

The Living, Breathing Story: A Memorial of Faces

Reimagining Justice for Chicago Torture Survivors, Winter 2021 Final | Lena Diasti

Memorials represent a part of our society's social memory. It reflects the urban and cultural identity of a people. In the summer of 2020, we saw community members unite together, demanding to become the curators of their cities. People began to determine which memorials, statues, and monuments should continue to take space, and which should be reconsidered. Public memorials that reflect, remember, and celebrate the history that community members want to be engrained as their social memory has become an increased priority. The case of the Chicago Torture Survivors falls nothing short of this. The demand for reparations and the promised memorial included in the historic reparations package is one of the reasons why I decided to take this approach for my final.

My ability to create this memorial is in solidarity and dedication to the intangible memorials that are being built today to remember the Chicago Torture Survivors. With the Chicago Police Torture Archive, the way we memorialize can transcend all boundaries. In my work, I hope to create an experience where people can come and be immersed in a living breathing story, an archive that has voice and life.

The memorial would be located in the South Rose Garden in the heart of the loop at Grant Park. The memorial should be easily accessible and visible to the entire public, whether they be tourists or community members.

The construction of the memorial was done rather intentionally. 121 panels center the flowerbed that sits at the eye of the memorial. 120 of those panels represent the survivors that were recognized by the city of Chicago in the reparations packages. However, the final panel was included to recognize survivors who did not come forward or could. The panels are all placed in a series of circles that fit like Russian dolls, progressively getting smaller in size to fit within one another.

The panels' outward-facing side displays the survivors' names and a brief description of the flower that is drawn throughout their portrait. On the other side of the panel that faces inward towards the flowerbed, the panel serves as a canvas to the survivors' portrait.

The idea of constructing the survivors' faces to be facing the interior provokes a similar experience to how the Chicago Torture Cases were known by the public. Those who were unaware, or ignored what they knew, stood at the outside, not seeing or acknowledging or believing the faces, stories, or experiences of survivors. At times, when walking around the outside of the panels, you can see glimpses of the survivors' faces from

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the adjacent side. Even removed, and not involved within the circles themselves, everyone can assume and never lose sight of the survivors and their faces.

To see the full faces, to hear the real voices, memorial goers must walk between and with survivors. Memorial goers must make the active choice to see the survivors in full, to be immersed by the faces, stories, and life that is the survivors. This experience parallels that of the organizers, advocates, lawyers, family members, and community allies who were in it - some by choice, others by force. By entering in, the memorial goers take responsibility and agency for listening, believing, and taking forward what they are now a part of.

Each portrait of the survivor includes a drawing of a specific flower that holds a unique meaning that embodies some aspect of the survivor. LaTanya is drawn with gerbera daisies that signify purity and rejuvenation. Darrell is drawn with coneflowers to signify strength and healing. And Anthony is drawn alongside gladioluses that signify honor and remembrance.

At each panel, there is a hanging telephone attached to its side. With the phone, memorial goers can pick up the phone to hear words from the survivor themselves. The survivors' reflections center questions such as what brings them joy, how do you want to be remembered, what grounds you, and where do you want people to go from here? Again, the action of physically picking up the phone, holding it, and listening to the survivors' stories requires action on the part of the memorial goers. It creates an intimate experience where only the individual holding the phone, pressing the speaker against their ear, can hear the voices of the survivors.

As mentioned, these panels center around the focal flowerbed. The flowerbed will house the diverse range of flowers depicted in the survivors' portraits that I described earlier. Here, the symbolic strength, power, grace, and resilience of the flowers will be centered around the faces and voices of survivors. As the park is centered around the expansive greenery of Grant Park - memorial goers can buy seeds and sprouted flowers of the plants drawn in the survivors' portraits. With these seeds and sprouted flowers, memorial goers will be encouraged to plant their flowers all across the Park area. The concept of this is to expand the bounds of the memorial - opening the experience and memory to all who see the flowers across the largest park seated firmly at the center of the city.

A memorial builds and constructs social memory. My intention of this memorial is for the memory to be told by the voices of survivors, engrained by the legacy of their faces.

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The video is from the perspective of an attendee of the memorial. You will be seated at the eye of the memorial, standing next to the flowerbed, picking up the phone, and hearing the voices of survivors. This video is a glimpse of the experience I hope memorialgoers would feel as they walk through this living, breathing story.

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Portraits:

[Darrell Cannon](#)

[Anthony Holmes](#)

[LaTanya Sublett](#)

Memorial:

[Blueprint](#)

[Interior](#)

Video link:

[Via Youtube](#)

References:

[CTJM: Testimonies, Torture Survivors' Roundtable - Memorial Ideas](#) by CTJM

[The Effects of Public Memorials on Social Memory and Urban Identity](#) by Ebru Erbas Gurler, Basak Ozer

[Chicago Police Torture Archive](#) by CPTA

[Darrell Interview](#) from the Torture Machine Book Tour at Seminary Co-Op