

Staff Report

Date: March 16, 2012
To: Honorable Members of the Visual Arts Committee
From: Mary Chou
Re: Police Memorial for the Public Safety Building

Artist Shimon Attie, who has been commissioned to create a police memorial for the new Public Safety Building in Mission Bay, has proposed revised text for the phrase inscribed in the metal backdrop in the entryway, and a revised concept for the text inscribed within the cylinder. The text will be reviewed by Chief Suhr and BALEAF, an organization that provides support to the law enforcement family who have had members killed in the line of duty or have been seriously injured. SFAC staff will report on feedback from this review during the Visual Arts Committee meeting on March 21, 2012.

Phrase in Backdrop:

The artist proposes the phrase "Look Up, their Valor Shines." Arts Commission staff supports this phrase because it is positive and uplifting, and makes direct reference to the glass cylinder above. Attached are visuals that show the phrase in the backdrop.

Text in Cylinder (description from the artist):

I would like to propose that the text inscribed on the cylinder be a site-specific poem, rather than solicitations from the community.

The Poem would be commissioned from internationally renowned Poet Gwyneth Lewis, with whom I will collaborate and give direction to. Ms. Lewis is the former National Poet of Wales, and has recently been a Fellow at both Harvard and Stanford Universities. I have collaborated with her on many projects in the past, and depending on how the process unfolds, the final poem may or may not be co-authored by both of us.

While the "democracy" of solicitations from the community is appealing, there are several advantages to the new approach that I am proposing.

First, it guarantees a more elegant, resonant and poetic use of language than most non-writers can produce.

Secondly, it allows for greater control over content, and more specifically, it will allow for the writing to be more "site-specific." In other words, the poem itself can encompass and include reference –in poetic form- to important physical and experiential elements of the visitor's actual experience in the artwork, and how these elements also function metaphorically. This might include, for example, the experience of looking upwards towards the ever-changing sky, being immersed in a glass Well of floating words of gratitude and valor, the changing qualities of light, and reference to the grounded earth via the dark floor and darkened steel behind. The poem will also reference the Memorial Name Panels in the adjacent lobby, thus further serving to unite the Name Panels with the Memorial artwork.

Beyond the site-specific elements, the focus of the poem will remain the same as before. It will express deep gratitude and appreciation for the enormous sacrifices that have been made. It will also reflect on the qualities of those who have given so much, such as honor, valor, courage and respect.

I am forever grateful for what you have given, and I shall never forget you. You kept our streets and homes safe, so that my family and I could sleep at night. You braved the dangers each day, with the uncertainty of knowing whether you would arrive safely at night in your own home and family. You protected all of us, and for this, you paid the ultimate sacrifice. I will never find the right words to thank you for your service. I hope that wherever you are, you are in eternal peace. Please know that though we never met, I am forever grateful for what you have given, and I shall never forget you. I feel a bit shy writing to you, since we have never met, but you gave so much to me and to all of us. You kept our streets and homes safe, so that my family and I could sleep at night. You braved the dangers each day, with the uncertainty of knowing whether you would arrive safely at night in your own home and family. You protected all of us, and for this, you paid the ultimate sacrifice. I will never find the right words to thank you for your service. I hope that wherever you are, you are in eternal peace. Please know that though we never met, I am forever grateful for what you have given, and I shall never forget you.

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Look Up, their Valor Shines

