

# THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

ESTABLISHED BY CONGRESS MAY 17, 1910

J. CARTER BROWN, Chairman

HAROLD BURSON  
JOHN S. CHASE  
SONDRA G. MYERS

WALTER A. NETSCH  
ALAN R. NOVAK  
EDWARD D. STONE, JR.

CHARLES H. ATHERTON, Secretary

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## MINUTES OF THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

13 October 1981

The meeting was convened at 9:45 a.m. in the Commission of Fine Arts offices at 708 Jackson Place, N. W., Washington, D. C.

Members Present:

Hon. J. Carter Brown, Chairman  
Hon. Harold Burson  
Hon. Sondra G. Myers  
Hon. Walter A. Netsch  
Hon. Alan R. Novak  
Hon. Edward D. Stone, Jr.

Staff Present:

Mr. Charles H. Atherton, Secretary  
Mr. Donald B. Myer, Assistant Secretary  
Mr. Jeffrey R. Carson  
Mrs. Sue Kohler  
Mr. Richard H. Ryan

National Capital Planning  
Commission Staff Present:

Mr. George Evans

### I. ADMINISTRATION

- A. Dates of next meetings: 10 November 1981  
15 December 1981

B. Minutes of the 16 September 1981 meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts, approved.

C. Design mock-up of Castle (Renwick) Gates at Smithsonian Castle: report. The Secretary said the staff had been working with the Smithsonian on this project and had twice viewed a mock-up of the gates in approximately their intended position on Independence Avenue. The design had been based on a sketch of the gates in place (although they were never actually erected) seen in Robert Dale Owen's Hints on Public Architecture (1849). Staff member Sue Kohler showed slides of the mock-up,

on the north side of the plaza. He showed a slide of the original Great Seal, designed in 1782, and suggested it would be an appropriate design to use in the plaza, with its depiction of the L'Enfant plan, since it was the seal in use in L'Enfant's time. He noted, however, that PADC prefers the current Great Seal design. Mr. Netsch suggested both might be used. The members all preferred the original design; a letter will be sent to PADC stating this preference. Exhibit D

B. National Park Service, National Capital Region

1. CFA 13/OCT/81-4, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, granite samples.

The Secretary said this submission was for a material sample only; he noted, however, that the Commission had received requests to speak from individuals opposing the design of the memorial, and had also received a letter in opposition to the design from veteran James Webb, which had been submitted for the record. Exhibit E

Robert Doubek, the project director for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, was introduced. He said a professional design team had been chosen to work with Maya Lin in executing her winning design, and then introduced architect Kent Cooper of the Cooper-Lecky Partnership, head of this team

Mr. Cooper said he would have a complete design in November, and although reluctant to make a partial submission at this time, needed approval of the material as soon as possible because of the time factor in procurement and shipping. He said the design required solid black granite with no veining, so that the many names, at a small scale, could be sandblasted into it satisfactorily. He said such granite was available only in Sweden or India; the choice would be dependent on cost and availability. He showed a sample of the highly polished granite (this one from Sweden) which had been approved by Miss Lin. Mr. Netsch, noting the Government's policy of using domestic materials if at all possible, asked if a different color of a satisfactory density would be available in the United States. Mr. Cooper said he did not know; Miss Lin had specified black. Mr. Netsch commented that concepts can change, and added that black does offer a great contrast to the other memorials.

Two persons speaking against the design were then heard. The first speaker was Thomas Carhart, an attorney, graduate of West Point, and a Vietnam veteran. He stated his conviction that the war was fought for a noble cause, although he realized many people did not agree with this assessment; he said also that he had been the victim of strong animosity when he returned from Vietnam. He reviewed his association with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund and his submission of a design in the competition. He added that he did not expect to win but had been very disappointed in the design chosen, and in the fact that there was not even one Vietnam veteran on the jury. He thought the winning design insulting and demeaning: black instead of white, hidden in the ground instead of raised above it. He thought the design was based on a political view of the war. He closed by asking that the Commission of Fine Arts reopen the competition. Exhibit E-1

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5.

The second speaker, Tony Norton, said the winning design was not original and opposed it on these grounds. He showed an illustration from "Unbuilt America" which, he said, was the basis of Miss Lin's design.

After the speakers had been heard, Mr. Netsch said he did not believe the decision to reopen the competition rested with the Commission of Fine Arts. He commented also that he did not think that jurors always had to have been involved with the event which brought forth the design of a memorial.

The Chairman then reviewed the previous submission of the design, saying that the Commission had heard a dissenting voice at that meeting, but had felt that the design was appropriate, that it had great dignity and simplicity. He said the modulation of the ground, openness to the sky, and the relationship to the other memorials on the Mall all made it very effective. He thought the material was beautiful, the site very important, and the total effect one of contemplation and appreciation. He noted the trend away from the traditional type of monument, whose symbols now seem inadequate, and the movement towards a landscape solution.

Mr. Carhart said that while he could agree with much of this, the memorial could have been designed as a low key, low profile white structure above the ground, rather than depressed and black.

Mr. Doubek said the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund would make a statement for the record, and then introduced Jan Scruggs, president of the organization. Mr. Scruggs noted that he, too, had been seriously wounded in the war, and he talked about the psychological aspects of the war and the reactions to the design for the memorial. He thought any design would arouse misplaced anger in some people, anger which was really directed towards the treatment Vietnam veterans had received, not towards the memorial. He said there are still lingering problems relative to the war which the nation needs to resolve. He noted that the winning design had been praised by a number of individuals and groups, including the American Legion. In regard to the composition of the jury, he said the members were very competent, had been interviewed by Vietnam veterans, and some had participated in other wars, if not that in Vietnam.

Mr. Burson said at this point that he thought the Commission was being brought into something it did not contribute to, and that it was being used as a forum for intramural difficulties. The Chairman and Mr. Netsch agreed, and the Chairman turned the discussion to a consideration of the submission, which was for approval of a material sample. Mr. Netsch questioned whether the Commission should approve the sample at this meeting or wait until the entire design was submitted. The Chairman said that in view of the time schedule and the long lead-time necessary to order the stone, he thought they should go ahead and accede to the request to review the material sample separately. No one had any objections to the quality or appearance of the black granite sample, and it was unanimously approved. Exhibits E-2, E-3