

Towards Remembrance

In Memory Of

21ST CENTURY MEMORIALS RESONATE WITH AN AGE OF GROWING CONFLICT, TERROR AND PREJUDICE. SPENCER BAILEY INVESTIGATES THE ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF LOSS.

On 19 July 1989, three-year-old Spencer Bailey boarded United Airlines Flight 232 in Denver with his mother, Frances, his brother Brandon, and 293 other passengers. They were bound for Chicago. At 37,000 feet, the plane's hydraulic lines were severed, and the pilot was forced to make an emergency landing at Sioux Gateway Airport, Iowa. Upon impact, the fuselage split into several pieces. Bailey was found in the wreckage and was quickly handed over to Lieutenant Colonel Dennis Nielsen, who carried him to safety. The scene was captured by photographer Gary Anderson and the image became iconic, carrying associations of masculine heroism and childhood innocence – narratives that remain embedded in western cultural responses to tragedy.

Bailey's brother also survived the crash, but his mother unfortunately did not, passing away with 112 other passengers. Now a design journalist, author and Editor-at-Large at Phaidon, Bailey has mixed feelings about the memorial to Flight 232, which was unveiled in Sioux City in 1994. These emotions are complicated by the fact that the centrepiece of the work, *The Spirit of Siouxland*, is a bronze statue of Bailey in Nielsen's arms, created by sculptor Dale Lamphere.

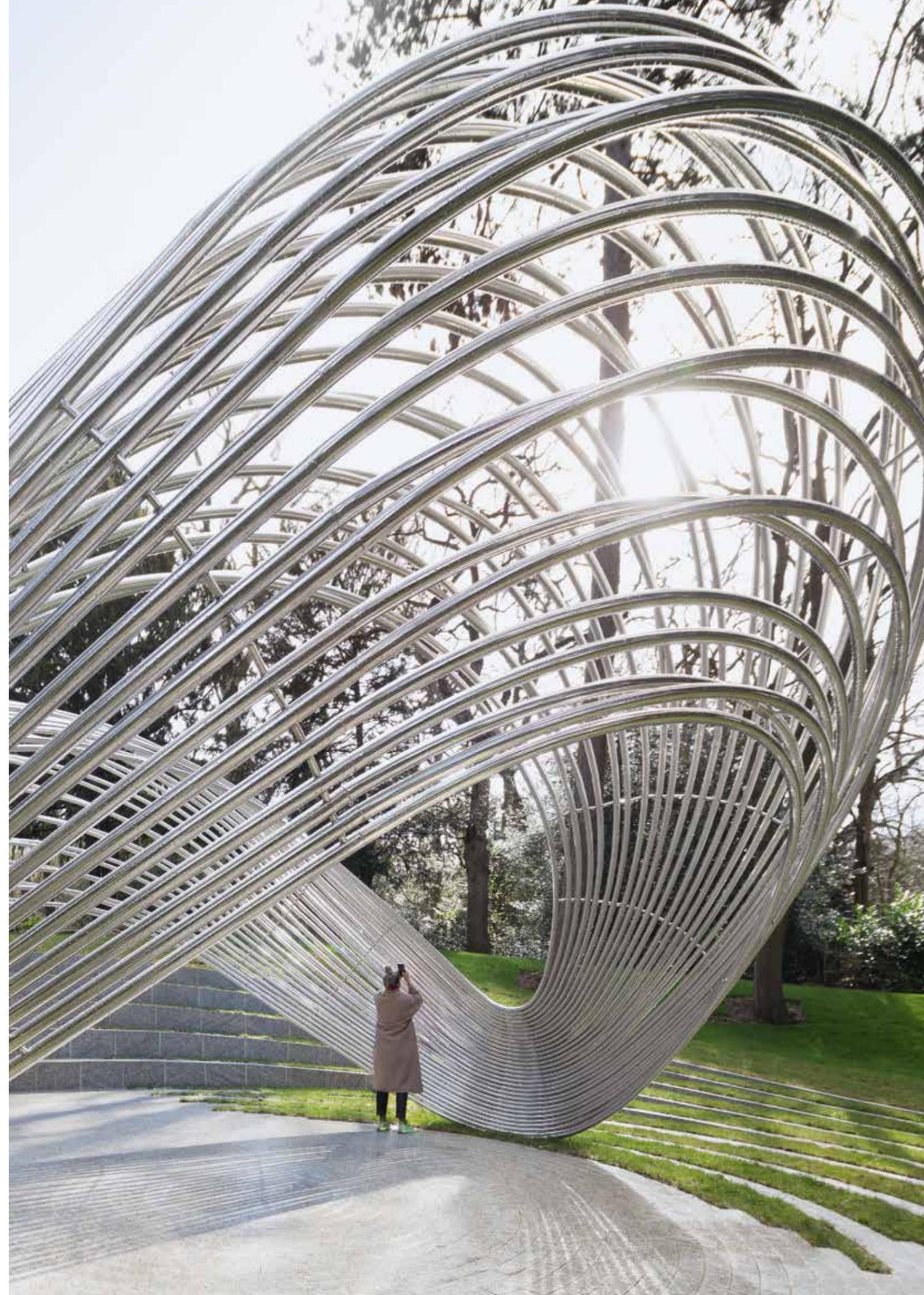
"A young child being carried by a man: there's something inherently political about that, and also patriarchal. The reality is that a woman actually found my body in the wreckage, and there's no photo of her." The erasure of this second rescuer, Lynn Hartter, typifies this memorial's lack of attention to the multiplicity of experiences it represents – to miss out key details. "The only names at the site are the four people connected to the statue: the photographer, Colonel Nielsen,

the sculptor and myself – not all the other men, women and children who were on the plane that day."

Bailey's new volume of memorial art would probably never have come about without the formative experience of the crash or, perhaps, of having his young body cast in bronze. However, when researching for this book, a key distinction for Bailey was the difference between "memorial" and "monument" – two terms that have been perpetually confused. And it's the monument-like qualities of the Flight 232 memorial – the use of figurative sculpture and narrative tableaux; an emphasis on heroic individuals who are almost always white men and who often stand for a patriotic myth – that detract from its value as a memorial by definition.

During the era of high western imperialism and throughout both World Wars, monuments were chief talismans of collective memory, rooted in the twin traditions of Neoclassicism and Realism. The columns, needles and arches erected for WWI, with their sombre classical proportions and incorporation of statuary, are products of the monument era. However, with their poignant lists of names, many of these structures also become precursors to an aesthetic and cultural seachange: the shift from "monument" to "memorial" – felt more strongly from the 1960s onwards into today.

A key turning point was Maya Lin's design for the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* constructed in Washington in 1982. Prior to this, collective suffering had been distilled into figurative renderings of heroic archetypes or leaders: often one person cast in bronze or stone. However, Lin's design was in keeping with the minimalist aesthetic of the era: a 250-foot-long





Flight 93 National Memorial, Shanksville, Pennsylvania, USA, Paul Murdoch Architects (2011–2020).
Picture credit: Eric Staudenmaier Photography / Paul Murdoch Architect.

“On many memorial sites, there is also an ephemeral, living presence of foliage and water amongst the solid elements. Just as stone and steel imply permanence, so the lithe, light-reflecting qualities of water stand for new life, recovery and growth.”

Previous Page:
Sousse and Bardo Memorial,
Birmingham, England, UK, George King
Architects (2019). Picture credit: NAARO

Left:
National Memorial Hall for Israel's
Fallen, Jerusalem, Israel, Kimmel
Eshkolot Architects (2017).
Picture credit: Amit Geron



black granite wall, set in a rift in the ground in Constitution Gardens, etched with just under 58,000 names. The change in emphasis might have seemed contradictory. On the one hand, there was no figurative or realistic element to Lin's design – no emphasis on the human form and thus, for some, no obvious conduit for the memories that the site was intended to honour. On the other hand, by pulling focus from one particular individual, the project was curiously able to emphasise the importance of collective grief. The centrepiece – if there is one – is the list of names.

In short, Lin's project marked a shift from realist or classical monuments, to minimalist ambiguous memorials that allowed for wider representation. Audiences are tasked to imagine and empathise for all the things that it does not show. The underlying quality – which allowed the design to achieve balance and be successful in its intent – was abstraction. The monument did not tell any one story, instead telling everyone's. It's this subtle, seesawing quality that binds together the 60 plus works in Bailey's book.

There are many other recurring features in contemporary memorials. Most obviously, there is an emphasis on solidity through concrete, steel, granite and brick. Ironically, these are materials that were, in the hands of first-generation minimalist artists, used to focus attention on the barest of forms. Here, they become saturated with huge emotional and allegorical weight. To gaze on the barren slabs of Peter Eisenman's *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* (2005) – a vast, undulating grid of concrete “stelae” on a Berlin square – is to encounter a stark, unshiftable presence that seems to stand both for insurmountable loss and the permanence of history as a whole: a determination not to forget.

By contrast, many works forego ideas of stability or permanence, preferring to focus on empty spaces. These designs take on new connotations of mourning, speaking to a feeling of loss that is invisible but insurmountable: that must be built around rather than filled. The most obvious example of this is Michael Arad's *Reflecting Absence* (2014), which marks the site of the Twin Towers with two deep square wells, waterfalls cascading over their inner edges into basins 30 feet below. A similar effect is achieved by Micha Ullman's *Empty Library* (1995), which commemorates a Nazi book burning on the Bebelplatz in Berlin. Almost invisible from ground level, the project comprises a rectangular shaft cut into the ground of the public square, with empty shelves lining the inner walls of the subterranean cavity.

On many memorial sites, there is also an ephemeral, living presence of foliage and water amongst the solid elements. Just as stone and steel imply permanence so the lithe, light-reflecting qualities of water and vegetation stand for new life, recovery and growth. The grounds of the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum (2000) – designed by Butzer Architects in memory of the victims of the Oklahoma bombing – offer an elegant synthesis of landscape and architecture. The central feature is a large, rectangular reflecting pool, flanked by a gently sloping lawn.

Then there is visitor interaction: in many cases, the completion or consolidation of the memorial occurs through the presence of human life. For example, after entering the vast, glass-walled lobby of David Adjaye's Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (2016), visitors take an elevator 65 feet down to the museum's “crypt.” From there, they begin a journey back upwards



National Memorial Hall for Israel's Fallen, Jerusalem, Israel, Kimmel Eshkolot Architects (2017). Picture credit: Amit Geron.

through five subterranean floors of chronological galleries, including a reconstructed slave cabin and a segregated railway carriage. Above ground are exhibition floors framing the achievements of African American sportspeople, cultural icons and musicians. To make the journey from darkness into light is to partake in a form of metaphor, enacting the process from bondage to (some form of) freedom.

Adjaye's design also asks difficult questions about the whole idea of memorial architecture. If constructing them is the art of shaping social memory, who decides what gets remembered, and how? The politics of memorialisation – its vulnerability to political and economic power and prejudice – might explain the dearth of memorials to black experience, amongst many other causes, on the western memorial map. As a white male author, Bailey is sensitive to this. "There aren't enough memorials in the USA depicting or honouring the incredible sacrifice and loss that African American people have experienced over this nation's history. There should be slavery memorials in Africa, there should be more slavery memorials in the UK, Belgium, France, Portugal, and so on ..."

With this context in mind, one of the most viscerally affecting works is the The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, which opened in Montgomery, Alabama, in 2018. A tribute to the 4,400 black Americans lynched between 1877 and 1950, the MASS Design Group's site includes a central pavilion with 816 Corten steel blocks hanging from its ceiling, each six feet tall and representing a US County where a lynching took place, inscribed with the names of those killed. Around the edges of the pavilion, replica slabs are laid on their sides. The connotations of the arrangement – strange fruit, coffins in serried rows – are unavoidable but unforced,

depending on visitors to complete the image in their minds.

Moving into 2020 and beyond, how will we memorialise the tragedies of our own time, such as the loss of life from Covid-19, which is also stratified by racial inequality? Perhaps equally importantly, in a culture fractured by political animosity, is there any common ground for our grief: for the subjects we consider fit for remembrance and the means we choose for doing so? Can we grieve together anymore?

On this final point Bailey is, inherently, optimistic. "I think we can. What most people are angry about is figurative statues. They are monuments, they are not memorials. Most statues depict white men, and typically they've done pretty terrible things. There aren't a lot of abstract memorials that can cause this sort of consternation." The capacity to honour collective memory is the achievement of memorials, not monuments, which remain riddled with the narratives of empire and conquest – colonialism and slavery.

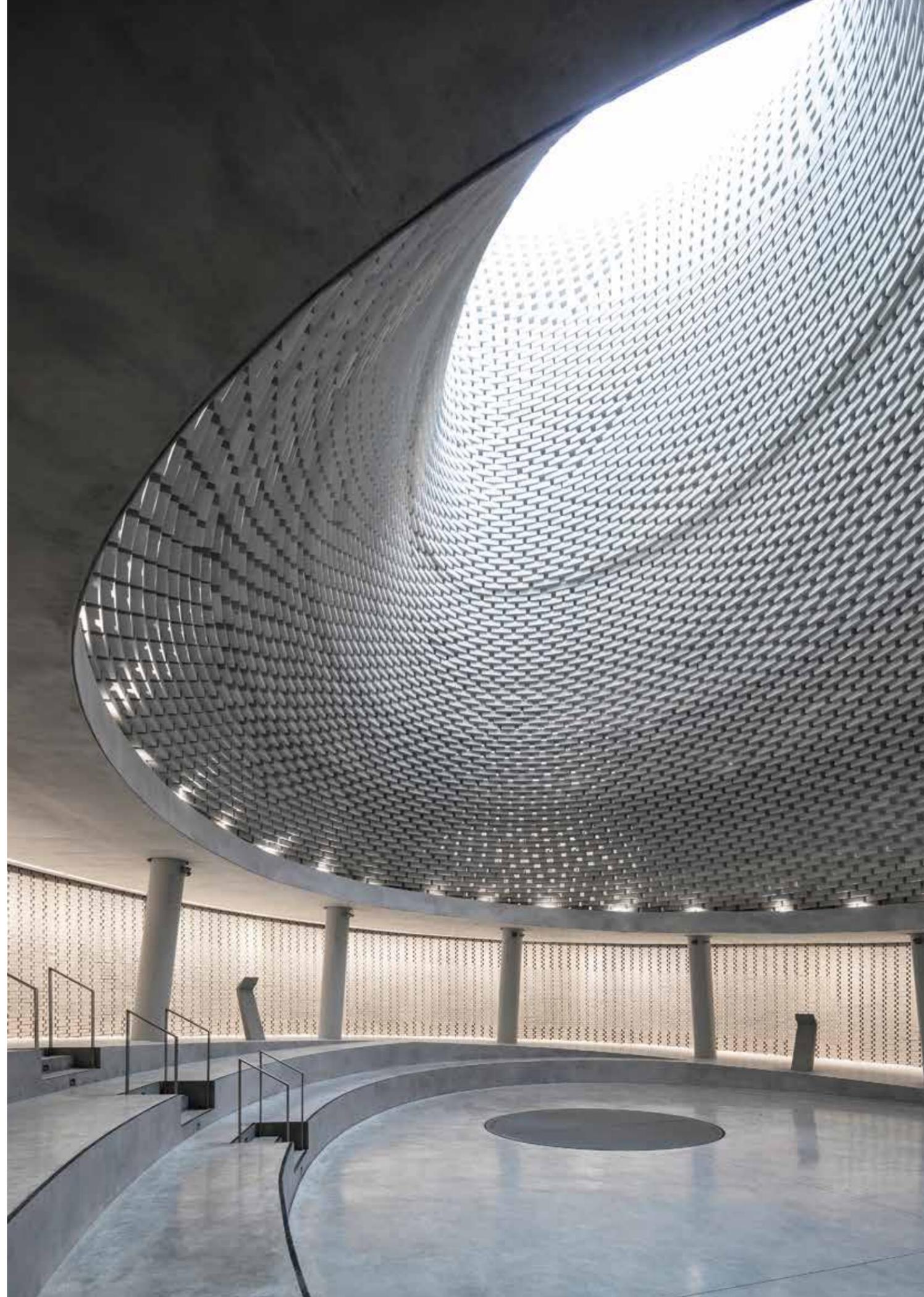
It's this same sense of the democratic, unifying power of abstraction that informs Bailey's thoughts on potential future monuments, for example, those that might recognise the devastating pandemic. "It would be interesting to create a [uniform] design that is simple enough to be executed anywhere – installed in parks, cities and towns around the world featuring local names of the dead, with a digital searchable component that has the names of everyone around the world." For Bailey, such a project would harness the power of memorials to shape our collective future as well as curate shared memories. "We need memorials not only to remember, but also to force us to slow down. They are to humble us, turn us inward, allow us to feel things. They serve as expressive concrete reminders that help us heal."

Right:
National Memorial Hall for Israel's
Fallen, Jerusalem, Israel, Kimmel
Eshkolot Architects (2017).
Picture credit: Amit Geron.

Words
Greg Thomas

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Contemporary Memorials*
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Exhibition Reviews

1 Balancing Act

JULIE COCKBURN

Julie Cockburn's (b. 1966) latest exhibition, *Balancing Act*, springs into The Photographers' Gallery, London, like a burst of kinetic energy that dances across the walls. The images follow the format of collage seen in previous work, and are just as delicate and mischievous. As the exhibition title suggests, the images lean towards sentiments of stability – fitting for a series made so recently, in an off-kilter world.

At first glance, the compositions may seem arbitrary, in the way that the multitude of shapes and strokes overlay the found vintage photographs that Cockburn is known to employ. In fact, the shapes are placed with fine precision, using techniques of hand-embroidery or glued vinyl to give each image an astute sense of poise and positioning. This device lifts the photographs beyond their previous state and contexts. Nostalgic portraits, figures in action, perched

parrots and majestic landscapes are all reincarnated with the spirit of Cockburn. Their predictability is subverted, and their position as forgotten relics is called into question.

Four works entitled *Ta Da 1 – 4* (2020) submerge an ice-skating figure underneath block-coloured orb-like balls. They burst with spectacle and spirit, drawing the eye to something unseen: like an aura or the adrenaline felt when a human performs something dangerous and complex. Meanwhile, images of mountain-ranges like *Valley Melody* (2020) and *Magic Lake* (2020) – which move away from human performance – still succeed in evoking a sense of movement and energy. The sprinkling of shapes hark to a trail that's left for the viewer – a journey that's yet to be had. *Balancing Act* is altogether thoughtful and compelling. These are stories that have been resurfaced and reimagined.

Words
Robyn Cusworth

The Photographers' Gallery, London
9 September - 25 October

thephotographersgallery.org.uk

2 The Time We Call Our Own

A GROUP EXHIBITION

It's hard not to feel a sense of loss and longing at Open Eye Gallery's first show since reopening, which reflects on clubs and parties as sites for creative resistance. A dance floor seems almost unimaginable in this age of distance. Curated by Adam Murray, *The Time We Call Our Own* presents work by six international artists – Amelia Lonsdale, Andrew Miksys, Oliver Sieber, Dustin Thierry, Mirjam Wirz and Tobias Zielony.

Luring us in through the glass front of the gallery is a large-scale image from Dustin Thierry's series *Opulence*, a tribute to the black LGBTQ Ballroom scene in Europe. Like religion, nightlife subculture is characterised by icons, rituals and communities. In Mirjam Wirz's documentation of Latin American "sonidos" we see how sound systems produce new forms of belonging beyond those prescribed by family or workplace. Displayed on two black walls that meet in a

corner, enticing us inwards, Oliver Sieber's *Imaginary Club* points to a global collective experience through continuities of style in Japan, Europe and the USA. Shot throughout the 2000s in Lithuanian small-town discos staged in former Soviet municipal buildings, Andrew Miksys' *Disko* shows a generation finding new forms of expression in the wake of the USSR, whilst for Tobias Zielony's post-revolutionary Ukrainian youth techno and queer raves are a liberating nocturnal respite from wider Russian influence.

In the upstairs gallery, Amelia Lonsdale offers 1970s snapshots by her mother and her then boyfriend, both New Romantics. Club culture thrives in the cracks between day and night, between art and hedonism. Gentrification, far right populism, and now Covid-19, threaten the spaces portrayed in this exhibition – and with them our capacity to dream.

Words
Rachel Segal Hamilton

Open Eye, Liverpool
3 September - 23 October

openeye.org.uk

3 Games We Play

THE OUTSIDE ART PROJECT

There is something very fitting about *Games We Play*. Change and transformation are two key themes that connect the three photographers behind the 30 large-scale images in the *Outside Art Project* – the new outdoor exhibition space in King's Cross. Julie Cockburn remodels vintage photographs through media such as painting and embroidery; Luke Stephenson blends portraiture with still life; and Weronika Gęszicka subversively hijacks subjects, decontextualising found images and giving them a completely surreal feel.

Games We Play feels very punctual too. The exhibition was inaugurated on 27 July in partnership with The Photographers' Gallery and at the height of summer 2020, a time which perhaps lacked the glee typically associated with the sandy, hot season. The world was still in lockdown, emerging as part of the government's "Get Back to Summer" campaign. Stephenson's rich, sculptural ice-creams melt

in tiny teardrops and the effect is bittersweet. The thready, round bubbles emerging from Cockburn's photographs, as in *Mountain Lake*, seem heavy and intrusive. The twin girls playing ball in Gęszicka's *Untitled #10* lean beyond the frame, a metal structure fixing the photographs two-by-two above a series of benches and which brutally cuts short the girls' fun.

Games We Play extends the length of King's Boulevard, through Pancras Square and up towards Granary Square. Viewers can read into the decision to exhibit art outside the train station, where mundane and "ordinary" journeys have been completely transformed. Art has the power of illuminating reality. It encourages us to look again, to find exceptional beauty in normality and broaden perspectives.

This is the first exhibition hosted by the Outside Arts Project, ending on 1 November, and should neither be missed nor given for granted – providing much-needed cultural respite.

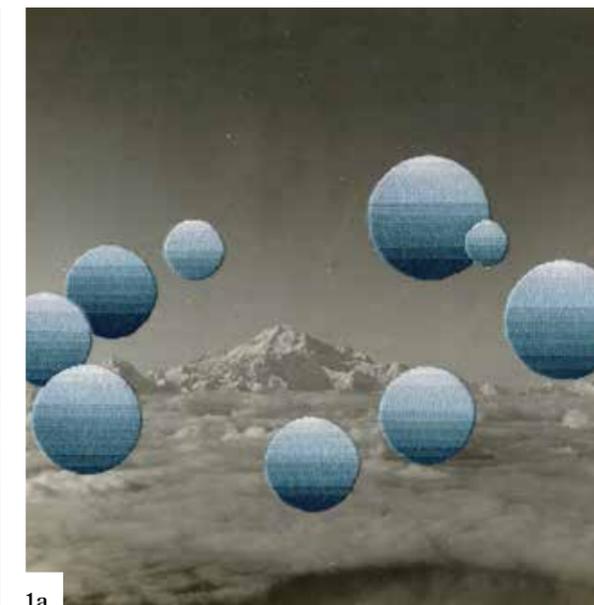
Words
Carolina Mostert

King's Cross, London
27 July - 1 November

kingscross.co.uk



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1a



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1b

1a. Julie Cockburn, *Blue Moons*, 2020. © Julie Cockburn. Courtesy of The Photographers' Gallery. 1b. Julie Cockburn, *Valley Melody*, 2020. © Julie Cockburn. Courtesy of The Photographers' Gallery. 2. Dustin Thierry, *Opulence*, *Thierryn Vineyard* at the *We Are The Future – And The Future Is Fluid* Ball organised by *Legendary Marina 007* and *Mother Amber Vineyard*. *Body painting by visual artist Alrich*, *Dustin Thierry*, *Amsterdam 2018*. 3. *Untitled #10* © Weronika Gęszicka. Courtesy of the artist and *lednostka gallery*.