

HRRC Salon
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Human Rights, Aesthetics, and Memorialization

Abstract:

Integral to constructing collective memory, memorials and their attendant commemorative practices provide memory with a concrete material form and a symbolic language of remarkable elasticity. Because of their potent symbolic power, memorials are widely recognized as a compelling resource for fostering reflection and public dialogue about the past. Yet how that symbolic power is produced is rarely addressed in human rights discourse.

Like all acts of remembrance, whether a memorial functions to “help or hinder social reconciliation” (in Pablo de Greiff’s words) depends not simply on its overt meaning, but also on the “method for ‘producing’” it, i.e. the processes and contexts through which that meaning is generated and into which it is inserted. In the case of memorials, the “method” is fundamentally aesthetic—a category rarely considered in transitional justice or human rights discourses.

Our research takes up this problem, in order to offer recommendations for expanding the reparative and transformative capacities of symbolic reparations. We explore how the fundamentally aesthetic, expressive nature of symbolic reparations can provide a potentially powerful tool of repair and transformation.

Bios:

José Luis Falconi is Assistant Professor of Art History and Human Rights at the University of Connecticut, as well as the president of Cultural Agents, Inc., a nongovernmental organization that promotes civic engagement and creativity through artistic education. He co-chairs the Research Program on Arts & Human Rights at UConn’s Gladstein Family Human Rights Institute.

Robin Adèle Greeley is Professor of Art History and co-Chair of the Research Program on Arts & Human Rights at the University of Connecticut’s Gladstein Family Human Rights Institute. She writes extensively on art, politics, and human rights in Latin America, specializing in analyzing policies and practices of symbolic reparations for victims of mass human rights violations.

Michael R. Orwicz is Associate Professor of Art History and co-Chair of the Research Program on Arts & Human Rights, Gladstein Family Human Rights Institute, at the University of Connecticut. He specializes in visual culture and human rights and has published widely on the role of photography in human rights. He has also published on neo-imperialism and the notion of spectacle; theories of nationalism and representation; and Marxism and the social history of art.