



February 28, 2011

American Association for State and Local History
1717 Church Street
Nashville, TN 37203-2991

Dear Selection Committee:

I am writing to enthusiastically endorse the nomination of Museum Without Walls™: AUDIO as an exemplary multimedia historical interpretative project. This innovative program of the Fairmount Park Art Association has changed the way that ordinary Philadelphians and outside visitors to engage with public space and the environment through outdoor sculpture. As an educator and museum professional who has worked in the public realm for over 30 years, I want to underscore the groundbreaking nature of this project. It has provided our field with a new model using the latest interactive technology that reaches people on the street, enticing and encouraging residents and tourists alike to become more aware of the fascinating and complex histories behind each artwork.

I was introduced to Museum Without Walls™: AUDIO through colleagues at the Pew Center for Arts & Humanities. In 2009, I learned more about the Park Association's project when I was asked by Pew to join an AASLH conference panel, *Beyond Pushing Buttons: Using Technology to Connect with New Audiences* for which Penny Balkin Bach, the Art Association's Executive Director, also presented. At that point, the project was still in its planning stages. I was very impressed at how carefully the planning was thought out and developed since far too few projects engage in good planning and assessment in early stages when it is most crucial. As creator and founding director of *PhilaPlace.org*, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's interactive Web site anchored neighborhood history and culture outreach project, I know well the planning, collaboration, and intensive work it takes to create a successful project engaged with the public. Because of my own commitment with *PhilaPlace* to build an inclusive and diverse constituency, I was immediately drawn to the inclusive and creative approach of Museum Without Walls™: AUDIO. The solid scholarship that is the foundation of the audio stories is exemplary. They are focused examinations of sculptures that are quite disparate, created over more than a century, and united by their relationships to the civic and cultural life of Philadelphia.

What makes this program so extraordinary overall, is that each audio segment features multiple voices, each with a unique and direct connection to the sculpture. The voices weave together a complete narrative; in fact, listening is like eavesdropping on to a captivating conversation. The group of nearly 100 speakers is staggering in its scope, including award-winning, nationally recognized historians, living artists speaking about their work, family members with first-person commentary, educators, civic leaders and commissioning parties. More specifically, each audio segment is additionally enriched by elements of surprise, humor and poignancy.

To further elaborate, I will never again look at the *All Wars Memorial to Colored Soldiers and Sailors* by J. Otto Schweitzer (1934) quite the same, having learned through Museum Without Walls™: AUDIO how racist attitudes of the period kept the sculpture from being installed in its intended location. Samuel Hart Jones, Jr. explains how his great-grandfather Hon. Samuel Beecher Hart, an African American state legislator, initiated the commissioning of the sculpture. Michael B. Roepel, President of the Committee to Restore and Relocate the *All Wars Memorial*, talks about the effort to relocate of the memorial to its current site, 60 years after its creation. Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Charles Fuller, who wrote "A Soldier's Play," speaks about racism and African American military life. Finally, we also hear music from "Lift Every Voice and Sing," written by James Weldon Johnson and performed at the original dedication ceremony in 1934. It's possible to learn more about the sculpture on the Museum Without Walls™ Web site, where one can listen and watch a slideshow, submit a personal story, or post photographs.

By making these stories available through a variety of free online and mobile delivery methods, the Art Association has found the ideal formula for reaching new audiences. Participants can simply dial up a program using their cell phone while standing in front of a sculpture, download the audio programs to their mp3 player at home, listen to the programs online, or download the mobile app to the iPhone. This is not technology for technology's sake; rather all are efforts to make learning playful. This is museum education at its best. Furthermore, all of the multimedia aspects are appropriate, user-friendly, and provide opportunities for user-generated content and feedback. Listeners, cell phone to ear, can stare up at a sculpture or walk around it to check out an alternate view suggested by the audio program.

In other examples of this 360 degree approach, for the sculpture *Abraham Lincoln* (1871) by Randolph Rogers, we hear from Kirk Savage, who wrote *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America*; Harold Holzer, author and co-chairman of the United States Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission; and Millard F. Rogers, Jr. author of *Randolph Rogers: American Sculptor in Rome*. The *Monument to Six Million Jewish Martyrs* is illuminated by Holocaust survivor Edward "Eddie" Gastfriend, who was Chairman of the committee that commissioned the monument; James E. Young, historian and author of *At Memory's Edge: After-images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art*; and Nina Wolmark, daughter of the sculptor Nathan Rapoport who is a filmmaker now living in Normandy, France.

It is clear that the Art Association went to great lengths to track down an appropriate mix of speakers to elicit stirring narration and informative discourse. They had a vision for how to interest an audience on the street through content-rich and layered story telling. Working with a team of experienced audio producers, many of whom have worked for National Public Radio, the Art Association makes every word count to capture the listeners' attention.

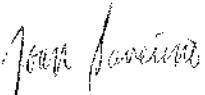
I especially enjoyed listening to Nancy Tomes speak about the *Garfield Memorial*, as Professor Tomes wrote about the death of President Garfield in her book *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life*. Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, artist and Professor of Native American Studies at the University of Oklahoma, gives his perspective on *Stone Age in America*, a sculpture depicting a native woman protecting her child from a wild bear. We hear from Pulitzer Prize-winning biographers William S. McFeely (Ulysses S. Grant) and Alex Storozyński (Tadeusz Kosciuszko). Thor Hyerdahl, Jr., Director of the Kon Tiki Museum in Norway and the son of explorer Thor Hyerdahl, Sr. speaks about explorer *Thorfinn Karlselfni*; and Maria Wiberg, Educational Director at the Millesgarden in Stockholm, Sweden, explains Carl Milles' *Playing Angels*. Reclusive artist Robert Indiana, who created the iconic *LOVE* sculpture, speaks about his childhood influences; and acclaimed artist Mark Di Suvero relates how the sculptor Rodin influenced his thinking. The program also includes such colorful participants as Bob Milewski, (on the *Swann Memorial Fountain*) the Fairmount Park Foreman who oversees fountain maintenance; Frank Bender, the leading forensic sculptor in the country who helps find missing persons

(speaking on death masks); and James “Jimmy” Binns (on *Rocky*), former Pennsylvania Boxing Commissioner and Sylvester Stallone’s Philadelphia lawyer.

Beyond the richness of the narration, this technology provides new opportunities for audience measurement and evaluation – a real challenge for an organization that does not sell tickets or have a facility. The Art Association is now able to track audience usage, and has the ability to receive feedback over the cell phone system or online. According to a formative evaluation by Randi Korn and Associates, audience feedback has been extremely positive, and listeners report feeling “smarter” and “proud” of their city after listening to the programs. Public art is the ideal “gateway” experience for visitors, especially younger generations, who may be interested in history and art but don’t generally seek a formal museum experience. With its free and easily accessible technology, the Art Association with its Museum Without Walls™; AUDIO is in the vanguard of those of us seeking ways to use the newest media available to increase curiosity about local history, art, culture, and the environment and to make it relevant to for the broadest of audiences. The one way to strengthen the project is if the Park Association can extend it by adding stops and sculptures. This would further increase public interest and engage an even wider group of scholars, historians, and people from all walks of life.

As a hybrid history and art organization, the Art Association is accustomed to communicating regularly with neighborhood and civic organizations, peer institutions, the academic and creative communities, and public agencies can be a collaborative model for institutions such as historic houses, historic districts, outdoor sites, and museum settings. For all the reasons explicated above, I enthusiastically support the nomination for Museum Without Walls™; AUDIO for the AASLH History Awards program. I hope that you will give the highest recognition to the Fairmount Park Art Association’s pioneering effort that has brought this wonderful interactive program to the streets of Philadelphia.

Sincerely,



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February 20, 2011

To the Committee for Leadership in History Awards, AASLH:

The "Museum without walls audio" created and produced by the Fairmount Park Art Association of Philadelphia is a fabulous project in its use of art history and history to educate the public in a nonpedantic manner. It brings to the casual walker, biker, or driver in an amazing natural setting, not only a sense of local and state history, but also a presentation of the wider ideas and values that art can express. Given a project of this scope--- 36 widely scattered sculptures along a several mile stretch of road and river, diverse as to period, style, purpose, and quality --- it is really impossible to make a blanket critique of its scholarship. Broken down into general categories, there are sculptures that are monuments to individuals--famous men, mostly American and (1) woman, "Joan of Arc" (#21). These tend to be laudatory--- the scholarship is accurate in relation to facts, but the interpretations tend to the view of history embracing American exceptionalism. There are emblematic works; individuals such as "the Thinker" (#15), the "Charioteer of Delphi" (#20), and the "Cowboy" (#31) and groupings like the "Civil War Soldiers and Sailors Memorial" (#14), to name a few. These usually exemplify moral or spiritual values of their time and place.

Given the nature of the project, scholarship as traditionally defined is basically irrelevant to many of the segments. Therefore, it seems necessary to define "scholarship" in a wider perspective beyond the traditional search through archives and papers, and the use of current scholarly trends in interpretation. The "voices" often reflect the cultural beliefs of their times and as long as the facts are correct, it would destroy the unique quality of each offering to insist on a uniform set of meanings.

There are several types of contributors to be considered as scholars. Traditional "scholarly voices" include historians, art historians, curators, scientists who are both museum curators and administrators- all with excellent backgrounds in research and publication. The academics in history or art history are particularly knowledgeable about the pieces or the historical periods of which they speak. The audio related to the Lincoln statue (#23) is a good example of this, where a scholar and author on 19th century sculpture and chair of the Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, together with the author of a biography of the artist, Randolph Rogers, focus on the symbols of the emancipation proclamation, on the quill pen, on Lincoln's upward gaze to the heavens; on the background and history of the making of statue; on its relationship to other seated statues; and the significance of

the sculptor. They enliven their contribution with interesting stories, all in about four minutes.

There are the artists themselves, their family members and fellow artists who might actually be thought of as talking versions of original source material. Among many, one might consider the discussion between the sculptor, Mark di Suvero and his co-worker, Lowell McKegey who installed "Iroquois" (#16). They muse on aesthetic and structural questions, on the technology and meaning of their work, and on art as experience and feeling rather than description. Most of the works in this category are highly abstract, and their audios truly help the listener to understand them in relation to their creators. This should be the goal of all true scholarship.

Finally, there are the members of the community who were involved in the commission of a work or in its siting- vitally concerned in the message the piece would convey. Many of them are well versed in the facts, although the message they see in the piece may partake of an earlier or less academic interpretation. Still, their recital of the events of the day and the struggles they encountered in achieving their purposes (listen, for example to the audio of #12, "All Wars Memorial to Colored Soldiers and Sailors,") gives one to understand how much more powerful this kind of scholarship may be than academic interpretation.

On the other hand, the academic discussions of the three terraces of the Ellen Phillips Samuel Memorial (#s 27-29) led by Penny Balkin Bach and Michael Zuckerman who also oversaw the scholarly aspects of the overall project is a brilliant display of just how fascinating an academic analysis of a sculptural collection can be when it combines both contemporary art history and intellectual history.

If I had several pages, it would be possible to judge each audio on its own scholarly merits (which I have, in fact, done in my notes,) but in the space allotted, it is necessary to generalize, often beyond good standards of evaluation. The use of over one hundred personal "voices" makes for a marvelous experience, but also for a huge variation in sources and interpretations. That said, I have tried to present some generalizations that I have found useful in determining whether or not the scholarship of the project as a whole meets the excellent standards required in award-winning public history. Drawing on my own experiences of decades as an academic historian, an administrator and teacher in museum programs, and a consultant to historic and house museums, I am firmly convinced that it does. In the interests of full disclosure, I must also add that I have a long-time love affair with the open-air art in Fairmont Park and have learned a tremendous amount and derived great enjoyment from working with the "mural without walls audio".

Stephanie G Wolf

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