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The Twenty-First-Century Monuments

Reflections on Nomadic and Intermedial Monumentality

Abstract

Since the nineteenth century, the concept of the monument has undergone a significant morphosis. Its meaning shifted throughout the twentieth century, from the receptacle for heroic, self-aggrandizing, national gestures celebrating ideals and triumphs, to ephemeral, conceptual interventions marking national ambivalence and uncertainty. With the possibilities of immersive digital technology and the internet, the twenty-first-century monument has expanded toward the unmonumental, the immaterial, and the virtual. This paper focuses on two Iranian artists living outside of Iran that use digital technologies to reveal power structures inscribed into sculptural and monumental forms. Morehshin Allahyari and Shirin Fahimi engage with the sculptural codes of monuments to propose novel ways to make and mark a space for painful, diasporic, suppressed, or erased memory. They counteract a monumental aesthetic linked to solidity, permanence, and stiffness with a monumentality that is participatory, generative, mutable and unfolds between actual and physical spaces. Rethinking the function of sculpture as a monument vis-à-vis its expansion via 3D technologies, augmented reality, and the internet, this paper explores an intermedial and nomadic monumentality emerging in recent sculptural discourse.

Key Words

Intermedial and nomadic monumentality, Shirin Fahimi, Morehshin Allahyari, monuments, 3D technologies, virtual reality

"The remarkable thing about monuments is that one does not notice them. There is nothing in the world so invisible as a monument," or so the Austrian novelist Robert Musil once claimed.[1] Writing his famous essay during the early stages of the so-called mass media age in 1927, he was worried that public monuments were losing relevance in the face of the

1 Robert Musil, "Denkmale," in *Nachlaß zu Lebzeiten*, ed. Robert Musil (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1957), pp. 59–63, here p. 59. For the English translation of Musil's quote, see Peter Carrier, *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory Cultures in France and Germany since 1989: The Origins and Political Function of the Vél'd'Hiv'in Paris and the Holocaust Monument in Berlin* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), p. 15.

rapidly growing and pervasive media landscape. He believed that as the public became more familiar with monuments, they became less noticeable and eventually faded into the background. Of course, writing from the perspective of a well-established European intellectual, Musil likely did not consider that the "unnoticed monuments" surrounding him could have deeply disturbing effects on others – especially those concealing painful histories and memories. It is a similar ignorance that resonates in the presence of many monuments in public space today. Contrary to Musil's prognosis, it is, however, via social media and the contemporary digital media landscape that many monuments' troubling presence is being highlighted and thematized.[2] One such example is the performative removal of a monument to Edward Colston during the worldwide Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, documented and shared via social media. Around the same time, monuments of other colonial figures were symbolically decapitated or covered in red paint.

It is these recent developments, expanding from the physical into the digital sphere, that have put the aesthetics of monumentality once again up for discussion. This paper aims to contribute to discussions on twenty-first-century monumentality through focusing on the distinct relationship between sculpture and monuments.[3] With a particular focus on the work of Iranian artists Morehshin Allahyari and Shirin Fahimi, it highlights a generation of artists that use digital technologies to reveal power structures inscribed into monumental forms but also use them as a means to restore and open up alternative sites of commemoration. It thereby reflects on the expansion of the sculptural in the (post-)digital age in relation to one of sculpture's main categories.

Based on an in-depth discussion of Morehshin Allahyari's series *She Who Sees the Unknown* and Shirin Fahimi's *Umm al Raml's Sand Narratives*, the text demonstrates how contemporary artists engage with the sculptural codes of monuments. Allahyari and Fahimi propose alternative ways to make and mark space for painful memories, without necessarily claiming that their works are monuments. Their works counteract a monumental and sculptural aesthetic, which is historically linked to solidity, weight, permanence, and stiffness, with a monumentality that is participatory, generative, mutable, and unfolds between actual and digital spaces. The use of digital technologies for the construction of alternative memory sites by the artists discussed in this contribution not only prompts renewed theoretical scrutiny of the very idea of monuments but also of the sites in which they operate.

2 See, for example, "Edward Colston Statue Pulled from Bristol Harbour," BBC News, last modified June 11, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-england-bristol-53004755 (accessed December 11, 2020).

3 This contribution benefitted from the thoughtful feedback of Megan Luke and Ursula Ströbele, whom I would like to thank warmly.

Wandering the Spheres of Monuments

Since the nineteenth century, the concept of the monument as debated in sculptural discourse has undergone a significant change.[4] From a receptacle for heroic, self-aggrandizing national gestures celebrating ideals and triumphs, the notion of the monument shifted throughout the twentieth century toward conceptual interventions marking national ambivalence and uncertainty.[5] Modernism sealed the fate of monuments, countering their intentional character that fixed one version of the past artificially with unintentional, unmonumental, and ephemeral forms.[6] For modern artists and critics, the heroic stiffness and unassuming pretentiousness doomed the monument forever as archaic and it was discarded as an artistic form. "The notion of a modern monument is virtually a contradiction in terms; if it is a monument it is not modern, and if it is modern, it cannot be a monument," Lewis Mumford wrote in 1938.[7] Rosalind Krauss famously designated monuments unable to refer to anything beyond their base, "functionally placeless and largely self-referential."[8] In the context of debates on German postwar monument culture, historians suggested that monuments rather than commemorating events can also bury them beyond ideological layers of national interests.[9] Others argued that rather than preserving public memory, the monument displaces it altogether, supplanting a community's memory work with its own material form.[10] And yet, in their contention with the notion of the monument, postmodernism also triggered a new interest in the subject. If historically monuments were fixed to a site, the modern monuments were characterized by "a kind of sitelessness, or homelessness, an absolute loss of place."[11] Krauss discussed these characteristics in relation to modernist sculpture and concluded that its status, meaning, and function is therefore "essentially nomadic."[12] In Germany, the intensive reflection on the Nazi era has led to unprecedented

4 See Horst W. Janson, *The Rise and Fall of the Public Monument*, Lectures in the Humanities, ed. Andrew W. Mellon (New Orleans: Graduate School, Tulane University, 1976); Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October*, no. 8 (Spring 1979): 31–44, here 33.

5 See James E. Young, "Twentieth-Century Countermonuments," in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 276–78, here. p. 276.

6 See for example Michael Diers and Andreas Beyer, eds., *Mo(nu)mente: Formen und Funktionen Ephemerer Denkmäler* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993).

7 Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1938), p. 438.

8 Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," 1979, 34.

9 See Martin Broszat and Saul Friedlander, "A Controversy about the Historicization of National Socialism," in *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historians' Debate*, ed. Peter Baldwin (Boston: Beacon, 1990), pp. 102–34.

10 Andreas Huyssen, "Monument and Memory in a Postmodern Age," *The Yale Journal of Criticism: Interpretation in the Humanities* 6, no. 2 (1993): 249–61, here 249; Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Psychology Press, 1995); See Hermann Lübbe, "Zeit-Verhältnisse," in *Zeitphänomen Musealisierung: Das Verschwinden der Gegenwart und die Konstruktion der Erinnerung*, ed. Wolfgang Zacharias (Essen: Klartext, 1990), pp. 40–50.

11 Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," 1979, 34.

12 Ibid.

levels of reflective preoccupation and public debate around the notion of the monument.[13] A generation of conceptual artists countered the problematic history of the monument with propositions for counter and anti-monuments, such as Hans Haacke's *Ihr Habt Doch Gesiegt* (1988), Sol LeWitt's *Black Form (Dedicated to the Missing Jews)* (1988), or Jochen Gerz's and Esther Shalev-Gerz's *Harburg Monument Against Fascism* (1989), Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Homeless Projection* (1981). Hermann Lübbe identified the peak of the building of monuments and memorials in the 1970s and 1980s.[14]

This development went hand in hand with a general expansion of the field of sculpture since the 1960s, one that questioned statuary, permanence, as well as the anthropomorphic, and brought forth unmonumental, time-based, or immaterial aspects of the medium.[15] The notion of sculpture broadened as the spheres of sculpture and everyday life merged.[16] As artists have developed critical approaches to traditional monumental and sculptural codes through ephemeral, living, impermanent or vivid modes, the monument has become a contested site, a site of cultural conflict, but also a place of possibility, to potentially restore the memories of those that have been left behind.

Since the late 1980s, postcolonial and feminist discourses across the globe have contributed to critical reflections on appropriate national forms of mourning of the genocides of Indigenous populations, the resuscitation of slavery, and the presence of female voices in the act of commemoration.[17] These contributions have marked the monument as a place

13 See, for example, Arkadi Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union*, trans. A. S. Brown (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2018); William John Niven and Chloe E. M. Paver, *Memorialization in Germany since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Carrier, *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory Cultures in France and Germany since 1989*, 2005; Brigitte Hausmann, *Duell mit der Verdrängung?: Denkmäler für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1980 bis 1990,* vol. 11: *Theorie der Gegenwartskunst* (Münster: Lit, 1997); Günter Morsch and Christine Brade, *Ich dachte, Sie wären tot: NS-Mahnmale und Erinnerungsprozesse in Ostwestfalen-Lippe* (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1997); Günter Morsch, ed., *Von der Erinnerung zum Monument: Die Entstehungsgeschichte der Nationalen Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen*, Schriftenreihe der Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten, vol. 8, (Berlin: Hentrich, 1996); Ekkehard Mai and Gisela Schmirber, eds., *Denkmal – Zeichen – Monument: Skulptur und Öffentlicher Raum Heute* (Munich: Prestel, 1989).

14 See Hermann Lübbe, "Zeit-Verhältnisse," 1990, pp. 40–50.

15 See, for example, Mary Ceruti, *Where Is Production?*: *Inquiries into Contemporary Sculpture*, ed. Ruba Katrib (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2017); Ceruti, *How Does It Feel?: Inquiries Into Contemporary Sculpture*, ed. Ruba Katrib (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2016); Ceruti, *What About Power?: Inquiries into Contemporary Sculpture*, ed. Ruba Katrib (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2015); Eva Grubinger and Jörg Heiser, eds., *Sculpture Unlimited 2—Materiality in Times of Immateriality* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015); Ursula Ströbele, ed., *24h Skulptur: Notes on Time Sculpture* (Berlin: Distanz, 2015); Richard Flood, Laura Hoptman, Massimiliano Gioni, and Trevor Smith, eds., *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century* (London: Phaidon Press, 2012); Grubinger and Heiser, eds., *Sculpture Unlimited* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011).

16 See Sabine B. Vogel, "Die Grenzenlosigkeit der Skulptur," *Kunstforum International* 229 (2014), pp. 30–85, here p. 30.

17 Andrew Denson, *Monuments to Absence: Cherokee Removal and the Contest over Southern Memory* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Shiera S. El-Malik and Isaac A. Kamola, eds., *Politics of African Anticolonial Archive* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017); Anthony Downey, ed.,

of cultural debate rather than of shared national values and ideals. Reviving the academic study of monuments within discourses on sculpture, it becomes clear that there is an increasing interest in the monumental and its various forms for both cultural analysis and recoding.[18] At a time when protestors all over the world take down monuments that celebrate colonial histories, questions around monumentality are once again surfacing with force.

Alongside the possibilities of immersive digital technology and the internet, the twenty-first-century monumental codes have further expanded toward the unmonumental, the immaterial, and the virtual. This development goes hand in hand with a general expansion of the very idea of the public realm into virtual and digital spaces. Surprisingly, there are very few publications that focus on and deeply examine the impact of digital technology on sculptural production and in particular the discourse relating to monuments.[19] This is astounding when we remind ourselves that the fundamental delimitation of monumentality has been the subject of theoretical debate since at least the beginning of the last century. With distinctions between the virtual and the real, the digital and the analog, and the material and the immaterial becoming ever more elusive, offline public space and online public spaces are considered equally relevant sites to enact monumental structures.[20] By rethinking the function of sculpture as a monument vis-à-vis its expansion and boundary crossings through 3D technologies, augmented reality, and the internet, this text aims to conceptualize an *intermedial* and *nomadic* monumentality. It sets out with a careful iconographic reading of Allahyari's work *She Who Sees the Unknown: Aisha Qandisha* and then places the artist's practice in conversation with the work by artist Shirin Fahimi and her *Umm al Raml's Sand Narratives*. How does twenty-first-century monumentality need to be rethought?

Dissonant Archives: Contemporary Visual Culture and Contested Narratives in the Middle East, Visual Culture in the Middle East Series, vol. 2 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015); Ana Lucia Araujo, *Politics of Memory: Making Slavery Visible in the Public Space,* Routledge Studies in Cultural History, vol. 17 (New York: Routledge, 2012); Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer, eds., *Contested Histories in Public Space: Memory, Race, and Nation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); K. S. Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, 3rd ed. (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008); Joanne M. Braxton and Maria Diedrich, eds., *Monuments of the Black Atlantic: Slavery and Memory,* FORECAAST, vol. 13 (Münster: Lit, 2004); W. J. T. Mitchell, *Art and the Public Sphere*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

18 See, in this context, one of the most recent publications, Nausikaä El-Mecky, "Illegal Monuments: Memorials between Crime and State Endorsement," in *Monument Culture: International Perspectives on the Future of Monuments in a Changing World*, ed. Laura A. Macaluso, American Association for State and Local History Book Series (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 177–89. In 2020, *e-flux architecture* and Het Nieuwe Instituut hosted a discursive series on monuments, see "Monument," Het Nieuwe Instituut, Research & Development, last modified September 17, 2020, https://research-development.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/en/research-projects/monument (accessed October 12, 2020).

19 Important contributions to this rethinking of sculpture in the digital age have been made by the DFG-funded research project at the University of Siegen, *Virtualisierung von Skulptur. Rekonstruktion, Präsentation, Installation* (2002–09) under the direction of Manfred Bogen, Jens Schröter, and Gundolf Winter, however not in relation to the monument. See Christian Spies, Jens Schröter, and Gundolf Winter, *Skulptur – Zwischen Realität und Virtualität* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2006).

20 For deeper reflections on the dissolution between digital and physical worlds in the context of the post-digital, see the introduction to this volume.

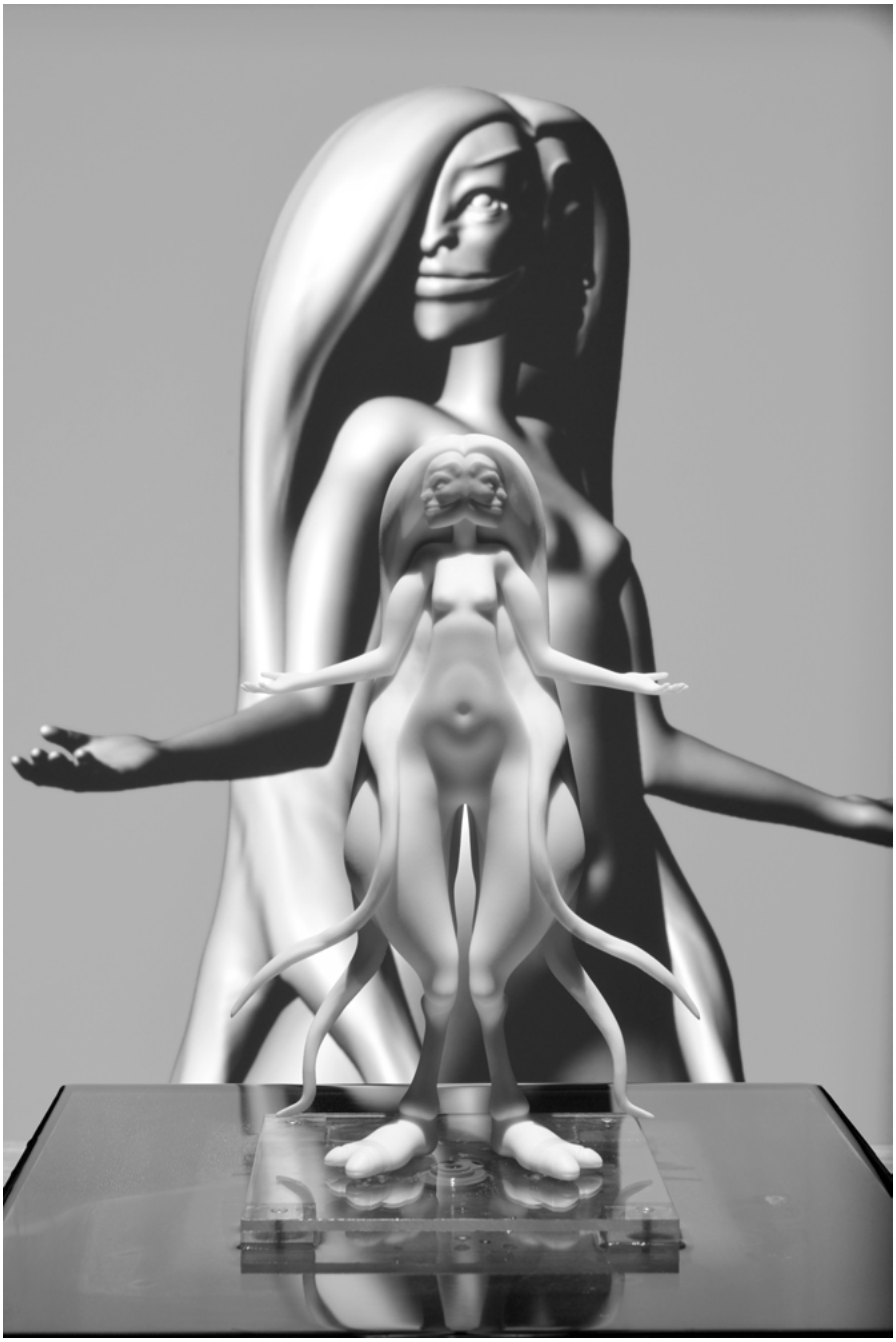
Sculpting Memories

The center of the sculptural installation *She Who Sees the Unknown*: *Aisha Qandisha* by Iranian and US-based artist Morehshin Allahyari at the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina, Canada, is a small white figure (fig. 1). The creature is two-headed, with each head facing opposite directions like a Janus head. Its thighs are split open. All the way to the abdomen, the figure appears to be composed of two parts. It has a front and a back with a distinct void in the middle. Its inviting and confident pose seems welcoming and intimidating at the same time.

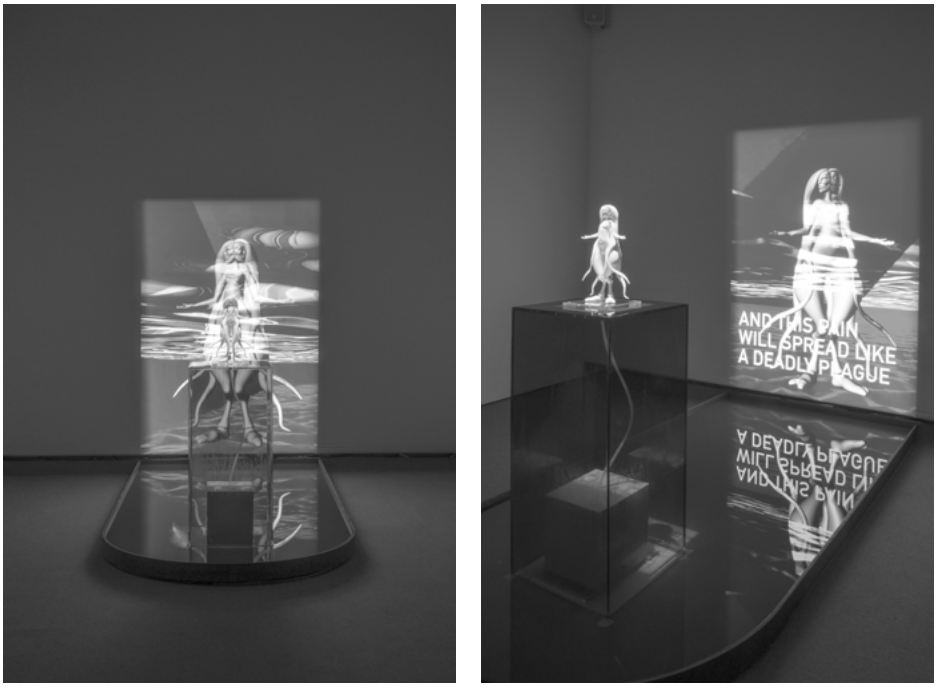
The chimera, half human and half animal, is made from white resin and sits on a red translucent plastic plinth that is placed inside a water basin. The highly reflective surface of the water functions like a mirror that factors into the video projection on the wall behind the display. In Allahyari's video essay, the monstrous figure appears against a red background. It stands thigh-high in water. While the actual figure on the plinth is around 35.5 centimeters high, 23.8 centimeters wide, and 8.6 centimeters deep, and therefore relatively small, the video projection shows the mythological figure of Aisha Qandisha (or Aicha Kandicha) in human-size. When positioned in front of the installation at the MacKenzie Art Gallery, the actual 3D-printed figure and its projection are overlaid and the object and image merge into each another. The figure's physical features are augmented by its digital counterpart which magnifies its sculptural presence and relates it to the visitors' body. Upon entering Allahyari's installations, the physicality of her 3D-printed object and its virtual equivalent in the video essay begin to converge. As a connector and transgressor between the realm of the physical and the digital, the 3D-sculpted object is positioned at their boundary (fig. 2). Water, sculpture, and screen engage spectators and implicate them into an intimidating and commemorative spatial experience. Allahyari's *Aisha/Quandisha* is part of the series *She Who Sees the Unknown*, which revives the memory of the partly forgotten but once powerful jinns and goddesses of Middle Eastern origin by representing them in sculptural forms. In pre-Islamic mythology and Islamic theology, jinns play a central role. They are fearsome and honored creatures that reveal themselves to humans either to solve or create catastrophic situations.[21] At the heart of her series, Allahyari places the reconstruction of these monstrous, often female or gender neutral figures and their stories using 3D-sculpting and -printing.

Combined across the works in her series—including *Ya'jooj Ma'jooj*, *Huma*, *Kabous: The Right Witness,* and *The Left Witness* as well as *The Laughing Snake*—Allahyari reveals herself to be engaged in complex cross-media dialogues, incorporating 3D-printed sculptures,

21 For comprehensive research on the importance of jinns, see G. Hussein Rassool, *Evil Eye, Jinn Possession, and Mental Health Issues: An Islamic Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2018); Robert W. Lebling, *Legends of the Fire Spirits: Jinn and Genies from Arabia to Zanzibar* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010); Amira El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn*, Contemporary Issues in the Middle East (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009); Waḥīd ʿAbd al-Salām Bālī, *Man's Protection against Jinn and Satan*, trans. Haytham Kreidly (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2006).



1 Morehshin Allahyari, *She Who Sees the Unknown: Aisha Qandisha*, 2019, installation with 3D-printed resin sculpture, reflecting pool, and HD video.



2 Morehshin Allahyari, *She Who Sees the Unknown: Aisha Qandisha*, 2019, installation with 3D-printed resin sculpture, reflecting pool, and HD video.

videos, VR experiences, the internet, and, at times, performance.[22] The connective tissue in the series, however, is the materialization of her composite figures in sculptural form. Their space-encompassing presentations are not only intended to preserve, protect, celebrate, and archive their historical influence, they also allow the artist to recode, or in her words "refigure," their historical trajectory for critical and creative reflections on the contemporary experiences of Southwest Asian and North African (SWANA) women.[23]

Allahyari's work *She Who Sees the Unknown*: *Aisha Qandisha* revolves around a she-demon, also called *jinnia*, who is deeply rooted in North Moroccan popular beliefs and which Allahyari has revived using 3D technology and storytelling. Still relevant today, the belief in Aisha Qandisha, and Allahyari's interpretation of it, embodies the fear of female influence and power. Allahyari describes the symptoms of a spell by Aisha Qandisha in a passage

22 For a comprehensive documentation of the project, including images of the works, see Morehshin Allahyari, "She Who Sees the Unknown by Morehshin Allahyari," http://shewhoseestheunknown.com/ (accessed February 8, 2020).

23 SWANA is a decolonial acronym for the South West Asian/North African region. It is used instead of terms such as Middle Eastern, Near Eastern, Arab World or Islamic World that have colonial, Eurocentric, and Orientalist origins, see SWANA Alliance, "About," website, https://swanaalliance.com/about (accessed October 24, 2022).

of her video essay. A possessed man is said to suffer from blindness, paralysis, muteness, impotence or a disinterest in other women.[24] This fear can be traced back to the ancient goddess of love, Astarte or Astart who reached Morocco via the ancient city Carthage.[25] Fallen to the ranks of a Moorish *jinnia*, Aisha Qandisha is considered to be an updated version of the powerful goddess, who is thought to have her origin and counterpart in the early Semitic matriarchies.[26] With the change from a matriarchal to a patriarchal social structure, women were robbed of their powerful status. Once influential goddesses were turned into jinns thought to pose real danger to their male counterparts.[27] Allahyari's work not only reinscribes Aisha Qandisha back into contemporary memory culture, but also into a whole lineage of women reaching from the Semitic matriarch, to the goddess Astarte, to contemporary SWANA woman represented by the artist herself.

Her installations thereby not only evolve around memory assemblages surrounding her jinns, but more precisely an artistic embodiment of these memories and their aesthetic formation. In his pioneering book *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* (1925), Maurice Halbwachs conceptualized the social dimension of individual memory, reminding us that an individual's memories are always situated within their sociocultural context.[28] Pierre Nora call this a "lieux de mémoire," a memory site "where memory is crystallized, in which it finds refuge."[29] Astrid Erll has further specified that the emergence and life of memory sites depend "on repeated media representations, on a host of remediated versions of the past which converge and coalesce"—a dynamic that strongly underpins Allahyari's work with memory.[30] The German couple Aleida and Jan Assmann coined the term "cultural memory" to speak about a form of memory that is tied to material objectivizations, such as images, texts or works of art. Cultural memory refers to objectified and institutionalized memories that can be stored, transferred, and reincorporated throughout generations.[31] "The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images and rituals specific to each society, in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilise and convey that society's self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the

24 Jordi Aguadé, "Â'isha Qandîsha," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, eds. Hamilton A. R. Gibb (Leiden: Brill, 1954), p. 85.

25 See Manfred Lurker, *The Routledge Dictionary of Gods, Goddesses, Devils and Demons*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 157; Edward Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1926), p. 395.

26 Ibid., p. 396.

27 See James Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908), p. 115.

28 See Maurice Halbwachs, *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1925), p. ix.

29 Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past.* vol. 1: *Conflicts and Divisions*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 1.

30 Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, "Introduction: Cultural Memory and its Dynamics," in *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory,* ed. Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), pp. 1–14, here p. 4.

31 Jan Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, and Sara Young (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), pp. 109–18, here pp. 110–11.

past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularly," Jan Assmann writes.[32] They thereby distinguished and refined Halbwachs's notion of "collective memory" by subdividing it into "cultural" and "communicative memory," in order to examine the distinct forms of transmission of memory.[33] While "cultural memory" is linked to objectified memory, "communicative" memory designates acts of transmission of memory in everyday oral practices.

Throughout the series *She Who Sees the Unknown*, the sculptural matrix maintains an important reference point to transmit both cultural as well as communicative memory. This "objectification" of memory is key in illuminating the multi-layered trajectories and memory assemblages surrounding Allahyari's protagonists. This also becomes evident with the presentation of her hypertext narrative *The Laughing Snake,* an online narrative that weaves together Allahyari's personal experiences of molestation, coercion, and cultural castigation growing up in post-revolutionary Iran with the myth of *The Laughing Snake. The Laughing Snak*e is a tale that appears both in the illustrated manuscripts from the *Book of Felicity* and the *Kitab al-Bulhan* (often translated as the *Book of Wonders* or the *Book of Surprises*). The *Book of Felicity* was commissioned by the Ottoman Sultan Murad III in 1582.[34] Its story involves a female jinn with a face of a human and the body of a snake who conducts a murderous rampage. She conquered cities, murdering human and animals alike. Numerous attempts to kill the jinn were unsuccessful. The way she was finally defeated was by holding a mirror in front of her; confronted by her own reflection she laughed until she died. Although the exact literary source of the tale remains unknown, its association with a number of legends is evident. These include Narcissus, Medusa, and the Gorgons, as well as the Iranian motif of the horse-phoenix that killed people by making them laugh.[35] One may also think of the basilisk in Roman mythology, a reptile with a terrifying stare, which translates in Persian as "laughing snake," or the epic Iranian figure of Zahhak, "the man who laughs," who grew two hungry snakes on his shoulders.[36]

The sculptural quality of Allahyari's work is not only discernable in the presentation of *Aisha/Qandisha*, where the figure is presented on a plinth and it is monumentally extended via the screen and amplified even further through its reflection in the surrounding water (fig. 2). It is also present in the exhibition setting of the *Laughing Snake*. In a room completely decked out with mirrors, a 3D-printed and painted figure (41.9 by 63.5 by 10.1 centimeters) of the *Laughing Snake* is dangled from the ceiling and completes the

32 Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 125–33, here 132.

33 Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 2008, p. 110.

34 See Miguel Ángel de Bunes Ibarra and Evrim Turkcelik, *The Book of Felicity | Matali' al-Saadet | Islamic Art, Astronomy and Astrology* (Barcelona: M. Moleiro Editor S.A., 2008); Stefano Carboni, "The 'Book of Surprises' (Kitab al-Bulhan) of the Bodleian Library," in *The La Trobe Journal* (Love and Devotion: Persian Cultural Crossroads, State Library of Victoria Foundation, 2013), p. 22, https://research-repository.uwa.edu.au/en/publications/the-book-of-surprises-kitab-al-bulhan-of-the-bodleian-library (accessed September 23, 2020).

35 See Carboni, "The 'Book of Surprises'," 2013, p. 29.

36 See Ibid.

3 Morehshin Allahyari, *She Who Sees the Unknown: The Laughing Snake*, 2019, installation with 3D-printed plastic sculpture, mirrored room, and interactive hypertextual narrative, at *Refiguring the Future*, Hunter College, New York.

futurist, shrine-like installation (fig. 3). Once again, the presentation alludes to a sanctified, devotional space. The spatial experience magnifies the viewers body and extends it along with the sculptural object beyond its actual boundaries.

Allahyari constructs structures that address and implicate the viewers' bodies in an experiential and sculptural setting. At the same time, her works are places that house gendered and diasporic memories and histories that the artist enacts through digital technologies. It is this intentional fixation of memories in *sculptural* modes, their embodiment in a designated form and site, that not only suggests a discussion of Allahyari's work in the context of digital, diasporic, and generative archives. It also positions her work in proximity to monumental codes, in the sense of memorial structures that aim to transmit a message for the future through visual modes. Rethinking the function of monuments under digital terms, what forms of monumentality does such work educe?

Recoding Monuments

بنای یادبود

Distinct from an archive, a monument indicates something that is emphasized in a double sense in regard to the cause for its representation as well as its form.[37] A monument highlights something worthy of glorification or remembrance. [38] Compared to an archive, a monument is thus not only an embodiment of a memory in a textual or physical format, but also a particularly motivated form of art object often in sculptural form. From its earliest usages until today, the word "monument" refers to a human artifact erected to preserve the memory of a notable person, action or an event.[39] Monuments memorialize and are therefore also called memorials. While archives record the past and its memories in wider, more diffuse forms, monuments are *intentional* memory structures often in a sculptural form that record the past but are equally enacted to convey a message to the future. Following Foucault, the archive is always already a representation of a taxonomy, classification, and annotation of knowledge.[40] Monuments in comparison, transcend the mere act of archiving and move toward structures that commemorate and monumentalize.[41]

The English (and German) word, "monument," derives from the Latin word *monumentum*, something that reminds.[42] The German word *Denkmal* is an exception to the pattern. It has its roots in "to think" but is often used synonymously with monument. "Memorial" derives directly from the Latin word *memoria*, "memory," and notably monuments convey memory. The word "monument" also links to the Latin word *manere*, something that remains.[43] From the same origin derives *monere*, to remind, and *monimenta*, memorials or burial places who remind those who are passing by that they themselves existed and are mortal.[44] Following these origins, other things that are written or produced for the sake of memory are called *monimenta*, "reminders."[45] According to *The Chambers Dictionary*, the word "monument" can either refer to "a statute, trophy, building or sim, erected to commemorate a

37 See Albrecht Graf von Egloffstein, "Das Denkmal – Versuch einer Begriffsbestimmung," in Mai and Schmirber, eds., *Denkmal – Zeichen – Monument, 1989,* pp. 38–41, here p. 38.

38 Ibid.

39 See Marita Sturken, "Monuments," in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Kelly (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 272–76, here p. 274.

40 See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 22.

41 For a nuanced discussion of Allahyari's work in the context of archives and monuments, see the chapter "Monumentality: Sculpting Memories between Monuments and Archives," in Mara-Johanna Kölmel, *Sculpture in the Augmented Sphere: Reflections at the Intersection of Corporeality, Plasticity and Monumentality*, PhD diss. (Lüneburg: Leuphana University, 2022).

42 See Robert K. Barnhart, ed., *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1999), p. 675.

43 See Andrew Hui, "Texts, Monuments and the Desire for Immortality," in *Moment to Monument: The Making & Unmaking of Cultural Significance*, eds. Ladina Bezzola Lambert and Andrea Ochsner (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008), pp. 19–33, here p.20.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

person or event," a "tomb," "anything which serves as a commemoration, a memorial," but also a "written memorial, document, record" or "a literary work, book, writings, literature."[46] A monument is thus an embodiment of a memory in a textual, physical, or sculptural form. Using visual codes, monuments aim to convey and transmit a message. The German art historian Alois Riegel defined the monument as an object that itself preserves an element of the past. He distinguishes between two types of monuments – intentional ones, whose lasting significance is determined by its makers, and unintentional ones who achieve their monumental status through later events.[47]

یادبود (Yādbūd) is the Persian word for "monument, memorial or landmark." In a literal sense, it can be translated as an "aid to memory," something used as a reminder of something or someone. The word is tied to the Persian word بنای یادبود (Banāye Yādbūd), which means "memorial or monument" and commonly refers to a construct, a figure, or a building. Other words that are used for memorials are لوح یادبود (Loḥe Yādbūd), which is more commonly used for a "memorial plaque, board," or even a valuable sheet of paper, as well as یادگار (Yādegār), which is translated as "relic, souvenir, memorial, memory, evocation, or token."[48] While memorials mainly focus on paying tribute to the dead by emphasizing loss or sacrifice, monuments in both the West and the SWANA region can honor and be a reminder of the past in wider forms.[49] They not only reconstruct the past to communicate it to future generations, they also actively take part in these realities and are able to shape them. In interviews and public presentations, Allahyari has suggested that *She Who Sees the Unknown* not only aims to challenge "the limitations and possibilities of remembering and forgetting," but is also intended "to remind women, *femmes*, the people of the Middle East that our figures and our stories, fictional and actual, matter—not just for the present but for claiming of an alternative future that is not exclusively white or Western."[50]

Allahyari's works can thus be described as being in the proximity of monuments in the sense of *memorial structures* that aim to transmit a message for the future. Allahyari's work goes toward the development of future-oriented structures, which are intended to commemorate, bring people together, or, in other words, to memorialize, to remind, to instruct the public, as in the derivation of the word "monument."

46 Editors of Chambers, *The Chambers Dictionary,* 12th ed. (Edinburgh: Chambers, 2011), p. 995.

47 See Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origins," trans. Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo, *Oppositions: A Journal for Ideas and Criticism in Architecture* 25 (Fall 1982): 21–56.

48 My sincere thanks to Dr. Zahra Samareh, translation researcher, authorized translator, and sworn interpreter for Persian, for providing generous support with the spelling, translation, and transliteration of the Farsi words.

49 See Sturken, "Monuments," 1998, p. 274.

50 "Morehshin Allahyari: She Who Sees the Unknown: The Laughing Snake," *Art-Agenda*, Announcements, https://www.art-agenda.com/announcements/216308/morehshin-allahyarishe-who-sees-the-unknown-the-laughing-snake (accessed February 6, 2020).

Another example of such an approach is the work of Iranian and Toronto-based artist Shirin Fahimi.[51] Fahimi shares with her colleague and collaborator Allahyari an interest in SWANA mythology, in magic, esoteric, and spiritual practices and their revival through the lens of technology. At the heart of her projects is the act of reworking and reclaiming forgotten memories and beliefs of the SWANA region and making them fruitful for our present and future. *Umm al-Raml*, the mother of sand, is a fictional persona that Fahimi has been developing throughout different iterations and in performative collaborations, also with Allahyari. Known as the opener of time and space, Fahimi's *Umm al-Raml* masters *ilm al raml*, or science of sand, known as geomancy in English, a centuries-old method of divination practiced in Iran until today.[52]

Raml means sand and points to the conceptual core of *ilm al raml* that entails predicting the future from tracing figures in sand or the earth. Since the Golden Age of Islam (ca. 8th–14th century), sand was used as a medium for predicting such things as the weather, victories, or personal events. Ibn Khaldun, a well-known Muslim scholar, implies that geomancy was developed to avoid difficult calculations, such as that of the planetary positions required by astrology.[53] Put differently, *ilm al raml* uses algorithmic procedures, some of the oldest material practices, to try and understand the beyond. Shirin sees this cultural technique as an important precursor of the algorithmic procedures underpinning today's digital space, and as an attempt to counter the lack of reference to female spiritualism and prophecy in the literature on *ilm al raml*. But it is also important to note the ancient mathematical structures that are based on binary codes, one and zero configurations, that underpin ritualistic practices of divination. Such practices have been dismissed as irrational or superstitious in the contemporary era, but in fact may help us to understand the algorithm as an "emergent form" throughout history rather than a "technological a priori."[54] Fahimi however, reimagines the history of *ilm al raml* from the perspective of a female *rammal* (geomancer). Her work broaches the gender bias embedded in the contemporary practice of "occult" sciences or divination techniques in which women practicing these methods are perceived as naive, uneducated or prone to superstition. She thereby questions how the exclusion of women from spiritual leadership in Islam influences their exclusion from political power in society. Her *Umm al-Raml* thus represents a female prophet, one of the many

51 See, in this context, Shirin Fahimi's website shirinfahimi.com/home.

52 See "Pattern Recognition: From Tracing Figures in Sand to Devising Other Futures: A Conversation between Shirin Fahimi and Mara-Johanna Kölmel," Akademie-Solitude.de*,* blog, February 24, 2021, https://www.akademie-solitude.de/de/web-residencies/pattern-recognition-from-tracing-figures-in-sand-to-devising-other-futures/ (accessed January 29, 2023).

53 See Marion B. Smith, "The Nature of Islamic Geomancy with a Critique of a Structuralist's Approach," *Studia Islamica* 49 (1979): 5–38, here 31.

54 Matteo Pasquinelli, "Three Thousand Years of Algorithmic Rituals: The Emergence of AI from the Computation of Space," *e-flux,* no. 101 (June 2019), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/101/273221/three-thousand-years-of-algorithmic-rituals-the-emergence-of-ai-from-the-computation-of-space/ (accessed January 29, 2023).

4 Shirin Fahimi, *Umm al Raml Sand Narratives: First Story*, 2021, screenshots, augmented reality. Open this link on a mobile device to see the effect preview: https://www.instagram.com/umm.al.raml/?hl=de.

female forces that have been erased throughout history. Using digital means, Fahimi aims to bring this empowering female presence back into the public sphere.

For a web residency at the Akademie Schloss Solitude in 2021, Fahimi created a 3D model of her *Umm al-Raml* avatar in form of an Instagram filter (fig. 4). Using this augmented reality filter that you can access through Fahimi's Instagram account, the avatar alongside her tools for divination appear virtually in the user's chosen public and private spaces. Pairing the chosen space and the filter, one thereby experiences the mother of sand inhabiting a hybrid space between the actual and virtual spheres. By making the viewer complicit in enacting *Umm al Raml's* presence with a phone device, Fahimi inscribes her figure into public life. At the moment of using the filter, the space onto which Fahimi's avatar is projected becomes a commemorative site, a structure that reminds and monumentalizes *Umm al Raml* alongside the centuries-old divination technique *ilm al raml*. Her work thus offers a temporary monument to this fictional figure that emerges from the overlap of a virtual avatar and a physical place.

In a further iteration of her project, *Umm al Raml's Sand Narratives*, Fahimi uses virtual reality to tell the individual stories of four Iranian women that practice mysticism in Toronto. Fahimi highlights their approach to female prophecy and interweaves their stories with her own approach to *ilm al raml*. Her VR experience transports the viewer into a sandy, desert-like landscape that hosts sixteen houses (fig. 5). Corresponding in their spatial structure to a geomantic divination, these houses open different doors toward the past, future, and present. The houses speak to the female encounter with mysticism and divination

5 Shirin Fahimi, *Avaz-e-Eshgh in the House of Fire & Rose in the House of Water*, from *Umm al Raml's Sand Narratives*, 2022, digital rendering of 3D models.

techniques and allow the users to create paths to different epochs. By moving between the houses via steps or by using the VR teleport function, time takes on a spatial quality. Within each house there are series of 3D objects and videos alongside sculptural busts of each woman. Their faces, however, are covered by a face mask to protect their identity and create a mystical presence. These installations talk about the women's spiritual journey in the context of their diasporic experiences, their interpretation of "foreseeing" the future, and their reflection on the power of female prophecy.

Fahimi's work not only evolves from the women's individual memories, but from their artistic embodiment and their aesthetic formation in a dedicated site and form. Fahimi reformats their memories using VR technology to create a memorial structure, and a particularly contemporary one at that. The immersive, participatory potential of her work and the VR technology she uses are key in illuminating the multilayered narratives and memory assemblages that lie behind the protagonists of her installations.

Within this VR experience, the objects, videos, and busts take on sculptural qualities. As 3D objects, they appear larger than life and evoke a monumental feel. One can move around or through them and see them from multiple perspectives, like objects in actual space. Of course, they are not haptic objects in space but visual ones that address the viewer's body primarily through their gaze. While the movements of the users in Fahimi's VR landscape do not translate to movements of their bodies in actual space, the work however

does evoke a whole-body experience. Through the soundscape, the tactility of the controller, and the life-size object and figures in her VR world, the viewer becomes immersed through what Ursula Ströbele calls in this volume "a dynamic coupling of body and virtual space/image and the indiscernibility of perception and affection."[55] Mediating between collective and individual, as well as present and past memory, the VR experience animates and sculpts Fahimi's narrative.

The VR work itself thereby begins to function like an accessible and immersive monumental structure to remind, commemorate, and preserve the spiritual and mystical voyages of Iranian women in diaspora for future generations. Inscribed into Fahimi's approach to 3D-spatial-capture technology and augmented reality, is thus a proposal of recoding both digital and physical space as a site for commemorating alternative histories and erased memories.

Intermedial Monumentality

Rather than reverting to a monumental vocabulary linked to solidity, grandeur, or material vehemence, Allahyari and Fahimi recode monumental structures using digital technology to speak about acts of cultural forgetting that reveal themselves to have complex gendered characteristics. Their work thereby transgresses the boundaries of how memories have typically been solidified in aesthetic and monumental forms. To this end, Allahyari and Fahimi fuse participatory, interactive, and time-based qualities with a three-dimensional experience of their work in the form of space-encompassing or immersive presentations. In *She Who Sees the Unknown*, Allahyari constructs memory sites that unfold across the medium of sculpture, digital files, projections, as well as storytelling. Through the figure's elevation on a plinth, its expansion through its reflection in the water, its augmentation through the digital projection on the wall and its soundscape, Allahyari incorporates the spectator in a memory site and at the same time a sculptural setting that imitates a sacred space for commemoration and remembrance (figs. 1–2). This sculptural quality of her work is also magnified in the exhibition setting of *The Laughing Snake* and by the many reflections of the object in the space. Allahyari's orchestration is thereby also evocative of spaces that are sacred and monuments to jinns. In Aisha Qandisha's case, these are usually pits, grottos, springs, and fountains as well as places where someone has seen her.[56] In the exhibition setting of Fahimi's *Umm al Raml's Sand Narratives* one enters the gallery through a hall covered in sand that echoes the terrain of her VR experience. At the heart of the exhibition, one finds a sculptural structure illuminated by green LED lights that bear the same contours of the houses in her VR experience (fig. 6). It houses the reality headset and controller to enter the

55 Ursula Ströbele, "Notes on Truth to Materials, the Aesthetic Limit, Site-Specificity and 3D-Printing" in this volume.

56 Vincent Crapanzano, *The Hamadsha: A Study in Moroccan Ethnopsychiatry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 145.

6 Shirin Fahimi, *Umm al Raml's Sand Narratives*, 2022, exhibition view at articule, Montreal. Photo: Guy L'Heureux.

VR world and is surrounded by human-sized digital screens broadcasting interviews with Fahimi's masked protagonists.

More precisely, it is then Allahyari's and Fahimi's intermediality, their mixing of analog and digital techniques of storytelling, moving image, and sculptural vocabularies that allow them to expand codes of monuments.[57] In their works, the monumental is no longer merely bound to the typical aesthetic form of monument but rather functions as an expanded site for commemoration. Allahyari and Fahimi foster an intermedial monumentality that, through its heterogeneous media, questions a monument's ability to bury memory under a monolithic material form. Following Klaus Bruhn Jensen's reflection on twentieth-century avant-gardes and their embrace of heterogeneous media, the term intermedia can once again be employed to speak of a transgression and innovation of a sculptural form, namely the monument, which is now articulated in the interstices between different media forms.[58]

57 The term "intermedia" was coined in the context of 1960s discourses on the structural interactions and overlaps of different art forms. See, in this context, Dick Higgins, "Intermedia," *Something Else Newsletter* (1965), reprinted in *Horizons: The Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983). The term "intermedium" is adapted from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Lecture No. 3, On Edmund Spencer," reprinted in *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor, lecture III (London: Constable & Co, 1936), pp. 21 and 31ff.

58 See Klaus Bruhn Jensen, "Intermediality," in *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy,* eds. Eric W. Rothenbuhler, Klaus Jensen, Jefferson Pooley, Robert T. Craig (Hoboken: Wiley Online Library, 2016), pp. 1–12, here p. 1.

Such intermedial monumentality uses numerous media to diversify its message and thus reinscribe and transmit memories. Crafted from myth, historical data, and very personal experience, Allahyari and Fahimi's works' intermedial monumentality uses hybrid modes including sculptural objects, video projections, hyper-narratives, and sound to reframe relationships between past, present, and future and inscribes the marginalized into the developing script. On one hand, their work thereby becomes evidence to the monument's durability and its continued social function. On the other hand, it is witness to the dramatic change in aesthetic codes of monuments or counter-monuments, and their expansion into the digital sphere.

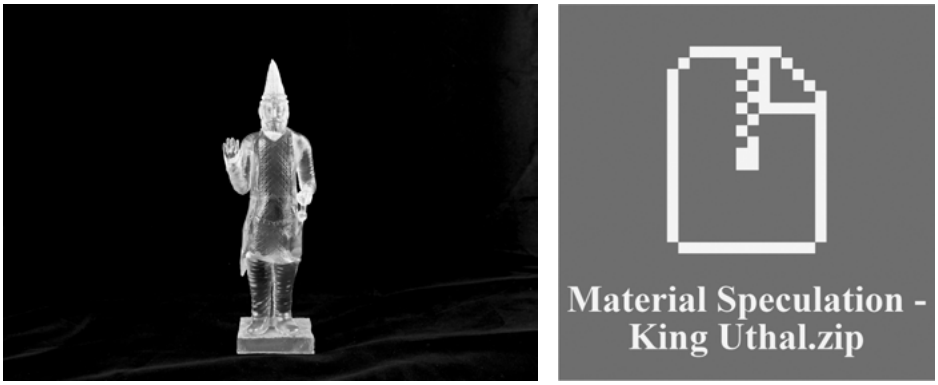
Nomadic Monumentality

Fahimi and Allahyari's works thereby become amalgamating of different individual and collective memories, experiences, influences, and sources from here, there, and elsewhere. Their works could thus be described in a way Avtar Brah describes diasporic experiences, namely as "contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure."[59] Similar to Allahyari, Fahimi enacts in her work alternative structures of remembrance, a proposal of what one could call an augmented, intermedial, and yet nomadic monumentality that may also speak to the artist's own diasporic position.

This form of monumentality can also be demonstrated with Allahyari's *King Uthal* for her *Material Speculations: ISIS* series.[60] It is here that the artist uses her typical triad of research, archiving, 3D-modeling, and -printing, to digitally recreate twelve selected monuments from the Roman city of Hatra and Assyrian artifacts from Nineveh, which were purposefully destroyed by Isis in 2015. The files of one of the reconstructed monuments, to King Uthal of Hatra, is made available online on rhizome.org for download and printing (fig. 7). In this way, Allahyari subtly subverts and criticizes the institutional implications (from erecting to distribution) of monuments, yet equally critiques the iconoclastic acts of destruction against monuments that have been a part of their history since their beginnings. Her use of digital technology not only allows her to critically comment on ordinary public monuments, but to actively reshape their aesthetic and functions. As a downloadable .STL and .OBJ file, the former and now-destroyed monument of King Uthal has exchanged its solidity with a nomadic mutability that is further contextualized by research documents and data related to the original statues, all available in the downloadable folder. The work thereby assumes a nomadic monumentality that reaffirms and multiplies its presence as memory sites every time the folder is downloaded to someone's hard drive. The memory sites that her nomadic monuments mark can then be described as having several locations

59 Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 193.

60 For an in-depth reading of Allahyari's work *Material Speculations: ISIS*, see also the contributions by Verena Kuni and Ursula Ströbele in this volume.



7 Morehshin Allahyari, *Material Speculations: ISIS, King Uthal*, 2015–16.

and materialities at the same time. They have a digital materiality existing in form of a file on Rhizome's servers or after a download on an individual's computer, but they can also assume an actual materiality and location in form of a 3D-printed object in actual space. Allahyari's project does not claim to be comprehensive copies of destroyed artifacts and monuments. The objects themselves do not conceal their role as plastic containers. Her works act as monuments in response to an absence of monumentality. They are stand-ins, reminders of destroyed memory sites that at the same time reveal and display the information and causes of their absence. The cultural information and critique that these works convey becomes more important than the object itself.

Allahyari's and Fahimi's works invite a collective form of remembrance in the public arena of the internet, virtual reality, as well as physical sites that can take root in a community and strongly resembles the functions and structures of monuments. They thereby activate the digital realm as a monumental space. This gesture may also link to a Persian understanding of monumentality that is not based around singular objects but expanded toward whole cities and entire spaces, such as Persepolis or Hatra. The "monumentalization of the public sphere is therefore among the most striking phenomena of the Middle East," according to Jean-Baptiste Yon.[61] One might then even argue, as I have done elsewhere, that Allahyari and Fahimi apply the expanded notion of Persian monumentality within the digital realm.[62]

61 Jean-Baptiste Yon, "Hatra and Palmyra: The Monumentalization of Public Space," in *Hatra: Politics, Culture and Religion between Parthia and Rome, Oriens et Occidens*, 21., ed. Lucinda Dirven (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2013), pp. 161–70, here p. 161.

62 See Kölmel, *Sculpture in the Augmented Sphere*, 2022.

8 John Craig Freeman, *Border Memorial: Frontera de los Muertos*, 2012, augmented reality public art, Lukeville border crossing, Arizona.

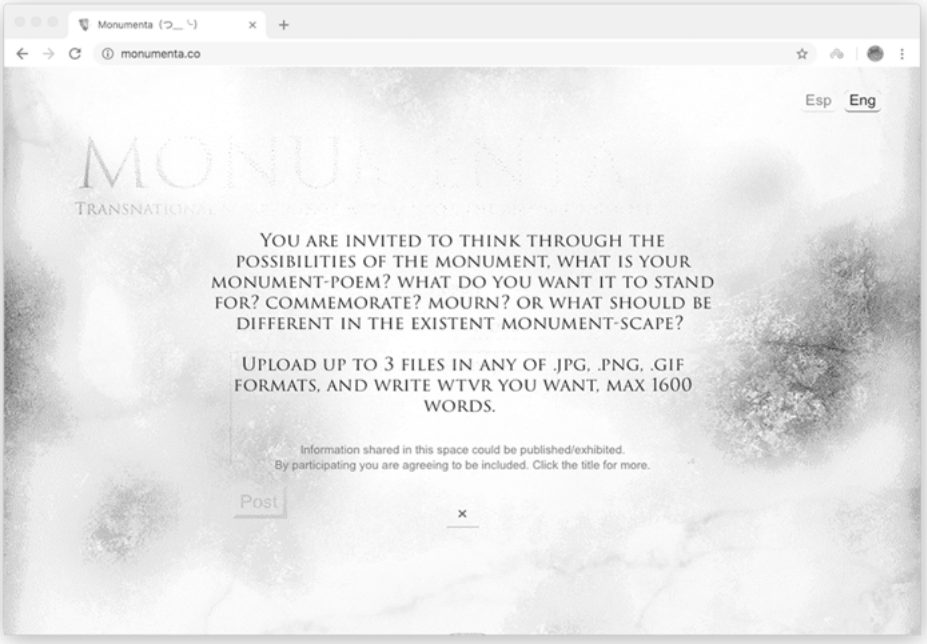
Conclusion

> Every period has the impulse to create symbols in the form of monuments which according to the Latin meaning are "things that remind," things to be transmitted to later generations. This demand for monumentality cannot, in the long run, be suppressed. It will find an outlet at all cost.[63]

Morehshin Allahyari and Shirin Fahimi update and advance reflections on monumentality under digital terms. As this contribution has argued, it is both through an intermedial and nomadic approach to monumentality that these artists have questioned a monument's capacity to extinguish memory and bury it under homogenous material forms. Their cross-media approach uses hybrid modes from physical sculpture to video, virtual and augmented reality experiences, the internet and at times performance, to redefine and refigure relationships between the past, present, and future. Their work can also be seen as part of a wider development of the increasing infiltration of monumental structures in the digital and augmented sphere. John Craig Freeman, for example, has developed a number of VR monuments and memorials, such as *The Border Memorial: Frontera de los Muertos* (fig. 8), which uses AR to commemorate Mexicans who have died along the US/Mexico border.[64] In their crowd-sourced project *Monumenta* (2018–present, fig. 9), Puerto Rican artist Gabriella Torres-Ferrer invites the public to use an interface that allows the user to both archive existing monuments and also to submit proposals for future commemorative sites. The project rethinks who and what monuments are for through contributions such as Nolad Chaliha's submission *Destroy All the Confederate Statues Left in the US*. The artist exposes the forces

63 Sigfried Giedion, *Architecture, You and Me: The Diary of a Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 28.

64 See John Craig Freeman, "Border Memorial: Frontera de Los Muertos," JohnCraigFreeman.com, blog, last modified December 30, 2013, https://johncraigfreeman.wordpress.com/border-memorial-frontera-de-los-muertos/ (accessed January 29, 2022).



9 Gabriella Torres-Ferrer, *Monumenta*, 2018–present, participative unique website, http://monumenta.co.

constructing collective memory and history in public space by proposing an app that allows users to disassemble confederate monuments in the US by simply using one's hand.

Similar to Allahyari's or Fahimi's works, the proposed monuments on Gabriella Torres-Ferrer's webpage or the augmented memory sites of Freeman (which require further elaboration elsewhere), counteract problematic monuments by imagining themselves as transmedial, nomadic, distributed, and migratory. More precisely, these works acquire site, weight, and presence in a participative act, or in a distributed manner. They consciously resist and reject fixity, permanence, and site-specificity as seen in more traditional monuments. These works activate monumental functions to expand the sculptural form and offer novel impulses to commemorate complex historical trajectories and gendered experiences. The spectators thereby become complicit in enacting the works and their bodies are immersed in a multisensory experience that unfolds across VR, AR, 3D-printed objects, video, and sound. Using digital technologies, these artists thus remodel, remediate, and expand the notion of a sculpture and its deep links to the monument, namely as an intermedial, a nomadic, and a migratory form of commemoration. No longer a precious object empowered by sacred efficacy, solidity, grandeur, and material vehemence or weight, the monumental rather functions as an expendable, nomadic memory site that can be enacted at any time online. Given that the number of people online on social media and blogs, such

as Tumblr or Instagram, can on some days eclipse the population of a small country, the reality is that large parts of the public participate in these sites frequently. Catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic, they often spend much more time in online public spaces than they would in any form of actual public space.[65] These interventions, then, also speak of an active reclaiming of public space—one that goes hand in hand with a general expansion of the very idea of the public realm and toward the virtual and digital spheres. By symbolically critiquing and engaging in the very malleability of cultural monuments, they address the evocative power of monumental structures, and at the same time adhere to the socially acceptable function of the recreated artifact, as a memory site and a hinge between an individual and collective form of remembrance. Every response to what Sigfried Giedion calls a period's "demand for monumentality" comes with a responsibility: an ability to respond to such time with appropriate, meaningful, sensitive, and at times radical structures for memory. It is this responsibility, inherent in making monumental structures, that Allahyari, Fahimi, and their peers address through their critical engagement with monumental codes. As such, the discussed works not only critically examine the tendency of monuments to be deployed in ways that reproduce power relations. They also remind us that history and its memory are always subject to forms of representation and that it is through both a conceptual and aesthetic confrontation that such heritage can be addressed critically.

65 According to recent statistics, 5.16 billion people (65 percent of the world population) currently have an internet connection and 4.76 billion have internet-enabled smart phones. See Statista, "Internet Users in the World 2023," last modified January 2023, https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/ (accessed March 11, 2023).