

# National Native American Veterans Memorial Design Competition

## STAGE II JURY REPORT

June 22, 2018



The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) carried out the National Native American Veterans Memorial (NNAVM) Design Competition to identify the most fitting design to honor Native American veterans and give all Americans the opportunity to learn of their proud and courageous tradition of service in the Armed Forces of the United States.

NMAI began the Competition process with extensive consultations with Native American veterans across the nation to define the qualities that the selected memorial design must embody. These qualities formed the Vision and Design Principles for the memorial.

The Design Competition provided the vehicle to explore alternate approaches to achieving the memorial—approaches that have the capacity to not only address the Vision and Design Principles, but to also enhance the experience of everyday visitors. Being proposed on the grounds of NMAI adds complexity to this exploration in that the memorial will not “stand alone” to create its own environment, but will be an integrated part of the museum.

Realizing this complexity and duality of purpose, the Jury consciously selected five submittals from the Stage I entries that provided an opportunity to explore five different approaches to, and five different sites for, the memorial. This strategy proved to be extremely valuable to the process and the Jury’s understanding of the memorial.

The resulting Stage II submittals raised issues of memorialization, representation, potential programming, veteran and visitor experience, relationship to the museum, and how existing resources (both physical and programmatic) can be used to create a memorial that honors the military service of Native Americans, which the Jury thoroughly examined in their rigorous evaluation of the submittals.

The members of the Jury wish to express their heart-felt appreciation to the five Stage II Design Teams that gave so much of their talent, time, and energy to evolve their Stage I ideas into their remarkable Stage II design concepts. So it is with humility and a collaborative spirit that the Jury makes its recommendations for moving the project forward.

## The Selection

The NNAVM Design Competition Jury unanimously selects the Warriors' Circle of Honor created by the Harvey Pratt Team as the design concept that best embodies the Vision and Design Principles.

This design is culturally resolute and spiritually engaging. The circle is so profoundly important in all Native cultures that the supreme strength of this design is its ability for all people to connect with it and find meaning in it. The design balances intimacy and openness. It shows the capacity and the spirit of Native People to address the complexity of values, cultures, and ancestral beliefs that have sustained us all for hundreds of years. It is not time specific and will not become dated because the symbol of the sacred circle is timeless. There is no better way of honoring cultures that believe in this circular nature of life to the core of their being.

As a universally respected symbol among Native cultures, the circle is an ideal foundation for a timeless and powerful memorial. It is universal and inclusive, reflecting the spiritual beliefs of the diverse cultures to be represented. The abstract nature of the circle allows for interpretation of what is sacred and meaningful to each individual or culture and affords the greatest opportunity for inclusion without inadvertent exclusion of people or service. The additional interpretive elements included—the flame, the lances, and the additional text and imagery contemplated by the designers—would supplement the abstract symbol of the circle in meaningful ways.

The circle's infinite nature transcends generations and is an enduring symbol for Native American people as well as non-native visitors. It has a simplicity and elegance that can be embraced and understood by veterans, their families, and visitors. The concept of the circular nature of life makes individual veteran experiences and stories part of a collective unified experience.

## Recommendations for Refinement

In making its recommendation to the administration of NMAI and the Smithsonian Institution, the Jury understands that the selected design concept will continue to evolve and mature as the design process unfolds. To that end and integral to their selection, the Jury recommends further design refinements to be considered by NMAI and the Design Team as the design process continues.

These recommendations are as follows:

1. The proposed location on the eastern edge of the site is not achievable and the Jury proposes a new location on the north side of the museum, which is more consistent with the artists' Stage I entry. In addition to the site-specific impacts to the landscape, NMAI has no control over trees or sight lines on the land between NMAI and the Capitol, thereby compromising any visual connection. Additionally, the impact on the wetlands and divorcing the memorial from NMAI are two impacts that would need significant mitigation. The Jury believes that a location within the planting area on the north side of the museum would provide a much better situation and could interact with the functional and programmatic resources existing in that location. Locating the memorial in this location would create a "family" of venues that provide opportunities for programming and experience along the north entrance path, including the sound of water flowing along the River Walk, storytelling and programs in the amphitheater, and individual prayer and meditation in the Prayer Circle.
2. The site elements of the memorial expression should be simplified. Much of the simplicity of the Stage I submission appears to be lost in this iteration. The Jury believes that the current complex wall structure should be reduced to a single wall, allowing for a central space that can safely and comfortably accommodate individual and collective ceremony or contemplation and space for groups to assemble.
3. The many symbolic details and interpretive elements within the design concept are laudable. The Jury cautions, however, to make the message clear, inclusive and universal: Honor our Native American

Veterans. Explore opportunities for various communities to contribute, such as obtaining lances made of wood from different regions. NMAI operation and maintenance concerns and policies should be taken into account regarding the water feature and the flame as the design refinement continues.

## Evaluation of Design Concepts

The following is a summary of what the Jury saw as strengths and weaknesses of the proposed design concepts. Comments are listed in the order in which the Teams presented to the Jury. It must be noted that these comments are derived from five tremendously impressive efforts. All five Teams should be highly commended for their inspiring and thought-provoking concepts.

### **Wellspring of Valor**

#### STRENGTHS:

- A very appealing design, it is beautiful, abstract, and functional. From the standpoint of sheer artistry, this is extraordinary and fabulous.
- The family seat and sculpture add a degree of warmth and a connection to sacrifice and home.
- The glass spires would be beautiful, especially lit at night.
- The central water feature resonates. It provides a healing aspect, adds to the auditory shield, and cools the site.
- The potential for quotations and that kind of interpretation with multiple languages would be good. It could bring in the voices of our ancestors.
- The overall design has an intriguing contrast—horizontal and vertical elements, contemporary structure and traditional earthwork.
- It is a well integrated design of meadow, plaza, and seating wall. It is a good use of the space and creates its own interpretive space. Mounds are familiar and common and the wall rising out of it with words is very powerful.
- The location on the site activates the southern side of the museum and would be ideal to attract passers-by. A person could be piqued with

interest by the design to come around and read the wall. Being able to see it coming down Independence Avenue would help people to recognize it as the memorial over time.

#### WEAKNESSES:

- The form is striking but the motif is not Native American or veteran. It does not represent enough of what the memorial is supposed to convey.
- It is difficult to understand and would need a lot of additional interpretation. There is too much for the observers to figure out on their own.
- The shape of a star for the glass spires connects to veterans, but how do visitors see it as a star?
- The woman and child make up for the “lacking” feeling, but it is not enough.
- There is too much noise on the south side of the museum and no way to escape it on that part of the site. The design also does not afford opportunities for privacy.
- Creates confusion about public versus sacred space. The multi-purpose nature of the bench is worrisome—people sitting, leaving offerings, and interacting with the sculpture—and muddies the idea of what it is for.
- It does not speak to the soul, the spirit. It makes sense with the head, but not so much with the heart.

### **The Enduring Dance**

#### STRENGTHS:

- Figures tell a compelling story, are easily understood, and reflect Native and military traditions. The figurative sculpture will relate to many Native Peoples.
- Dance transcends Native cultures and is a powerful human statement. It is a vehicle for remembrance and reflection. Capturing the moment of a movement is significant and creates an intimate emotional moment and connection to the ancestors.
- The composition is uplifting and provides a sense of resilience. It suggests a dance to welcome the warriors back.

- There is a balanced mix of gender, service representation, and depiction of 250 years of history. The artist tried hard to be inclusive and seems willing to work to make them culturally appropriate.
- Its integration with the Welcome Plaza is a compelling addition to the museum and does not have much effect on the landscape. It fits naturally with the site, but does not look like part of the original building
- The plaza is big enough for this to stand alone but provides enough space for a large gathering.
- The ability to burn sage in the storyteller's hand is good and offers a sense of intimacy.
- The craftsmanship and potential beauty of the sculptures is without question

#### WEAKNESSES:

- Dance is not necessarily universal to the veteran experience. It is also a celebration for many and would not convey a feeling of solemnness and comfort.
- Some poses look overly stylized and more exuberant than would likely occur in most tribal communities.
- Dance is not an individual experience, yet there is no relationship of the figures as a dance composition.
- The attempt to be so inclusive leads to overgeneralizations and ironically leads to exclusions, as people will not be able to see themselves or their dances in the figures. Native People will heavily scrutinize the figures and with such a breadth of Native American communities, some groups will feel left out or misrepresented.
- In terms of timelessness, it is not certain the eight figures will always represent Native Americans or their ongoing military service.
- Its incorporation into the Welcome Plaza alters visitors' interaction with the wetlands. There is not a contemplative or intimate space. The number of visitors and tourists will take away from the needed serenity.
- There is some concern regarding the fragility of the statues, particularly of the smaller detailed elements. They might be difficult to maintain in light of the amount of visitors and large gatherings in the area.

## **Ribbon of Time**

### STRENGTHS:

- The wall is compositionally exquisite and artistic. It resonates as beautiful art.
- It is an interesting story telling device and takes the viewer on a journey. The storied history shows war and peace in context.
- The location on the site is well thought out and provides a harmonious alignment with the River Walk and building.
- An efficient use of space, the design is unobtrusive and is well integrated into the site incorporating into the existing flow on the site.
- The design of the wall is complementary to the museum architecture.
- The wall provides a visual barrier to the tour buses when they are parked along Jefferson Drive.
- The sequence of entering the site from the Mall (northwest corner), passing by the River Walk, encountering the memorial wall and being visually led to the east entrance of the museum is an admirable effort at wayfinding and experiential sequencing.

### WEAKNESSES:

- The content of the wall does not represent enough of what the memorial is supposed to convey. The veterans' story comprises a very limited portion of the overall wall.
- The story misses the mark in that there is no common mythology among Native Peoples. It is difficult to be inclusive using such specific symbols.
- People may not even realize that it is a memorial to honor veterans and additional interpretation and explanation would be required.
- Shows the formation of life, which is wonderful, but not on target. It is more educational than memorial.
- The relief work would have to be very intricate and the proposed material is difficult to manipulate. It is difficult to depict something in relief and try to tell a story in that form.

- The wall blocks the north landscape edge of the River Walk.
- The location lacks contemplative space or a place for healing or spiritual invocation.
- Utilization of the Buffalo Hunter does not connect to the idea of a Veterans Memorial as it depicts hunting and gathering, not military duty.

## **We Fought For Our Country**

### STRENGTHS:

- Guardians protecting Mother Nature and the future is a very strong and compelling statement. The depiction of the earth and future as a woman and child is powerful. Situating them at the top shows we are constantly moving into the future.
- An attractive design, it effectively conveys the warrior spirit and has a nice visual blend of Native and military imagery.
- Respect for the people and spirituality is well represented. There is much symbolism in the overall design.
- Figures make an effort to capture the breadth of service and universality of people. The idea of letting the viewer create the ongoing story into the future resonates.
- It is monumental in scope—a totemic, single structure.
- The plan creates a new way into the site and the museum and creates a connection to the Mall.

### WEAKNESSES:

- The torso sculptures are ambiguous. Half figures without faces are odd and more ghost like. The spiritual explanation is not evident and would need much interpretation.
- The imagery of half a human body is worrisome. It feels less than whole and not healing, which is a disconnect with the message that should be conveyed.
- The overall composition feels more like a statue or exhibit than a memorial. The shape and detail of the torsos contribute to the sense of exhibit rather than memorial.
- There is concern about the intensive maintenance required to keep the colored patina over time.

- The global significance of certain symbolic aspects is of concern (i.e., not all Native veterans came from a boarding school, nor is the healing hand meaningful across cultures). Representation of Native Hawaiians and Alaskans is not pleasing.
- It is not timeless. The uniforms are static, leaving the story to the panels, which seem like a tertiary element that could get lost in the overall work. The sculpture speaks to the past and present, but there is no room for moving into the future.
- The design focuses on the monument and does not address creating space. Given the height of the monument, it needs more space around it for people to see it. There is not enough space for privacy or reflection. The sheer size of the pathway needed to accommodate this monument would have a significant impact on the landscape and wetlands.

### **Warriors' Circle of Honor**

#### STRENGTHS:

- The circle as the central form is a powerful and universal symbol that crosses Native cultures and values. For something so simple, it is quite moving.
- The universality of the symbol allows different Native cultures to find meaning and representation and limits inadvertent exclusion. Native Alaskans may find comfort in the shape of their drum while Native Hawaiians may reflect on the concept of the *pikokolu* (literally, three “centers” within the human form signifying the importance of relationships and shared attachments to one’s ancestors and descendants).
- While the circle comes out of Native American spirituality, it is a concept that is not so foreign that non-Native people can also relate to it, resulting in true inclusivity.
- The infinite nature of the circle is culturally resolute and spiritually engaging, representing connectivity and continuity.
- The elements of fire and water are also universal across Native cultures and add to the power of the composition. These elements, along with the use of sound and prayer cloths, create a multisensory and soothing experience.

- The lances provide a good counterpoint to the abstract nature of the circle and allow people to interact with the memorial.
- The composition is public yet creates an intimate place for prayer and reflection.

#### WEAKNESSES:

- The location selected is extremely problematic. Too much destruction of the wetlands is required to construct the memorial and to create the intended views. The landscape is a unique place in Washington DC and this site design would puncture the landscape in a negative manner. There is also concern that long-term maintenance and security would be more difficult in this disconnected location.
- The view of the Capitol (through the circle) as portrayed in the design submittal is unachievable given NMAI's inability to dictate removal of the trees to the east that would block the view.
- The addition (from Stage I design) of an additional wall crowds the space and creates potential circulation issues. It seems unlikely that safe circulation of visitors with mobility issues could be accommodated.
- Some symbolic elements, such as the footprints, are too literal to be meaningful across cultures. Simplification of the design could improve its strength.

## Closing

As stated in the initial Invitation to Participate, the memorial carries the deep responsibility of educating across generations; respectfully acknowledging Native veterans; and reminding all Americans of our national obligation to honor this inspired legacy. The Jury sincerely agrees with this mission and feels that this Design Competition process, the finalists' contributions, and the selected design concept greatly contribute to the success of accomplishing this important endeavor.

The Jury thanks the National Museum of the American Indian for the opportunity to participate in this extraordinary project and looks forward to celebrating the completion of the National Native American Veterans Memorial.

Mr. Larry Ulaaq Ahvakana (Inupiaq)

Ms. Stephanie Birdwell (Cherokee)

Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole

Mr. Edwin Fountain

Mr. Brian McCormack (Nez Perce)

Mr. Mark Kawika McKeague (Native Hawaiian)

Ms. Lillian Pitt (Wasco, Yakima, Warm Springs)

Dr. Herman Viola

Mr. Kevin Gover (Pawnee), Alternate Juror