Symposium 2011

INTRODUCTION

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Welcome

Welcome to our twenty-first annual symposium on public monuments.

Please take copies of Howard Hibbard's obituary of Rudolf Wittkower, whom we honor each year with this symposium.

Take also the biographies of the speakers today. This means that my introductions do not have to be elaborate, which would take away time from the speakers' talks.

SLIDE #1: Photographs of Elaine Skinneer, Joan Gdosky, and John Zlobik

We hold the symposium at the beginning of spring each year, because spring, like public monuments, is symbolic of regeneration. The earliest monuments from prehistoric times,

and many since then, deal with notions of rebirth and renewal. And they always help us to remember. It's in that spirit that we commemorate Elaine Zlobik Skinner, Joan Zlobik Gdosky, and John Leo Zlobik, whose bequests, along with a contribution by my brother Richard Reynolds, made this symposium possible.

Elaine, Joan, and John were my wife Nancy's siblings, and over the past 30 some odd years of our married life, we shared a bond that enriched all of our lives enormously. The symposium is one way we commemorate their lives and that bond that continues to unite us, even in death.

SLIDE #2: Rudolf Wittkower

The symposium began in 1991 as a tribute to the renowned art historian Rudolf Wittkower, when the Municipal Art Society of New York City was embarked upon a worthy project called The Adopt-a-Monument Program to save the city's more than 800 major monuments from the years of neglect that was leading to their disintegration. I, along with other interested New Yorkers, was asked to help raise the public's awareness of the program and the need to save what I had termed New York City's "Monuments to Neglect."

As it was the 20th anniversary of Professor Wittkower's death, no one's life, work, and career, it seemed to me, was a better witness to the importance of public monuments than his.

Professor Wittkower's work became not only "a standard for the finest art historical scholarship of the entire 20th century" but also for the third millennium.

One of his greatest legacies that invites our reflection today was his spirit of dialogue and collaborative inquiry, which infused his work throughout his life.

From fifteenth-century painting to the history of Baroque sculpture and architecture, Wittkower's spirit of collaborative scholarship dates from his very first publications. In fact, his first five books were the work of collaboration. And it was characteristic that he wrote two books, "Born Under Saturn" (1963) and "The Divine Michelangelo" (1964), with his wife Margot, his lifetime helpmate and partner. He was also a great teacher.

In Professor Wittkower's obituary, his student, protégé, and friend, the late Howard Hibbard, wrote, "Rudolf Wittkower was the ideal teacher. Perhaps his outstanding quality was faith. He saw talent where others did not, and carefully nourished it."

So, I proposed to the Municipal Art Society a symposium that would honor this great teacher and scholar by exploring the origins and meaning of public monuments and their significance in dealing with our origins and our past.

In our very first symposium, for example, Ian Tattersall, at that time Chairman of the Department of Anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History, explained that

the urge to monumentality was born more than 100,000 years ago with the Neanderthals' ritualized burials, which suggested belief in an afterlife, and which were perhaps humankind's first monuments.

He also showed us how timeless, universal, and elemental truths emerged that governed our earliest evolution and determined our gradual development as human beings. Those universal and elemental truths shaped that great repository known as man's past. Monuments affirm the importance and significance of that past.

Back in 1968, the world-renowned microbiologist, humanist, and Pulitzer-Prize-winning author Rene Dubos wrote, "The past is not dead history, it is the living material out of which man makes himself and builds the future." By means of those timeless, universal, and elemental truths, we have slowly realized our intellectual and spiritual potential that has enabled us to produce symphonies, conquer disease, and pierce the cloud of unknowing that surrounds the universe.

When we lose touch with the past, Dubos believed, we lose touch with the inner self. We are cut off from what he calls "the deepest layers" of our nature that enable us to understand the mysteries of the past that keep us in tune with our origins and the rest of the cosmos. Dubos maintained that it's that sense of continuity with the past and the rest of creation, which is served by our public monuments, that not only enhances life but "is also essential to sanity" because it keeps us mentally and emotionally intact.

Wayne Dynes, Professor of Art History at Hunter College, says that in assuring that continuity with the past through our public monuments we assist our very survival. Now, that seems like an outrageous claim. That is, until we consider the implications of a characteristic that Ian Tattersall observed in Neanderthals' behavior: their characteristic to care for each other in a social as well as an individual sense. The distinguished psychiatrist Willard Gaylin, in his landmark study of 1976 on caring concluded that man's characteristic of caring may very well account for the survival of the human species. So, Wayne Dynes was not so far off the mark.

I met Dr. Gaylin in 1976 the year his book, *Caring*, was published, when he was lecturing at Columbia University on the writings of Sigmund Freud. Ever since then, the book has not been far from my grasp. I asked him to participate in the symposium this year, but he said since he turned 80, six years ago, he no longer takes speaking engagements. But he sent me his book, *Adam and Eve and Pinocchio: on Being and Being Human*, and gave me permission to draw freely from it for my remarks today.

There's something in the human heart, Will Gaylin said, that's gratified by contributing to the happiness of others. He went on to ask how can we explain in this Darwinian age, such behavior as selflessness, generosity, empathy, caring, and self-sacrificing? What makes a person choose good over evil? And, he insists, that which can be done to encourage such choices is a crucial issue in species like ours. It's hardly a theoretical problem. Our very survival, he believes, depends on it. Will Gaylin believes we have much to learn about the significance of existence and the meaning of survival. But, it's

not just knowledge that we must acquire but the special skills necessary for empathy, love, and self-sacrifice. He says the potential for loving and caring is genetically fixed in the human being. The prodigal son and the forgiving parent, for example, are dominant themes in the literature and mythology of diverse cultures at different times. In Christian theology, for example, the only suffering sufficient to demonstrate the extent of God's love of man was the sacrifice of his Son. Love is not only a human experience, Will Gaylin says. It's the ultimate expression of our humanity. And the common ingredient of all love is the merging of the self with another person creating a new identity. The isolated self cannot survive to maturity without others.

In fact, caring is the means by which man reaches maturity, according to the metaphysician Father Norris Clarke, who we honored in the symposium last year. It was clear enough to him that no one can reach mature development as a person without the experience of giving oneself, forgetting oneself. We reach maturity only by overcoming what the noted theologian J. Wentzel Van Huysteen identifies as the negative aspects of what it means to be human—hostility, arrogance, ruthlessness, unkindness, and the like. In other words, we reach maturity through reparation.

Every time we reach out to love and care for another for the other's own sake, or repair a damaged relationship, Father Clarke would say, we are transcending ourselves, leaving behind our own natural self-centeredness to put our center of attention in another. It's in that self-transcendence that man fulfills his destiny as a traveler through the material cosmos to his ultimate goal, what the Benedictine theologian and physicist Stanley Jaki

called the shining reflection of the Creator and Father of all. For that reason, the great mendicant friars of the Middle Ages referred to man as *homo viator* man, the traveler.

Today, in that spirit of collaborative inquiry, so much a part of Rudolf Wittkower's scholarship and teaching, speakers in the fields of paleoanthropology, anthropology, theology, sociology, journalism, the fire service, and art history gather here to explore an aspect of man the traveler, an aspect that Father Clarke might call the "extraordinary interconnectedness" of caring, love, and reparation.

What, we might ask, does this interconnectedness have to do with monuments?

Wayne Dynes, in that first symposium in1991, traced the meaning of the term monument back to ancient times. He reminded us that the term monument has a duality of meaning – not only permanent structure but also written text that goes back to ancient times. Thus, in 23 BC, when the great poet Horace was preparing to publish a series of odes, he looked about him in the great city of Rome surveying the many famous monuments in bronze and stone and declared, "*Exegi monumentum aere perennius*," "I have completed a monument more lasting than bronze." And 12 centuries before Horace's declaration, an Egyptian scribe referred to the writings of the learned scribes who preceded him, when he wrote, "…their teachings are their pyramids."

It's that duality of meaning – permanent structure and written text, combined with Rudolf Wittkower's legacy of dialogue and collaborative inquiry that has infused the symposium

over these past two decades. We continue that remarkable legacy today, as speakers from diverse orientations explore the "extraordinary interconnectedness" of caring, love, and reparation.