

Art, Race, Space

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Abstract

Art, Race, Space is a collaborative research project that takes as its starting point *E Pluribus Unum*, a public art installation proposed for the Indianapolis Culture Trail by renowned artist Fred Wilson that was cancelled in 2011 due to controversy surrounding Wilson's appropriation of a freed slave figure from the Soldiers and Sailors Monument. Art, Race, Space" goes beyond examining the visual legacies of racial bondage to explore how the public responses to sculptures, memorials, and archaeology reveal our society's faultlines of race and inequality. Building on the ideas about race, class, visual culture, and democratic debate that emerge from the Indianapolis project, the faculty have designed a multifaceted program to advance scholarship and promote civic dialogue about these significant issues.

The faculty members organized an interdisciplinary symposium in January, 2013. Supported by an IAHI grant, the symposium explored the complicated relationships between art, race, and civic space with presentations by Wilson, community representatives who supported and opposed the sculpture, and scholars from a variety of disciplines who examined historical and cultural contexts of the controversy that had revealed Indianapolis' longstanding racial and class tensions. The dialogue was expanded with the presentation of historical and contemporary examples from other parts of the United States. In order to encourage public dialogue, the symposium provided opportunities for audience members and presenters to engage in conversations, and it deployed social media (Twitter and Facebook) to encourage broader participation.

The project's goal is to further scholarship and encourage public conversation on race and materiality. To this end the faculty have created a website, a Facebook page, Twitter account, and are working on an open-access curriculum to support dialogue in schools and informal learning settings about the complex issues of art, race, and representation. The faculty are also collaborating on academic publications, including selected proceedings and an article on the symposium's "hybrid discourse" that combined university and community resources, expertise, and communication practices and brought together diverse voices in constructive conversation about the challenging issues surrounding *E Pluribus Unum*.