

# Hank Willis Thomas with MASS Design Group

The Embrace

Protests bring us together. Our convictions lead us to physical proximity and together, we are powerful in defense of our principles.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King understood the power of physical collectiveness in advancing our fight against injustice. As we reflected upon the King legacy, one image—one idea—emerged above the others: Embrace.

On multiple occasions, the nation witnessed the Kings locked together at the frontlines of a march. A monument that captures this embrace declares that love is the ultimate weapon against injustice. In evoking the love shared between the Kings, their commitment to each other, and their ideals, The Embrace is overwhelmingly simple and accessible: it is about what we share, not what sets us apart.

Beneath the 22-foot-high arms of Dr. King and Coretta Scott, passersby will be reminded of our shared human connection. This memorial will envelop participants, allowing them to be simultaneously vulnerable and protected. The memorial will solidify the ideals of inclusion that the Kings defended in their united life of activism. We seek to call people into the act of empathy, an idea Coretta Scott captured when she spoke about the power and accessibility of unconditional love, which when embraced, impels people to go into their community, take risks, and change others' lives for the better.

By highlighting the act of embrace, this sculpture shifts the emphasis from singular hero worship to collective action, imploring those curious enough to investigate closer.

The materiality will further encourage introspection and action. In contrast to the patinated bronze memorials in the Common intended to be observed from afar, The Embrace will be a mirror finish bronze, reflecting the changing natural environment of the park and the viewers themselves. As an inhabitable space, it will be impossible to remain disengaged.

Located at a crossroads in the Common, the landscape around the memorial leverages a gentle incline, forming two spaces. The northern plaza faces the Capitol Building, Shaw Memorial, and Black Heritage trail. The southern amphitheater embraces the Parkman Bandstand where King addressed the Common on April 23, 1965. Each space can accommodate large or small gatherings and multiple types of engagement.

Together, the Capitol, The Embrace, and the Bandstand create an axis that leads to the proposed King Educational Center in Dudley Square. A wall bearing the iconic image that inspired The Embrace will accentuate the exterior facade and mark the gateway to Dudley Square. The path connecting the memorial and education space implores visitors who have experienced the emotion of The Embrace to travel to the neighborhood where King began his historic march on the Common and engage in the activism and hope the Kings embodied.



















