

# Penjing | 盆景

**Approach**  
We're witnessing Los Angeles in a moment of significant renewal and reflection, represented by the rewilding of its river, and spirited debates surrounding its density, transit, and infrastructure. The city is unearthing and confronting layers of forgotten histories, while facing increasing resistance towards these difficult histories, including a rising swell of anti-Asian sentiment. The present is an opportunity to imagine a new infrastructure of memory intertwined with the city's evolving systems which reorient our relationship to those histories and each other.

The Past Due report's attitude towards the garden resonated with us and became the genesis of our approach. The garden serves not only as a place of respite and reflection, but also enables communities to "reconnect civic memory with notions of maintenance, fidelity, and care."

**Proposal**  
Penjing is a Chinese art form and ancestor to Bonsai in which the garden becomes a microcosm that focuses the visual and mental gaze towards introspection. Often seen as living sculpture or physical poetry, it embodies a cultural attitude towards sculpture as something existing between object and landscape, and is regarded as an extension of surrounding built and natural environments. With the sites of the massacre scattered amongst sidewalks and parking lots, Penjing is able to serve as both a compact sculptural object and evocative space. Scaling to fill each site and protected by a quiet vessel, each Penjing offers ritualized care to unassuming places that often lack it, with its microcosmic interior serving as a mirror of the communities who design and sustain it. Penjing are further linked to Asian Angeleno communities through the flower industry as a result of past racist policies. They not only survive but thrive in residual spaces, in keeping with stories of resilience many Chinese immigrants trace in the building of their communities.

**盆 | Pen (frame)**  
The outer vessel of our proposal is a honed cylindrical form shaped from locally sourced limestone, emerging from a hewn base. Three openings carve away its thick exterior to reveal an inner void sculpted with 18 polished flutes, each memorializing a victim of the massacre, collectively centered upon a hidden garden. The memorial becomes a vessel within a vessel; the cleft and honed exterior takes on a scholar-stone ethos of embracing weathering and wear, while the inner polished form references the subtle lobes of a Chinese celadon bowl. In this nested vessel, the memorial becomes a space of absence, where loss nurtures a garden growing in the face of adversity. This balance between ruggedness and refinement, protectiveness and vulnerability, suggests a spirit of resilience that we see as both poetic and pragmatic. One's experience of the memorial's layered frames builds upon Chinese spatial traditions of implied thresholds and gates, and its excavation and discovery become a visual and performative analogue to the palimpsest of Los Angeles' own complex histories.

**景 | Jing (scene)**  
We see remembrance as a constant and ongoing act rather than something sacred and unchanging. As such, in resistance to rigid interpretations of history and memorialization, we imagine the garden within the memorial to be a space and scene to be grown and renewed by its surrounding community. By setting a living landscape as the memorial itself, the act of remembering also becomes one of care and maintenance, inviting tactile engagement. The vessel may house a traditional penjing, but it may also hold a field of flowers, or be reimaged by local artists and community programs. We were deeply impressed by the description of Ta Chiu commemorations immediately after the massacre as consciously serving both the grieving community and educating non-Chinese neighbors, and propose that this framework continue through the combined elements of landscape, inscribed vessel, and collective care. We see the changing 'scenes' of Penjing as fulcrums from which to extend connections and community between and beyond their immediate sites.

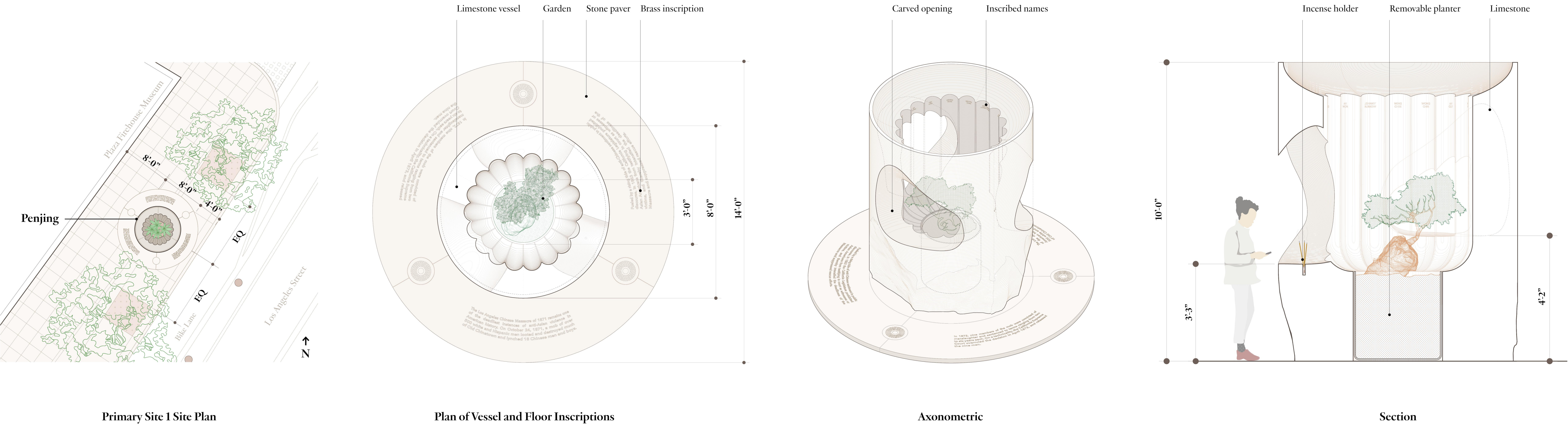
As an expanded strategy, multiple Penjing might commemorate the various sites of the massacre. Connected by a walking trail punctuated with QR code markers, visitors may activate augmented reality or educational overlays to delve more deeply into the history of the event. These markers, alongside inscriptions regarding the massacre, are inlaid into the circular pavers surrounding each vessel, producing a physical context and quietly defined space around it. The memorial is intended not to stand alone, but to become active within Los Angeles' Chinese diaspora, serving as nodes for procession, sites for festivals and cultural events, and centers for community.



A woman looks through a sculpted opening to a Penjing garden



Low winter sun illuminates Penjing garden and rakes across names on the fluted inner surface







A teacher explains the history of the event to local school children



Chrysanthemums and incense offered in memorial

