

Maya lin: a personal reflection

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Maya Lin: A Personal Reflection

Learning about Maya Lin and her struggle changed my understanding and appreciation of her work by making me realize how much racism she had to deal with, especially from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Just because she is Asian doesn't mean that she can't have proper respect for those that have died. She spent so much time researching just to prepare her idea for the memorial and ended up with the best idea that supports and memorizes the veterans that truly gives people an idea of what war does and how we should remember those who died for our country. She absolutely seems like the type to take the time to plan out the works she creates, and they truly feel inspired by someone who cares about making something beautiful for others to admire.

Even with the park she made, she truly had every piece of the park tied in mind with a connection to nature and natural pieces of the earth, tying heavily into the basic facets of nature itself. It's just a shame that people have considered her work on the memorial in line with something that lacks artistic ideals, instead of considering it a something entirely different when it's just as much a piece of art as any other sculpture or work of art is. The Healing Power of Art Part 2 – Unfortunately, there aren't too many large scale outdoor public sculptures up in North Austin near The Domain where I live, but the closest one I could find is up here in Northwest Austin on the east side of the Austin Public Library Milwood titled Learning to Fly.

This sculpture was created by Lori Norwood in 1997 and uses steel alloy, gray paint, and stones for materials. The piece consists of five silhouette-

esque children completely modeled in the gray steel alloy with their arms stretched out, each on the five large stones as if they are running or perhaps, attempting with their imagination to fly. The sculpture itself takes up only a few feet in one direction, but for what little space it takes up, it speaks volumes in terms of artistic design. I'm not quite sure how people in the area interact with the sculpture, but I thought it was interesting to walk around it and see different types of personal perspective due to the three-dimensional space used by the sculpture. However, the most important aspect of the sculpture are the visual elements that it uses, such as line via direction and movement, color via color harmonies, and space via three-dimensional space.

The first noticeable visual element in the piece, line, is clearly seen in the sculpture through the shapes of the children that are placed in a forward and relatively straight-looking line. This is where direction and movement come in, as the children in the sculpture are all pointing and/or heading in one direction. If the shapes of the children were pointing in different directions, it wouldn't give the sense of a singular forward direction that exists in the sculpture, portraying children heading ever forward into the future. It would also fail to give the sense of moving towards that future that emanates from the sculpture. This singular forward direction also invokes the design principle of rhythm. Because the five-sculpture set consists of similar looking children, there is a notion that while children may look, act, and otherwise be very different, the path towards becoming an adult is a universal one. Plus, the fact that the children repeat in a relatively straight line supports the notion that development through learning, imagination, and play is

something that all children experience and required in the path to gain the skills, knowledge, and other pieces of life that a child develops as they become an adult and “learn to fly”.

The second noticeable visual element in the piece, color, can be seen through the mixed grays of the paint on the sculptures themselves, the nature landscape underneath the sculptures, and the limestone that the sculptures are placed upon. Thanks to analogous color harmony of the varying shades of gray in the sculptures and limestone, as well as the green of the grass being a bit complimentary to the brown dirt, these color elements give the sculptures a sense of depth and importance in accordance with the surrounding landscape and cause the sculpture to stand out in the surrounding area to the point where people will notice and see it.

Plus, thanks to the harmony of color, the piece invokes the design principle of emphasis and subordination. Because the hands and fingertips are emphasized with a lighter gray compared to the rest of the darker grays across the shapes of the children, they attract the most immediate attention and allow the sculptures to have a more humane look. However, the viewer can see subordination via the generally fewer interesting parts of the children in the sculpture that aren't fully formed and shaped as if they haven't fully developed. This is something that wouldn't be seen or noticed if the entire sculpture was just a single shade of gray.

Third and finally, the piece's third noticeable visual element is space, as this piece takes great advantage of three-dimensional space to achieve a message. This can be seen simply by the fact that the sculptures essentially

look different depending on how you view them in the space. If you view the sculptures from the side, you might see parts of the head or torso that aren't fully there, but if you view from the front or the rear, you get a clearer picture of the sculpture. Much like if you look at the past or future of humanity, you get a better idea of humanity compared with only looking at the present. With this use of three-dimensional space, the piece has the design principle of unity and variety. Looking at this on a flat canvas or rather, through just one photo from the front, the sculptures look bunched together in a single area, so you can get a sense of unity as the shapes of the children all look very similar, but not the sense of variety.

The variety in this piece comes from looking at the sculpture from the side, where you can see variety from the spacing of the sculptures, the depth and difference in each of the poses, as well as seeing the steel pieces being effectively used to make up the human body-like pieces. In conclusion, Learning to Fly combines the visual elements and design principles of line in direction and movement with rhythm, color in color harmony with emphasis and subordination, and space in three-dimensional space with unity and variety to communicate and support the importance for the growth and development of children into adults. Considering the piece was created in 1997 but is still applicable and relevant now at more than twenty years later, it clearly was designed with a message in mind that is not only timeless, but also meant for both adults and children.

However, it also seems as if the artist intended for the piece to have multiple ideas that could come across to the viewer, especially depending on if the

viewer is a child or an adult. For children, these elements work together to seemingly express the ideas of fun, joy, and a sense of play as they see fellow playing children in the sculpture. For adults, these elements work together to seemingly express the idea that children are important to the future of humanity and through encouragement and support of the development of children, they become proper functioning adults and “take flight” into the world as effective citizens.