

The Scar

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The works of the past always influence us, and help us in creation of new work. The Tsunami Memorial Competition required a design that was unique in its cause. In contemplating what a modern day memorial should be, I investigated numerous memorials from the beginning of the act of remembering through creating a place, to the modern day idea of the memorial. The memorial has a metamorphic typology, forever changing to relate to its motive. Each takes a different shape and has a unique ritual throughout history. Its shape is derived based on what it marks and becomes the symbolic space of remembrance. The tsunami memorial was required to remember victims of the tragedy, marvel at the spirit of the survivors, create a place of learning and acknowledge the support received from all over the world. While doing my research it was quickly evident that this memorial was unique. It will not remember victims of war, or elevate a group of people for their contributions. It will not serve or remember confined by culture. The memorial needed to break cultural barriers, and remember those who were innocent victims of a natural disaster. These requirements narrowed the research to a few that I have felt dealt with the idea of a memorial relating to disasters by breaking cultural boundaries.

The function of a memorial is not to preserve the past, but to socially construct it¹. The headstone is an example of an everlasting symbol of the deceased, created to mark the location of the body and for the purpose of remembrance. The earliest public memorials were monuments created to remember the lives lost in wars and to give meaning to the loss. A memorial can also be a spontaneous event sparked by a sudden loss that affects a large group of people. The 9/11 or the death of Princess Diana are examples of events that were followed by spontaneous memorials that took shape with an indefinite design. The act of visiting the grounds, whether it is Ground Zero or Buckingham Palace, and leaving a thought or something physical at the location created these memorials.

The disastrous tsunamis that swept across the Indian Ocean took thousands of lives, destroyed property and public utilities totaling US\$616 million². It not only injured many lives but also greatly damaged the environment in the affected areas. The site for the tsunami memorial is part of the Khao Lak - Lamru National Park in Phangnga Province, southern Thailand. This is the site where the first Tsunami hit. My design acknowledges the site to be the memorial itself and the act of progressing through the park and opening onto the ocean as the act of remembrance.

In 1982, Maya Lin created a powerful war memorial for the veterans of the Vietnam War. The minimalist memorial achieved to relate to a large mass with varying views towards the war without making any political statements. The design consisted of a long, black granite wall containing over 58,000 names of the war veterans. No name appears more meaningful or important than the next, they are organized in a chronological order illustrated the war in the passage of time. Maya Lin explains she wanted the names in chronological order because to hone the living as well as the dead it had to be in a sequence in time.³

¹ Brian S. Osbourne, "Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, and Commemoration: Putting Identity in Its Place", Queen's University, November 12, 2001, p. 9.

² <http://www.tsunamimemorial.or.th/information.htm>

³ Robert Campbell, "An Emotive Place Apart" A.I.A. Journal, May 1983, p.151

Set in the park of the Constitution Gardens, the wall doesn't appear prominent or grand, and does not impose on the life of the park where it is situated. The panels of the wall are arranged into two arms, extending from a central point. The wide angled wall appears to rip open the earth to create a place of quite serenity. The gentle grassy slope descends the visitor towards the centre of the wall into a world separated from the noise and visuals of everyday life protected by the arms of the memorial into a quite place for contemplation. The polished granite containing the names creates a mirror like surface that reflects its visitors onto the wall and names they are reading, creating a personal connection between the visitors and the veterans. Through the many battles and controversies surrounding the design, the Vietnam Veterans memorial emerged as a place of healing for the nation.



Figure 1.0 – Bird's eye view of the Vietnam War Memorial



Figure 2.0 – Polished granite wall

Maya Lin broke stereotyped design of war memorials. She created a place that inspired many modern day memorials to concentrate on the healing power of memorials without relying on traditional design. The Twin Towers memorial is attempting to create a place that breaks all cultural boundaries and remembers the victims of the terrorist attacks.

Much like Maya Lin's design, the Twin Towers memorial resides in the two voids, descending its visitors into the foundation of the towers where visitors are given a chance for quite contemplation. The voids were created by foots of the twin towers that now will contain two recessed pools and the ramps. The surface of the memorial plaza consists of composition of stone pavers, deciduous trees and low ground cover that will deepen the experience of the memorial through its annual cycle of rebirth.

Descending into the memorial, visitors enter a darkness that is away from the sights and sounds of the busy city. As they proceed downwards, the sound of the water grows louder. At the bottom of the descent, the visitors are behind a thin curtain of water, staring out at an enormous pool. The names of the victims are written in a continuous ribbon surrounding the pool. Standing at the water's edge, looking at a pool of water that is flowing away into an abyss, the visitor can sense that what is beyond this curtain of water and ribbon of names is inaccessible.⁴

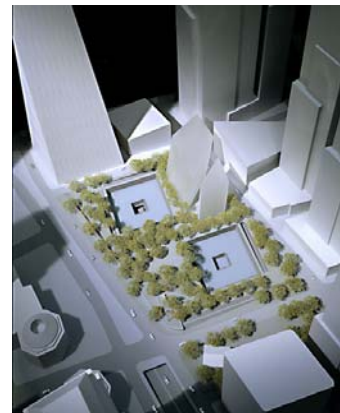


Figure 3.0 – Winning entry of the Twin Towers competition

⁴ www.twintowersmemorial.com

The names of the deceased will be arranged in no particular order because no victim is more important than the other. The act of finding the names of loved ones by the visitor is a ritual that is part the experience of the memorial. A short passageway that contains a small dais where visitors can light candles or leave an artifact in memory of their loved ones connects the two pools. The massive expanse of the original foundation can be seen while descending along the slurry wall.



Figure 4.0 – Inside the Twin Tower Memorial

The underground interpretive centre located at bedrock contains the preserved artifacts from the twin towers as well as an exhibition area, lecture halls and a research library. Another space located at bedrock is a very private room of unidentified remains. This room has a large opening in the ceiling that connects the space to the sky above.

The complex functions of the Twin Towers memorial along with the simple intensity of the Vietnam Veteran's memorial became the greatest influences on my design of the Tsunami Memorial.

The area chosen for the Tsunami Memorial is filled with people of different backgrounds. Throughout the history of the park, opportunity drew people to the area, first was the tin mining, then fishery and then the tourism industry. Before the Tsunami, the area was a high-class tourist destination attracting many to its beaches and culture.

Thailand's culture is evident in the Mokan community. This group of people is a community of fishermen who occupied the Andaman coasts of Thailand for centuries. They lost their homes, boats and belongings, but very few lives. This group of people really understands the sea and knew the tsunami was coming long before the disaster hit. Most of them escaped for this reason.⁵ The Mokan community leads a very simple life and is largely self-sufficient. Their houses are built very light up on bamboo stilts, with woven bamboo wall and thatched roofs. They use the local tropical hardwoods to build their wooden boats that last for generations. They do not follow other religion, only worship the sea in a very simple way, by offering yearly feasts of fish and rice sweets to the sea and asking for forgiveness for what they have taken. Many believe the Tsunami is a result of taking too much from the sea. To rectify this, many are making extra offerings to the sea after the Tsunami.

On December 26, 2004, the tsunamis of the Indian Ocean shocked the world. Thailand became the centre of the world's attention as nature demonstrated its power. The tsunami memorial was to unite the world in remembering the event for generations to come.

My memorial was designed as a progressive walk from the point of entry to the boardwalk into the water. The path reveals the disaster as the visitor walks through the forest, finally revealing the whole story at the end of the walk. Whether it is a close friend of a victim or a curious tourist, the memorial achieves to give the visitor an in depth understanding about the Tsunamis and a moment to reflect and mourn the victims. This idea stemmed from the design of the Smriti Shoudho, the National Martyr's Memorial of Bangladesh. The memorial is designed as a long and arduous walk towards the memorial monument with ups and downs in pavement levels and cross

⁵ <http://www.tsunamimemorial.or.th/community.htm>



Figure 5.0- National Martyr's Memorial

bridges, all of which represents the struggle for independence⁶. Along the way lie a reflection pool and several mass graves.

The memorial is entered off of a major highway through a narrow road leading to the parking lot. A long set of stairs then leads to the Visitor's Centre. The long journey up marks the beginning of the path symbolizing the pain and hardship the Tsunamis caused the land.

The Visitor's Centre has a rooftop amphitheatre that merges into the earth allowing visitors to walk directly into the theatre from the top.



Figure 6.0 – Section of Visitor's Centre

The reception and restaurant is dug into the earth where visitors can relax or continue in the journey by taking the natural ramp up. This is where the boardwalk begins. Constructed with local hardwood the boardwalk is designed to meander through the forest taking the path of least resistance in order to have minimal disturbance on the landscape.

The boardwalk is careful not to reveal the sight of the Andaman Sea. Large 6' high displays made out of black slate border the boardwalk providing information on the disaster. A timeline is maintained to track the progression of the Tsunamis. This timeline ends at the end of the walk and visitors must walk through the natural grounds



Figure 7.0 – Museum concept

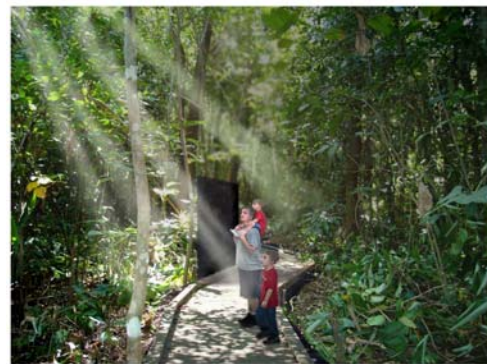


Figure 8.0 – Boardwalk through the forest

⁶ http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/N_0113.htm

enclosed by two retaining walls that hide the views of the surrounding forest.

Much like Maya Lin's design, the earth is dug out to create the Scar, the memorial museum (refer to Figure 6.0). This space becomes the heart of the memorial symbolizing the great scar left on humanity by the Tsunamis. The location of the Scar was chosen carefully to have minimal disturbance on the landscape. The footprint is kept to the minimal for the same purpose.

The visitor is dropped into the dark memorial museum by the stairs that descend into The Bridge. As the visitor walks through the descending Bridge that floats between the sky and earth, the first sight of the sacred waters of the Andaman Sea is revealed. Water is treated as a healing agent in a large number of memorials, and it becomes an especially important element since the memorial is located at the shore where the first Tsunami hit. The two waterfalls on either side of The Bridge fall down beyond the bridge and run parallel to the Bridge until both unite at Sea. The rush of the water becomes the rhythm of the space but remains untouchable. This becomes an inspiring space both overwhelming and subtle in its message remains open for personal contemplation. The Bridge is designed to appear floating in the dark space and is constructed with local hardwood stained in a dark shade. A place of grief, reflection and learning; the Bridge becomes a flexible space for museum items and learning tools.

Light creates the drama in the space. Over 280,000 light tunnels are inserted onto the ceiling each representing a victim creating a star filled sky. During the day, natural light is filtered onto the dark space embodying the shadows of the leaves, grass and flowers of the Healing Garden. A collection of soils from every nation that has lost citizens to the Tsunami is used to create this garden on top of the museum. Each year on December 26th, the garden is re-created and allowed to flourish for another year. At night the light tunnels bring in artificial light placed throughout the ceiling.

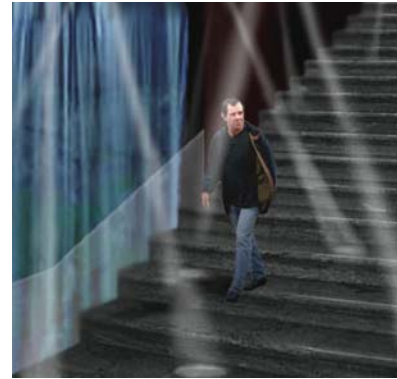


Figure 9.0 – Descent to Bridge

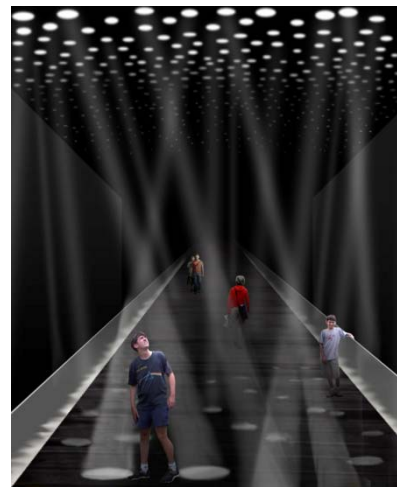


Figure 10.0 –The floating Bridge

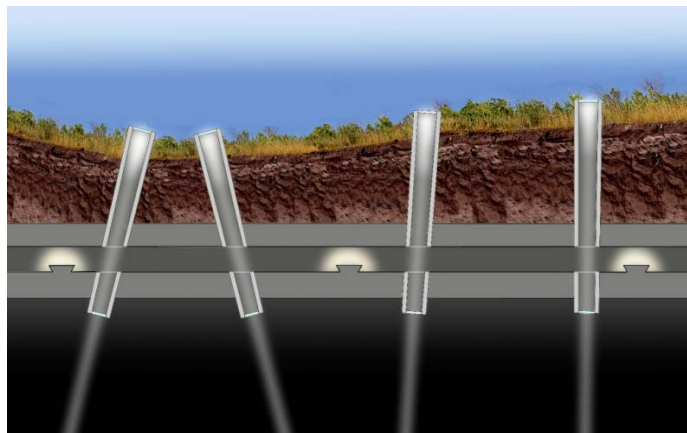


Figure 11.0 – Light tunnel detail

As one comes out of darkness and steps into the light, the overwhelming vision of the Andaman Sea fill the horizon. Four great concrete walls with inscribed names of the survivors and heroes who have helped the victims stand on either side in no particular order, as the bridge dips into the sacred water. The visitor is encouraged to make contact with the sea and light a candle that holds a personal message and watch it sail away. Many will come in awe of nature's powers; many to remember a lost loved one and many to ask forgiveness from the sea. Lights underneath the bridge continue underwater to form a straight line towards the horizon. The extent of the visitor's journey ends here as they make a personal connection with sea and the lives it has taken. The



Figure 12.0 – The wooden boardwalk meets the sacred water



Figure 13.0 - A personal message

visitor is returned through a different route reconnecting with the boardwalk that takes them back to the starting point. One experiences the great wound left by December 26, 2004 and leaves with a single scar.

The history of memorials became important to understand how a monument or place relates to and effects the emotions of the visitors. However; the design of the Tsunami memorial was to be completely unique to its cause to really serve its purpose. The tsunami memorial became a place that understands the importance of a journey leading to a climatic understanding of the events or a personal connection. This idea of a journey, along with the use tactile experiences of sight, sound and touch to evoke emotions form the modern day memorial.

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Twin Towers Memorial Competition: <http://twintowersmemorial.com>

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Picture Reference

Figure 1.0: Maya Lin's Vietnam Memorial Design <http://www.achievement.org>

Figure 2.0: Maya Lin's Vietnam Memorial Design <http://www.atpm.com/7.01/washington-dc/vietnam-memorial.shtml>

Figure 3.0 and 4.0: Twin Towers Memorial <http://twintowermemorial.com>

Figure 5.0: Smriti Shoudho <http://www.panoramio.com>