

Barbara Chase-Riboud

Empty Pulpit Monument

Claude Levi-Strauss stated that “art is the only proof that anything has ever happened in the past.” To me, this is one of the most provocative and truest comments on the role of art. Everything else is hearsay. I believe in the power of art and have devoted my career to sculptural embodiments of historical figures like Marian Anderson, Martin Luther King Jr., Alessandro de’ Medici, Alexander Pushkin, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, Mao Tse Tung, and Malcolm X.

My memorial dedicated to Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King is made of light, stone and bronze. The truncated stone pyramid represents their mission and collaboration, and the searchlight beacon represents their message from the top of the mountain they climbed together. The Memorial is inspired in part by a 17th century carved wooden pulpit, likely resembling the pulpit of the first Martin Luther, which I saw in 2014. This extraordinary object gave me the idea of an empty pulpit to symbolize Martin Luther King Jr.’s silenced voice. From the empty pulpit, the searchlight beacon pierces the darkness. The Indian granite serves as homage to Gandhi’s non-violence movement and inside the passageway is engraved a historic lineage of the diaspora. The floor under the arch repeats the iconic “We shall overcome” slogan. On the back of the monument carved out of the bronze in full view is their most powerful quote: “I have decided to stick with LOVE, HATE is too great a burden to bear...”

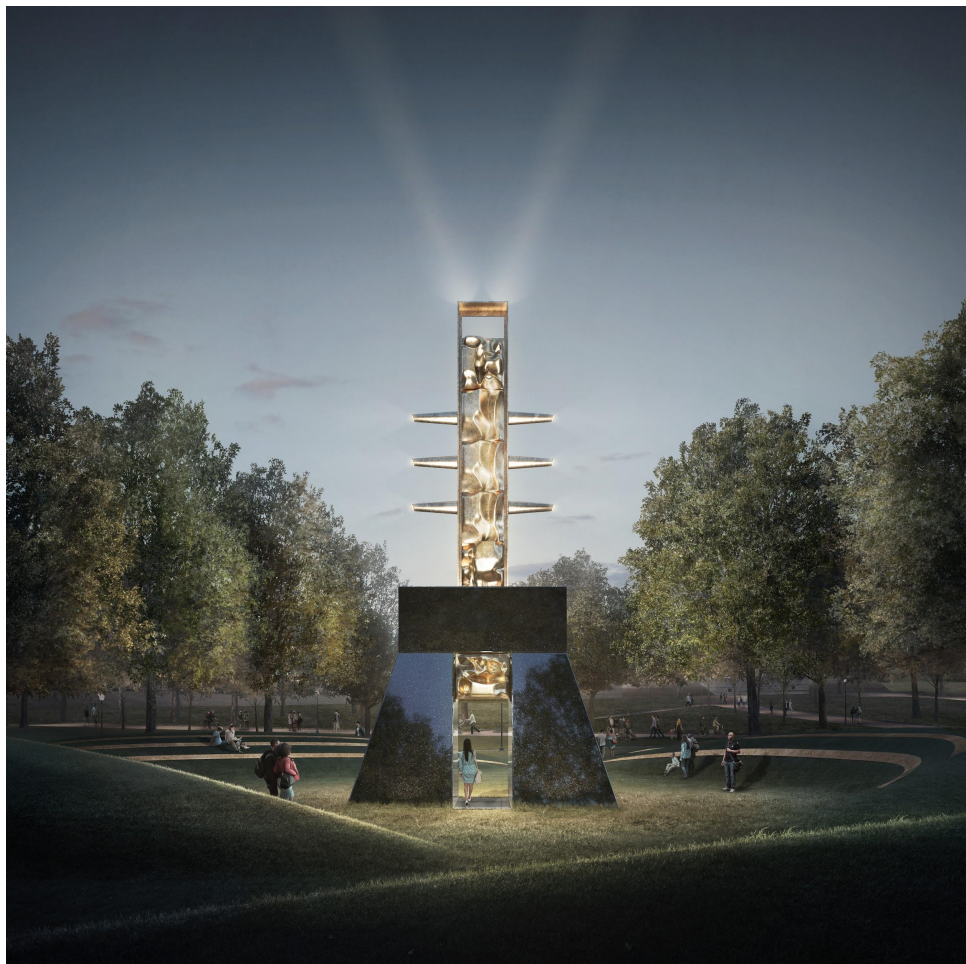
Surrounding my memorial will be a series of undulating landscaped “waves” – green rolling hills amongst which the public can roam and wander. Additional MLK and CSK quotations will be strategically placed, embossed on bronze plaques embedded in the green slopes and vales of the hills. These bronze plaques – which the public can sit beside, contemplate, and touch – will reflect both MLK and CSK’s most famous and significant quotations, ranging in subject or topic from Vietnam to the March on Washington, to Selma, to Birmingham, and the Nobel Peace Prize.

For the Boston public, I hope the monument will stand as a historical reminder to early biographical landmarks for both MLK and CSK. Boston is where MLK studied for the ministry and CSK studied music at the conservatory; they met in Boston, and their lives forever forward were entwined. I hope it will serve as a destination for reflection, relaxation, education, and inspiration.

This communion with MLK and CSK will be a powerful, cognitive force. It also serves as a warning and an example. The warning embedded and embodied not just in the forms but also what they are made of – ephemeral light and imperishable stone and bronze. MLK whose stilled voice rises from the empty pulpit in a column of light which is almost solid, that illuminates the sky and rolling landscaped hills below.

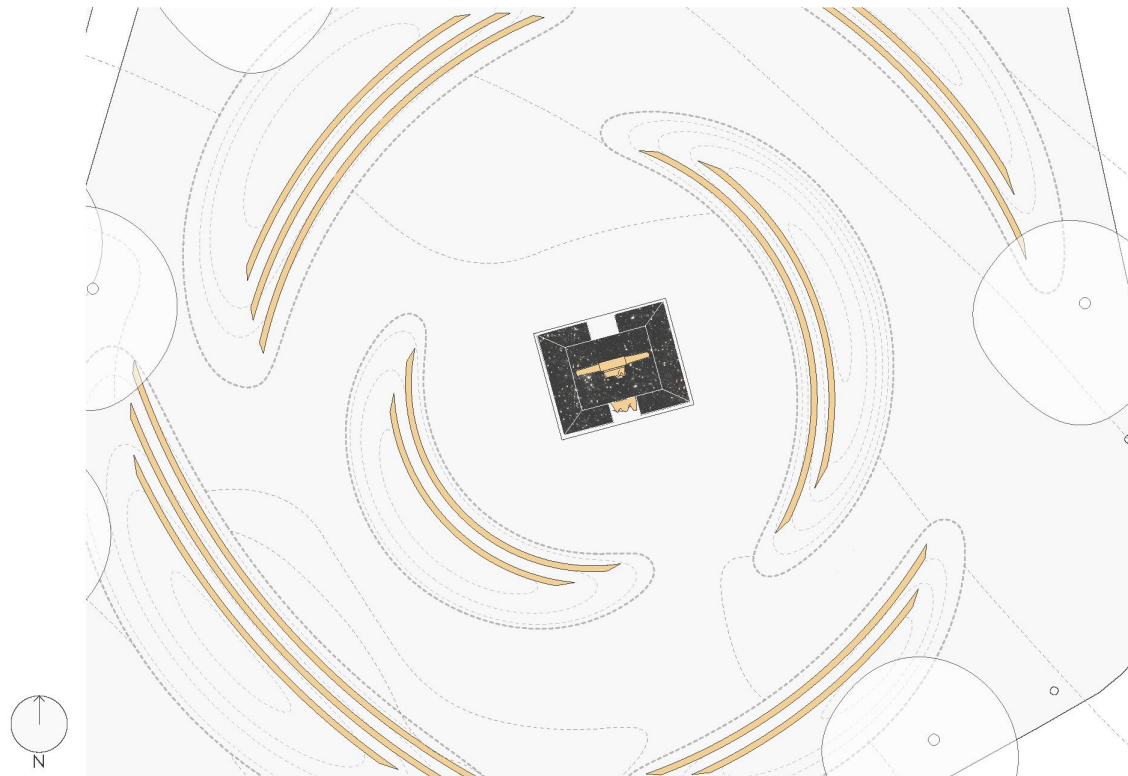






SITE PLAN - 1"=20'

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SITE SECTION DETAIL - LANDSCAPE

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