Boston’s Beauty: The Tale of the Women’s Memorial

Boston’s Women’s Memorial is a tribute to memorialize a few women out of the many who shaped Boston into the hub of innovation, culture, and progressiveness it is today. The monument includes a trio of women, Abigail Adams, Lucy Stone, and Phillis Wheatley. Each woman had their own unique story and personality that was shown through their poses and what they symbolized. Abigail Adams was one of the most established first women as she was not only the wife of John Adams but also his closest advisor. She consistently assisted John by providing her advice and input through intellectual discourse about politics and governments. She is presented standing confidently with her arms crossed against her stone pillar. This portrayal of Adams alludes to her forceful but composed nature who achieves all she desires.

Lucy Stone is otherwise known as a distinguished activist who advocated for women’s rights and against slavery. Additionally, she was also the first woman from Massachusetts to earn a college degree. She is lying on her side with her feet placed on marble while clutching a pen as though she is about to write. Stone’s position presented the admirers with the sense that she was an intelligent woman who took lead. Phillis Wheatley was enslaved but was known to be one of the best writers in Boston once she learned to read and write. She served as a catalyst into the antislavery sentiment in Boston at the time. She is depicted in a sedentary position while holding a quill pen with one hand and the other placed on her face as though she was pondering upon a
thought. This illustrates Wheatley as an insightful individual who was always ready and willing to write.

The project was inspired in 1992 from a town hall meeting advocating for women's representation in the city as Boston at the time underrepresented the works of women. Boston’s first lady in 1992 ushered this undertaking into life along with the Women’s Commission, the Commonwealth Avenue Mall Committee, and the Massachusetts Historical Society. It was a 12-year long process to set up the installation. Along Commonwealth Avenue, there are a multitude of monuments honoring the works of figurative historical figures but the Women’s Memorial was different because it was the first all-women installation. This exhibit received a considerable amount of criticism during its construction for being a bandaid on a broken system of underrepresentation.

During its creation, people also believed grouping these women together weakened the dominance of women in society because they asserted that women fostered many pivotal movements and ideas through their own merits. Therefore these women should be rewarded with individual recognition honing more deeply into their impact. However, in 1992 in the town hall meeting when those citizens were advocating for women's representation they won a placement in the avenue monuments so it was strategic to place three women instead of one because this spotlights more female power. The monument also depicts a strong sense of sisterhood to the viewers passing by. Furthermore, they emphasize the idea that women do not tear each other down to succeed ahead but rather work for the greater good no matter the validation one receives from the credit. Although it was criticized and labeled as a quick face, this memorial is still revered and admired today among the local Boston community and its tourists.
This monument promotes curiosity and engagement because of the statue's distinctive and empowering stance. When I was visiting the memorial to video the monuments I witnessed a mother visiting with her young daughter and son. She went into explicit detail about the importance of the women’s presence among the other male memorials. As her daughter admired the beauty and strength of these women, her mother expressed how these three women were just a few of an innumerable number of pivotal figures who paved the way for women. Continuing on she explained how these women struggled to receive the recognition they deserve so little girls like her could be anything they dreamed of being, rather than just a pretty face in society. I remember her daughter turning to ask if she could take a picture with Abigail Adams and began to imitate her stance in the picture. This is one instance I experienced, where a monument was inspiring citizens but, I know there are many moments like this one where younger and older women that come to visit are empowered by these historical figures. This memorial not only teaches Boston’s community but serves as a reminder every day of the triumphs that women have accomplished in the face of adversity.

They occupy the ground level while utilizing large blocks of stone for the women to stand against and perch upon. This allows for individuals passing by to stop and take in the statue and all that it stands for. The monument is very inviting, promoting an interactive atmosphere as in these photos kids are reading the inspirational words of Adams, Wheatley, and Stone, admiring the realistic portrayal of these women, and or hugging these historical figures. This is a unique take on public art because the statues are not much larger than their viewers. Most monuments made are usually placed on a pedestal and are towering over the viewers like these here on Commonwealth Avenue. The stones consist of the stories, ideas, and words of these revolutionary women. Artist Meredith Bergman, the genius behind this exhibit strategically
placed these women because she wanted to portray “women as having come down off their pedestal, making a feminist metaphor literal and concrete. The purposeful placement of the memorial places them in the center of the commonwealth walkway for many people to pass and admire the history of Boston made by women. It is also surrounded by a bountiful amount of greenery. When I visited I witnessed the sun beaming through the leaves on the monuments giving a sense of grace and beauty through its engagement making these inanimate objects producing a lasting impact on me. It also leaves viewers deeply infatuated with the beauty these powerful women exude.

I believe that these monuments are beautifully made, extremely impactful, and methodically placed to entice deep emotions. However, the criticism of the past makes me wonder if it truly would have been more impactful to present these women separately giving them each their time in the spotlight as they are the only women among all the monuments up and down commonwealth avenue. It seems contradictory to have created the monument to combat the under-representation of women as they are memorialized by being clumped together even though they do not share a common story other than just their gender.
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