



Homomonument

by Jason Goldman

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Unveiled in Amsterdam on September 5, 1987, the Homomonument is one of the world's foremost public memorials of the lesbians and gay men who were harassed, imprisoned, or executed during World War II. While the monument officially remembers the suffering and attempted elimination of homosexual men and women during the Third Reich, it was more widely conceived and executed as a broad acknowledgment of the persecution endured by gay men and lesbians throughout history.

The monument was also intended to function as a political touchstone for the continued fight against hatred and oppression in contemporary times.

Although ideas for a public monument had circulated within lesbian and gay circles soon after the war, and despite complaints about the widespread erasure of homosexual persecution during Hitler's reign, organizing for a public monument was not fully realized until the 1970s, when visibility became an important political objective for many gay and lesbian emancipation groups.

Further political catalysts came in 1970 after gay activists were arrested for attempting to place a lavender wreath on Dam Square in Amsterdam during the annual national memorial service. The wreath, which was intended to draw public attention to the thousands of homosexual women and men who were persecuted during the war, was removed by police and denounced as a disgrace.

Throughout the 1970s, similar wreath-placing demonstrations were executed with varying success, as activists constantly pushed for the inclusion of homosexuals in the public's collective memory of Hitler's "social purification" campaigns.

A coalition of Dutch gay and lesbian organizations finally secured government approval for the memorial in the early 1980s and began the huge task of raising the money necessary to complete it. Through grass roots fundraising, political lobbying, and community organizing, these groups helped forge the infrastructures of action now characteristic of many queer communities in large European and North American cities.

In its reliance on community mobilization and its insistence on public visibility, the struggle for the monument was not simply about the past, but was also very much about--and in some senses, crucial to--contemporary strides against homophobia in Europe.

Accordingly, the monument's design simultaneously looks back on gay and lesbian histories as it also looks toward the future. Designed by Karin Daan, the monument consists of three large triangles of pinkish granite that together compose one giant triangle.

Each smaller triangle is distinct and serves a different function within the overall space: one extends tranquilly over a nearby canal and is used mainly to leave flowers in memory of the persecuted; another is raised as a sort of podium and is used mainly as a gathering spot; the last triangle is set into the ground, quietly bearing the inscription, "Such an unlimited longing for friendship," a line from the gay poet Jacob



This pinkish granite triangle is one of three that comprise the Homomonument. Flowers are frequently left here in memory of those persecuted by the Nazis.
Courtesy Ted-Larry Pebworth.

Israël De Haan.

Together, the three triangles effectively articulate the Homomonument's mediation between past, present, and future. Its solemn symbolic recognition of war and persecution is balanced by its function as a lively venue for social and political gatherings.

On one level, the design recalls the pink triangles used to designate homosexuals within Nazi concentration camps. But as the pink triangle had by the 1970s been adapted into a political marker of emancipation and pride, its incorporation into the monument's design also signifies the need for continued visibility and resistance to erasure and oppression.

Bibliography

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About the Author

Jason Goldman is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Art History at the University of Southern California. His academic interests include the history of photography, twentieth-century art, pornography, contemporary art, and contemporary visual culture.