MEMORIAL TO THE VICTIMS OF THE 1871 CHINESE MASSACRE

Infinity mirror box: an optical device where two opposing mirrors spaced apart give the illusion of infinite depth.
Lifting my head to gaze at the moon
Lowering my head I think of home

This couplet, from the classical poem by Li Bai, captures the immigrant’s sentiment at its purest. The upward gaze of hope and aspiration, and the downward gaze of remembrance and longing for that left behind.

Our proposal builds upon the gestural experiences and spatial metaphors in the raising and lowering of one’s head and the feelings that they elicit. Each time we hold our heads up with pride, we are also afforded the reciprocal gesture of lowering our heads in humble reflection of past wrongs.

Primary Site

A split boulder rises from a sea of black ingot-shaped paver bricks. An infinity mirror box is encased in the boulder. Its illuminated walls of optically infinite depth are lined with pinewood tablets. The top rows of tablets are inscribed with the identities of the massacre victims, while others are left blank; they recall ancestral memorial tablets in village temples. The pinewood ‘shaft’ echoes the depth of Chinese American roots on this land, and the magnitude of human loss to anti-Asian violence through time. The sea of coal-black ingots alludes to the multitude of immigrant stories untold and to the “streets paved with gold” myth that continues to beckon many.

Secondary Sites

18 Chinese worker’s stools, fashioned from thermally-treated pine will serve as street furniture at the four sites of the massacre. Each stool is inscribed with the name of a life taken; each an invitation to fill the absence; and each a marker to link this spatial narrative of our collective history.

A Guangdong white pine tree rises at the Chinese American Museum’s entry court. An emblem of immortality, the living pine shares the origin of the lives taken and establishes a material link to the tablets and workers’ stools. It grows as a symbol of hope, connecting our past and our future.

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