

U.S. COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

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26 November 2018

Dear Ms. Mendelson-Ielmini:

In its meeting of 15 November, the Commission of Fine Arts reviewed a revised concept design for the central water feature, accessibility alterations, and refinements to the high-relief sculpture for the National World War I Memorial within Pershing Park, located on Pennsylvania Avenue between 14th and 15th Streets, NW. Expressing appreciation for the advancement of the design for this second set of components comprising the design of the memorial, the Commission approved the submission with the following comments to guide the project's further development.

In their discussion of the proposed configuration of the central pool and the viewing platform within it, the Commission members expressed strong support for the idea of accommodating public programming in this space, particularly with a design that encourages use in all seasons of the year. Emphasizing the importance of retaining the original character of the park's central pool, they observed that the U-shaped scheme provides more area of water scrim, whereas the island configuration creates the greatest sense of the pool's continuous edge. Citing advantages in both of these options, they endorsed the island configuration as the one that best conveys the original sense of the body of water, although they suggested increasing the area of the scrim on the platform to give it a stronger presence. They also recommended further study of the material and scale of the paving on the platform, possibly using lighter-colored granite in the areas surrounding the scrim or on the bridge in order to reduce solar heat gain. For the design of the bridge, they suggested that it might be articulated as lighter in character than the main platform, emphasizing its conceptual role as a passage over water; they also requested further study of the edge conditions along the perimeter pool generally to maximize safety while avoiding the need for handrails.

For the design of the central high-relief bronze sculpture depicting a soldier's journey through the experience of the war, the Commission members praised the refinements to reduce the length and make adjustments for historical accuracy; they found that the result has been to increase the artwork's emotional impact and potential for engaging the visitor with a deeper understanding of the past. Characterizing the effect of the revised work as hauntingly realistic and wrenching, they supported the depiction of figures in genuine reaction to the battle experience, such as the staring countenance of the shell-shocked soldier toward the right side of the composition. Acknowledging the memorial sponsor's intent to present a revised maquette in the coming year, they requested that this model encompass related elements of this central commemorative feature, including the surrounding stone wall and the adjacent water elements. In general, the Commission members advised that the presence of interpretative information for the central sculpture should be minimal, perhaps limited to the former kiosk site, and augmented by such technologies as mobile apps.

In its review, the Commission also endorsed the interventions proposed on the east and south sides of the park to accommodate contemporary standards for barrier-free access.

The Commission looks forward to further review of the refinement of other components of the memorial as the final design is developed; please consult with the staff for guidance on these future submissions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Luebke', with a large, sweeping initial 'T'.

Thomas E. Luebke, FAIA
Secretary

Lisa Mendelson-Ielmini, Acting Regional Director
National Park Service, National Capital Region
1100 Ohio Drive, SW
Washington, DC 20242

cc: Libby O'Connell, U.S. World War I Centennial Commission
David Rubin, Land Collective
Sabin Howard, Sabin Howard Studio