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THE MONUMENT'S END

Monuments have always been a problem. No matter how often we have
contested, effaced, torn down, or simply forgotten them, we retain our
enduring drive to make them. We continue to argue over where to site
them, whether to preserve them, and how to respond to the controversies
surrounding them. Yet the fundamental issue that underlies all the others
is the question of why we have them in the first place. Given that they so
often end in demise, what end do monuments serve?

The Monument's End takes up this question with particular attention to
the double sense of "end." Monuments are usually defined as works made
to commemorate consequential persons or events. The common presumption is that monuments are designed to endure: long into the future, they
should remind us of the past. In practice, this rarely happens. The usual
definition of monuments, therefore, is insufficient. Monuments cannot be
defined solely by the ideas and intentionality behind them. Monuments
can only be understood fully by addressing the gulf between what they are
meant to do and what they *actually* do, and by considering the reasons for
the actions taken both for and against them.

This book does not offer a solution to the problem of monuments.[1] Instead I aim to show why their combination of persistent appeal and ambivalent purpose is interesting precisely because it cannot be resolved, and
to explore what that quandary tells us about "monument" as a category.
One could write a survey of monuments across time and place, or a focused study of one monument or particular set of monuments. This book
attempts to do both, as it explores a specific and crucial historical case as
well as the larger issues at stake across time periods.[2]

I am an art historian, which means that I care about how the categories
of "monument" and "art" intersect, diverge, and exist in friction with one
another. I use the phrase "public art" in my book's subtitle not as a synonym

but as a qualifier. Not all monuments are works of art. In fact, very few of them are. Many monuments across history have derived their power from aesthetic banality, and from asserting authority through established forms. Take the equestrian statue, a form that originated in Roman antiquity and has been reprised in countless examples and contexts ever since.[3] To sit on horseback, as the art historian Robert Farris Thompson once wrote, is "an arrogant form of sitting."[4] The representation of a man on horseback—whether a general, a king, or an emperor—has become so recurrent that there is no mistaking its message of power and hegemony. Whatever inventive skill went into the making of a modern equestrian monument is undercut by its refusal of originality, its recourse to forms we already know.

Nevertheless, to distinguish art and monument on aesthetic grounds alone does not get us very far. A cookie-cutter statue of a Confederate soldier, the kind erected systematically by White supremacists in the wake of the American Civil War, is uninspired by design. Its uninspired-ness is nonetheless an aesthetic quality, which serves to directly instantiate the monument's ideology. Many would consider it a category error to put a cookie-cutter Confederate statue alongside Michelangelo's *David*, a singular and highly celebrated sculpture in the history of Renaissance art, even though it too was erected as a monument, and it too was a statue made to stand on a pedestal.[5] Any definition of monument has to account for these extreme cases as well as the many cases that fall somewhere in between.

The Monument's End considers monuments on a spectrum that runs from propaganda to high art, and from aesthetic banality to creative experiment. Within this expanded field, sculpture may be the most recognizable medium for making monuments, but it is not the only medium. Throughout these pages, I resist the presumption that monuments are necessarily monumental in scale or fixed in location. Likewise, I extend my discussion of public art to works well beyond those that stand in a public square. The many "publics" that I consider range from a community of friends to a collective body of citizens.[6] To my mind, it is impossible to address the question of what monuments are for without recognizing their plurality.

In resisting the traditional definition of monuments by kind or intention, I aim—at the same time—to better articulate what makes them a distinct category. This book participates in a historiography of understanding images in terms of how people respond to them. If that seems self-evident, it is not. Many past studies of monuments have been focused on their iconography and design, which is to say, on the beginnings of

their stories rather than their middles and ends. Following the work of scholars like Horst Bredekamp and David Freedberg, I am invested in understanding what happens to monuments—and what monuments make happen—*after* they have been put on view or entered into circulation.[7] In other words, I am interested both in the aims of monuments and in their literal endings—in demolition, removal, or replacement.

Monuments, like sacred images or ritual objects, are designed to generate powerful, embodied responses. As the literary scholar Mary Carruthers has written, "they *place* what we think."[8] Monuments condense in a single locus an expression of authority, an ideology, or a particular understanding of the past that might provoke contemplation or abhorrence or any number of competing reactions.[9] A monument might get one kind of response at its unveiling and still others two decades or two centuries later. The moment of a monument's creation is only as important as the many moments when it is reactivated through the performance of its celebration, critique, mutilation, or destruction.[10] The novelist Robert Musil is often quoted as saying that "there is nothing in the world as invisible as monuments."[11] That apothegm holds most, but not all, of the time. Monuments bore us until they don't. To put it another way, monuments are only actualized through response. And once actualized, they become impossible *not* to see.

I write this book as an American who grew up in the American South, where I lived surrounded by monuments of a condemnable kind: statues designed to glorify individuals who fought to perpetuate the enslavement of Black people or who disenfranchised Native Americans of their lands. During the years when I was researching and writing this book—from 2016 to 2023—many of those monuments were protested against and ultimately taken down (Pl. 1). Yet a monument's impact can still be felt in its absence, sometimes just as strongly. My confoundment over those monuments in part inspired my drive years ago to become an art historian, to find a language for understanding the incomprehensibility of their existence and my co-existence with them. At the same time, I recognize the limits of what art history can do. For those who lived in the shadow of such monuments across generations, who saw in them a perpetual reflection of injustices they had experienced and continued to experience, words are insufficient recompense. I mention my own experience not because it is representative, but because it guides my specific concerns in the pages that follow.

The problem of monuments that champion the oppressor in nations defined by the pursuit of liberty is not new; it is centuries old. In my book's title, the phrase "modern republic" refers to this history of conflict and my

choice to concentrate on monuments that exemplify it. What is a republic? There are many ways to answer that question, but the most basic is this: a republic is a free state, which is "free" in the very particular sense of being free from domination by an arbitrary authority. Classical republican theory holds that a republic is antithetical to monarchy and tyranny, which subjugate their subjects and restrict their actions—effectively treating them as slaves.[12] According to this theory, the republic is the sole form of government that allows citizens to exercise self-governance, or the freedom to represent themselves.[13] All strands of republican thought share some notion of being *free from* as a common ground.[14]

With the word "modern," I mean to emphasize my focus on the period of early modernity, when a new idea of revolution was born from an emergent consciousness of historical time that sharply distinguished the present from the past.[15] Under the guise of revolution, republican thought experienced revivals in Renaissance Italy, in England and the Netherlands during the seventeenth century, and in France and the United States during the eighteenth century—to mention only the best-known examples.[16] Early modern republics varied in nature, in constitution, and in their interpretation of the classical theory at their origin. Each grappled with a different sense of its past as distinct from its future. Crucial to every case, however, was the issue of political representation, the basic question of how the state stood for the people and was constituted by the people.[17] This period in the history of republicanism is especially significant to the modern history of monuments because monuments too are a form of representation, albeit of a different kind. Within a republic, it is all the more important for *whom* monuments represent (the political body that they stand for) to align with *how* they represent (through their design, placement, scale, etc.). A misaligned monument has little chance of survival.

Action and Reaction

Monuments occupy a tenuous place in nations founded upon commitment to the liberty of their citizens. Although controversies in the democratic public sphere tend to focus on the abhorrent legacies of the individuals or events they commemorate, the problem is more fundamental than that. It is no accident that when we think about monuments, we think of statues on pedestals, triumphal arches, and mausoleums. The quintessential forms that monuments take derive from the models of empire. The history of monuments is largely a history of recurrent forms that reinforce domination. Violence is built into their very design. Liberty is not.

The difficulty of reconciling the monument's reactionary forms with the modern republic's progressive ideologies has arisen in every republic ever founded.[18] At its most extreme, that difficulty has led to the toppling and obliteration of offending monuments. At its most aspirational, it has led to experiments with monument-making that occasionally have succeeded but more often have failed. It is hard to escape the dominant forms that monuments take, and all but impossible to make of them something befitting a republic.[19] So too, it has proven hard for many modern republics to resist the temptation of empire building. The association of economic independence with republican liberty has been used to justify forms of violence and exploitation that have resulted in freedoms of one kind and profound unfreedoms of another.[20]

This point leads me to the specific case at the heart of *The Monument's End*, through which I explore the many issues raised here. I argue in this book that the tension among the impulse to commemorate, the aspiration toward liberty, and the allure of empire first manifested itself in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic—and did so in ways that have reverberated across many republics since. I should acknowledge that monuments are not the first thing that come to mind when one thinks of the early modern Low Countries. As the historian Johan Huizinga famously put it, one thinks instead of "odd stray notions gleaned from paintings"—of pictures created by artists like Rembrandt van Rijn, Jacob van Ruisdael, or Johannes Vermeer that hang in museum galleries rather than occupying the streets.[21]

The history of monuments in the Low Countries has been all but overlooked, in part because the Dutch produced so few monuments of the traditional kind. The urban spaces of the Republic were not punctuated by honorific statues, and most of its public buildings were modest compared to those produced elsewhere in Europe. The avoidance of these usual suspects was a deliberate choice. The Dutch Republic, like many modern republics since, originated in a revolt against imperial rule and solidified around a commitment to citizen governance. In practice, the Republic was unstable, imperfect, threatened by internal political divisions and wars abroad, and vexed by its own colonial ambitions on the global stage. The Dutch sought to avoid the trappings of their imperial past but could not fully escape its legacy.[22]

This is too short a book to address all the complex factors that led to the Dutch Republic's formation, but a cursory summary is in order.[23] The Netherlands had a long history of urban self-governance, going back to the late Middle Ages.[24] Individual cities were long practiced in resisting external authority and asserting their autonomy. When the region came under

the rule of the Spanish-Habsburg Empire in the early sixteenth century, that resistance did not go away or even into abeyance. The Dutch Revolt that resulted was, in rhetoric, motivated by a desire to liberate the Low Countries from the tyranny of Spain.[25] In reality, it was a civil war motivated by forces internal and external including material and economic motives, the rise of Protestantism, and shifting geographies of power both within the Netherlands and beyond it.[26]

The republic that emerged from the period of prolonged conflict misleadingly dubbed by nineteenth-century historians the Eighty Years War (1568–1648) was a free state governed by a stadtholder and a parliamentary body known as the States General. The States General comprised representatives from the seven United Provinces of the northern Netherlands. In this period, the position of stadtholder was occupied by successive members of the House of Orange, who served as the Republic's chief magistrate and as head of the army and navy.[27] The official religion was the Dutch Reformed Church, but it was neither the exclusive nor even the dominant religion of the confessionally diverse population. Following the official achievement of independence in 1648, the relative power of the individual cities, the provinces, and the stadtholder remained in flux. The only constant was a commitment to the idea of liberty as freedom from domination. However, that idea—which could be interpreted and applied in so many ways—proved remarkably difficult to substantiate. This was especially true when it came to its visual representation.

Mirror Aspirations

What are monuments for? One answer is that they provide a stage for people to perform their connections with the past. In a painting by Dirck van Delen from 1645, a family poses beside an imposing tomb (Pl. 2). Well dressed in somber black hues that mirror the black marble of the monument itself, the couple and their two sons stand in a vast church interior. The husband leans his left arm on his wife's shoulder and rests his right hand on his hip, holding a pair of gloves with cultured nonchalance. None of them looks at the tomb, nor do they need to. We see immediately that the one is meant to be understood in relation to the other. The space of the church frames the encounter between family and monument but does not distract from it. A pulpit is visible through the arches at the tomb's center, and a large organ hangs over the entrance leading out onto the street. The walls and the columns are empty, and the base of the columns behind

the family are noticeably cracked and in need of a paint job. Only two other visitors are present, another well-dressed man and a figure walking with a crutch over the church's threshold. In this public space, four people have gained a private moment with a monument and claimed its history as their own.

The mausoleum depicted in van Delen's painting is arguably the most recognizable monument of the Dutch Republic, dedicated to one of its key historical actors: the nobleman William of Orange, who posthumously earned the epithet "Father of the Fatherland" (*pater patriae*) for his role as a leader of the Dutch Revolt.[28] William was murdered in 1584 and his tomb completed in 1622. In the intervening four decades, the Dutch had begun to think of themselves as a republic and to weigh what sort of free state they wanted to create. William's tomb was intended as much to embody those aspirations as it was to memorialize the individual at its center. By no coincidence, the commission took place during a period known as the Twelve Years' Truce (1609–21), when fighting with Spain was temporarily suspended and the matter of instantiating an independent Dutch identity was of central concern.[29]

The many conflicts that the Dutch faced in establishing a modern republic are inherent in the monument's conception and design. The ideals that drove those conflicts were what motivated the States General to approve the project and to pay for it with public funds. "Public monument" was used in the seventeenth-century Netherlands to refer to publicly commissioned and funded memorials dedicated to the Republic's self-proclaimed heroes.[30] In other words, the phrase had a specific rather than a generic meaning. All monuments have publics, but not all monuments are created by a public body for public edification.[31] As one contemporary Dutch historian wrote to his readers, monuments like William's mausoleum belonged to them; these are "our tombs" (*onse Graven*), as he put it, and to visit them was to learn from them.[32] This notion of the monument as representative of the Dutch people is something that van Delen's painting emphasizes as well. The artist organized the composition so that the allegorical bronze statue of Freedom on the tomb's right corner extends her liberty cap over the entrance to the church in the background. We are to understand through this symbolic gesture that those who enter are free, and that William of Orange had fought and died for their right to be so.

Yet William of Orange was also of high birth, and there is privilege represented here too. William's mausoleum, which still stands today in the town of Delft's New Church, was designed by the sculptor Hendrick de

Keyser on the model of aedicular tombs dedicated to rulers past (fig. 1).[33] The term "aedicular" refers to the way that the monument frames the body of the deceased, housing it between columns and beneath a canopy. The arches that surround and enclose the effigy speak to the grandeur of William's legacy. De Keyser was also Amsterdam's official sculptor and de facto city architect. During the period when he was at work on the tomb in Delft, he was busy with other projects including the Haarlemmerpoort, a new city gate in Amsterdam based on the model of an ancient triumphal arch (Pl. 3).[34] In van Delen's painting, we do not see the full extent of the Delft monument's triumphant aspect because the artist chose to obscure it with the angle at which he represents the tomb and through the tomb's imaginary site within the church's nave.[35] These choices are telling and transformative.

In reality, the mausoleum occupies the sacred space of the choir in what was once a Catholic house of worship, prior to its whitewashing and transformation into a Dutch Reformed church in 1572. As one approaches the monument from the church's entrance, one first sees not the recumbent marble body that van Delen pictures but rather an enlivened effigy of William of Orange (Pl. 4). Cast in glistening bronze, this second effigy is positioned at the front of the tomb as if enthroned or riding on a triumphal chariot. This is William as an armed general, a warrior. In the painting we see only part of the helmet resting at the feet of this bronze effigy, just enough to remind those who knew the monument firsthand of its presence. By positioning the family at this end of the tomb, van Delen made a deliberate act of substitution. The citizens of the new Republic here become the living embodiment of what William of Orange fought for, something greater than the nobleman himself. A close look at the bronze helmet reveals a reflection of the husband's body, his bent elbow especially prominent on the convex surface. Every paterfamilias is also, in some sense, a *pater patriae*.[36]

As a response to the mausoleum in Delft, van Delen's painting is both deferential and critical: a duality that neatly encapsulates the very problem of commemorating a new instantiation of experimental government with the oldest and most conventional representational forms. Van Delen's painting stands out among the many paintings, prints, and souvenir images of the tomb made in the seventeenth century because it not only confronts the relation of a public monument to its site and its public but also tries to resolve the contradictions inherent to the monument itself. An aspect of the tomb almost impossible to photograph is the way the rectangular panels of black marble at the columns' bases also reflect a

Figure 1. Hendrick de Keyser, *The Mausoleum of William of Orange* (side view), 1614–23. Nieuwe Kerk, Delft.

Figure 2. Hendrick de Keyser, *The Mausoleum of William of Orange* **(detail). Nieuwe Kerk, Delft.**

visitor's own body when one stands alongside it (fig. 2).[37] This physical connection between viewer and tomb, once observed, cannot be unseen. The base of de Keyser's monument is a mix of black and white stone, but van Delen depicted it entirely black in what I take to be another intentional revision. As a monument for a republic, the mausoleum only works if it mirrors the collective rather than glorifying the individual. Otherwise, it is just another entry in a long line of aristocratic tombs dedicated to a past that does not represent the present.

The Imaging of History

Responses to monuments are constitutive of what monuments are. I chose to introduce the tomb of William of Orange through van Delen's painting in order to make that point. However, pictures are not the only way to tell a history of response. One of my motivations in writing this book was my somewhat iconoclastic desire to write a monograph on Dutch art that was *not* focused on paintings—and to see what we might glean from looking at other, less familiar forms of creative and cultural production that were equally important to the period. Throughout the pages that follow, my discussion encompasses cannons, citadels, relics, prints, marginal doodles, poems, pamphlets, medals, even a carved nautilus shell. Of course, there are funerary monuments, monumental statues, and municipal buildings that I address here too, along with paintings, including none other than Rembrandt's *Night Watch*. Yet this is less a book about artists, patrons, and pictures than it is a history of reactions to and interactions with monuments in and beyond the seventeenth-century Netherlands. It is a work of intellectual history and at the same time a book about embodied experience.

Many of the monuments I discuss remained understudied for reasons that are also relevant to draw out. Studies of the interrelation between Dutch art and national history in the Netherlands began to be tempered during the period between the two world wars when the isolationist and nationalistic tendencies in earlier Dutch scholarship, for obvious reasons, became suspect and distasteful.[38] At the same time, writing by non-Dutch scholars on the art and history of the Low Countries increased, especially in the United States where a new fervor for collecting works by Dutch artists took hold during the "Gilded Age."[39] This collecting craze was fueled in no small part by a sense of kinship with the Dutch republican project. In the mid-nineteenth century, the American writer John Lothrop Motley published his monumental *Rise of the Dutch Republic*, the combined result of rigorous archival research and biased fervor for the "genius of liberty" that Motley declared—in a highly racialized narrative characteristic of the nineteenth century—as native to the Dutch people and intrinsic to their nation.[40] A century earlier, the American founding fathers had already looked to the Dutch Revolt as a model for the American Revolution and the making of a modern republic.[41] They examined the Dutch past to bear out the origins not just of a historical free state but also of their own. In turn, American collectors saw in Dutch portraits and scenes of daily life a reflection of themselves, their own ideals, and their aspirations.

Motley's positivist and progressive history of the Dutch Republic could not and would not be written today. It is inevitable that my own book is biased for different reasons, partly in ways that I have already acknowledged. However, my primary inspiration comes not from American historiography but instead from the Dutch art historian Henri van de Waal's *Drie eeuwen vaderlandsche geschied-uitbeelding*, published in 1952 and indelibly informed by its author's experience as a Jewish scholar during two world wars.[42] The title of the book is impossible to translate elegantly, but the key term is an invented one: *geschied-uitbeelding*, or the "imaging of history." Van der Waal seeks to understand throughout how approaches to representing history transformed in the Netherlands across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in tandem with the momentous political and cultural upheaval of the age. His ambitious commitment to engaging with works of art across media and his rigorous demonstration of iconological method inspire key questions I take up here about the politics of representation and about what both art and history are for.

The Monument's End centers on the period from the mid-sixteenth century to the last quarter of the seventeenth century, from the beginning of the Dutch Revolt to a moment when the Dutch Republic was both officially independent and more imperiled than ever. This book is not strictly chronological, nor is it meant to be a comprehensive survey of all monuments produced on Netherlandish soil over a particular span of time. It is a book that includes discussion of many texts alongside works of art, which I have translated myself (unless otherwise noted) with a view to legibility and, when relevant, to preserving the rhyme common to seventeenth-century Dutch poetry. My principle of organization and selection was to draw out issues in the history of response and counter-response to monuments that resonate across the history of monuments at large. This approach allows me to reframe key moments in the history of European art and political thought while citing continuities that extend into the postcolonial present. Above all, my guiding principle is this: the history of monuments has something to teach us, even if the histories that monuments so often embody and reinforce are those that we now rightly teach against.

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