

Colonial and Slavery Memorials for the Future

*How to complement the current landscape of colonial
and slavery memorials in The Netherlands: learning
from Monument Indië-Nederland.*

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Introduction

We are living in an age of deconstructing history, realizing our past is not as black and white as we thought it was and questioning the certainty we once had about the 'objective' and 'truthful' history as we knew it (Munslow, 2006). By slowly peeling off the different layers of the past, our historical awareness grows and we gain a broader perspective on what has actually happened. Movements such as Black Lives Matter have sharpened our lenses massively. This inevitably had impact on our perception on monuments and memorial architecture (Omstreden Monumenten, n.d.). Organizations, initiatives and protest groups started arising in order to give a voice to this changing perception, craving to find a new way of representing history in our built environment, for example through monuments.

In this research paper we will dive into the topic of Dutch colonialism by looking at the current representation of this past in public spaces. This is a timely topic that directly connects to the more critical approach towards the colonial past, which was up to now subject of various distortions and whitewashing of historical facts. Institutions like the *National Institute Dutch slavery past and heritage* (NiNsee), address the controversy of the topic and try to gain awareness in all layers of society. They bring the theme into the public consciousness by contesting responses such as those that are denoting these issues of critically looking at the distorted historical facts, as an 'overreaction' of slavery descendants (Whitewashed Slavery Past? The (Lost) Struggle Against Ignorance about the Dutch Slavery History - Humanity in Action, 2014). NiNsee also address how the visualization of our slavery history is crucial for people to become aware and interested in the topic, and how a lack of representation and education leads to the problems we are facing today: an uninformed attitude to the colonial past among the Dutch (Whitewashed Slavery Past? The (Lost) Struggle Against Ignorance about the Dutch Slavery History - Humanity in Action, 2014). Our memories

are being capitalized by social, political and economic institutions, which is something that goes beyond the topic of colonialism, but rather emphasizes the structural problem in general (Nguyen, 2006). So even though, this paper is focused on the colonial past in specific, some of the principles concerning historical representation can also be recognized in relation to other difficult periods in our past.

Since physical representation of history in our public spaces, massively influences how we perceive our historical events, we must ensure that the told stories represent the different perspectives. When doing this, we have to let go of the dichotomy between these perspectives in order to create a 'just' memory (Nguyen, 2006). This is where an opportunity lies for architects, artists and designers to carefully think about the way we want to preserve our current memorials and how we should design the future ones.

In this light, I aim to better understand the state of the arts of the monuments dealing with the colonial past in The Netherlands. To do this, I will take a close look at the case study of *Monument Indië-Nederland*, since this is a great example on the complexity of a monument representing a controversial period in our history and how society intervened. In addition, the monument also contains very interesting design intentions which we can learn from.

Before diving into the case study, I will first touch upon the historical context of Dutch colonialism. Not only will I address the role The Netherlands played during these times, but I will also emphasize the colonial traces that are still visible in our current society. For example exterior building elements, monumental buildings and memorials in our outdoor spaces that are visible for every person in society, regardless of their budget, timing or class. I will give an overview of the presence of these physical colonial traces in our public spaces, by way of mapping. The main source for this mapping exercise is the database of Mapping Slavery (Kaarten Nederland, n.d.). Afterwards, I will

dive into the case study of *Monument Indië-Nederland* by conducting literary and archival research, supported by field research. I will appoint historical context, the symbolism behind the design decisions and how this caused society to intervene with the monument. However, the explanation of the different design elements doesn't seem to be the full story of its symbolic meaning. More layers unravel on the actual intentions of the sculptor Frits van Hall, when taking a close look at his background and political beliefs. The lessons learned from Monument Indië-Nederland are then complemented by memorial examples and literary sources, such as *Mortal Cities and Forgotten Monuments* by Arna Mačkić (2017), *Monumental Lies: Culture Wars and the Truth About the Past* by Robert Bevan (2022) and *Nothing Ever Dies* by Viet Thanh Nguyen (2006). By way of conclusion, I will use the gained insights to propose a vision for developing the current scenery of colonial and slavery memorials in The Netherlands.

1. The Dutch and their Colonial Past

Before I can start researching the current historical references in our public spaces, I first need to gain a better understanding on our colonial past. What role did the Dutch play and what traces are still to be seen nowadays? The answers to these questions will provide more context when analyzing the narratives that are currently being represented in our built environment.

Colonization is the act of settling in a foreign country and taking control over it (Colonize Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary, 2023). Europeans have proven to be active colonizers - a majority of all nations in the world have, at some point, been colonized by countries of the European continent (Blakemore, 2021). The 15th century period, or the so called 'Age of Discovery', is the focus in this research paper. It was Portugal that then began to explore new trading routes and interesting civilizations outside of the European continent, but other nations followed. Soon enough, a competition arose between European countries to extend their empires all over the world (Blakemore, 2021). The Netherlands were also part of this competition, mainly during the 17th century, when founding the VOC (United East India Company) and WIC (West India Company) (VOC en WIC, n.d.). Due to their overseas colonies, the Dutch were able to trade a lot of goods as well as slaves, something that massively increased the economy in The Netherlands and therefore also created opportunities for knowledge and art to flourish. From the Dutch perspective it is therefore not surprising this historical period is also referred to as 'the Dutch Golden Age' (Pound, 2021). The stories of success on how the Dutch increased their national wealth have been, and still are, widely represented everywhere in our public spaces. Think of prestigious buildings of the former VOC, statues of commanders that were in charge of our colonial areas and museums full of noble art pieces and portraits of these 'heroes' from our Golden Age.

However, there is also another side to this story of increasing wealth. The invasion of civilizations and their lands, led to distorted power dynamics in which the colonizer would bluntly implement their ideas, ideologies and culture. One way in which they would do this, was by superimposing their vision on architecture on the invaded nation, without taking the local context into account (Mack, 2022). But most importantly, and even worse, the empowered colonizers saw the native people as tradable objects and a source of money, to be used for creating enslaved workforces for their own wealth (Pound, 2021). It is estimated that over 500,000 people have been working as slaves in the Dutch colonies (Whitewashed Slavery Past? The (Lost) Struggle Against Ignorance about the Dutch Slavery History - Humanity in Action, 2014).

The Netherlands were one of the last countries to abolish slavery in 1863. It took so long because the Dutch were convinced these uneducated slaves would supposedly not be able to handle this amount of freedom. Above that, the slaveholders would gain 'massive losses' if all their enslaved employees would leave from one day to the other. And so, even though the abolition of slavery was bound to happen, a new law was introduced where these former slaves were forced to sign a 10-year contract with their former owners. This should prevent their plantation economy from suddenly collapsing. Above that, The Netherlands decided to finance former slaveholders to compensate for their sudden 'losses' of free employees (Einde aan een Treurige Geschiedenis van Slavernij (1863), n.d.). The abolition also did not directly result into the independence of all colonies, since Curaçao, Aruba and Sint Maarten are still a part of our Dutch Kingdom (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020). This shows that the banning of slavery did not mark the end of distorted power relations between The Netherlands and its former colonies.

Many Dutch see slavery as an act perpetrated by only a small portion of society, since they mainly look at the VOC and WIC leaders being the perpetrators. But as is revealed by the Rijksmuseum exhibition Slavery – ten true stories 2021, the different aspects of slavery have infiltrated into all layers of society. This goes for the colonies as well as The Netherlands itself, causing the legacy of it all to still somehow be rooted in our society (Pound, 2021). And so, despite the fact that slavery has officially been abolished, there are still many traces to be seen nowadays. One of the biggest traces being the strong relation between colonialism and racism, as stated by Valika Smeulders: "Discrimination is universal, but to legalise it as a system that a certain group of people was meant to serve the other half of the world, that is something that was installed by colonialism, and at the end of colonialism that was reinforced through 'scientific' racist ideas. Racism was borne out of colonialism, not the other way round" (Pound, 2021).

With the colonial period being a black page in our national past, The Netherlands have found it difficult to acknowledge the events that have occurred during the previous centuries and the traces they still show nowadays. However, we can notice this governmental attitude is gradually changing. We can see this, for example, with the banning of Black Pete – a helper of St. Nicholas appearing as a blackface figure with big golden earrings, kinky hair and exaggerated red lips (Little, 2021) – or the official apologies of the Dutch government for the role they played in the slavery trade during the colonial time period (NOS, 2022). This indicates there now seems to be a momentum for re-evaluating the way we have previously represented our colonial past and for carefully thinking about how we should be doing this in the future.

2. Mapping Traces

The built environment is a great scenery for publicly showcasing and representing our cultural past, from monumental buildings to memorial architecture. I will conduct a mapping exercise in which the narratives of our historical representation of colonial times in the public space, will be pinpointed. The main database I will use for this mapping exercise is Mapping Slavery, which is a public history project initiated by Dr. Dienke Hondius, a professor at the Free University of Amsterdam. Mapping Slavery, among other things, focusses on the physical traces of slavery we can currently find in our public spaces (Over Ons – Mapping Slavery, n.d.). They have started gathering information on museum exhibitions, archival pieces and physical traces in our built environment. This information is then categorized and mapped, resulting in an overview of colonial references in our public spaces (Kaarten Nederland, n.d.). Even though their research is still a work in progress, the findings up until now are already relevant for gaining an overview on colonial and slavery monuments in The Netherlands. For the mapping exercise in this research paper, I will focus on the (so far) registered data regarding statues, monumental building (elements) and memorial sites in our built environment. However, some crucial elements are currently still missing in the Mapping Slavery database and needed to be manually added to the overview, for example the Zeeuws Slavernij Monument in Middelburg and Tilburgs Slavernijmonument. In figure 1 the result of the mapping exercise can be found.

Something that becomes very clear from this map is the distorted balance between the narratives that are represented in our built environment. How come we can find a massive amount of references to the ‘pretty side of the story’ while only six memorials can be found that emphasize with the dark side of this same story from the victims’ perspective? This overview shows the distorted image in the current scenery, which does not longer align with our societal

perspective on historical representation. The map points out the urge to take action and radically improve the current landscape of colonial references in our built environment.

We do have to keep in mind it was not possible to conduct a complete image of every component that refers to the colonial history in our public spaces, since a variety of organizations is currently still working on compiling and categorizing all this information. Yet, we can assume the conclusion of this mapping exercise is representative for the overall ratio of physical colonial traces that can be found in The Netherlands.

With the earlier mentioned changing attitude towards our past, we are now waiting what adjustments are to be implemented into the scenery of our colonial representation in the built environment. During the official apologies on slavery from the 2022 Dutch government, prime minister Rutte stated the government is willing to invest a lot of money into measures and initiatives that encourage the increase of awareness and emphasizes on the slavery past. One concrete way in which they would like to do that, is by creating a National Museum of Slavery in Amsterdam (Gerlings, n.d.). On a critical note however, museums do come with the difficulty of excluding certain groups of people. Even though museums are crucial places to represent (historical) narratives through art, objects and other forms of storytelling, we have to be aware that these locations are usually not freely accessible due to tangible as well as intangible barriers. First of all, they welcome people within a certain budget and timeframe to experience the exhibitions and collections. This results in the exclusion of people that do not live up to these time and money based criteria. Above that, museums have to deal with so-called ‘threshold fear’. This concept basically states that art is seen as an exclusive property, concern and right of people from upper classes, mainly welcoming for example white

communities. This causes an emotional barrier for other groups of people to visit museums (English, 2015). As mentioned before, it is the elements in our outdoor public spaces that are visible and easily accessible for every individual, regardless of their budget, time schedule or societal class. Therefore, it is a shame nothing has been stated by Rutte about concrete adjustments within our current (outdoor) public spaces in terms of, for example, monuments.



Figure 1: Overview of Statues, Monumental Building (Elements) and Memorial Sites in the Dutch Built Environment that Represent our Colonial Past. (by author)

3. A Case Study of a Monument: Monument Indië-Nederland

The changes in our collective perception on history, influence how we look at our monumental references to the past, and vice versa. Or as Frederico Bellentani explains: “Culture can shape the designers’ and the users’ interpretations and even influence actions and interactions within the space of monuments. In turn, monuments convey cultural meanings in space contributing to the shaping and reshaping of

culture” (2021, p.29). In order to conduct a concrete example of this interaction between our social-cultural mindset and monuments, we will look into the case study of Monument Indië-Nederland (see figure 2). This monument, formerly known as the Van Heutsz-monument, is located at the Olympia Square in Amsterdam (see figure 3) and designed by Frits van Hall and Gijsbert Friedhoff.



Figure 2: Monument Indië-Nederland. (Van Velzen, n.d.)



Figure 3: Aerial photo of Monument Indië-Nederland and its Direct Surroundings. (Kaart van Amsterdam, n.d., adapted by author)

3.1 The Rise of a Monument

In 1873, which was ten years after the abolition of slavery, the colonial government that ruled in the Dutch East Indies started a military expedition against the Sultanate of Aceh. When the first mission failed, soon a new attempt was made, implying the 'urge' to conquer the Sultanate. This second attempt then became the bloodiest and longest fight The Netherlands has ever fought, and only could be stopped by the invasion of Japan during World War II. The government somehow tried to justify the attack on Aceh by claiming the sultanate was a threat for The Dutch East Indies. Meanwhile, they were just aiming for colonial expansion, perceiving the many victims of this manslaughter as nothing more than collateral damage (De Winter, 2019). And it was J.B.

van Heutsz who played an important role in this war, since he was a fairly prominent commander of the Royal Dutch East Indies Army, being given the task of bringing Aceh under Dutch authority (Van Heutsz-monument, n.d.).

Somehow, many people in The Netherlands, including Queen Wilhelmina, saw Van Heutsz as a hero. When the former commander passed away in 1924, even a crowd funding started to finance the grave tomb in which he would be buried. The popularity of Van Heutsz was clearly proven by the amount of money collected, since there was even a budget left to create a memorial for the colonial 'hero' (Bruins Slot & Van Hasselt, n.d.). For socialists dissatisfaction on



Figure 4: Reveal of the Van Heutsz Monument, June 15th 1935. (HNI Archive(FRIE) 2.42-7)

the monument quickly arose. How dare they make a monumental immortalization to honor this person who is responsible for so many victims? It was after two years of discussion, that a deal was made: the Van Heutsz-monument could be realized if, in exchange, the socialists could build a monument for Domela Nieuwenhuis, one of the founders of the socialist movement in The Netherlands. And so, in 1930 The Municipality of Amsterdam organized a design competition for the Van Heutsz-monument, which was won by sculptor Frits van Hall and architect Gijsbert Friedhoff (Bruins Slot & Van Hasselt, n.d.). On June 15th 1935 the monument was festively revealed by Queen Wilhelmina (see figure 4 and 5).



Figure 5: Queen Wilhelmina at the Reveal of the Van Heutsz Monument, June 15th 1935. (HNI Archive(FRIE) 2.42-8)

3.2 Art and Architecture as a Symbolic Language

The memorial site consists of several components, some of which have been adjusted or added over time. Each of these elements have a symbolic meaning, all of them together representing a certain narrative on the colonial relation between The Netherlands and former Indie.

When approaching the site, the attention is immediately drawn to the main vocal point of the monument: the statue. It is a statue of a woman with two lions on her side, representing the Dutch authority in former Indie. She is placed on a pedestal, decorated with ornaments on both sides (see figure 7), which visualize the different sceneries in the Dutch colony. Originally, the pedestal also contained a portrait of J.B. van Heutsz on the front, as shown in figure 8, but this has been removed and never got replaced (Teeuwisse et al., 2016). The water, best seen in figure 2, represents the oceans that physically separate the two countries, even though in this monument it is represented as more of an element of connection. Perhaps, because the power of the VOC was gained by their system of trading over waterways, implying water is a crucial element in the relation between The Netherlands and its colonies. The central 18 meter tall brick pillar, that emphasizes the statue in the middle, contains an arc of rays on top which symbolizes the friendship between the Dutch and former Indie (Bruins Slot & Van Hasselt, n.d.). The pillar is connected to a brick wall on both sides, containing 5 arches per wall, as seen in figure 9. In between these arches again ornaments can be found, similar to the ones on the pedestal, which also showcase a variety of sceneries in the former colony (see figure 10, 11 and 12), like slaves working on the plantation (Van Velsen, n.d.). Later on, four columns have been added on the memorial site, two of which are visible in figure 13. In the next subchapter I will go into more depth regarding these additional pillars.

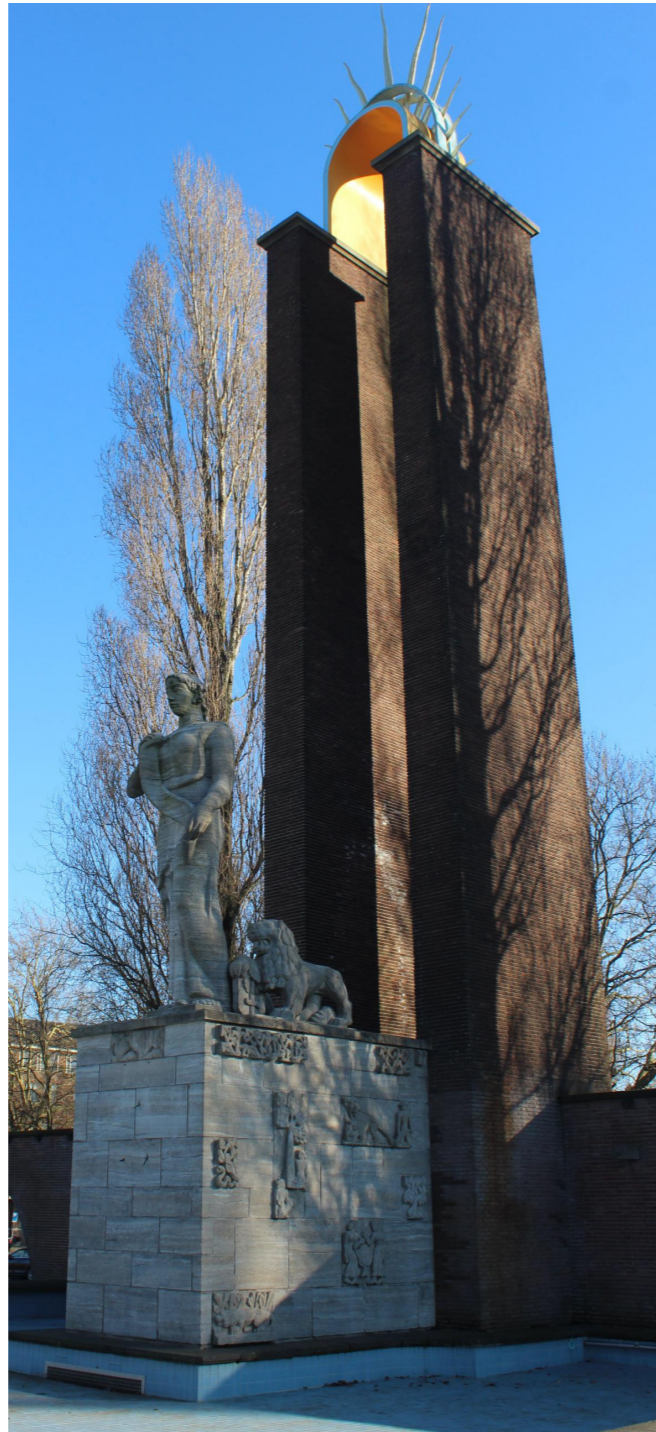


Figure 6: Vocal Point of the Memorial Site. (by author)



Figure 7: Ornaments on Pedestal. (by author)



Figure 8: Original Portrait of Van Heutsz. (Teeuwisse et al., 2016)



Figure 9: Wall with Arches, Semi-enclosed Seating and Later Added Pillars. (by author)

A remarkable aspect is the dominance of a main axe; it seems to be very clear what should be perceived as the front and back side of the memorial. It is then interesting to wonder why the information plate, is placed on the back (or south) side of the monument. Is it intentional people will first have to experience all the elements of the memorial, before gaining information on the meaning of the monument? With the addition of the pillars in the perpendicular direction however, another axe was added, metaphorically also adding a new perspective on the original symbolics of the memorial. These pillars break through the boundaries of front and back, north and south. They seem to form a connection between the Amsterdams Lyceum and the Olympia Sports Park (see figure 3), a route taken by many students when they have outdoor sports classes in the park. In addition, these students also use the monument as a place to 'chill' during their lunch breaks or after school (E.L.L. Tulp, personal communication, February 7, 2023). Quite some seating facilities can be found on the memorial site, especially the benches on both ends of the wall are very popular. This might have to do with the fact the

bench is semi-enclosed by the curved edges of the wall, visible in figure 9.

In addition to the students from the Lyceum, the monument is a popular recreational space for the everyday passer-by, especially during summertime. People will sit on the benches, children enjoy the water and others will lay in the grass (E.L.L. Tulp, personal communication, February 7, 2023). And so, the memorial also beholds a social value in its urban context. However, for the passer-by and recreational user there seems to be little understanding of the actual symbolic meaning and historical representation of the monument. But this might not necessarily be a bad thing. There is also a certain beauty to perceiving this monument as a public space that invites people to use it how they like, creating their own individual memories, aside from the symbolic meaning of the site. This addresses how such memorial sites, or any monument for that matter, in our public spaces will inevitably also serve as 'just' an element in the urban fabric, to be used in the way society wants to make use of it.



Figure 10: Ornament on Wall. (by author)



Figure 11: Ornament on Wall. (by author)



Figure 12: Ornament on Wall. (by author)



Figure 13: Two of the Later Added Pillars. (by author)

3.3 Society Intervenes

It already started on the day the monument was being revealed by Queen Wilhelmina on June 15th 1935 when opponents of the former commander actively demonstrated. They were reminding people how Van Heutsz played a crucial role in times of the bloody colonial oppression (Van Heutsz-monument, n.d.). Since this official reveal, the memorial had been damaged on a frequent bases. It is interesting to point out however, it was not only the socialists who criticized the design result. Van Heutsz supporters concretized how the monument was 'too weak' and did not do justice to the honor this hero deserved for all his hard work in the colony (Bruins Slot & Van Hasselt, n.d.). It is of course questionable why the only visual reference to the former commander is a bronze portrait and his name written on the base of the statue, while this entire memorial site was supposed to immortalize his heroic deeds.

Later in the 20th century the monument had been a target of several bomb attacks (Teeuwisse et al., 2016). Even though no big damage had been caused by these bombings, it does emphasize this new period in which the monument came into disrepute again. In 1984 even the bronze portrait and letters on the statue pedestal, seen in figure 8, were stolen (Teeuwisse et al., 2016). This action meant that the only visual elements that directly referred to former commander Van Heutsz, were removed from the monument. The portrait had never been replaced after the theft.

In the end of the last century, the government decided the memorial site needed to be renovated. Of course, opponents of the monument could not stand the idea of the municipality still worshipping a monument that represents former commander Van Heutsz, completely ignoring the darker side of the historical narrative. At this moment, the collective societal perspective on historical representation had already shifted massively in comparison to when the monument was built in the 1930s. Their protests helped and in the beginning of the 21st century the

function and name of the Van Heutsz Monument were changed into Monument Indië-Nederland. Where it originally used to represent the commander of the Aceh mission, it now represented the relation between The Netherlands and its former colony Dutch East Indie (Van Heutsz-monument, n.d.). In 2007 even new elements were added to the memorial site: the pillars. On these pillars, six important dates were added, as seen in figure 14. The dates refer to specific happenings in the history of the colonial relation between The Netherlands and Indonesia, as well as to the history of the monument itself. 1596 is the year in which Cornelis Houtman and Pieter Dirksz de Keyser arrived on Bantam for the first time, marking the beginning of the colonization of Indonesia. In 1935 the Van Heutsz Monument was officially revealed by Queen Wilhelmina. Ten years later the declaration of independence was submitted, but only in 1949 the Dutch gave recognition to the independence. In 2001 the official function and name of the monument changed and six years later the new pillars were added (Van Heutsz-monument, n.d.).

As mentioned in the previous sub-chapter, these additional pillars are placed perpendicular on the main axe of the monument and differ in materialization compared to the original elements. It is said this decision was consciously made to emphasize the contrast between the western country of The Netherlands and eastern Indonesia (Van Heutsz-monument, n.d.). You may therefor wonder if this was done to intentionally point out the difference between the two countries, not seeing them as a coherent unity. On the other hand, it is only more than logic to make visually clear which elements on the memorial site belong to the original design of Van Hall and which aspects have been added on a later moment.

We should be critical however, on whether the addition of these pillars and the change of name of this monument are actually addressing the root of the

problem. In an attempt to partially change what the monument stands for, still the full story of our past and all its different perspectives, seem to be missing. Perhaps, it is just impossible to erase the original meaning of this monument, or any monument for that matter, and completely shift what it stands for. But then again, we should question if 'erasing the original meaning' is what we want as a society. Is this a discussion about rubbing out how we have previously represented our history in a one-sided way? Or about addressing it, gaining awareness and encouraging people to start looking at our past from different perspectives?

The story of this monument portraits how society takes a certain degree of ownership over the elements in our public spaces. It also shows how our fluctuating societal perspective on history, is leading in how we perceive our monuments. Even though it has been a while since there were protests against the monument or very serious demolitions have occurred, the discussion on the topic of colonial representation in our public spaces is now more accurate than ever. And we as designers must be involved in this discussion.



Figure 14: Six Dates on Added Pillar. (by author)

4. Designing Monuments and Colonial Narratives

It seems to be clear what the original meaning of the Van Heutsz Monument was, no wonder society intervened. But weirdly enough, when we start to have a closer look at the background and political view of sculptor Frits van Hall, new insights come to light in regards to the design decisions he made. What can Van Hall teach us about memorial design? In addition, literature and examples will give a better understanding on criteria for memorial design, which can help us to develop the current scenery of colonial monuments.

4.1 Hidden Design Intentions from a Socialist Sculptor

Apparently, Van Hall was well-prepared for the controversy this monument would fuel. He told one of his colleagues about the possibility of adding the words 'Freedom', 'Merdeka' or 'Indonesia' in case people would want the monument to become a statue of freedom in the future (Bruins Slot & Van Hasselt, n.d.). His predictions on the societal dissatisfaction became reality, as if he foresaw the many events that would occur at the memorial site. The comment of Van Hall is a very interesting one, since you then start to wonder whether he had the intention of facilitating these adjustments (or even damages) to the monument in order to encourage a social-political discussion. To gain a better understanding of the actual reasoning behind the monument design, it is interesting look into background story of Van Hall.

Frits van Hall was born in 1899 in Bodja, located on the island of Java, Indonesia. He was one of the five children of Dutch father Maus Cornelis van Hall and East Indie mother Carlina Sophia de Bode. When Frits was six years old, the van Hall family moved to the Netherlands. In 1916 Frits followed summer classes in sculpturing and wood cutting, which apparently inspired him to continue in this artistic field. He decided to start at the Rijksakademie for Fine Arts in Amsterdam two years later. These were the years in which Van Hall truly started to develop as a sculpturer, apparently with a predilection for Egyptian and Javanese art. Throughout the years he rapidly developed as an artist as well as a person who was politically involved. His socialist views increased overtime, probably fueled by the similar political values within the artist world. During World War II he was part of a resistance group and even gave space to people in hiding. This active resistance

work led him to be arrested and eventually to be killed in 1945, a few months before the end of the war (Teeuwisse et al., 2016).

When observing this brief overview of Van Hall's life, it is rather questionable how a socialist with East Indie roots, agreed to design a monument of a war commander who was responsible for the bloody manslaughter in Aceh. Somehow, unlike his fellow sculptors and despite his background and political beliefs, Van Hall didn't see reason to refuse the design assignment. However, Van Hall only really started to further develop his political interests and an urge to fight fascism, during the process of designing and building the Van Heutsz monument (Teeuwisse et al., 2016). Something that implies his political interest to have mainly increased in this specific time period, is the difference between the submitted design and the actual monument. The main element that shocked the jury during the reveal in 1935 was the prominent statue of the woman, since the original design included a statue of commander Van Heutsz on a horse. This was only one of the few design adjustments the sculptor added during the realization without the jury's awareness. Instead of honoring Van Heutsz with a sculptured statue, only a bronze portrait of the former commander was placed on the base (see figure 4). A portrait intentionally placed to be removed (or even stolen) in the eyes of Van Hall (Teeuwisse et al., 2016). And so, by slowly removing some of the elements and adding new ones, for example the word 'Freedom', the original meaning of the monument could change overtime. This is how Van Hall consciously intended the design.

It can be noticed how Friedhoff and Van Hall tried to find a nuance in the controversy of this social-political topic, attempting to find a common ground between the nationalists and socialist communities. But we should be critical on whether the aim of connecting these opposing groups through this monument, in reality just encouraged the polarization to increase even further, leaving none of the political groups to be fully satisfied in the end.

The more we learn about this monument and its sculptor, the more layers seem to unravel. We can tell that the design is thought through on a much deeper level than society might have assumed, and it is therefore questionable how valid all critique on this monument actually is. However, it can be argued that Monument Indië-Nederland does fall short in communicating the actual design intentions of Van Hall and his view on adjusting the monument overtime into a statue of freedom. It truly feels like a missed opportunity for society to not fully understand the design decisions made by Van Hall and therefore not completely realize what it stands for.

4.2 Representing History through Memorial Architecture

As shown in the case study of Monument Indië-Nederland, but also in the mapping exercise before, society is dissatisfied with the one-sided narratives that are being represented in our public spaces. These monuments do not represent the full story, and therefore not the truth. By manipulating the historical narrative in public spaces, you manipulate the way society perceives these stories, influencing their perception on the past. In order for people to be well informed and form their own opinions on such topics, an important aspect of memorial design is therefore to truthfully represent this variety of perspectives. "Truth is a common good," as stated by Eyal Weizman in *Memorial Lies: Culture Wars and the Truth about the Past* (Bevan, 2022). But the question is: what do we consider being 'the truth'? What one person perceives to be the truth might differ from the viewpoint of others. So how do you address all these 'truths'? This is a complexity also being addressed in the book *Mortal Cities and Forgotten Monuments* by Arna Mačkić (2015). She questions whether it is possible to create memorials for everyone, representing the different multilayers and variety of perspectives all in one monument, and how to relate this to the past as well as the future. This latter point is important to address, since contemporary memorials are not just a representation of the past but rather the existence of this past in present times, involving present events and sometimes even future ones (Tanović, 2015).

Breaking through the boundaries of time in combination with the diversity of the perspectives in every story, makes it rather difficult to design timeless monuments to everyone's liking. A possible way to tackle this problem might be to expand the represented narrative by adding other perspectives overtime. This concept was for example implemented in the design of Monument Indië-Nederland with the addition of the pillars and change of name. Another example of this approach is this *Anti-Slavery Art Installation* by the Colston Statue in Bristol (see

Figure 15). The original statue of Edward Colston is a classical exemplar of what Viet Thanh Nguyen explains to be 'remembering one's own' (2006). This is the concept of portraying your own side of the story as the heroic and only narrative, implying the opposition to be the evil one (Nguyen, 2006). The additional art installation showcases the dark side of the story behind the heroic image, adding this contradictory perspective to the currently represented narrative. On a critical note however, the addition of the installation leaves little room for visual nuance and the common ground on which people with different opinions can have discussions on the matter. According to Nguyen, the downside of representing a historical event in 'black and white' can be the tendency to promote violence between different groups (Nguyen, 2006). Arna Mačkić addresses in her book that it is very important to apply a design language that goes beyond the borders of politics, religion or cultural interpretations, when aiming to create a monument for everyone. The memorial should avoid tensions and claims of truth, and most-importantly it should not ignore or deny what has happened in the past (Mačkić, 2015).

A topic Mačkić also touches upon in her book is the sense of place, since memories can have a strong relation to a specific site. But how would you then, for example, design a memorial in The Netherlands regarding a broad and complex topic such as slavery? Most of the terrible events occurred outside of our Dutch borders. The United States also came across this dilemma. They wanted to embrace a sense of place, while aiming to commemorate events – the lynching of black people – that happened throughout multiple counties within the nation. They managed to translate the events into one memorial: *The Memorial of Peace and Justice* (see Figure 16), located on a site in Montgomery, Alabama. Since soil has been dug up from the actual sites where the lynching took place, and was then used in elements of the monument, a strong sense of place occurs. In addition to using the

soil within the monumental elements, the counties in which those lynchings took place can 'claim' their part of the monument. The idea is that they will place it somewhere in their own community to engage in the process of acknowledgement of this dark past. Direct relations to the places involved in certain historical events, can have positive impact on the process of understanding and healing (The National Memorial of Peace and Justice, n.d.).

Something the Memorial of Peace and Justice portrays really well, is the option of not necessarily designing a 'static' memorial that has to be fully grounded on its site, while still emphasizing with this sense of place. Because why do we usually seek a way of statically representing our history, when our societal perception on history is always to some degree dynamic? This means designing with the aim of creating a static monument gives us the impossible task of estimating how we, as a society, will look at historical representation (and therefore our monuments) in the future. And so, we should maybe look at ways of implementing a certain flexibility for future adaptation and societal interference into the design. This concept would be similar to how the Van Heutsz monument was intended to change overtime, in appearance as well as in its meaning. Perhaps, juxtaposing the symbolical need for a fixed embedment of a memorial on its site, while also creating flexibility for adaptation overtime, is where the key solution lays in radically improving our memorial scenery. Instead of perceiving monuments as a static object that should be left untouched, we should see it as dynamic element in our public spaces. They should be flexible overtime and welcoming multiple perspectives to the narrative.



Figure 15: Anti-Slavery Art Installation by Colston Statue, Bristol. (Anti Slavery Art Installation by Colston Statue in Bristol, 2018).



Figure 16: The National Memorial of Peace and Justice, Montgomery, Alabama. (The National Memorial of Peace and Justice, n.d.)

Conclusion

There is a dark side to our colonial past, that still shows its traces in our present society. In the Dutch built environment statues, monumental buildings and memorial sites represent a distorted balance of these historical colonial narratives, underrepresenting the slavery perspective. Monument Indië-Nederland is a great example of such a one-sided colonial reference, causing society to interfere and give voice to the shifting collective perspective on historical representation. Although, we should question whether the critique on the monument is completely valid, since the hidden design intentions of sculpturer Van Hall reveal something surprising: the monument was actually intended to be adjusted overtime by removing and adding elements to the memorial site. This would give opportunity to slowly shift the original meaning of 'honoring former commander Van Heutsz' into 'celebrating the freedom of the East Indie colony'. There are also other memorial examples that emphasize additional perspectives and spatial flexibility. This inspires us to think of monuments as being more than just a 'static' object, but rather dynamic and flexible elements in our built environment that give space to add other perspectives to the narrative, and to be subject of societal change overtime.

And so, in order to answer the question on how to complement the current scenery of colonial and slavery memorials in the Dutch built environment, we should look into the possibility of expanding the currently represented one-sided narratives. This can be done by somehow adding new perspectives to the monuments, while making sure to give society a voice in how we should do this. In this way, a broader palette of perspectives is being represented, without ignoring or denying our history. For that matter, these additions overtime will actually even enrich the current memorial scenery, by also representing our changing societal perception on history over the years. The next step for this research is to actually look into how we should design these 'monumental additions'.

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