

IN MEMORY OF

DESIGNING CONTEMPORARY MEMORIALS
SPENCER BAILEY

HOPE

STRENGTH

GRIEF

LOSS

FEAR

In contemporary memorial-making, the feeling of loss seems to be achieved most powerfully through the listing of names or the creation of a massive physical void, or a combination of the two.

Maya Lin's 1982 Vietnam Veterans Memorial (page 54), which does both, can claim to have reshaped the memorial landscape over the decades to come. Indeed, if this book were to have a family tree, most of its branches would stem from Lin's memorial. Built on the National Mall in Washington D.C., the solemn, V-shaped design cuts into the earth, as if a gaping wound in the nation's heart, and its polished black granite surface reflects the 58,320 names of the dead. The memorial's simplicity, in message and form, allows for seemingly endless readings—all of them, though, with a great sense of loss. Touching the smooth stone is especially affecting. As I walked down, into, and out of the sunken, gently sloping landscape, slowly tracing my fingers along the names on the wall, I felt the kind of visceral, spine-tingling sensation that can come with a profound realization. The Vietnam memorial was built to be a tactile, sensory experience. One *feels* the loss there, and also sees oneself reflected on the shiny surface. The sheer scale of the names jolts the body. I can readily conjure up the awe I felt the first time I stood in front of it.

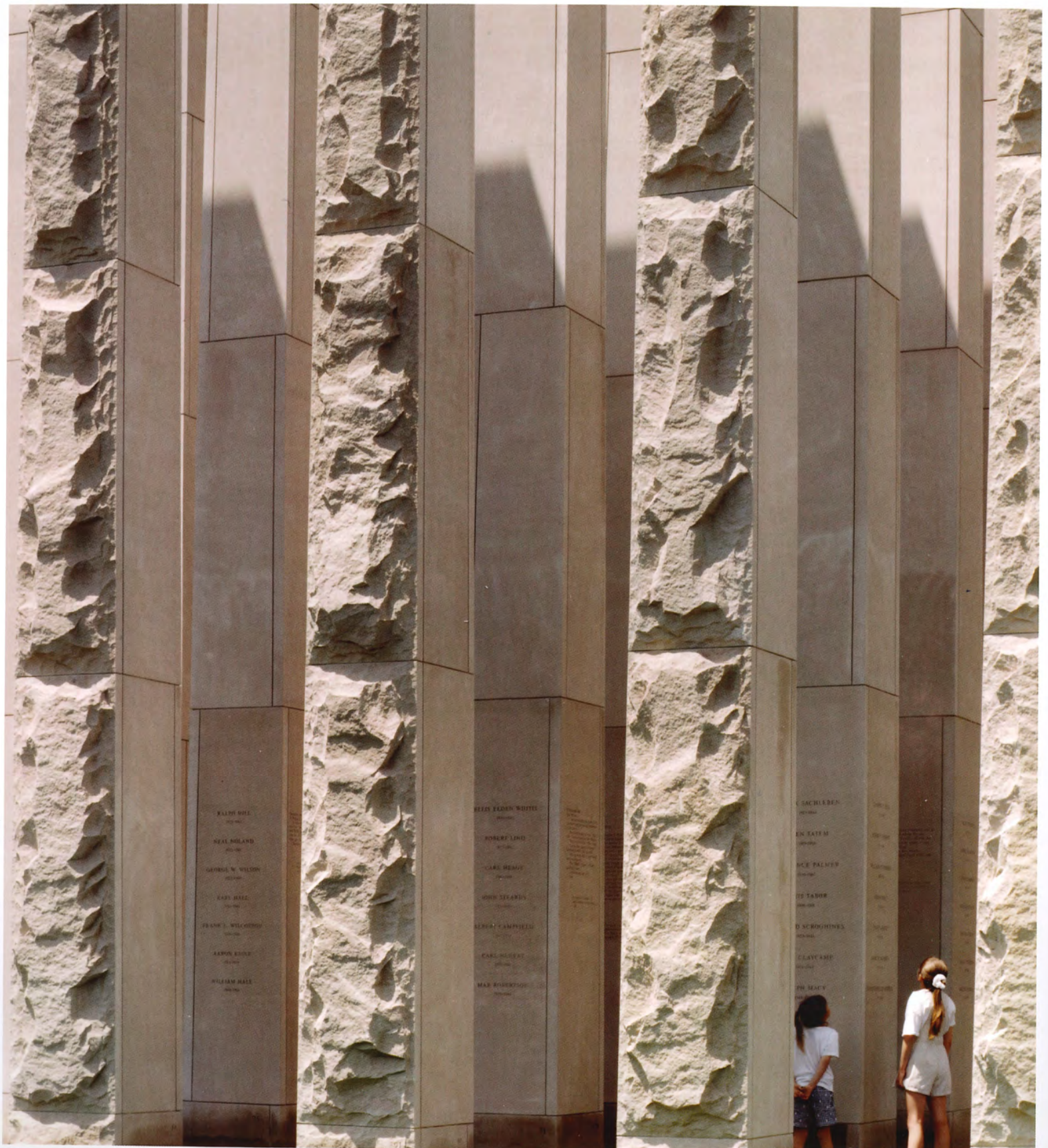
To similarly strong effect, Maryann Thompson and Charles Rose's 1997 Bartholomew County Memorial for Veterans (page 188) in Columbus, Indiana, combines stone (in this case, regional limestone, rough on the outside and smooth on the inside); a twenty-five-pillar structure; and inscriptions of letters home from active

service members. Other memorials that use naming in weighty, poignant ways include Michael Arad's 2014 Reflecting Absence (page 118) at the World Trade Center; Philippe Prost's 2014 International Memorial of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette (page 34) in Ablain-Saint-Nazaire, France; Kimmel Eshkolot Architects's 2017 National Memorial Hall for Israel's Fallen (page 78) in Jerusalem; and MASS Design Group's 2018 National Memorial for Peace and Justice (page 88) in Montgomery, Alabama.

At Hans and Torrey Butzer's 2000 Oklahoma City National Memorial Museum (page 50), abstraction primarily appears in the form of 168 empty glass-bottomed chairs arranged like tombstones, each representing someone killed in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. Haunting in its beauty and purity of form, the installation serves as a heartbreaking reminder of the lives taken. Walking from chair to chair, I felt the collective and individual loss in a way that an artifact could rarely, if ever, accomplish.

For me, when it comes to loss, the most stirring memorial was artist Taryn Simon's *An Occupation of Loss* (page 190) installation at New York's Park Avenue Armory, in the fall of 2016. Comprising eleven towering concrete pipes designed by Shohei Shigematsu of OMA, inside of which thirty professional mourners from around the world performed for half an hour each night, it was effectively a built memorial to mourning itself—an overpowering, all-encompassing meditation on loss. I left feeling both distraught and, somehow, astonishingly relieved.

BARTHOLOMEW COUNTY MEMORIAL FOR VETERANS



Designed by Charles Rose of Charles Rose Architects, and Maryann Thompson, with surrounding grounds by the landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh, the Bartholomew County Memorial for Veterans in Columbus, Indiana, comprises twenty-five pillars made of regional limestone, each 40 feet (12 meters) tall and arranged in a five-by-five grid. Though the memorial is crafted of rough-hewn stone on the outside, the interior walls are smooth-cut and feature inscriptions of letters home from active service members, collected from local families by the city's *Republic* newspaper. One, dated from April 1944, reads: "Displaying outstanding courage and showing complete disregard for his own safety, Private Bumbalough crossed the river. While advancing to his objective, in the face of overwhelming enemy fire, he was killed. His magnificent courage and devotion to duty in the face of vastly superior odds served as an outstanding example and an inspiration to all who witnessed his actions."

The concept, which rose above proposals from Maya Lin and Vito Acconci in a competition, establishes a profound sense of compression. Intentionally designed to appear as if the stones were growing up out of the ground, the memorial's pillars taper toward the sky, creating a feeling at once heavy and hopeful. The inscriptions provide an added emotional element. Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. (page 54) served as a key reference point for articulating the notion of a mass grave. A sort of sacred space, the memorial feels weighty upon entering, but looking up, perforations of skylight shine in, lightening the mood.

Since its completion, the memorial has hosted annual Memorial Day and Veterans Day gatherings. In the 2017 Kogonada-directed film *Columbus*, it serves as a sort of architectural protagonist, a place where the movie's star, Jin (played by John Cho), goes to reflect on and mourn his ailing architecture-scholar father.



LEFT THE MEMORIAL COMPRISES TWENTY-FIVE PILLARS MADE OF REGIONAL LIMESTONE, ARRANGED IN A FIVE-BY-FIVE GRID.

OPPOSITE COLUMNS FEATURE INSCRIPTIONS OF LETTERS BY ACTIVE SERVICE MEMBERS, COLLECTED FROM FAMILIES AND A LOCAL NEWSPAPER.