Monuments to Unknown Heroes at the CAC is an expanded presentation that originated at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Argentina in 2020. The current exhibition is co-produced by MAMM, the Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín, Colombia, where a year-long series of public workshops is being held responding to the central themes. Monuments to Unknown Heroes is generously supported by the participating artists and by Alexander Gray Gallery, New York. Submissions to the original 2020 call can be viewed alongside the 2023 works in an online catalog by scanning the QR code found near the installation and on the back of this brochure.

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Monuments to Unknown Heroes

Monuments to Unknown Heroes is a participatory installation that investigates how we ascribe value in the context of public monuments. The project brings together nearly a hundred responses that imagine monuments to under recognized or unknown heroes. Each artist was asked to respond to the prompt, “Who or what is deserving of public commemoration yet has been overlooked?”

This presentation is an expansion upon a call for submissions that originally took place in the days following the start of the pandemic. Initiated by conceptual artist and pedagogue Luis Camnitzer, this visual archive captures various approaches to transforming the fabric of our cities and our collective memory. This installation imagines a future in which those who rarely get recognized are seen as society’s true heroes, thereby transforming the fabric of our cities and our collective memory.

Organized by Amara Antilla, Senior Curator, Contemporary Arts Center.
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This installation is an expansion upon a call for submissions that originally took place in the days following the start of the pandemic. Initiated by conceptual artist and pedagogue Luis Camnitzer, this visual archive captures various perspectives on the ways in which we memorialize. The project also raise questions about the socio-political and economic underpinnings that typically accompany the production of public monuments. The shortfalls of America’s public monuments have received heightened scrutiny in the years following the social justice protests of 2020. Subsequent nation-wide campaigns called for the removal or renaming of monuments, streets, and sites that refer to legacies of the Confederacy, settler colonialism, and violence. Traditional monuments often depict male military heroes celebrating acts of war and abuses of power. However, the most heroic acts are often those performed anonymously and without expectations of recognition or reward.

For this presentation, an updated call for proposals was circulated to local and international artists inviting a reflection on the ways in which the people, places, or histories we value ought to be commemorated. Some participants approached this prompt with humor or irony, crafting monuments to honor “second chances” or the “unknown psychotherapist.” Others take a serious look at the ways in which more complex and inclusive national, cultural, and personal histories might occupy our public sites. These proposals include designs for monuments to unknown factory workers, migrants, mothers, and front-line workers, among others. This installation imagines a future in which those who rarely get recognized are seen as society’s true heroes, thereby transforming the fabric of our cities and our collective memory.

Monuments to Unknown Heroes

Participating Artists

Carol Abbott   Tina Gutierrez
Flavio Abuhab   Louis Hock
Daniel Alatorre   Roberto Jacoby
Ester Alfaro   Yohana Jaimez
Enrique Allen   Juan Diego Pérez La Cruz
Jose Bedia   Fred and Leader
Gary Beeber   Cynthia Lin
Walter Borges   Rachel Linnemann
Luis Camnitzer   Inisto López-Aparicio
Israel Cibils   Georg Lutz
Arambir Cone   Jesse Ley
Michael Coppone   Marco Maggi
Fabio Caruana   Eric Javier Markowski
Calegna Cullen   Jason Lena
Claudia de Monte   Sylvia Meyer
Lusso Diaz   Jonas Monib
Sam Durant   Ronald Moran
Magdalena Fernández   Michael Muller
Martina Fischer   Carla Navarette
Beatrice Red Star Fletcher   Cristina Ochoa
Harrell Fletcher   Renato Oranna
Jose Franco   Nadia Orrego
Abby Friend, Dylan Bauer   Jamie Paye
Alecia Mihai Guaran   Jenny Perlin
Ed McGoogan   Ben Pollock
David Enrique Martinez   Laila Porter
Guerrero   Angel Poyon

Ask Yourself

1. Think about your community. Who are the heroes in your community? How would you choose to honor them?
2. What role do monuments currently play in your life? How could they be made more effective in everyday life and in our society?
3. Consider the monuments presented by the artists in this installation. Are there common themes amongst their works?
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The CAC receives Annual Exhibition Support from Gale and Dave Beckett, Cincinnati. CAC also receives Annual Exhibition Support from Gale and Dave Beckett, Cincinnati. CAC also receives ArtsWave’s Int’l & Special Exhibition Fund, and generous contributors to the CAC Exhibition Fund. General operating support for the CAC is provided by The F&G Fund, The Johnson Foundation, Antioch, National Endowment for the Arts, and the Ohio Arts Council.

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The proposals on display point toward a complex and inclusive national, cultural, and personal histories might occupy our public sites. These proposals include designs for monuments to unknown factory workers, migrants, mothers, and front-line workers, who rarely get recognized are seen as society’s true heroes, thereby transforming the fabric of our cities and our collective memory.

A portion of the submissions are displayed in the CAC Lobby, and additional works can be viewed on the CAC’s website. You can also scan the QR code found near the installation and on the back of this brochure.

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