

Capps, Kriston. "These artists point to social upheaval — and one simple solution," *The Washington Post*, 28 October 2020.

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Maren Hassinger's "Monument" sits on a pedestrian thoroughfare south of Dupont Circle. (Matailong Du/Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative)

As an oceanographer, Matthew Fontaine Maury made his mark in navigation. A 19th-century scientist and native Virginian, he charted ocean lanes and currents and published detailed guides in astronomy and cartography. The "Pathfinder of the Seas" greatly reduced the time it took for ocean-faring sailors to make the dangerous voyage across the Atlantic.

For all his capabilities, Maury devoted much of his life to the preservation of slavery. As an officer for the Confederate States Navy, he acquired and outfitted ships for the Confederacy, planned the defense of its harbors and lobbied European leaders to intercede in the war on its behalf. Maury developed deadly contact mines (then known as torpedoes) that cost the Union Navy dearly. When news of the Confederacy's defeat reached him in England, Maury fled to Mexico, where he briefly served as imperial commissioner of colonization under Emperor Maximilian. (Eventually, he returned to the United States in good graces.)

Now, many decades later, an otherworldly armada has arrived at a former school in Northern Virginia that once bore Maury's name. Twenty-six sailing ships made of driftwood and canvas by artist Lynda Andrews-Barry line the path leading up to the Arlington Arts Center – which was known as the Maury School for nearly 50 years.

"Passage," the site-specific installation by Andrews-Barry, is one of three outdoor artworks on view that point to urgent movements in social justice. Taken together with two separate pieces organized by the Smithsonian Institution and the Phillips Collection, these projects point to the ways that public and private art institutions are responding to profound changes in, and demands from, society.

"Passage" is a testament to the national reckoning over race and oppression – and commemoration – in America. This work is far from over, even with respect to this single Confederate: A statue of Maury was removed from Richmond's Monument Avenue in July, and the Alexandria City School Board is mulling a name change for Matthew Maury Elementary School. Anchored at Arlington Arts Center, "Passage" reveals a hidden history.

Andrews-Barry, an artist who can trace her family back to the arrival of enslaved ancestors who were sold to a plantation in Anne Arundel County, sourced the driftwood from the grounds near her studio in Virginia's Northern Neck, where slaving ships once passed on their way up the Chesapeake Bay. She modeled her ships loosely after the *Clotilda*, the last known ship to transport enslaved people to the States; the remains of the vessel were uncovered last year near Mobile, Ala.

Up close, the 26 ghost ships that make up "Passage" lose some of their haunted aspect. Crisp grommets and store-bought netting don't quite convey the curse of long-dead mariners. An application on the canvas makes the sails glow at night, a spectral indictment of Maury Park

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(the grounds still bear his name). Unfortunately, the phosphorescence also gives the sails the slightest green tinge in daylight. Wear and weather may improve the overall look.



"Passage," by Lynda Andrews-Barry, is an installation of shiplike sculptures on the lawn of the Arlington Arts Center. (Photo by Dawn Whitmore/Lynda Andrews-Barry/Arlington Arts Center)

Another site-specific project, this one by the Harlem-based artist Maren Hassinger, makes use of wood to suggest an alternative to equestrian bronzes and marble statues. "Monument," which occupies a pedestrian thoroughfare at the south end of Dupont Circle, is a swoop of interlocking branches of a fallen willow tree from Kingman Island in Northeast D.C.

Hassinger's "Monument" is understated. Its wedge shape rhymes the urban curve where Connecticut Avenue meets the traffic circle even as its natural materials depart from surrounding asphalt and neon. The somber structure seems to mirror the tents just across the way, on the north end of Dupont Circle, where the number of people sleeping outdoors has grown over the course of the pandemic.

There is a social dimension to much of Hassinger's work. The National Portrait Gallery commissioned the artist to perform a live adaptation this coming spring of her 2005 video, "Birthright," in which she interviews an estranged uncle about family secrets dating back to her grandparents' exodus from Louisiana to Los Angeles during the Great Migration. While "Monument" might seem at first glance like a minimalist exercise, it's hard to miss the correspondence between the sculpture and pup tents and what it reveals about monuments — about the gap between the values we choose to elevate and those we neglect.



"Moral Injury/So Vote" is an artwork by Jenny Holzer on the facade of the Phillips Collection. (Photo by Carl Maynard/Jenny Holzer/Artist Rights Society)

Then comes a third project, by the conceptual artist Jenny Holzer, with a brisk assessment of the state of affairs. "Moral Injury/So Vote" comprises two fabric panels attached to the facade of the Phillips Collection. One reads "MORAL INJURY" in bold sans-serif white letters against red; the other, "SO VOTE," in the same typeface on black. It's typical of the often acerbic aphorisms that are Holzer's hallmark. Here she's condensed the many calamities that America faces into a single catchall category — and offered a two-word solution. The power in this piece comes from people.