

MONUMENTAL:

Fifty Years of
Creative Memory Activism
in Toronto

A Pocket Walking Guide
by
Andrew Lochhead



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About this Guide

This book is a guide to the walking tour “Monumental: Fifty Years of Creative Memory Activism,” which I developed for Heritage Toronto in 2024.

The information for this tour was assembled through scholarly research, participant observation, and most importantly through a series of oral history interviews conducted with artists and community members directly involved in the works you’ll visit.

I am grateful to those who shared their stories with me, and thankful for the trust extended to me to share them with you.

While I use the word “tour” here as a shorthand for this activity, I’m unsure if that’s the most helpful word to describe it. I’d rather think of it as a walk, a conversation, or an intervention similar to those covered during the tour.

That being said, please take care in doing this tour/walk/conversation/intervention. Consider taking it with a friend. Many of the subjects covered — police violence, slavery, Residential Schools — are difficult to read about, to think about, and to remember. If you feel upset during the walk, stop at anytime. There are also mental health resources listed on the back page of the guide.

Despite the heaviness of what we’re discussing, I hope this guide also succeeds in capturing the spirit of revolutionary joy and care with which these works of creative memory activism were undertaken.

WRITING AND SPEAKING YOUR LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Read the Land acknowledgement section on the following pages. What would you include in your Land acknowledgement? Write some ideas here. Try saying them aloud.

A LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It is important to acknowledge the Land that one is on, as well as the people who have historically lived there and continue to call it home.

The Land on which the city of Toronto is currently located has and continues to be home to the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Huron-Wendat peoples and their descendants. This land is also home to a diverse range of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, urban Indigenous peoples, and Indigenous people from around the world.

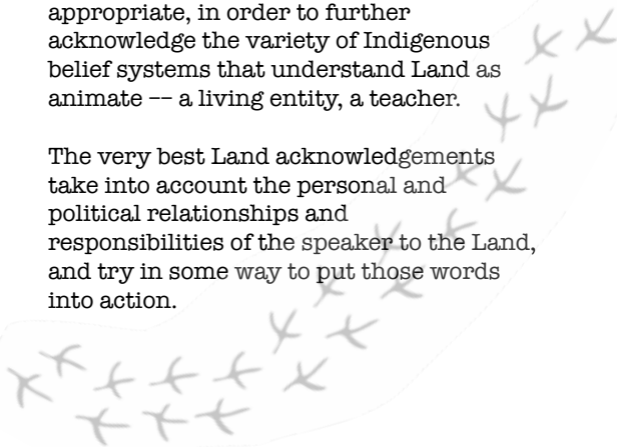
Perhaps you have heard of a Land acknowledgement before. Often they are spoken at the beginning of significant events, meetings, and sporting events.

In settler-colonial states such as Canada, Land acknowledgements play an important role in identifying, affirming, and, as the word implies, acknowledging the continued presence of Indigenous peoples on this Land and their relationships to it.

For settlers and newcomers, Land acknowledgements also provide an opportunity to consider what being on Land means to them, and to recognize their responsibilities toward it and toward Indigenous peoples.

When speaking or writing about Land, I've chosen to capitalize the term, when appropriate, in order to further acknowledge the variety of Indigenous belief systems that understand Land as animate -- a living entity, a teacher.

The very best Land acknowledgements take into account the personal and political relationships and responsibilities of the speaker to the Land, and try in some way to put those words into action.



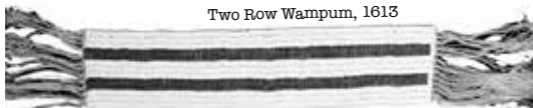
So before you head out on your walk using this book, take some time to reflect on whose Land you are on and the circumstances by which you came to be here. How might walking offer you a way to put your words into action?

If you don't know already, make sure to learn about the treaties that govern the Land you are on.

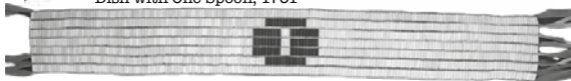
The Land that is known as Toronto, for example, is governed by multiple treaties. This includes Treaty 13, or the Toronto Purchase, the Kaswentha, or Two Row Wampum, the Treaty of Niagara, and the Dish with One Spoon.

Below you can see some of the wampum belts that represent these agreements.

Two Row Wampum, 1613



Dish with One Spoon, 1701



Treaty of Niagara, 1764



Treaty 13 is a Land agreement between the British Crown, and later the Canadian government, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. It is part of a series of treaties collectively known as the Toronto Purchase. These treaties (1787 and 1805) were routinely violated by the Crown and Government and remained in dispute for centuries. The treaty was finally renegotiated and settled in 2010.

The Kaswentha, or Two Row Wampum, is an agreement originally between the Haudenosaunee and Dutch, made in the seventeenth century and later taken up by the British. This agreement and the accompanying Covenant Chain state that non-Indigenous and Indigenous people will live on the Land in a separate but equal relationship and that neither will interfere with one another's affairs. These agreements set forth the idea of regular meetings to renew the terms of the treaty and to resolve conflicts.



The Treaty of Niagara was negotiated between the British and twenty-four Indigenous nations, a foundational agreement that “represents the meeting of British and Indigenous legal systems”^{*} and sets out terms of how and under what conditions British people may settle on Indigenous Lands

Finally, the Dish with One Spoon is an agreement between the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee to live in peace, sharing and responsibly stewarding Land and its resources. More than the aforementioned treaties, its spirit and principles are often invoked in Land acknowledgments, but the extent to which settlers are “welcomed” into the treaty, as some acknowledgements claim, remains contentious to this day.^{**}

NOW LET'S GO WALKING

^{*} Talking Treaties Collective, A Treaty Guide for Torontonians, 2022

^{**} See Jacobs & Lytwyn “Naagan ge bezhig emkwaan: A Dish with One Spoon Reconsidered,” 2020

Handy definitions to keep in mind...

MONUMENT

“A monument is a projection of power and presence in public.” - Monument Lab, National Monument Audit, 2021

INTERVENTION

A type of artistic practice dating to the early twentieth century that involves acting in some way on an existing place, object, system, or structure to reveal new or overlooked knowledge about the intervened object or the world around it.

CREATIVE MEMORY ACTIVISM

A form of interventionist art that involves artists creating new monuments, altering extant ones, or destroying sites of public memory or commemoration, such as statues, street names, or plaques.

(I invented this term to centre the role of creative communities in combatting the violence that monuments sometimes represent. CMA as a term is meant to highlight the generative possibilities of this kind of art and to understand it as a radical form of public curation rooted in an ethics of care, rather than wanton iconoclasm.)

Your Walking Route and Table of Contents (Helpful map on next page)

Start: Churchill statue near
intersection of Armory and Chestnut
Streets.

A. Charles Pachter vs Churchill Statue

B. Toronto Homeless Memorial

C.& D. Sankofa Square +
Renaming Dundas St.

E. Toppling the Egerton Ryerson Statue

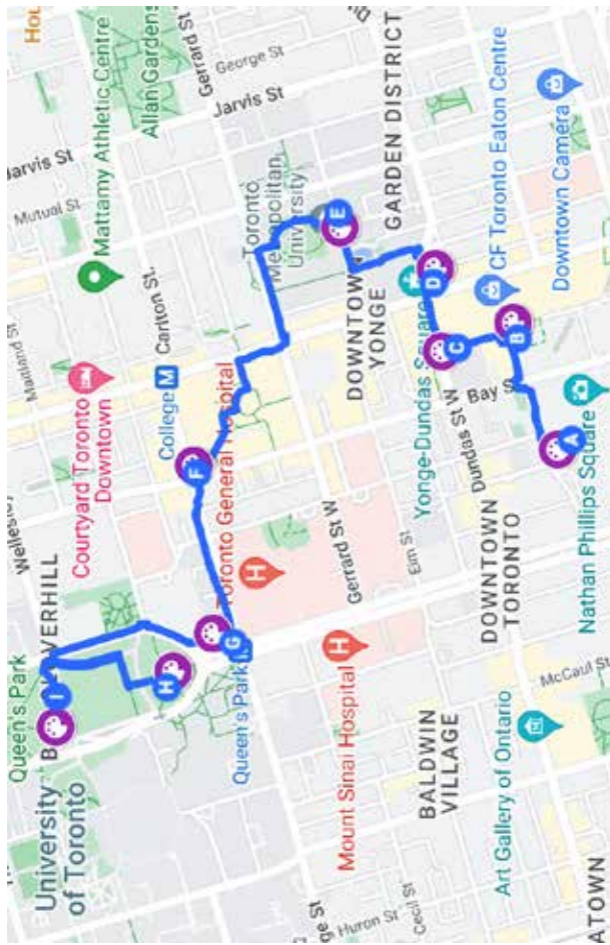
F. The Strawberry Ceremony, Defund the
Police Street Painting + Quentin VerCetty's
Ancestral Uprising

G. #BlackedOut History Plaques

H. Ogimaa Mikana + BLM Statue Paintings

I. Artists at Queen's Park

End: King Edward VII statue at Queen's
Park near Wellesley Street and Queen's
Park Crescent.



STOP A. Intersection of Armory and Chestnut Streets

Charles Pachter vs Churchill Statue



★ Artist Charles Pachter, left, says City Council is making a big mistake if it lets a 10-foot statue of Winston Churchill go up in Nathan Phillips Square. The proposal goes before council on Wednesday

**‘Churchill statue
does not belong
at our City Hall’**

In 1976 the painter Charles Pachter wrote an editorial, published in the Toronto Star newspaper, criticizing the idea of erecting a bronze statue of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill at, what was then, Toronto’s brand new City Hall.*

*designed by Finnish architect Viljo Revell

Until this editorial Pachter was mostly known for his pop-art inspired painting of Queen Elizabeth II riding a moose.

Many Torontonians today know his work, even if they don't realize it. His enamel painting "Hockey Knights in Canada", depicting the Toronto Maple Leafs and Montreal Canadiens, has decorated the College St. subway station since 1985.

Pachter's editorial stirred controversy, even though his arguments weren't exactly the critiques of Churchill we're used to hearing today. (No mention of his role in the Bengal famine, nor his virulent racism, or his suggestion that chemical weapons should be used to murder Indigenous people.) Instead Pachter (who strongly believes that Churchill deserves commemoration in Toronto) argued that the space in front of City Hall should be reserved for statues of famous Canadians created by Canadian artists.



Charles Pachter, Hockey Knights in Canada, 1985. Photo: ArtworxTO

Nevertheless, Pachter's editorial is a significant intervention (even if it doesn't sound like one) if not for the argument itself as much as what it tells us about social and political debates that were taking place in the city in the mid-twentieth century.

Pachter's writing can be understood as a contribution to a larger debate about public space, art, and monuments that had been ongoing in Toronto since the 1950s. His criticism of former Conservative MP and Insurance magnate Harry Jackman (a name you'll read again later) who proposed erecting the Churchill statue raised questions about who has access to, and the right to, shape public space.

The three days of letters the original article generated, which were also published in *The Toronto Star*, exposed tensions between competing mythologies of the Anglo-Canadian colonial project and settler identity.

One myth emphasized the "Anglo" portion. The other emphasized the multicultural, modern "Canadian" vision of the state, that began to develop in the years following

WWII, but reached its zenith between the late sixties through the early eighties (a time marked by significant events such as the “Canadian Centennial”, Expo ‘67, the adoption of the Maple Leaf flag and metric system, and the patriation of the first constitution).

By exposing these tensions in retrospect, we are able to critique them today.

The final paragraph of Pachter’s editorial, which mentions emerging scholarly critiques of Churchill, hints at the more complex and critical discussions of the former PM’s commemoration happening today. These include interventions at Churchill statues across the country and around the world.

In London in 2020, an unknown artist added the words “was a racist” to the plinth of the Churchill statue outside Westminster Palace.

In Edmonton in 2021, a statue identical to the one in Toronto (by Oscar Nemon) was covered in red paint following the location of 215 presumed graves of children at the site of the Tkemlúps Secwépemc Indian Residential School.

In Halifax that same year, another identical statue of Churchill was covered in Post-It Notes featuring his racist quotes as part of a tour not dissimilar to this one.

As you head to the next site, think about how this monument you're at is a confluence of all these creative actions, and how the story of Charles Pachter's editorial helped to make that apparent.



Telling the story of Charles Pachter's Editorial against the Winston Churchill Statue at City Hall.

May 2024.
Photo by Ellie Chesnutt.

Walk along Hagerman Street to Bay Street

Think about where you are walking. What connections are you mapping? Think about how places here in Toronto connect to places elsewhere. What is the relationship between places and memory? How did the last stop make these connections and relationship apparent?

Be sure to cross at the crosswalk.

Look for the large, white pillars indicating Trinity Square's entrance.

Before entering the square, be mindful that this public place is sometimes people's home. Treat it as you would if you were visiting a neighbour's home. (Which you are!)

Follow the path to the right and look for the small, painted structure near the south-facing door of the church.

This is the Toronto Homeless Memorial.

STOP B. Church of the Holy Trinity, Trinity Square

Toronto Homeless Memorial

Welcome to the Toronto Homeless Memorial. This is the first monumental intervention on the tour that is an example of artists creating a monument.

It is also a first-of-its-kind-in-Canada monument that commemorates people who have died in the shelter system, incarcerated, or in care, or without a fixed address.

It is a monument with two sorts of official histories ...



Toronto Homeless Memorial in 2024.

Thank You to Greg Cook and Tim Martin for sharing these stories, and to Cathy Crowe for your facilitation and support.

One is its history as an outgrowth of commemorative and memorial practices related to homelessness -- a practice that gained prominence in activist communities in the 1980s.

Examples of these activist memory practices include the Homeless Person's Memorial Day -- marked in the northern hemisphere as December 21st (the longest night of the year) and, more locally, the plaque that remembers the victims of the Rupert Hotel fire, which killed ten people living in precarious circumstances.



Rupert Hotel Fire plaque. Photo by Alan L. Brown.

The other history is the oral history that attributes the monument's creation to the late Bonnie Briggs, a poet and advocate for the homeless. Briggs, who had experienced homelessness herself, was inspired by other memorials and monuments around the city, such as the Toronto Cenotaph, located just a few metres away from where you are standing commemorating those who died in the Great War, WWII and the Korean War.

Briggs reasoned that a monument to the homeless dead would spur political action and awareness in the fight against homelessness. She partnered with the advocacy group Toronto Disaster Relief Committee to help realize her vision.

The Homeless Memorial, however, is not just the sculptural object (designed to contain the names of the dead) you see in front of you. It is also a monthly memorial service that takes place on the second Tuesday of each month.

It is also a website, necessary for continuously adding names beyond the capacity of the original monument. More than 1,200 names have been added since its establishment in 1997.

The triple nature of the Homeless Memorial makes it a powerful intervention that works in several different ways.

1. As a counter-monument, a monument that addresses and challenges other monuments around it. Think about the definition offered earlier of monuments? What monuments do you see around you?

2. Calling attention to the complex politics of place by where it is located. (incidentally this was not the first choice location for the monument, but opposition by city councillors to a more visible memorial in St. James' Park caused it to eventually be located here.) Here on stolen Land, surrounded by the offices of major banks, near the entrance to one of Canada's largest shopping centres, City Hall, and the law courts, the Homeless Memorial calls to mind the intersections between homelessness, colonialism, racism, and structural and systemic violence,* and the system of private property (largely based colonial resource and wealth extraction) that blocks access to housing for all.

* Indigenous people make up nearly 25% of the homeless population in Canada. A further 20% of the population are racialized people and 86% of homeless will experience violence at the hands of police or emergency services workers.

3. Marking and making place. The Homeless Memorial is a place to grieve and remember, but also to organize, amplify and animate conversations around homelessness. Over the years the memorial has also invited artists to collaborate and enliven its message.

Bonnie Briggs naturally understood the tripartate functions of the memorial. In a poem (read on next page) she anticipates its multimedia composition well ahead of when the technology that would have made this possible was widely available.



Monumental Interventions Tour at the Toronto Homeless Memorial, Photo by Ellie Chesnutt.

We Are You

By Bonnie Briggs

Homeless Memorial, "We Are You"
The homeless are people too.
The homeless die, who remembers?
That Society has lost some of its members?
We have a monument to remember and show,
What Society needs to know.
The reality of life on the street,
What an incredible challenge to meet.
This monument will be in St. James Park.
It will be lighted, daytime and dark.
There will be tapes of people's stories,
Telling their tales of horror and glories.
You can come and leave a note,
Let others see what you wrote.
Come and visit, then call for change,
Our priorities, rearrange.
More housing is what we need,
Not the politicians' greed.
"We Are You", "You Are Us",
There is much we need to discuss.
Come and visit the Memorial today,
Come see what the homeless have to say.

A reminder that YOU are invited to participate in or attend the next Homeless Memorial Service, either in person or virtually.

Services take place on the SECOND TUESDAY of every month at NOON (Eastern Time)

Services are streamed live via the Church of the Holy Trinity Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/holytrinityTO/>

You can also visit the online memorial at <http://homelessmemorials.com/memorial/>

Walk to the rear of the church and follow the path north.

Look for the passage way and follow it to the main street.

This is Dundas Street. Turn right and walk toward the large public square -- stand in the middle of the square and then read on.



Sankofa Square awaiting new sign after being stripped of Yonge-Dundas name, May 2024.

STOP C+ D.

Sankofa Square at Yonge and Dundas Streets

Sankofa Square and Renaming Dundas St

You are standing in the middle of the recently named “Sankofa Square.” This is a good place to think about the role of place naming and renaming as a kind of intervention that produces, informs impressions of, and shapes what is possible in local places.

This stop on the walk is one that is very personal to me, and I’d like to step out of my “author’s voice” to share with you.

In 2020 I created an online petition that called on the City of Toronto to begin a public process to reconsider the name of Dundas Street.

 Toronto Eaton
Centre

on Centre



Ryerson
University

University
of Toronto
springs

DOLLAR
SPRINGS

BOOK AS STUDENT
AND SAVE 20%

EATON
CENTRE

The petition was launched in solidarity with long-standing calls from Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized community voices that called on governments and institutions to address the ways in which figures connected to colonial violence and white supremacy were celebrated in public. Calls that had come to the forefront of public discussion and debate during that year's BLM uprisings.

It was also inspired by the work of Scottish human rights campaigner, Sir Geoff Palmer and journalist Adam Ramsay who campaigned (and later succeeded) to have a plaque added to Edinburgh's Melville Monument describing the role its subject Henry Dundas, First Viscount Melville, played in obstructing and delaying the end of the transatlantic slave trade.

From my interest in local history, I recognized Henry Dundas as the namesake of Dundas Street here in Toronto. I reasoned that if Edinburgh was having a conversation about a 45m tall monument to Dundas, Toronto should probably have one about the 23km one we have here.

I like to think of the online petition as one kind of intervention that works, like the previous sites we've visited, in multiple ways.

1. In the conversation it creates. The petition intervened in public discourse, resulting in a four-year, high-profile, conversation on the relationship between place names, memory, and history. (As well as Toronto's place within the British Empire and how local places connect to global events.)

2. In the place that it makes. The petition was published during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. It created a place where people could express solidarity with one another and movements for spatial and racial justice, and presented an alternative for those who could not or would not for various reasons be in the streets.

3. In the change it facilitates. The result was tangible real-world change in the city's commemorative landscape. The petition led to a 2021 vote by Toronto City Council to rename all public assets bearing the Dundas name. In 2022, the adoption of a new commemorative framework for the city enshrined community storytelling, Indigenous worldviews, and traditional knowledge. It also resulted in an ongoing recognition review process of all public commemorations in Toronto.

Relevant to this location, it also began the process that would result in this place being named Sankofa Square.

Sankofa Square is an intervention that inserts the Akkan concept of Sankofa (the appropriateness and ability of looking to the past to inform the future) into the “text” of Toronto’s Street grid. A street grid that includes a disproportionate number of British Prime Ministers, colonial officials, military figures and monarchs.



A sign in a window on Dundas Street in support of renaming, 2020; a logo designed in support of the Sankofa Square name.

It also ...

1. Serves as a counter-monument to the as-yet-to-be-renamed Dundas St and Yonge St., two streets whose present names are connected to slavery: Dundas and Sir George Yonge, the latter attempted to smuggle slaves into the Cape Colony while governor.* (* The current City Council voted to pause the renaming of Dundas Street in 2023, citing a budget shortfall. At the same meeting, the Sankofa Square name was approved and the TTC directed to rename both Dundas Street Stations. The Toronto Public Library renamed the Jane-Dundas Library to the Daniel G. Hill Library in 2024, after the former chair of the Ontario Human Rights Commission and co-founder of the Ontario Black History Society)



Monumental Interventions Tour in August, 2024 at Sankofa Square.
Photo by Ellie Chesnutt.

2. It creates a new monument in the city that honours the contributions of African and African-descended people to Toronto. But also reminds us of the work to be done, the Land to be restored, the relationships to be repaired, the names to be named and reclaimed, and the shortcomings of our current political imagination in failing to address issues of spatial justice quickly and directly. It is a monument to justices yet to come.

Thank you for letting me share this story with you.

Leaving Sankofa Square, walk east to Victoria St.

Head north on Victoria St and enter the Toronto Metropolitan University campus.

Turn right on Gould St. and stop at the intersection with Bond St.

Look for an empty space between the trees. See if you can find a spotlight with a daub of pink paint on it. This is the former site of the Egerton Ryerson statue.



Monumental Interventions Tour stops at the site of the toppling of the Egerton Ryerson statue. August 2024. Photo by Ellie Chesnutt.

* the head was subsequently taken to Lake Ontario and then to 1492 Land Back Lane - a Haundenosaunee Land Defenders camp blocking a housing development on unceded territory along the Haldimand Tract - a land dispute that has been ongoing since 1784.

STOP E.

Intersection of Gould and Bond Sts.
Toronto Metropolitan University Campus.

Toppling the Egerton Ryerson Statue

If Sankofa Square reminds us, in part, of spatial justices to come, this is a place where justice was forcefully enacted.

On this site, at what was once known as Ryerson University, stood a statue of Egerton Ryerson, Chief Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada who while credited with developing the public education system in Ontario also developed philosophies and policies that informed the Indian Residential School system and contributed to the creation of racially segregated schools, and limited education for women.

The statue was defaced, pulled down, and symbolically beheaded in 2021, following a march honouring the children who died in the residential school system (1831-1997) The march was organized following the location of what are likely 215 unmarked graves of children at the Tkemlúps Secwépemc Indian Residential School site.*

Pulling down a monument can seem like an extreme form of creative memory activism to take. However ...

Social science research has supported the very real negative impacts of monuments that celebrate persons connected to racism, violent oppression, conquest, and colonization on racialized people and communities that continue to be subject to these forms of injustice. These effects include mental and physical health impacts of such monuments. Other studies



The Egerton Ryerson Statue, just hours before being torn down. June 7, 2021, X University* (Indigenous faculty and students requested that this appellation be used until the University was renamed. Thus, this photo was taken at X University.)

suggest the more racist monuments a community has, the less that anti-hate crime legislation is enforced in that community.* See Clarence C. Gravelee, "How Race Becomes Biology: Embodiment of Social Inequality," 2009. p6; Chelsey R. Carter, "Racist Monuments are Killing Us", 2019; and Lantz et al. "Historical Markers Or Markers of White Supremacy? Confederate Memorialization, Racial Threat, and Hate Crime." 2022

These harms were emphasized in 2020 when artists affiliated with Black Lives Matter painted three monuments across the city, (you'll get to visit each site) including the Egerton Ryerson statue.

Through this creative act, the artists called attention to this monument and the ways in which Egerton Ryerson's legacy continues to have ramifications for people today. They also highlighted the failure of the university to listen and act on the concerns Black and Indigenous students and faculty had raised about the statue over the last 30 years.

A flood light splattered in weathered pink paint is a material trace of the 2020 monument painting that can still be seen today. Toronto Metropolitan University, February, 2024.



Later, in 2021, the monument became a site of grief. A memorial commemorating children who died and childhoods lost at Indian Residential Schools was created by placing pairs of tiny shoes at the statue's base.

Each of these interventions underscored the need to address the harm caused by this monument in a meaningful way. It was the inaction by the university that would ultimately lead to the monuments toppling.

Given what you've read, what choices do you think were left for the artists involved in removing the monument? Do you think the university would have taken the statue down if the decision wasn't made for them? Do you think the name of the university would have changed without this action?

Thinking about these questions offers another interpretation of toppling the monument; that is as a radical act of public curation, rooted in an ethic of care. Curation, after all, comes to English from the Latin "curare" meaning "to care for."

You can think of that "care" as an obligation not just to preserve, but also to care for one another.

Does this change how you think about pulling down the statue?



Tiny shoes, stuffed animals, flowers, and personal effects surround the empty plinth days after the monument was torn down.

Give these questions some thought as you enter the passageway to the University quad (the large park in the centre of Kerr Hall, located to the north of Gould and Bond Sts.)

Take some time to reflect silently on what you have read so far, the places you have walked, and the interventions we've visited together.

It's a lot of heavy information and emotions to process.

Exiting the quad, take a deep breath before turning left and walking to Yonge St.

Cross Yonge St, and then head north to cross Gerrard St. Walk on Yonge St. Just beyond the Ikea you'll see the entrance to College Park on your left.

Walk diagonally across the park to the corner of Bay and College Sts.

Turn to your right and walk 50m or so from the corner to your right.

You are standing in front of Toronto Police Headquarters.



Poster for the 19th Annual Strawberry Ceremony - Feb. 14, 2024;
Quentin VerCetty's Ancestral Uprising AR Monument Installed at Police Headquarters, 2021.

STOP F. The Toronto Police Headquarters 40 College St.

The Annual Strawberry Ceremony+ Defund the Police Street Mural + Ancestral Uprising AR Monument

This is a good place to stop and take stock of all you have read so far.

In the sites visited, you've been asked to consider how creative memory activist interventions can open conversations and call attention to, contest, celebrate, indentify, and create place.

Here is a good place to think about how interventions can transform place.

The place transformed or the monument intervened in is right in front of you:
Toronto Police Headquarters.

Like the site of the Ryerson statue, Police Headquarters has been the site of numerous interventions.

In 2020, Black Lives Matter artists painted “Defund the Police” in large, pink letters on the road directly in front of where you are standing. This act transformed this space, a space surveilled and theoretically controlled by the police, into a space where community sovereignty of the streets was claimed and police authority challenged.



BLM, Defund the Police Street Painting, 2020. Photo by CBC News.

In 2021, artist Quentin VerCetty's "Ancestral Uprising", a virtual Afrofuturist monument commissioned by the City of Toronto History Museums, was temporarily installed here. The monument used Augmented Reality technology to allow mobile phone users to transform any site -- including police headquarters -- into a site of Black futurity that calls **all** people together in struggle.

The intervention that has taken place here the longest, however, is the annual Strawberry Ceremony hosted by the group No More Silence.

Honouring missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, LGBTQ+ persons, and two-spirit people, the unsanctioned and unauthorized ceremony has taken place every year since 2005.

Inspired by similar ceremonies in Vancouver, BC, it takes place every February 14 at 12:30 p.m. **YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND!**

The ceremony employs the strawberry, a pan-Indigenous symbol of hope and renewal associated with women, as its central ritual object. (The Anishinaabemowin word for strawberry, “ode’imin”, means heart berry.)

The ceremony provides strawberries and water, as well as prayers, to attendees for consumption. It also offers these prayers and nourishment to the spirits of the missing and killed, who, through speaking their names as part of the ceremony, are called into this place where you stand.

Elder Wanda Whitebird teaches that this is why the ceremony must always take place on the same date and time. It is because the spirits gather here awaiting the annual return of the ceremony.

The Strawberry Ceremony thus transforms this monumental place into a spiritual place, while still calling attention to the role of police in enacting violence, either intentionally or indifferently against Indigenous women, gay people, and trans people. Through its unsanctioned nature the ceremony is also a means of enacting Indigenous sovereignty on the Land.



The Monumental Interventions Tour gathers near the site of the annual Strawberry Ceremony, August 2024. Photo by Ellie Chesnutt.

From the southeast corner of Bay and College Sts. head west towards University Ave.

Once you reach University Ave, head north, crossing College St. from the southeast corner. Stop along the curve in the road (now called Queen's Park Crescent).



A close-up of a historical marker featuring a gold fist icon in a circle at the top. The marker is dark blue with a gold border. The text below the icon is as follows:

Baby Point Crescent, Baby Point Road, Baby Point Terrace

These roads are named after Jacques "James" Baby. He was a member of the Baby family who enslaved at least 17⁺ Black and Indigenous people in the late 18th and early 19th centuries in Canada¹. Some of these enslaved people were 'passed down' through the generations of the Baby family². In addition to the enslaved people that he may have 'inherited', Baby 'purchased' a Black "boy named Franke, aged 12 years" for \$532.50 (U.S.) at a Detroit "auction"³. Furthermore, James Baby opposed Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe's efforts to prohibit slavery in Upper Canada⁴. In summary, Jacques "James" Baby was a human trafficker who kidnapped and held Black and Indigenous people captive, forcing them to complete unpaid and brutal labour.

"What we accept, what we honour, who we choose to honour says a lot about what we value as a society."
—Joan Moore Davis, President of the Essex County Black Historical Research Society⁵

STOP g. Queen's Park Crescent

#BlackedOut History Plaques

During the summer of 2021, along the curve in the road where you are standing, seven black and gold plaques mysteriously appeared.

Made of wire and corrugated plastic, the plaques were created by an anonymous artist or group of artists. They featured the stories of historical figures such as Abolitionist and Publisher Mary-Ann Shadd, Charlie Daniels (who, in 1914, successfully sued an Alberta theatre for racial discrimination), Charles Roach and the Black Action Defense Committee, and historically Black communities including Hogan's Alley in Vancouver, Amber Valley in Alberta, and Toronto's Little Jamaica.

These creative interventions built on a previous series of identical plaques that in 2020 were installed around Toronto. Those told on the enslaving histories behind some of Toronto's most famous street and place names, such as Jarvis St., Russell St., Russell Hill Rd., and Baby Point.

(Street names that remain controversial today)

#BlackedOut History Plaques at Queen's Park Circle, August 2020; An original plaque from 2020 erected in Toronto's Baby Point neighbourhood. Photo: Irene Moore Davis (via Twitter) republished by CBC News.

The shape of the plaques is meant to recall the blue and gold plaques of the Ontario Heritage Trust. By using this shape and design, the intervention references the ways in which these kinds of histories are often excluded from memory infrastructure such as plaque programs.

They also call attention to the need for heritage organizations to look more carefully at the types of stories they tell, who or what is celebrated, and who or what is obscured or omitted from popular and public forms of historical interpretation.

At the next stop you will learn about another artistic response to historical plaques -- one that through its place connects two of the most important anti-racist and anti-colonial movements of the twenty-first century.



Monumental Interventions tour at the site of the #BlackedOut History Plaques. August 2024. Photo by Ellie Chesnutt.

Thank-you Susan Blight and
Dr. Syrus Marcus Ware!

STOP H.

Queen's Park.

Ogimaa Miikana &
Black Lives Matter Artists

Walk along Queen's Park Crescent until you reach the crosswalk near Grosvenor St.

Cross the street and follow the path into the park. When you reach the central trail turn left and walk toward the large, grey box. Stop in front of it.

This is Queen's Park. Queen's Park is Toronto's very first public park and is also the site of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It has what is likely the largest concentration of monuments in Toronto. Because of this it is also the site of many artistic interventions into its monumental landscape.

If you are looking at the grey box, turn around and look at the plaque that is now on your left.

This plaque was the site of a National Indigenous Peoples Day intervention by Ogimaa Mikana.

Ogimaa Mikana (Leader's Trail) is the work of Anishinaabe artists Susan Blight and Dr. Hayden King.

The project challenges the ways that colonial place names and commemorations obscure urban Indigenous presence, specifically Anishinaabe presence and the relationships to place imbued in Anishinaabemowin. (Anishinaabe Language)

The name Ogimaa Mikana is meant to honour the women leaders of the Idle No More movement, an ongoing, peaceful, revolutionary movement founded in 2012. The group seeks to restore treaty rights, sustain the environment, and “honour and fulfill Indigenous sovereignty.”* It was also the name that Blight and King bestowed on Toronto’s Queen St. in their first intervention (2013) when they installed a replica street sign at the corner of Queen and McCaul Streets, over extant municipal signage.

Many Torontonians will be familiar with the ceremonial Anishinaabemowin names Gete-Onagaming and Ishpadinaa that top street signs along Davenport and Spadina Road. These signs were inspired by the work of Ogimaa Mikana.

In 2014, Ogimaa Mikana created a cover for the plaque you see in front of you (NB. it used to be closer to the building).

The plaque, like the #BlackedOut History ones, mimicked the form and colour scheme of the Ontario Heritage Trust plaque which it obscured.



Ogimaa Mikana, "Formerly Queen's Park", 2014. Photo courtesy of the artists.

The plaque written in Anishinaabemowin, features an English translation that reads:

"Toronto (where the logs flow)
We all live on native territory,
our Anishinaabe land,
welcome to our community,
how do you recognize it?"

While installing the “plaque” the pair of artists were approached by Queen’s Park security and threatened with a trespassing charge if they hung their sign over the extant plaque.

A rich and sad twist of irony.

Take some time to consider the question posed by Ogimaa Mikana in this intervention.

How do YOU recognize this Land as Anishinaabe Land? How do you respect and honour it? How do you recognize Indigenous sovereignty on it?

While you think about those questions, turn back around to face the grey box and look at the base of it.



Tiny shoe memorial at the base of the “boxed” Sir John A. MacDonald statue, Queen’s Park, October 2024.

This is another “tiny shoes” memorial commemorating those children who suffered or died in the residential school system. It stands at the foot of a now boxed up statue of Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada’s first Prime Minister and Superintendent General of “Indian Affairs”, who played a pivotal role in the implementation of the residential school system and the development of Canada’s forced assimilation policy toward Indigenous people.

Macdonald’s monument has remained encased in this wooden crate since 2020, when it was painted by artists affiliated with Black Lives Matter.

This was the second monument painted that day, following the painting of Ryerson’s statue.

Affixed to the wooden box today is a message of peaceful and thoughtful debate about the legacies of historical figures like Macdonald.

But that message obscures the fact that what happened just after this monument was painted was far from peaceful.

After splashing this monument in bright pink paint -- again to highlight the role that figures like Macdonald and their legacies and contemporary celebrations play in authorizing the dispossession of Indigenous Land, the overpolicing and incarceration of Black and Indigenous people, and to, as one participant put it, "beautify this ugly monument" -- Toronto police surrounded the artists and their supporters.

The police attempted to "kettle" the group (a military-style manoeuvre allegedly banned by police following its disastrous use at the G20 summit in Toronto) before arresting three artists.

A move that persons involved described as ironic and sad given that police had "killed eleven people that month alone" and that those facing the brunt of the law were people who had painted an inanimate object.

The artists who were arrested were "disappeared" by police for over four hours. When they finally appeared at the 52 Division headquarters (only 3 blocks from where they were arrested) they were held without access to legal counsel and refused access to life-sustaining medications.

The arrests caused widespread outrage. Protestors occupied the forecourt of 52 Division until the artists' release some seventeen hours later. The artists were charged with "mischief," a crime that carries a maximum ten-year prison sentence.



Above: The painted statue of Sir John A. Macdonald, 2020. Photo by CBC News.



Left: The Macdonald statue in 2023.

Next Page: Sign affixed to "boxed" Macdonald statue by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



The arrests and charges were especially upsetting to Canada's arts community, which recognized the existential threat they represented to freedom of expression (a fundamental right guaranteed to all Canadians by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms). Thousands of artists signed an open letter affirming the artistic merit of the painters, condemning the arrests, demanding that charges be dropped, and the defunding of the Toronto police.

This action was significant because the legal basis for determining what is "art" in Canada is its recognition by other artists as such.

Eventually, thanks in part to efforts such as this, not to mention considerable lawyering, all charges against the artists were dropped in 2021.*

* Please note that while the names of the the artists arrested are part of the public record, they are not named in this publication in deference to their personal and professional safety. This should not be misconstrued as an attempt to deny them recognition for their significant work.



Monumental Interventions tour at Queen's Park, May 2024. Photo by Ellie Chesnutt.

The final stop on the walk is next.

From where you are, walk toward the Legislature. Turn right when you are standing directly in front of the stairs. Walk due east until you reach the edge of the grass.

Then walk north along the trail made by other walkers like you. Stop at Wellesley St.

Wait until it is safe, then cross the road and enter Queen's Park North.

Follow the path until you reach the clearing. Stop at the giant bronze statue.



STOP H.

Edward VII Equestrian Monument,
Queen's Park North

Artists at Queen's Park

If Queen's Park has Toronto's largest concentration of monuments, then the monument you are standing, or perhaps now sitting (take a seat on one of the benches -- you've earned it!), in front of is perhaps the most intervened-in monument in the park.

This is the King Edward VII Equestrian Monument.*

Before reading on, ask yourself "how long do you think this monument has stood here?"

Thank-you Dr. Syrus Marcus Ware,
Hazel Meyer, Amy Ching-Yan Lam

It looks pretty old. But this statue has been in Toronto only since 1969. Just fifty-five years.

While the focus of most tour stops has been on acts of creative memory activism, this is one site where it's good to know how this statue got here.

It's a story that connects back to the beginning of the walk too.

This statue once stood in Delhi, India, before being taken down after the country reclaimed its independence from Britain in 1947.

It sat in storage, carved into multiple pieces, until wealthy insurance man Harry Jackman (remember him?) decided to “gift” it to the city of Toronto.

There was just one problem. When the donation was announced, Torontonians loudly objected. Many people wrote to the newspaper expressing in clear language that they saw the statue as a reminder of British imperialism and at odds with the values of “modern” Canada. (Again think back to the competing narratives of Anglo-Canadian colonialism from the first stop.)

For his part, Jackman deflected criticism saying he was less interested in the man on the horse than in the horse itself. He argued that the monument was a valuable educational tool for city children, who had probably never seen a horse before.* (seriously!?!)

*Toronto Star, 1969

Despite the opposition, Jackman got his way and the statue was installed. This fact raises similar questions to those asked by Charles Pachter almost a decade later about who has access to public space.

What allows for this access?

Asking these questions and thinking about how the Jackman's "gift" was received, opens the door to thinking of this statue as an intervention, albeit one, unlike our previous examples, intervening from a place of extreme privilege and power.



The bronze effigy of Edward VII sits astride his horse "Kildare" in Queen's Park in 2022.

Not counting Jackman's intervention though (if it is indeed one?), this statue has been the site or subject of no less than three interventions.

As mentioned in the previous section, this is the final monument painted by Black Lives Matter affiliated artists prior to their arrest here.

It's also worth mentioning that this monument (particularly Kildare's generous "member") has been regularly painted by University of Toronto students for decades without provoking a militarized police response.

While the artists motivations and what happened to them were the subject of previous locations,* this site provides an opportunity to think of the medium through which their message was delivered: PINK PAINT.

The idea for using pink paint was not only to make monuments that are often ignored or seem invisible highly visible. It was also chosen as a "Queer-coded" colour. These acts of creative memory activism were all undertaken in the days following Pride Month in Toronto, and the artists involved in the painting, planning, and execution of this work wanted to celebrate the role of gay, lesbian, and trans people in leading anti-colonial and anti-racist movements, while recognizing that these contributions are often later "erased" from official histories of those movements.

Queer erasure is also the subject of artist Hazel Meyer's 2017 intervention "Where Once Stood a Bandstand for Cruising and Shelter."

This piece involved the artist erecting a forty-five foot (13.7m) high counter-monumental scaffold at the northernmost extreme of the park. From the structure, large banners made of home insulation inscribed with Meyer's poetry were dropped at regular intervals over a twelve-hour period.*

Commissioned for Nuit Blanche, an annual, all-night, contemporary art festival, Meyer's poems were based on oral history interviews collected by the Foolscap Project that told the LGBTQ+ and homeless histories of Queen's Park. Using an expressive language of desire and imagination, the poems evoked the spirit of the titular bandstand, once used for cruising and shelter -- imagining new possibilities and political arrangements in a place laden with representational power.

The bandstand was eventually demolished and the space it occupied was later filled by the King Edward monument. A fact that evokes the connections between the colonialism, imperial militarism, and machismo the statue represents and the suppression of Queer desire and oppression of Queer people.

Meyer's installation was to be staged at the site of the monument, however it was relocated at the last minute when the Legislature expressed "security concerns".

In a similar way to how Meyer's creative memory activism deployed imagination, so too did conceptual art duo Life of a Craphead in their work, "Equestrian Statue of King Edward VII Floating Down the Don River". (2017)

While this intervention did not occur here, it certainly concerns this place.

In this artwork, Amy Ching-Yan Lam and John McCurley floated a half-size replica of King Edward and Kildare down the Don River.

(Waaasayishkodenayosh in Anishinaabemowin or "Black Burnt Ground" in English)



Hazel Meyer, "Where Once Stood a Bandstand for Cruising and Shelter", Queen's Park, 2017. Photo by Henry Chan.



A statue of enslaver Edward Colston is dumped into the Bristol Harbour. in 2020. Photo by Reuters..

Dumping a statue in water has been a hallmark of memory activism since forever.

We can think of the statue of enslaver Edward Colston in Bristol or how the bronze head cut off from the Ryerson statue was dumped in water. These acts call to mind the ancient Roman practice of dumping statues of deposed leaders in the River Tiber.

Water is a symbolic purifier, but dumping in water also signifies “waste”. Certainly, dumping a statue (or its effigy) in one of the most polluted city rivers will do that. Water is also a force of nature to which all power is subordinate. These paradoxical relationships are clearly on display in this work.

But what this piece does best is to activate the imagination. In seeing the “fake statue” float down the river, or to see a picture of it, or simply to think about it, evokes a world where an empty plinth stands here in the park. A world where bronze miraculously floats, carried out into Lake Ontario, a cast off relic of a time that has yet to exist.

A world that is possible because it can be imagined.

A world free of violence, subjugation, and oppression. A world based on repairing relations, on Land back, on social, racial and economic justice. A world that all of the artists whose works you’ve visited today have imagined.

Perhaps you can imagine it too and carry that thought along with what you read and learned in these places with you, and share it with those who you meet.

THE END



Life of a Craphead, "Equestrian Statue of King Edward VII Floating Down the Don River", 2017.

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Additional Resources

Further Reading & Viewing

Ange Loft, Victoria Freeman et al.
“A Treaty Guide for Torontonians.” Jumblies Press, 2022.

Paul Farber, Sue Mobley, Laurie Allen. “National Monument Audit.” Monument Lab, 2021.

Syrus Marcus Ware. “Pink Splashes: Queering the Streets Through Abolitionist Interventions”, filmed at Schwules Museum, Berlin, 2022.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzOMk-GREbt8&t=622s>

Dr. Melanie Newton and Andrew Lochhead.
“The Power to Matter: Race and Commemorative Politics in Toronto.”
Filmed at the Institute of Historical Research, School of Advanced Studies, University of London, 2022. <https://youtu.be/e98yOWPpY80>

Mental Health Resources

National Indian Residential School Crisis
Hotline: 1-866-925-4419

Ontario Mental Health Helpline: 211

Toronto Distress Centre:

416 408-4357 or 408-HELP

Gerstein Centre Crisis Line: 416 929-5200

