

Article

Affect and Commemoration Atop the Pedestal

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Abstract: At the entrance to City Park in New Orleans, Louisiana, a monument to Confederate general P.G.T. Beauregard rose twenty-seven feet over the citizens of New Orleans until 2017, when the sculpture was removed from its pedestal. Following the removal, Mayor Mitch Landrieu asked: “why there are no slave ship monuments, no prominent markers on public land to remember the lynchings or the slave blocks; nothing to remember this long chapter of our lives; the pain, the sacrifice, the shame. . . all of it happening on the soil of New Orleans.” This landscape of empty pedestals was confronted by Paula Wilson that fall. Rather than erect a material monument that would directly replace the fallen General Beauregard, Wilson turned to her own body. Before the sun rose early one morning, she climbed atop the empty pedestal and began dancing in a performance titled “Living Monument.” This paper analyzes Wilson’s performance and its documentation as radical acts of refusing the logics of monumentality. In examining this work, I consider how performance as a mode of memorialization completely destabilizes the monumental presentation of a static history, thus offering a new grammar by which to think through modes of revolution and redress in the symbolic landscape.

Keywords: performance; monuments; commemoration; memorialization



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High above the entrance to City Park in New Orleans, Paula Wilson danced. Her perch was an empty pedestal, on top of which she unleashed a flurry of emotions for twenty minutes under the cover of the early morning. The year was 2017, a time that saw a heightened public awareness of monuments and public symbols, and the space that she occupied was formerly that of Confederate general P.G.T. Beauregard, whose statue had been removed in the weeks prior. Monuments, of course, exist with a surplus of affect. Created as material manifestations of loss, victory, and trauma, they are meant to stand as continuous appeals to emotion. The proliferation of monuments to the Confederacy was part of a campaign to control the memory of the antebellum American South through imagery, in response to images of the Confederate defeat and the abolition of slavery. In response to their removal, there has been an inundation of proposals for new monuments to replace them, with scholars and activists generating lists of people who deserve to be immortalized in stone or bronze. However, Wilson’s takeover of the space with her living body in a tunic and face paint upended the prevailing understanding of monumentality to include ephemeral commemorations of the Black communities of New Orleans. This paper argues that Wilson’s performance and its subsequent documentation offer a new method by which to approach monumentality and commemoration in public space that moves beyond the ever-present “up-or-down” binaries of monumental debates.

The monument to Beauregard rose twenty-seven feet over the citizens of New Orleans (Figure 1). On the night Beauregard died, 21 February 1893, an association was immediately formed for the “raising of funds for the erection of a monument commemorative of the great Louisiana soldier and General, Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard” ([Beauregard Monument Association 1917](#), p. 7).¹ When it was unveiled twenty-two years later, the Beauregard monument was intended to follow the lead of the monuments to the Confederacy that came before, such as the Robert E. Lee monument erected in New Orleans in 1884. His

presence in stone, sculpted by the same man who crafted the effigy of Lee, would continue to exalt and honor the Lost Cause that he fought for.



Figure 1. Photograph showing the dedication of the Beauregard Monument, published on the front page of *The Times-Picayune*, 12 November 1915.

The Lost Cause movement crafted a narrative about the Confederacy as a group bound together by patriotism and civic duty, honorably choosing to defend the rights of their community in the face of Northern aggression. Novels written by the wives and daughters of Confederate soldiers began the southern apologist mythology during the war; after it ended, the Lost Cause continued to be conveyed and constructed with the erection of monuments to the defeated Confederate soldiers and generals in the south. These monuments were often sponsored and paid for by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, whose campaign of misinformation sought to preserve Confederate ideals in future generations of Southerners, who would become what they called “living monuments” (Cox 2017). This re-writing of history can be easily observed in the speeches made during the unveiling ceremonies for the monuments. At the dedication of the Beauregard monument, Louisiana Supreme Court Justice John St. Paul directly connected Beauregard’s commemoration with that of the Lost Cause: “Well, indeed, may they worship at his shrine, for he was one, and not the least, of that galaxy of heroic men whose glorious deeds have placed their age and the struggle in which they took part among the grandest that adorn the annals of all times” (Smith 2017). The monument to Beauregard was the final Confederate monument erected in New Orleans, following the monument to Lee and another to Jefferson Davis, who died in the city in 1889.

These monuments, however, were not only intended to encourage pride in Southern heritage, but also assert White supremacy, as they were the visual manifestations in the public space of the codification of Jim Crow Laws that followed the end of Reconstruction. Illustrating this connection is the Battle of Liberty Place monument, which is dedicated to the 1874 siege conducted by the Crescent City White League, a militia largely comprised of former Confederate soldiers. The aim of this siege was to overthrow the recently elected Republican governor’s government and install his anti-Grant (and thus anti-Reconstruction) opponent. The battle saw the death of at least thirty-three people and was part of the

White League's broader efforts to intimidate and suppress the votes of the recently freed Black population. The monument itself was erected in 1891, seven years after the Robert E. Lee monument and seven years before the rewriting of Louisiana's constitution to all but eliminate the voting rights of Black citizens. The connection between these events and the monument was made literal when an inscription was added to its base in 1932, stating: "McEnery and Penn having been elected governor and lieutenant-governor by the white people, were duly installed by this overthrow of carpetbag government, ousting the usurpers, Governor Kellogg (white) and Lieutenant-Governor Antoine (colored). United States troops took over the state government and reinstated the usurpers but the national election of November 1876 recognized white supremacy in the South and gave us our state".

The Beauregard monument is an additional example of the ways that such monuments capitalized on memorialization in the creation of a selective civic memory. Though Beauregard was present as a dignitary at the erection of the Robert E. Lee monument, his post-bellum politics centered on racial harmony and reconciliation in New Orleans. He wrote often of the need for racial harmony to ensure the success and revitalization of the Southern states and actively advocated for the civil rights of newly freed Black citizens. While these stances in no way excuse his previous actions as a general who fought for the preservation of slavery, it is important to consider the effect of the monument's presentation of him as solely a representative of New Orleanian dedication to the Confederate cause. Doyle's sculpture preserved Beauregard in the Confederate uniform he wore when he ordered the attack on Fort Sumter that began the Civil War: the pedestal is simply inscribed, "G.T. Beauregard, 1818–1893; General C.S.A, 1861–1865." As written by James E. Young, civic memory, by definition, is "memory in service of a civic goal or policy" (Young 2016, p. 196). When civic memory is bound up with collective or personal memory through the use of memorialization, these distinct modes of remembering become conflated. The personal and collective memory of Beauregard as a champion of civil rights, remembered by many Black New Orleanians and Creoles of color, is bypassed and forgotten in service of the civic policies of white supremacy. With the end of Reconstruction and the new constitution in place, the new monuments of New Orleans served to express the affect of white supremacy in perpetuity, thinly veiled as commemoration of a "collective" past. That is, they did so until 2017, when the monuments were removed.

The removal was first called for by Mayor Mitch Landrieu after a separate but related series of events: the horrific massacre in 2015 of nine Black parishioners in Charleston, South Carolina and the publication of associated images. In the aftermath of the massacre, journalists uncovered the blog of the white supremacist shooter, which was decorated with the same Confederate battle flag that had been designed at the insistence of Beauregard.² For the Black citizens of New Orleans, these images only served to corroborate their lived experience of the purpose of such Confederate imagery in the city, and two weeks after the shooting, Landrieu called for the monuments to be dismantled. At first glance, such "swift" action by the city seems to represent an immediate response. However, activists such as Avery C. Alexander and Marie Galatas had been working to remove such symbols since the 1970s, a fight conducted in tandem with demands for civil rights.³ Civil rights activists were often in conversation with then-Mayor Moon Landrieu, Mitch Landrieu's father.⁴ While Landrieu's father did remove the Confederate flag from New Orleans City Hall, it took much longer for the Landrieus to understand the symbolism of Confederate monuments—displaying the insidious normalization of monuments and their ideals. Landrieu relays in his autobiographical recounting of the removals that when he was passing by the Jefferson Davis monument as a young boy, "I barely even saw the statue; Jefferson Davis was there-but-not-there as we drove by" (Landrieu 2017a, p. 36). Decades later, this overlooking continued, with Landrieu continuing: "...in the first few years of my term, I honestly didn't think much about Confederate monuments. . . [Following the murder of Trayvon Martin] our departments of property management or sanitation had to go out to clean the graffiti. The connection did not seem as obvious to me at that point" (Landrieu 2017a, p. 37). Two years after his initial call, the city finally took down the monuments to Beauregard,

Lee, and Davis, as well as the Battle of Liberty Place monument, pressed into action by the images of the Charlottesville protests against the removal of their own Lee monument. That event, along with the “Unite the Right Rally” that preceded it, saw neo-Nazis and white supremacists attacking counter-protesters in a display that sullied the argument that the monument’s only intended meaning lay in an honorable display of Confederate heritage. The intermingling of these new events with old images reiterated the ways in which monuments, despite their tendency to fade into obscurity and assimilate into the landscape, encode relationships and values in public space; those relationships and values then become as fixed as the monument itself.

Still, the removal of the monuments led many to consider this chapter of the city’s history closed. Those individuals jumped to consider what new monuments should be put on the empty pedestals in their place. This is the landscape that Paula Wilson confronted while living in New Orleans in the fall of 2017. Walking through the oak tree grove in City Park, Wilson passed by the empty pedestal that had held Beaugard’s statue. Between the massive and vibrant centuries-old oak trees and the cold, inanimate granite base, she recognized an oppositional conversation about monumentality. Primarily a painter, Wilson favors art that is monumental in scale, stating that, “As a black woman, I really think that taking up space and feeling like you can fill a room and find your body or your artwork, have an expansive existence, is something that is very important. . . . When we talk about monuments and the idea of something being monumental, you can’t interchange those terms. I think that if we focus on what we desire in terms of something being monumental, then the human spirit comes forward” (Sabatier 2021). She decided to create a work that spoke simultaneously to the embodied histories of New Orleans and to the emotions she felt as she passed by the site. Rather than create a material monument that would directly replace the fallen General Beaugard, Wilson turned to her own body and capacity for performance. Before the sun rose early one morning, she climbed atop the empty pedestal and began dancing (Figure 2). With her face painted, wearing a tunic she had sewn and painted for the occasion, Wilson swayed, high stepped, and waved for twenty minutes until she was forced down by New Orleans police officers.



Figure 2. Paula Wilson. *Living Monument*. 2017. Image courtesy of the artist.

While monuments are meant to freeze a particular moment in time in perpetuity, Wilson's energetic dancing transformed the pedestal from a place of static remembrance of the past to a stage for the celebration of the present. Indeed, celebration is what motivated Wilson's intervention. Wilson had become entranced by the history of Mardi Gras parades, first by the elaborate handmade costumes that informed her face paint and tunic and then by the tradition of second-line parades in which the "first line" of the brass band is accompanied by the "second line" of participants, dancing through the streets. This tradition grew out of jazz funerals put on by benevolent societies that were formed by members of the Black community in the 1800s to provide fellow Black people with social aid, as well as to assist with funeral expenses. The number of benevolent societies, also known as Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, especially blossomed after the Civil War, when previously enslaved individuals moved from the plantations around Louisiana into New Orleans and were met with little to no public assistance. During these funerals, the procession is accompanied by a jazz band to celebrate and memorialize the deceased. Though the mood is somber from the church to the graveyard, the funeral becomes a celebration following the burial. The band picks up the tempo to mark the transition of the deceased. The second line then follow suit, and the dancing of second-line participants "covers the gamut of life's emotions and experiences" (Raeburn 1995). Through her movements and dress, Wilson inserts the history of this entire affective range—from oppression and death to victory and joy. She invites us to consider the monumentality and joy of the jazz funeral, juxtaposing the austerity of the persisting materiality and permanence of monuments with the rapture and ephemerality of Black memorialization in New Orleans.

In his 1956 unpublished manuscript *The Negro in Louisiana*, historian and poet Marcus Christian put forth the first comprehensive history of Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs. Writing on their development, Christian stated: "With a clannishness forced upon [Black citizens of New Orleans] that is contrary to the precepts of real democracy, they have, nevertheless, kept about them a sane spirit of good fellowship and genuine fun-loving camaraderie which is the true essence of all democracies. Most whites never have the opportunity of viewing Negro organizations in actions unless they are parading in the streets, and it is only in this manner that most of them have become acquainted with Negro organized groups" (Christian 1956a, p. 6). In this way, the parades of the benevolent societies that have become the very basis for New Orleans's identity were the first monuments to Black life in Louisiana, paralleling the affective displays of grief and triumph that the white populations made in stone. Such a connection underlies the "Second Line to Bury White Supremacy," a second-line parade held by Take 'Em Down NOLA', a grassroots organization that began protesting monuments in the New Orleans landscape in 2013. The second line began at Congo Square, the main gathering place for enslaved people on Sundays in antebellum New Orleans. The music and dancing that developed in the square out of the mixture of diverse African cultures of the enslaved became the basis for Mardi Gras, second lines, and jazz. Using this space as the starting point for the second line sites the parade within Black joy and triumph. The second line itself—indeed, the funeral for the city's Confederate monuments—connects the monumental modes of commemoration used by white organizations such as the Beaugard Monument Association and the United Daughters of the Confederacy with those of social clubs.

In addition to their provision of social and financial aid, the clubs were in part a response to the segregation of public space in post-bellum New Orleans. One such space was City Park, where the Beaugard Monument served simultaneously as the greeter of visitors and the imagistic enforcer of post-bellum oppression. The park was developed on the former site of the Allard Plantation, where enslaved people cultivated and tended the land. As a segregated space, the park became the home of the Isaac Delgado Museum of Art, now the New Orleans Museum of Art, in 1911. The park also served as the backdrop to the Beaugard Monument from the time it was erected four years later. As such, the Beaugard Monument simultaneously served as the "welcome" to visitors, as the introductory symbol of culture, and as a declaration of white supremacy. As the

Beauregard Monument Association noted, “the City Park Association practically gave the ground [on which the monument was sited] and contributed \$1000 in money also” (Beauregard Monument Association 1917, p. 10).

Christian observes that, during the Jim Crow era, City Park was a particularly hostile place for Black people, as illustrated by an anecdote about a Black artist invited to an exhibition at the Delgado Museum of Art: “In making his way to the museum, in company with another Negro, he and his companion were threateningly set upon by white hoodlums, and forced to make a run for it. The artist and his friend finally arrived at the great building to which he had been invited, but their shoes were filled with mud, and there were stains upon the cuffs of their white linen pants” (Christian 1956b, pp. 2–3). At some point during this night, the artist and his companion would have undoubtedly been subject to Beauregard’s gaze. Their white attackers, as the “living monuments” of the U.D.C., were physically enforcing the values embodied in the Beauregard statue. As such, the park played an active role in solidifying and representing white supremacy in New Orleans, as land that bore witness to enslavement, Southern secession, the loss of the Confederacy, Emancipation, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and finally, desegregation.

Beyond its specificity to the physical site, Wilson’s performance has a discursive site-specificity; it is linked to the very materiality of monuments. By occupying the territory with her Black female body, standing eleven feet above the ground in a space once reserved for the bronze effigy of a Confederate general, Wilson recodes the space of the monument by demanding her right to appear in the rupture created by the empty pedestal. Ruptures, as Nicholas Mirzoeff writes, “are any place whatever where control fails. . . To feel the rupture, put your body in a space where it [is] not supposed to be and to stay there. If it works, a space of appearance is formed that coalesces common sensation” (Mirzoeff 2017, p. 32). Her performance, and her demand for her right to appear, rejected monumental logics, with the uncanny nature of her living body on the pedestal prompting her subsequent removal by police.

Historically, a pedestal exerts a physical dominance that announces the importance of the sculpture or statue that sits upon it. When that monument is replaced by a living, breathing body, the resulting image is uncanny indeed. Theorist Georgio Kohon states, “From the perspective of the viewer, [the uncanny] indicates how much the aesthetic experience might never be finished or complete: there is always the possibility of further development or new narratives . . . It might convey something already known and familiar and yet, at the same time, something unknown, unfamiliar, without necessarily being new—only *uncanny*” (Kohon 2020, p. 77). Monuments are designed to suppress any further “development”—their inscription upon public memory and the social discipline they inspire depend upon familiarity and permanence. Wilson’s occupation of the pedestal denies this stability, defamiliarizing the familiar and making strange the commonplace methods of monumental commemoration.

The performance itself was done in secret, attended only by two other people, and its documentation was controlled and disseminated by Wilson through a 60s video titled *Living Monument*. As a Black woman, the title itself suggests a refutation of the “living monuments” created by the U.D.C. in their Lost Cause campaign. In the collapsing of spheres—a public action kept private—Wilson controls the gaze, the terms on which she and her labor can be viewed and disseminated. It works within Tina Camp’s “tense of Black feminist future,” which she describes as being “humble and strategic, subtle and discriminating. It is devious and exacting. It’s not always loud and demanding. It is frequently quiet and opportunistic, dogged and disruptive.” (Camp 2017, p. 17). In the unauthorized performance, Wilson seized the chance to consider the monumental otherwise. In the two-channel video, Wilson’s performance is shown next to news footage of the Beauregard Equestrian sculpture being removed from the pedestal, with the images set to the song “Speaking in My Native Tongue” by Jamel Henderson (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Paula Wilson. *Living Monument*. 2017. Two-channel video, 1 min. Still courtesy of artist. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQHxGpvQHI4>).

Both channels begin with the same shot of the moon on the morning of the performance. In the latter, a series of clips of the monument's dismantling is interspersed with clips of workers running to, clawing away, and cutting at the pedestal. Their work was conducted in the middle of the night, aided by floodlights, a visual motif echoed in the lighting of Wilson atop the stripped pedestal.

Throughout the film, Wilson is filmed from below, granting her the monumentality that is being actively denied and stripped from Beauregard on the other screen. This juxtaposition creates what Wilson describes as a “kind of diametrically opposed situation where you have, on the one hand, something being removed and on the other hand, my exuberant performance on the base confirming my life force in that moment” (Sabatier 2021). This “confirming of life force” also firmly rejects what theorist Jose Esteban Munoz called the burden of liveness, which he defines as “a cultural imperative within the majoritarian public sphere that denies subalterns access to larger channels of representation, while calling the minoritarian subject to the stage, performing her or his alterity as a consumable local spectacle” (Muñoz 1999, p. 182). This conflict encapsulates the difficulties of representation involved in creating inclusive and reparative monuments, attempts at which so often suspend Blackness in a state of suffering or resistance. Wilson rejects such a suspension by completely changing the terms of monumentality, which conventionally call for a static memorializing effigy onto which a gaze can be cast. To illustrate, consider Wilson's performance alongside a work by New Orleanian artist Nic[o] Brierre Aziz. The 2017 photograph *New Wars. New Stories. New Heroes.* shows Aziz atop the Beauregard pedestal, seated in the pose of Rodin's *The Thinker*, his gaze intently meeting the lens of the camera (Figure 4). The pedestal is draped with a partially burned Confederate flag, and Aziz's feet anchor its placement. Staged early in the morning, *New Wars. New Stories. New Heroes.* is a continuation of a project created in a collaboration between Aziz and T. Roc Moore, in which Aziz took the position of *The Thinker* within a gallery space in order to “challenge viewers to question the Eurocentric foundations of our thought patterns” (Aziz 2017). When this work was translated to the pedestal of the Beauregard monument, it reveals the emotion that is not and *cannot* be captured within material effigies dependent upon the language of monumental sculpture.

While Aziz's work importantly acts to reclaim the empty pedestal and thus the narratives written throughout the symbolic landscape of New Orleans, the contrast between Wilson's moving, rhythmic performance and Aziz's still pose shows the significance of what is missing from public sculpture, in which the displays or recognition of forgotten and overlooked parts of history can only be (re)presented through stone or bronze.



Figure 4. Nic[o] Briere Aziz in collaboration with Ti-Rock Moore. *New Wars. New Stories. New Heroes.* 2017. Editioned print of time-based performance on plinth of former P.G.T. Beauregard Equestrian statue in New Orleans, LA. Image courtesy of the artist.

Aziz's work communicates the danger embedded within appeals like those made by Mayor Landrieu. Almost immediately following the removal of Confederate flags and monuments from view, Landrieu asked: "why there are no slave ship monuments, no prominent markers on public land to remember the lynchings or the slave blocks; nothing to remember this long chapter of our lives; the pain, the sacrifice, the shame. . . all of it happening on the soil of New Orleans" (Landrieu 2017b). Such an impulse to erect reparative monuments has the potential to reify the concepts embodied by the monuments they seek to replace. Whether intentionally or through carelessness, monuments represent a moment as complete, historicizing and freezing a moment in perpetuity. The representation that attempts at reparative monuments provide is ultimately subject to obsolescence and means little when the erection of such monuments is not accompanied by concrete political actions that can change the everyday realities of oppression faced by the people seeking to be included in the symbolic landscape. Despite such changes in symbolism, this oppression—systemic racism, police brutality, voter suppression, and economic disparity—is rooted in the relations represented by Confederate monuments. As such, Aziz and Wilson perform what Christina Sharpe calls "wake work," in which artists create works "that do not seek to explain or resolve the question of this exclusion in terms of assimilation, inclusion, or civil or human rights, but rather depict aesthetically the impossibility of such resolutions by representing the paradoxes of blackness within and after the legacies of slavery's denial of Black humanity," using their own bodies to communicate the real emotion and stakes that have for centuries been generated by the relations represented in Confederate monuments (Sharpe 2016, p. 14). In *Living Monument* especially, the monumental does not serve as a sort of death-dealing gesture that marks a moment as complete, or the individual as "consumable." On the contrary, Wilson's dancing body resists co-optation and provides a

new method of *un-monumentality* that prevents such a sense of completion from being projected upon the Black community of New Orleans.

When it was first exhibited at Locust Projects in Miami, Florida, *Living Monument* was shown with the tunic that Wilson wore during the original performance. Her inclusion of the material trace of the ephemeral performance along with its documentation amounts to the active creation of a material archive. The inclusion of the tunic links the viewer who was not there as a witness to the act itself, a bringing together of object and document. As Mechtild Widrich has observed, “by becoming monumental, and hence acquiring history, through its documentation, performance [has come] to function like commemorative objects” (Widrich 2023, p. 10). It may seem that a tension exists between the ephemerality of the performance and the subsequent archiving of the work, but while these may seem contradictory, it is important to understand that the archive *proves* the power of ephemerality. Through this secondary presentation, Wilson follows in the footsteps of past feminist performers who recorded their work. As Amelia Jones has observed of these, “it is precisely the relationship of these bodies/subjects to documentation (or, more specifically, re-presentation) that most profoundly points to the dislocation of the fantasy of the fixed, normative, centered modernist subject and thus provides a radical challenge to the masculinism, racism, colonialism, classism, and heterosexism built into this fantasy” (Jones 1997, p. 12). Her decision to covertly perform and mobilize the work through video documentation actively resists the static memorializing logics of monuments and the affect they inspire. Indeed, monument removal is often contended to be an “erasure of history.” However, as shown by the image of the Beaugard monument in this article, removal does not mean erasure. The archive will persist as evidence of our collective past—indeed, it is through the archive that we are aware of the history of the jazz funerals that have developed into Second Line culture. The recording of history is important, and with *Living Monument*, Wilson becomes a part of the history of the Beaugard monument, yet she is not fixed there. Instead, her fleeting takeover and its evidence become a sustainable form of commemoration that allows for the un-fixing of dominant histories and for the distribution of this vision.

In the creation of such an archive, Wilson is also countering the extensive archival collections of Confederate memory that actively omit and render invisible the histories represented within Wilson’s performance. Not the least of these is a Confederate time capsule found inside the Beaugard pedestal itself that contained Confederate battle flags, currency, and ephemera from the time of the monument’s erection. As Okwui Enwezor has noted, “against the tendency of contemporary forms of amnesia whereby the archive becomes a site of lost origins and memory is dispossessed, it is also within the archive that acts of remembering and regeneration occur, where a suture between the past and present is performed, in the indeterminate zone between event and image, document and monument.” (Enwezor 2008, p. 47). It is precisely in this interstice that *Living Monument* resides—the performance, its recording, and the tunic not only suture the forgotten past and the present, but also invite an exciting contemplation of the future and a consideration of monuments and how they can exist beyond material manifestations in public space.

In discussing public art, the architect and social practice artist Teddy Cruz says, “in many ways all that we are able to do is to represent or translate the issues of concern today, to raise awareness of the crisis into a kind of metaphorical image or object. But very seldom are we able to produce the methodologies that can allow us to transcend the problem and encroach on the conditions of power that produced it in the first place. . .” (Finkelpearl 2013, p. 260). Temporary material interventions, such as Simone Leigh’s *Sentinel (Mami Wata)* (2019), which was installed at the base of the extant column of the Robert E. Lee monument for eight months in 2022, aspire to this goal. The sculpture is an abstract representation of the deity Mami Wata, a water deity worshipped throughout West Africa and the African diaspora. Though it does important work in reinscribing the space formerly known as Lee Circle to include the history of African culture and spirituality within New Orleans, the sixteen-foot sculpture nonetheless depends on the relations produced by monuments.

In her rewiring of monumentality, Wilson offers the methodology envisioned by Cruz, one that completely reimagines the conditions of power and emotion as crafted through monuments, enacting performance and affect itself as a method through which to transcend the demands of the dominant public sphere for stable memory and completely altering the static, ever-present monument's psychosocial presence through her living body.

The pedestal that once held up Beauregard, Aziz, and Wilson was dismantled in August 2021. All that remains of it now is the traffic circle that serves as the visitor's entrance into City Park and the New Orleans Museum of Art. Inside of a wooden planter bed the size and dimensions of the pedestal, rising above a hedgerow, a grouping of giant crinum lillies serve as the monument's grave marker (Figure 5). There is nothing particularly affective about the landscaping of a traffic circle, but there *is* something affecting about what it promises: roots anchored in a problematic space offer the promise of growth, beauty, and new forms of commemoration.



Figure 5. The site of the Beauregard Monument after removal of the pedestal, 2023. Photo by author.

After the removal of the monuments in 2017, the community project Paper Monuments launched a public campaign that solicited proposals, asking “What is an appropriate monument for New Orleans today?” One anonymous reply detailed a monument to the culture of New Orleans, saying “I don’t mean the music or the food. I mean the actual culture that native New Orleanians live on a daily basis. I don’t know what that looks like, it is more of a lifestyle than something that can be described or drawn. It is the conversations with the elders. It is the greetings at the corner store. It is the asking someone where they went to high school. It’s the culture, and it is engrained in each of us” ([Paper Monuments 2018](#)). This is what *Living Monument* offers—urging the memorialization and appreciation of those we pass by every day, revealing the anxiety and oppression that produced so many monuments in our landscape and co-opting those monuments to give a voice to those historically denied it.

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Notes

- 1 This insistence from Beauregard resulted from confusion about similarities between the flag of the United States and the “Stars and Bars” of the Confederate States of America during the Battle of Bull Run in 1861.
- 2 Alexander was famously dragged up a flight of stairs from the all-white dining hall in the City Hall basement by New Orleans police while protesting segregation, an image of oppression that was revisited when Alexander, now a State Representative, was placed in a chokehold by the same police force in 1992 at a protest of the Battle of Liberty Place monument’s re-dedication, presided over by David Duke. For more on the roles of Alexander and Galatas, see *Roots Rising: The Take ‘Em Down Nola Zine*, vol. 1 (New Orleans, 2017).
- 3 Moon Landrieu began his political career in 1960, first as a State Representative before moving on to the City Council. He served as mayor of New Orleans beginning in 1970, reportedly receiving 90 percent of the Black vote, and remained in office until 1978.
- 4 This installation was a part of Prospect New Orleans, a city-wide triennial of contemporary art. Prospect has noted plans to continue to use the space for the presentation of alternative monuments by contemporary artists, similar to the Fourth Plinth in London.

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