

Cuno subscribes to the idea of a “Universal” museum, as he adamantly claims that art and culture of diverse nations should be available to all museums, given their obligation to museum visitors who come from everywhere in the world. Moreover, he argues that antiquities are the “greatest contributions to our common, human heritage, and we should work together to preserve for all of the time, to be studied and enjoyed by everyone everywhere.”<sup>52</sup> Given this assessment, he rejects the idea that antiquities belongs to any one nation, or should even be reviewed as a nation's cultural property. Implicit in this position is a failure to consider the problem of aggressive art imperialism and, inextricably, the power relations and history of colonialism, wherein imperialists forcefully withdrew treasures from the cultural banks of colonized nations. That was certainly the case in the history of the 1897 British Punitive Expedition/Benin Massacre. Cuno's position differs markedly from that of Layiwola. The polarity between the two represents the global divide concerning the fate of precious objects of one nation in the hands of another due to imperialism and looting, as in the case of Benin and other former colonized nations. This debate resonates in *Benin1897.com*, as the metamonument simultaneously commemorates, mourns, and criticizes the fate of looted property in its imitation of authentic royal sculpture. Of course, the installation displays sculpture of variation in form, color, texture and decorative embellishments, among other qualities, but the iconography of displacement, mourning, and reclamation in the simulacra of original forms is easily discernible. One nation's displaced monuments in the aftermath of aggressive art imperialism attest to another nation's victory. *Benin1897.com* underscores this point. In the face of cultural plunder, Coctu's reference to monuments as images of “eternity” stimulates the question, “Eternity for whom?”

Yet themes of eternity and posterity regarding the subjects of monuments, undercore the *raison d'être* of monuments, as well as the “permanence” of their media. Stereotypically, monuments are thought of as objects of stone, bronze, concrete and other durable material, that are placed in public sites in honor and remembrance of persons, events, etc. (as long as they do not threaten the prevailing political order). Such commonplace thinking would not, in general, recognize a temporary exhibition slated for dismantlement at the end of the exhibition cycle as a monument. *1897.com* consists of permanent and impermanent materials, and will be dismantled, though it certainly could be exhibited again. Contrary to stereotypes, a monument can be made of any material. It can be mounted one day and destroyed the next. What matters is how a form shows itself as monument, what and how it memorializes, for whom, and with what effect? These points require a review of the meanings of monuments.

Monuments call forth memory, as they inhere in memory and history, in material form and iconography. They vitally display to the public the heroic, spiritual, imperial, and majesty in iconic forms fixed for remembrance. Moreover, monuments are conventionally an index of wealth, power, and posterity, and emerge as symbols of great empires, dynasties, major figures and events: i.e. Egyptian pyramids, Ethiopian steles, Roman triumphal arches, Benin monarchical commemorative heads, etc. Yet monuments are also natural sites, such as Olumo Rock of Abeokuta (meaning under the rock): the sacred overhanging formation of Egba settlers after their flight from Egba towns during the Yoruba wars of the early 19th century.<sup>53</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines monument in a range of commemorative forms: “A statue or other structure erected in memory of the dead, either over the grave or in a church, etc.,” “An effigy; a carved figure;” “A structure, edifice, or (in later use also) a site of historical importance;” “a written document or record;” “a legal instrument;” “a piece of information given in writing (monuments of letters);” “something that serves as a memorial;” “an enduring, memorable, outstanding, or imposing example of some quality, attribute, etc.,” “something that serves as a reminder of, or witness or tribute to, a way of life, attitude, achievement, etc.,” “a natural or artificial fixed object that is used to mark a boundary of property, or location of a specific spot of land, and even a classic work of literature, among other objects.”<sup>54</sup> Given these definitions, it is clear that monuments come in a diversity of forms, but what is common to all of them are memory, merit and history.