Monument Matters

4.307/8 Art, Architecture and Urbanism in Dialogue

Synchronous Hours T / TR  10:30AM-12PM
Info Session: Thursday, Sept. 3, 10:30AM
ZOOM Link | Meeting ID 938 1425 9078

Professor: Azra Akšamija  | TA: Mariana Gonzalez Medrano
To schedule a meeting within our office hours, please visit this link

Units: 3-3-6 U /3-3-6 G I Class limit: 18 I Prerequisites: Permission of instructor

From Birmingham, Alabama to Antwerp, Belgium, the recent removal and defacing of monuments to Confederate and imperialist leaders marks a new wave in our stream of struggles over haunting legacies. Some believe that removing these statues is an attempt to erase or cover up history. For others, it is a means to confront violence, racism, and oppression in history and at present. This advanced course initiates a dialogue between art, architecture, and urbanism by focusing on intellectual debates about and critical interventions on monuments. We will discuss a range of themes related to politics of memory and commemoration, from trauma, iconoclasm, and censorship, over ethics of preservation, to the agency of monuments in relation to colonialism, nationalism, social justice, and democracy. The research component involves a group work on a “Dictionary of Monument Matters,” through which we will analyze methodologies of practitioners who intertwine these three disciplines in a critical spatial practice addressing traumatic, troubling, or toxic memory. Lectures, screenings, readings, and discussions with guests and faculty will inform the development of individual projects: a monument or an intervention on an existing site of memory chosen by students.

The course will have a cross-institutional exchange with the Aga Khan Museum Toronto exploring multiple perspectives on museum artifacts, as well as the GSD course “Art and Design in the Public Domain” by Krzystof Wodiczko, Professor at Harvard University / Professor Emeritus of MIT’s ACT Program, in the form of panels with faculty and guest artists, as well a peer-to-peer feedback on the work in-progress. The course will be held online entirely, but students based in the Boston/Cambridge area will have an additional option to meet real people in real places (we will have a few outdoor meetings and visits to local monuments, respecting social distancing and masked). Toolkits for home-based studio work will be provided by the ACT Program, depending on the individual need and location. Graduate and undergraduate workload and evaluation criteria vary accordingly.

NOTE: If you are interested in taking this course, please pre-register by Monday, August 31st to be added to MIT Canvas for Zoom invitations, or email Mariana Medrano marmedr@mit.edu to be added to our Zoom list.
Expectations >

The course meets twice a week for 3h synchronous time and 3hrs asynchronous time, for a total of 12 units of credit. You are expected to work at least 6hrs / week outside the class time. The Tuesday session will be our primary time to meet in person, discuss work in progress and Thursdays is primarily reserved for the discussion of the readings and critical practices.

**Semester-long Project**

You will be expected to work on one semester-long project, which is to design a new monument for a context of your choice or an intervention on an existing monument or a site of memory, addressing some identified issue with troubling, traumatic, or toxic memory. Individual and/or group work is possible. Both the midterm and the final presentations will be graded.

**Class and Homework Assignments**

Readings will be regularly assigned to provide a historical and theoretical framework for thematic clusters that will be discussed in class. The homework assignments include a variety of creative short exercises:

1. **Co-MASK**, you will be asked to create a mask as a statement or a commemoration of your experience of the pandemic.

2. **Dictionary of Monument Matters** will be our group work, created by the entire class gradually, over the course of the semester. The dictionary consists of concepts/methods/approaches to troubling memory, elaborated in short 200 w entries based on the assigned readings or art/design precedents. You are also welcome to create entries based on your own references that might not be listed in the syllabus. You will be asked to prepare and present your dictionary entries.

3. You will be asked to record a short video to introduce yourself to our collaborating partners (GSD class and the Aga Khan Museum), as well share photos of monuments from your current location with the rest of the class.

**Midterm Review**

For the MIDTERM REVIEW, you will be expected to present your research proposal for your semester project, in form of a 5-7 slide presentation outlining the following:

1. Context (1-3 slides) and research question
2. Problem (1 slide, describe the intellectual and political problem related to the contested memory in the chosen context/site)
3. Dictionary entry as a conceptual proposition for your monument / intervention (1 slide)
4. Sketch or a diagram of the final project (1 slide)
5. Materials and methods for production of your project you plan to use (1 slide)
Final Review
For the FINAL REVIEW, you will be expected to present your final project at the end of the semester in the form of a 10min. presentation, the format of which will be determined at the Midterm Review, depending on your concept.

Attendance
Regular and on-time attendance is required for all synchronous class sessions and reviews. It is your responsibility to catch up on missed content through instructors or fellow students. All class work and assignments must be completed on time.

Summary + Deadlines

Projects & Assignments
Group project: Dictionary entries → created through weekly responses
2. Individual projects:
   - Mask design
   - Monument / Intervention

Deadlines
Sept. 15 → Co-MASK
Oct. 6 → Project Proposal
Oct. 27+29 → Midterm Review (Prototype)
Mov. 5 → Peer Review GSD/MIT students due
Dec. 1+3 → Final Review
Dec. 8 → Project documentation due

Evaluations >
Grading will be based on:
   - Class participation – 10-%
   - Dictionary entries, feedback on readings and precedents – 30%
   - Midterm presentation – 30%
   - Final Project – 40%

Completion of the final project is required for a passing grade, as is regular attendance. Unexcused absences and repeated tardiness (late more than 15min more than 2 times) will automatically lower a grade by 1/2 a letter grade.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK</th>
<th>Tuesdays → STUDENT RESEARCH</th>
<th>Thursdays → PANELS</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sync time 10-11:30</td>
<td>Sync time 10-11:30am</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sept. 3 - First class - Class introduction Azra: Co-MASK project assigned</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Sept. 8 - Visit Local Monuments Walk and pastry, share images</td>
<td>Sept. 10 - Disgraced Monuments, Rewriting History</td>
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<td>Sept. 15 - Co-MASK presentations</td>
<td>Sept. 17 - Trauma, Monuments, Commemoration, and Counter-Memory Azra: Monument in Waiting</td>
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<td>Sept. 22 - Student Research Presentations / Individual or group meetings</td>
<td>Sept. 24 - Materiality of Memory, Iconoclasm, Censorship Architecture Department lecture: Azra Aksamija</td>
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<td>Sept. 29 - Myths of a Nation Lara Baladi, Abecedary of the Revolution</td>
<td>Oct. 1 - Decontaminate this Place 10:30-12: Panel Jill Magid + Cameron Rowland</td>
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<td>Oct. 6 - RESEARCH / PROJECT PROPOSAL</td>
<td>Oct. 8 - RESEARCH / PROJECT PROPOSAL</td>
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<td>Oct. 13 - Student Research Individual or group meetings</td>
<td>Oct. 15 - Us vs. Others, Construction and Exclusion of Otherness</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Oct. 27 - MIDTERM REVIEW</td>
<td>Oct. 29 - MIDTERM REVIEW</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Nov. 3 - Project development Individual or group meetings</td>
<td>Nov. 5 - Collaboration, Participation, Co-creation 10:30-12: Panel Krzysztof Wodiczko and Azra Aksamija Peer review MIT-GSD students due</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Nov. 10 - Project development Individual or group meetings</td>
<td>Nov. 12 - Workshop: Preservation Technologies and Indigineous Memory Guests: Jackson 2bears Leveen, Pedro Reynolds-Cuellar</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Nov. 17 - Project development Individual or group meetings</td>
<td>Nov. 19 - Workshops with GSD Students 10:00-11:30am Small groups share work-in-progress</td>
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<td>Nov. 24 - No class - Thanksgiving</td>
<td>Nov. 26 - No class - Thanksgiving</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Dec. 1 - FINAL REVIEW</td>
<td>Dec. 3 - FINAL REVIEW</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Dec. 8 - DOCUMENTATION DEADLINE</td>
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*This marks artworks and that will be discussed in class

WEEK 2: Disgraced Monuments, Rewriting History

Discussion:

Screenings:
- De Vos, Pieter, dir. Sikitiko. 2010. 9min (A prize-winning short Dutch film about actions against a statue of Leopold II of Belgium, colonial ruler of Congo. Info)

Broadcast:

Readings:

Optional Readings:

Artworks and Examples:
- Sinyangwe, Samuel. “I’m a black Southerner. I had to go abroad to see a statue celebrating black liberation.” Vox. Vox Media, LLC. Aug 17, 2017.
- See King Leopold II statues in Belgium.
WEEK 3: Trauma, Monuments, and Counter-Memory

Discussion:
What is a monument? Approaches to memory: figural vs. abstract, monumentality, embodiment, commodification, keeping memory alive, symbolic/representational aspects vs. social healing.

Screening:

Readings:

Optional Readings:

Artworks:
- Šerić Shoba, Nebojša. Monument to the international community by the grateful citizens of Sarajevo. 2007. Sarajevo.
WEEK 4: Materiality of Memory, Iconoclasm, Censorship

Discussion:
Writing/rewriting history, meaning inflicted through destruction, location and materiality of memory, timescapes of meaning-making, ethics of preservation

Screening:

Readings:

Optional Readings:

Artworks:
- *Ise Jingū, 伊勢神宮. Ise, Mie Prefecture, Japan.
WEEK 5: Myths of a Nation

Discussion:
Myths of a nation, link between a nation, memory, and territory.

Screening:

Readings:

Artworks:
- *Vo, Danh. We the People. 2010-2014.
- DeLappe, Joseph. The 1,000 Drones — A Participatory Memorial. 2014.

Guest lecture: Lara Baladi, Invisible Monument
WEEK 7: Us vs. Others, Construction and Exclusion of Otherness

Discussion:
Role of representation in construction of otherness, mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion.


Readings:

Artworks:
- *Shonibare MBE, Yinka. Alternative Monuments*. 2018
WEEK 8: Whose Heritage? Decolonizing Institutions of Memory

Discussion:
Institutional vs. Community Memory, Cultural Practices and Memory of Oral Societies, Ethics of Museums, Decolonizing Approaches


Readings:
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. “Whose culture is it, anyway?” in Cosmopolitanism 115-134

Optional Readings:

Artworks:

Guest panel: Daniel Sepulveda, Erin Genia, Mark Jarzombek

WEEK 11: Preservation Technologies and Indigineous Memory

Discussion:
Digital technologies ownership of technology.

Readings:

Artworks:

Guest panel: Jackson 2bears Leveen, Pedro Reynolds-Cuellar