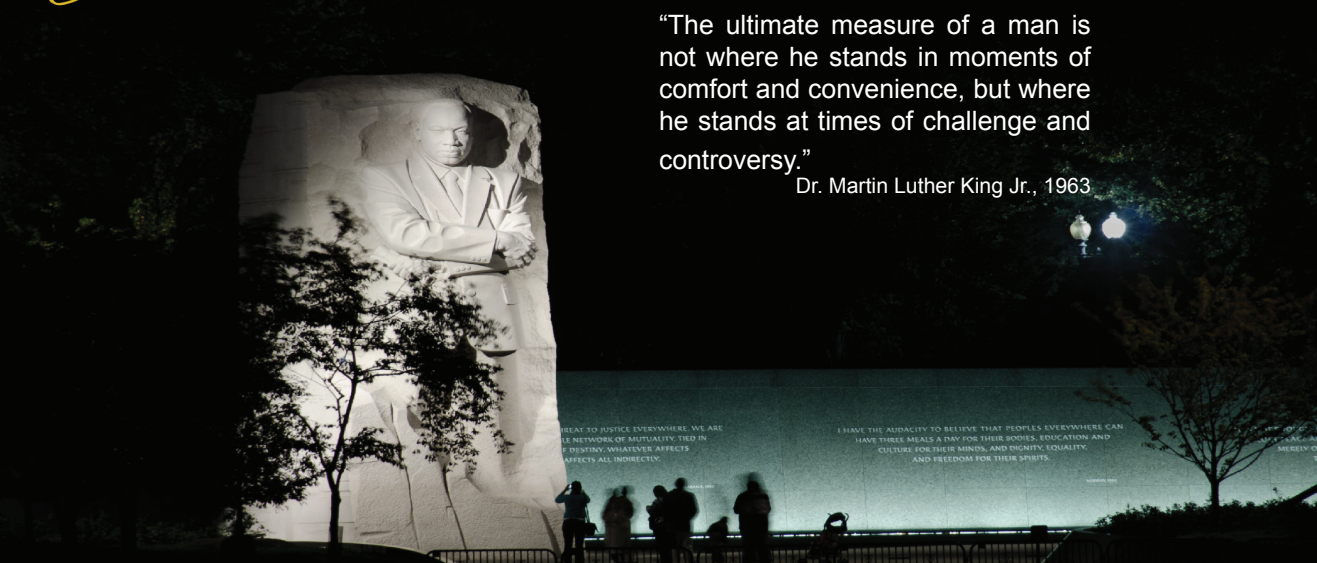


JAN 18, 2016

MLK DAY

Monuments in Art for a King



“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., 1963

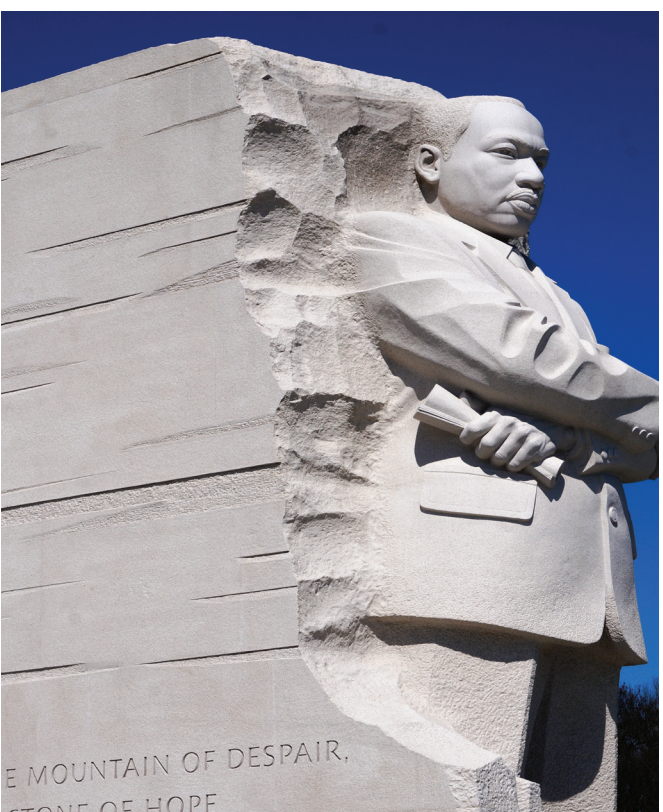
**WASHINGTON, D.C.,** - The committee for the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial had a journey in art along with their vision to create the monument in his honor. I had the privilege to sit in on a lunch and learn about this grand monument and the search for the right artist. There are a few things that one should know before going into the story of the art. King is the first African American honored with a memorial on and near the National Mall and is only the fourth non-president to be memorialized in such a way.

It sits on four acres of land and is comprised of a 30-foot high relief of King named the “Stone of Hope”, this stone stands past two other pieces of granite that symbolize the “mountain of despair”. It also includes a 450-foot inscription wall that has excerpts inscribed on it from many of King’s sermons and speeches. There are 14 inscriptions in total, the earliest from the time of the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott in Alabama, and the latest from his final sermon, delivered in 1968 at Washington, D.C.’s National Cathedral, just four days before his assassination.

It sits adjacent to the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial and shares a direct line of sight between the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials. It took over 20 months to complete and two decades to raise the funding of \$120 million. Funding was obtained from Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, citizens, the King Foundation, and substantial contributions from such donors as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, The Walt Disney Company Foundation, the National Association of Realtors, and filmmaker George Lucas. The figure also includes \$10 million in matching funds provided by the United States Congress.

This is the story that I learned that day about the art. I sat there thinking that it would be a simple presentation, which included how they selected the site and what was the process to design the experience. The presenter did begin in such a way; he explained that the original idea had been shortly after King’s assassination in 1968 and it was when King’s birthday became a National Holiday in 1986 they were able to make strides in completing the project.

They had solicited the professional community of architects and designers for proposals to the monument. At one point they thought they had an artist who could complete the work. Later they would find that the selected artist was subcontracting the work and would not be able to take care to oversee the artistic direction and creation.



This is where their journey of art began. The team started brainstorming on where such great artisans of stone would be in order to keep the monument on track. Immediately they thought of Italy and started to make plans to travel there. They learned they did not have to go to Italy right away because it just so happened that there was a convention of sculptors on the west coast of the United States. They packed their bags and off they went in search of the artist. Once they arrived, they started conversations with various artists and each one of them kept referring to a particular artist as the right person for the job.

They then met Master Lei Yixin, sculptor from the Peoples Republic of China. He indicated that yes, in fact he could do such a creation. They exchanged contact information with the artist with the idea to visit his studio at a later date. After the conference, the team decided to go to Italy to be sure that they were reviewing all possible candidates. Once they arrived in Italy they had the same answers as they did in the U.S. They were told the best artist was in China.



They continued on to Yixin’s studio in China and, much to their surprise when arriving to his studio he already had four complete busts of King completed. They took photographs of the bust to share with the King family to decide on which likeness was most representative. These photos made it to the press and much controversy started over why was a Chinese artist being used to create a monument for King.

One has to understand the Chinese revere their artists as national treasures and Yixin had achieved this status with his country. He and the Chinese government kept an eye on the American press and he continued to work with the foundation to complete the project. One of the criticisms was that the monument of King had his arms folded; he was looking downward instead of looking outward and that he did not look happy.

Yixin had a response for all of the controversy as it was occurring. He indicated that we still had a long way to go in America and also in the world, so therefore the design was not to have a full body King outside of the stone but to represent a partial composition of King. He said that no one would see his eyes at 30 feet up except for the birds and the representation was King contemplating as ministers often do before making a key point in a sermon or a speech. Besides the fact that the experience is designed so that the viewers are to look into his eyes.

Many more protests followed for the erection and labor of the monument. The organization spared no risk and was willing to award the contract to the entity that would insure the monument in case it broke. The center stone is comprised of three pieces that required precision placement in order not to crack. No one took the challenge.

Yixin completed the project as promised. In answer to the question of why is a Chinese artist fit to create a monument of King? His reply was that we believe King belongs to us, but in truth, King belonged to the world.

Artists of all ages have a message to share in helping readicate this epidemic that is affecting our community.


 ART ON AIDS/HIV

South Florida has the highest AIDS Rates in the USA!


 Stories of Poz Millennials

World AIDS Museum and Education Center  
 1201 NE 26th Street Suite 111  
 Wilton Manors, FL 33305  
<http://www.worldaidsmuseum.com>


 Experience OWNING UP, the new, powerful and moving multimedia exhibit that tells the stories of HIV+ Millennials through portraits and stories in their own words about facing the HIV/ AIDS epidemic.

Portrait:  
 Adam  
 Age 23  
 Infected with HIV