

December 13, 2016

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Positive feelings about the renovation of the Gio Ponti building at the Denver Art Museum were crushed when I learned that *Wheel*—Edgar Heap of Birds’s site-specific memorial to the infamous Sand Creek Massacre—was to be dismantled and relocated, like any outdoor sculpture or lawn ornament. More is at stake here than a single site-specific work of art. While it may have been commissioned by the Denver Art Museum, which owns it, *Wheel* now belongs to our national memorial landscape.

Colorado Territory covered itself in ignominy on November 29, 1864. The State of Colorado has never accepted responsibility for the atrocities committed in its name. The Civil War monument in front of the State Capitol shamefully lists Sand Creek as one of its *battles*. This is not only an insult to Native Americans, but to all American who *honorably* served their country.

If the Denver Art Museum is willing to scorn the sentiments of reverent people who have hallowed *Wheel* with their prayers and vigils over the past ten years, then the State of Colorado should be willing to honor the victims of genocide by striking “Sand Creek” from the battle honors of its Civil War monument, or by removing the statue and its pedestal from its current place of honor.

But we must preserve monuments, not destroy them. Monuments are created to embody collective memory, standing as milestones in our evolution as a society. Violence and tragedy are part of that story, which we recount through great works of art like the *Shaw Monument* in Boston by Augustus St.-Gaudens, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* by Maya Lin on the National Mall in Washington, and Denver’s *Wheel* by Edgar Heap of Birds.

Standing as a riposte to the Colorado Civil War monument across Civic Center Park, *Wheel* proclaims, “We have remained! We’re here to stay.”

At our best, we Americans like to think that we respect opposing viewpoints, seek rapport with our enemies and avoid doing harm to others. America has *never* attained this with respect to indigenous peoples.

*Wheel* was created by Edgar Heap of Birds as a work of art, but it has taken on a life of its own. Reverent people, heart-drawn to *Wheel* have transformed it from a work of art into a healing-place for solemn observance, like. To this, attention must be paid. It would be a callous act of gross insensitivity for the Denver Art Museum to desecrate what has become hallowed ground, by trading it in for a splashy event space.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James W. McKinstry". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font with a long horizontal line extending from the end.