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Lines of Darkness and Light

A Public Art Proposal for the University of Virginia

Sanda Iliescu

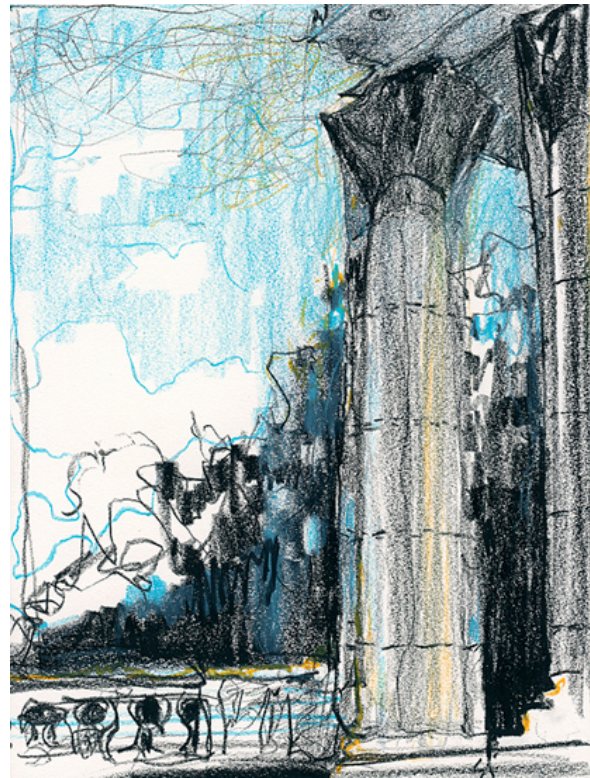
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Aristotle argued that there are two fundamentals of vision: darkness, or "melas," which is related to "melancholy;" and light, or "leukos," which is related to luminosity and lightheartedness. *Lines of Darkness and Light* turns to these two highly evocative visual elements to express the range of conflicting emotions that recent events at the University of Virginia have aroused. In so doing, it seeks to balance the powerful sense of mourning and grief that these tragedies have inspired with the passionate desire for change and healing they have also kindled.

In responding to President Sullivan's plea "to begin to identify the characteristics of a caring community, one whose members recognize their mutual responsibility for each other," I have conceived a two-part art project.

The first part is a temporary installation that will veil the columns on the lawn-side of the Rotunda in sweeping sheets of black fabric. Timed to coincide with the upcoming *Day of Dialogue*, this installation will be accompanied by a participatory project that will register participants' feelings about their personal lives vis a vis the questions that will be debated on the *Day of Dialogue*.

For ten days, beginning Sept. 17, the ten south-facing columns of the Rotunda will be wrapped in dark, semi-transparent veils. These veils will make a stark visual statement. As a sign of collective mourning they will bring people together in the shared experience of human grief and loss.



Veiled Column at Dusk / perspective study
Sanda Iliescu, 2010, colored crayon on paper

This proposal is driven by a desire to be frank about the gravity of recent events. It would be distasteful to turn away, or avert one's eyes, from the tragedy of the young lives lost here last year.

We are fortunate at this university to have such a powerful symbol for our collective will: the Rotunda. What better way to put such sad events into focus than by taking the beautiful classical columns facing the lawn and temporarily veiling them? These columns are so bright, so suggestive of optimism, enlightenment, and natural grace. It is fitting that for a brief period we have the courage to transform them by lightly and delicately covering them. They will, for a brief period, turn heavy, melancholy, and introspective.

When the veils are taken down, through contrast, the gleaming, luminous columns will move us more. My hope is that they will become brighter, and at the same time deeper. The memory of Aristotle's "melas," or essence of darkness, will transform and enrich the columns, as we continue to reflect and perhaps ask ourselves: "Remember when the bright columns were veiled?"

As a counterpoint to the melancholy veils on the columns, I intend to orchestrate a participatory project on the Lawn, to take place throughout the *Day of Dialogue*. Ten small boxes on pedestals will be set up on the two sides of the Lawn, one for each pavilion. The boxes are built of recycled wood, are painted in vibrant colors, and resemble old-fashioned voting boxes, with a collection slot at the top. Their vibrant colors are intended to suggest hope and renewal. While modest in size, the boxes provide a counterpoint to the column veils, referencing Aristotle's view that various combinations of beautiful dark essence ("melas") and light essence ("leukos") form the basis for all the colors of the rainbow.

On a table next to each box will be a stack of envelopes, each containing a sheet of paper and a pencil. Student volunteers will encourage participants to jot down personal reflections on subjects raised during the day. Two questions will be specifically asked:

- "Name one hope you have for the coming year."
- "Name one regret you have of the previous year."

Participants will then be invited to place their reflections in an envelope. Sometime during the *Day of Dialogue* each participant will insert his or her envelope in one of the colorful "voting boxes." Individual participants decide whether their envelopes are left anonymous or signed.

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Maintained by: **Vice President and Student Affairs Office**

Last Modified: Thursday, 23-Sep-2010 11:32:29 EDT

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