

Interventions into Historical Monuments and Statues (Johannesburg, 14–16 Nov 24)

University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa, Nov 14–16, 2024

Deadline: Apr 7, 2024

Brenda Schmahmann, University of Johannesburg

Creating a Disturbance: Interventions into Historical Monuments and Statues.

This is a call for papers for a conference hosted by the NRF Research Chair in South African Art and Visual Culture at the University of Johannesburg. It is envisaged that selected papers from the conference will be developed into a special issue of the journal *Public Art Dialogue*.

THEME

Movements such as #Rhodes Must Fall and #Black Lives Matter have had an important impact on art in the public domain, leading to a far greater critical sensitivity to the histories of people and issues commemorated in historical monuments and statuary than was hitherto often the case. But the “falling” of statues and monuments commemorating individuals and events associated with problematical ideologies and practices has not been the only outcome of this abhorrence. Of importance also has been a critical reworking of monuments and sites. Associated with a post-modernist resistance to singular truths, there were frequent instances of critical interventions to monuments being undertaken in the late twentieth century. Nevertheless, such activities have undoubtedly become especially prevalent in more recent years, when monuments and their meanings have been accorded increased critical attention.

Sometimes statues and sites have been reworked permanently, usually through additions intended to counter or correct the narratives they formerly told. When not given a permanent makeover, statues and sites have served as a prompt for performances, installations, graffiti, digital art, and other kinds of temporary creative interventions to them. Although some monuments are ultimately removed, their removal may be prefaced with various interventions that operate as a form of protest against the objects in question.

While many interventions into monuments are done with permission and endorsement by those in charge of statues and sites, many others are done without any authorization. As with authorized interventions, unofficial engagements at times assume forms such as performances and temporary installations that cause no physical changes to sites and statuary. At others, however, they may involve graffiti or some element of desecration. While there is a propensity to dismiss interventions of this kind as meaningless vandalism, it can be helpful to interpret them as discursive commentaries by their makers and a means to give voice to ideas that might otherwise go unspoken – even if one does not condone such practices. Sometimes undertaken with the intention of

calling for the removal of a monument, such interventions may also simply prompt viewers to think about an institution or ideology with which the statue or site in question is associated.

How do these various kinds of interventions operate as critique and commentary? How do they shift the relationship between viewers and monuments? How successful have they been in enabling new understandings of histories? How might the practice of reworking or intervening to monuments contribute to the contemporary heritage landscape? These are among the general questions that potential presenters are invited to ask.

PROPOSAL

A prospective presenter is invited to offer a 30-minute paper focusing on interventions or changes to historical statuary and monuments from any geography that were undertaken in the late twentieth or twenty-first century. The interventions discussed may be authorised or unauthorised, and they may have assumed any form. Potential participants are encouraged to focus on interventions to a single site or statue, or two or three examples by a single group or creator, exploring them in depth rather than offering broad surveys of this practice. Papers must be in English.

Papers must be on material that has not already been published. A prospective presenter must also be willing to develop the proposed paper into an article for the special issue of *Public Art Dialogue* emanating from this conference, should it be selected for potential inclusion in this publication. Please note that those papers selected for development into articles for the special issue will be subject to the usual peer-review processes of the journal.

Please submit your proposal with "Creating a Disturbance" in the subject line, and send it to the convener, Brenda Schmahmann (brendas@uj.ac.za), and copied to the administrator at the offices of the Research Chair of South African Art and Visual Culture, Neelofir Nagdee (nnagdee@uj.ac.za), by 7 April 2024. Please submit a single WORD document with the following information:

1. a title for your paper
2. an abstract between 350 and 500 words in length for a 30-minute paper
3. a short biography, including your current institutional affiliation (up to 200 words)
4. your contact details, i.e. e-mail address, postal address, mobile phone number
5. a statement confirming that your paper has not been previously published and that, should it be selected, you would be willing to develop it into an article for potential inclusion in a special issue of *Public Art Dialogue*.

Applicants will be notified of decisions by the end of April.

Please note: While "Creating a Disturbance" in some sense continues the conversation introduced at a conference we hosted in November 2023 which focused on contemporary forms of commemorative monuments, presenters are by no means limited to those who attended previously. We welcome proposals from both new presenters and those who may have participated in the 2023 conference (or others we have hosted).

FUNDING

Presenters will need to organise and pay for their own travel costs to the University of Johannes-

burg. However, international presenters and those from out of town will be provided with bed & breakfast accommodation sponsored by the host from the evenings of 13, 14 and 15 November 2024. Additionally, there will be no conference fee, and meals and transport within Johannesburg during the conference will be provided by the host.

Reference:

CFP: Interventions into Historical Monuments and Statues (Johannesburg, 14-16 Nov 24). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 11, 2024 (accessed Dec 17, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/41191>>.