

sculpture

September 2006
Vol. 25 No. 7

International Sculpture Center
www.sculpture.org



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Clockwise from top left: Jerusalem's Western Wall, site of Jeremy Langford's *The Western Wall Glass Sculpture Project*, 2006. *Jerusalem*, 2006. Stacked glass, 5.5 meters high. *Destruction*, 2006. 48 stacked glass columns and fiber optics, dimensions variable. *Patriarchs*, 2006. 15 stacked glass columns, 3.2 meters high.

JEREMY LANGFORD

The Western Wall Glass Sculpture Project
Jerusalem, Israel

In 2001, the Israeli Government and the Western Wall Heritage Foundation invited Jeremy Langford to create a series of sculptures portraying the history of the Jewish people. Located in the Western Wall Chain of Generations Center in the Old City of Jerusalem, the sculptures are installed underground in eight chambers dating from the era of King Solomon to that of the Crusades. Searching for an abstract form to interpret the full scope of his subject, Langford settled on the column as "the symbol of the Jewish people and the Biblical narrative." His artist statement elaborates: "A column for me is the development of line...the line begins from a point and lengthens and thickens, so too the column in these structures is a basic building block of form and function." Navigating the complexities inherent in such an archaeologically, spiritually, and politically significant site, he embarked on a five-year journey to give form to the centuries-long triumphs and struggles of an entire people.

Langford distilled the historical narrative into eight separate sculptural groupings. The first three establish origin, beginning in the entrance with a single glass column illuminating the end of a dark passageway. The column is inscribed with Hebrew characters spelling "Jerusalem," and behind them verses from Chronicles tracing the descendents of Adam are etched on the wall. Hebrew characters can be found throughout the project. Langford notes the significance of lettering in Kabala, in which "each letter has its own intrinsic structure—a sacred geometry representing complex energy patterns and manifestations of spiritual dimensions." The *Patriarchs* group consists



Clockwise from above: *Holocaust*, 2006. Stacked glass, 180 x 180 cm. *Yearning*, 2006. Stacked glass, 9 meters. *Rebirth*, 2006. Stacked glass columns with sculpted glass inlays, 5 meters.

of 15 columns set in an arched stone passageway that represent Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the 12 tribes of Israel. The columns in the third group, which celebrates the power of Old Testament kings and prophets, are deployed in a solid, heroic formation lit from above. Destruction follows, mimicking the destruction of the first Temple in 586 BCE and the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. This work introduces the first angles and asymmetrical lines of the project—fragments of columns are shattered and strewn about the chamber. Departing from historical events, *Yearning* reaches up from the depths of the site in what Langford describes as the “inherent desire to return to self—the symbolic return to the ‘Promised Land’ of Israel.” He considers this unifying desire the “common denominator of humanity.” The sculpture also evokes the Tower of Babel, whose construction was fueled by a yearning to be closer to God. The solidity and integrity of the columns suffer another blow in *Holocaust*, represented by a fragmented, yet somehow still complete column, split into six sections. *Rebirth*, signifying the return to Israel, rises from a floor of carved black glass, which parts like water upon reaching a dense stand of columns of varying heights. A wall of stacked glass branded with names forms the final sculpture, *Remembrance*. Its undulating surface resembles a topographical map or perhaps even facial profiles.

The unique nature of the Western Wall site required careful consideration and treatment. Before beginning work, Langford “went into seclusion in the tunnels...and sat whole nights sometimes from midnight till dawn

in a semi-meditative state drawing and creating different renderings.” He writes, “I drew on my own connection to modern art and connected deeply to the energy of the site...I was conversing with a matrix of inspirations left by kings, prophets, priests, conquerors, invaders, warriors, holy men, and madmen.” The rewards of such inspiration were countered by technical difficulties. Progress on the sculptures was often held up by archaeological discoveries, and layers of earth had to be carefully examined as the works were installed. When digging the foundation for *Yearning*, a 2,200-year-old, Herodian-era ritual bath and a wall from the period of Solomon’s Temple were discovered. To protect the finds, engineers suspended the nine-meter-high sculpture from steel girders, leaving the archaeological remains visible through a glass floor.

Langford’s monumental columns are constructed entirely of glass, mainly using the cold glass method of sculpting and stacking. For him, stacking underscores the symbolism of the project: the layers echo the history of the Jewish people and of the different civilizations that have built on and inhabited the ground of Jerusalem. Glass is Langford’s specialty, and the contrast between its reflective brittleness and the rough ancient stone enhances the sculptures’ sleek modernity while “complementing the architecture and archaeology of the site.” He describes the creation of glass out of sand as a “metaphor for



transformation and hope.” Langford sees his installation as encompassing all of humanity, a “metaphor for the whole state of man,” in addition to a history specific to the Jewish people: “In the same way the Jews have survived for thousands of years despite persecutions, pogroms, and so much suffering, so too can anyone succeed, and indeed, thrive under the most adverse circumstances.”

—Laura Dillon

Juries are convened each month to select works featured in Commissions. Information on recently completed commissions, along with quality 35mm slides or transparencies and an SASE for return of slides, should be sent to: Commissions, Sculpture, 1529 18th Street NW, Washington, DC 20036.



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