

6,000,000

Holocaust Memorial Installation

concept and design

by

Justin Henry Rubin

and

John Paul Merigliano

Genocide in the 20th Century: 6,000,000

Memorial and Installation

by

Justin Henry Rubin and John Paul Merigliano

Concept:

6,000,000: this is a number that is all too well known and all too little comprehended. It is easy to say it without understanding what it represents. In this case it represents 6,000,000 individual people - people, the product of love-making, labor and birth, with hopes, memories, loves, universes each unto their own - taken from existence without reason. An act devoid of compassion or humanity multiplied beyond the realm of ordinary human comprehension, it is this very lack of ability for a human being to conceive of the vast number that prohibits a realization of the vastness of the loss, and the impossibility for grief of the single individual embedded into the number. **6,000,000** is a project that attempts to bring reality of this abstract representation to the people of our modern world, a world becoming ever more apathetic to, and unaffected by, imagery (in words and pictures) of violence, through another mode of expression and representation. In a specified area (heretofore known as an *Installation*), 6,000,000 short black lines will be drawn over a specific period of time. The Installation attempts to capture into a relatively small space the expanse of the number and the horror of the murders, and the time allotted to the project a minimized sense of the duration. It compels the observer and artist to view each line individually, almost in a sense that it is a memorial to a particular individual, but also as a community/family that can be viewed as a whole entity. However, it is important that this project not take on the façade of being a work of art in any way; this is essentially a form of experiential documentation. You can write the number 6,000,000, you can say the words "Six million" or you can display it. That is all it is - another way to understand a number. The connection the viewer/participant makes should be in the act of making (emphasis on it not being 'drawing') the lines and understanding their relevance. But it is a work that should have no form or aesthetic.

The project could be expanded to other genocides of the 20th century using the same materials. I could envision a series of rooms each draped in memorials.

Installation Process Possibilities:

6,000,000 has a multiplicity of ways of being presented as a memorial:

- a) a performance work, in which specific people, in a place open for observation, will draw the lines.
- b) a performance work, in which observers in addition to specified artists will draw the lines.
- c) a completed work, in which the relic of the act of the drawing can be exhibited.

Memorial:

Ideally, the finished work would be in a space that could be viewed from a single vantage point. Whether the lines would overlap, or whatever shape they would take, would be the outcome of a particular Installation. The materials (surfaces and implements) would be variable from one Installation to another, but would be consistent within a single Installation. The effigy would, upon completion, become a memorial through immolation and be burned or otherwise destroyed, combining a symbol for remembrance, impermanence, and the actual burning of the bodies of the victims of the Holocaust. A record or any single Installation can be made through a film/video of the process, the immolation, and the space before and after the work was completed.

Duration and Materials:

The number 6,000,000 is not an accurate statistic, but rather a representative number of the scale of the *tragedy*. Therefore, a representative memorial does not need to be an exact symbol. Approximately 300 lines can be drawn per minute per artist, making 333 man hours the needed duration for proper execution (the process is a rite and must not be hurried; each line must be drawn with the proper conviction).

History of the Conception and Philosophy:

Some weeks ago I decided to attend the visitation hour at a funeral home for the passing of the elderly mother of a colleague of mine. Although it was on the opposite side of town, in a section that I was rather unfamiliar with, I decided to take a route that would take me through many side streets and backs of rundown warehouses and factories. Following a longer than usual trip to this side of the small city, after a couple of dead ends and wrong turns, amidst the desolation and melancholy of these graveyards of business, I arrived at this freshly painted small chapel shaped building, entering with some trepidation as I couldn't ignore feelings of intrusion. I was warmly greeted though, and after some time milling about, observing the grandchildren drawing and playing tag in tiny suits and dresses, cordially shaking hands with people I didn't know and having a cup of coffee I approached the coffin. I was taken aback at the sudden rush of emotion that filled me seeing this woman peacefully laid with a drawing of her name placed on her clasped withered hands reading 'I love you grandma', for Jews don't have open coffins at services such as these, and this was in fact the first time I had ever seen a dead person. Memories of the funeral of my great grandmother when I was very small and my mother crying at my grandfather's funeral some ten years previous came back to me. I approached a poster board with pictures of this old woman whom I never knew and her daughter came to me and was smiling as she told me the details of each, pointing out her departed father, and all the wonderful happy times of their life.

During the brief service that followed, the pastor spoke of the celebration of her life and how she is now at rest. Family members spoke and silently cried as I slowly looked about the room at other older people, knowing that it was not too long before they themselves would be eulogized. My thoughts gradually focused on the younger and younger attendants and myself. Would we all be so fortunate one day as to be in a similar state of death after a full life, celebrated by family and friends?

That evening, I attended a Holocaust memorial lecture with a survivor and some professors at my university. However, my mind was still on this old woman and the photos of her life. As the aged survivor of Thereisenstadt spoke, his words became quieter as his image became younger and faded into my imagination of the endless crowds as they were transported to Auschwitz and Dachau, Birkenau and the rest. For

the six million deaths of each Jew in the camps and Baba Yars of the war now sixty years past, there were six million births, six million children who will never receive a service in celebration of their singular lives, or poster-board with pictures, or attendants drinking coffee of playing children, or family members lifting the coffin into the hearse, or strangers stopping by to pay respects to stones that will never be erected in their name.

Am I so fortunate to have simply been born in 1971 and not 1931, in Manhattan and not Warsaw? Can I dive into time and see my face hopeless in the trains? Any misfortune that can ever befall me in my life is meaningless. I began to think about a manner in which the 6,000,000 Jews murdered in Nazi Europe could be made into a service for the dead - a memorial for each individual. I found myself drawing short lines in winding rows on paper and began to count the lines. This is when the image of the memorial was formed in my mind.

6,000,000

Sound Environment

by

Justin Henry Rubin

In conceiving a Sound Environment to be used alongside a presentation of the Installation, I at first set out to write musical scores, some for voices, others for instruments, that could be performed at specific intervals. After a series of failures, I realized that attaching an aesthetic to the project was in fact not a valid way of proceeding; no artistic means can be in any way appropriated to produce a memorial to the victims of mass murder. The visual/visceral aspect of the installation has no intended aesthetic, and so I opted to create sounds that would, in effect, emulate the actions involved.

I chose a fragment of a recording of a composition of mine, *From the Sonnets of Apology*, in which texts of the turn of the 20th century poet Samuel Greenberg were set for ensemble and choir. The fragment is extensively repeated, successively overlaid with transformations of itself - at different pitches and durations. The plaintive choir, at first clear, become a mass of sound wherein individual voices are lost in the juxtaposition. Our ears search for a single voice in these waves of sound as our eyes and mind are similarly becoming aware of the impossibility of an intellectual understanding of the cumulative effect. This gradual sense of being overwhelmed is at the center of the installation's experiential component.

The sound begins to remind one of an eternal echo. These voices of tragedy, which fall further into the past, must not become a hollow echo, but remain vibrant - it is the voice of history that is crucial to the survival of humanity. Man's apparent incapacity to listen to this voice continues to act as a testimonial of his inability to learn from the suffering of his heritage and renew it in his own time...our time.

Note: *From the Sonnets of Apology* was performed by The Ensemble Singers under the direction of Philip Brunelle at the 2002 Plymouth Music Series: *Essentially Choral Reading Session* in Minneapolis, Minnesota on March 12.







