

Philadelphia-based artist Karyn Olivier was selected to create the Dinah monument, entitled *Right Here*.

Karyn Olivier's Statement:

*Right Here relates to some of my past public commissions where the work sought to intersect and collapse multiple histories with present-day narratives. For example in *Here and Now/Glacier, Shard, Rock* I blended contrasting topographic and anthropologic histories through three lenticular images — a glacier, a pottery shard from the historic Seneca Village (a Manhattan settlement founded by free black property owners who were displaced when the city destroyed their properties to develop Central Park), and the contemporary landscape. At the University of Kentucky, I reproduced and relocated (in an adjoining vestibule) the black and brown figures from a controversial historic mural, which created a new context, and therefore new meaning, to examine representations of slavery and the subjugated.*

I am interested in Stenton House, its legacy and its presence in the Nicetown community. Since 1899 great efforts have been made to “preserve and maintain Stenton as an historic object lesson” for the benefit of local residents, Philadelphians and beyond. This opportunity to expand and amplify how we honor Dinah within the Stenton House tradition, is a critical extension of the “historic lesson” that’s been told so far.

I believe Dinah’s memorial (which is also a monument) should allow for multiple perspectives, histories and narratives to come to the fore; as a site for inquiry, interpretation and imaginings of the future. The best monuments are instruments — offering a mirror to witness ourselves, our community, our city and our country. They are active, shifting, temporal and contemporary. And though little is known about Dinah, this commemoration of her legacy — this physical marker, this evidence — must strive to be more than solely a symbolic gesture. I believe it can be imbued with the power to craft a continually evolving American history, adding Dinah’s story to the narratives that become our collective “heritage.”

*For *Right Here* I will create an installation consisting of circular seating (using Kasota stone) and two text-filled stone tablets. There will be two openings to allow easy access into the space. On the ground in the center, there will be a low profile water fountain. I will adhere the original Dinah plaque and a newly fabricated plaque on the exterior facade of the tablets. *Right Here* will offer different ways for visitors to engage and “activate” Dinah’s memory.*

My hope for the seating is to create an installation that feels embedded and seamless within the landscape. I am interested in creating a public space that at times will feel intimate, even private. I am also interested in countering and disrupting the verticality of the nearby Logan memorial. Verticality in monuments often point to power, hierarchy (“this is more important than...”) and the false insistence of a singular/dominant perspective (which is supposed to represent a universal). In contrast, a horizontal axis is expansive, multiplicitous and nonhierarchical.

One main locus of activation is the two panels of text, each asking similar questions. On one panel, these pointed questions are asked directly to Dinah. On the other side, the questions are posed to the visitor who becomes both the interviewer and the interviewee. Very little is known of Dinah’s life. Some historical texts record her name, make reference, and speak with care about her, but in

totality, knowledge about her life is scarce. My charge became, how can we keep Dinah's memory alive, active and present in the now? And I kept asking myself unanswerable questions; imagining who she really was beyond the plaque's declaration and the lines penned in a few manuscripts. I thought, if I am curious, I am sure others must be, too. I decided to create a list of questions for Dinah, which range from the practical ("when were you born?") to the intimate ("what was your greatest sorrow?").

My hope is for this to do several things. Dinah will remain "alive" through this activation; in a viewer's reading of the questions, he or she is in a sense asking/addressing Dinah—a viewer may begin to imagine what Dinah's life may have been like. Though these questions are likely asked in silence, the site has been activated by this internal activity. I hope this piece can foster a connection between the neighborhood residents and their local history. On the opposing panel, questions are asked/directed to the visitor. Is Dinah asking these questions? Can these questions allow for individual reflection — asking oneself "do I feel free?" I'm excited at the possibility of this work creating literal, metaphorical and imagined conversations between Dinah (specifically), the multiple and disparate histories of generations of life at Stenton (slaves, servants, family members), and in the present moment (politically and culturally in Nicetown, Philadelphia and beyond). What does it mean to have an on-going dialogue between shifting authors and multiple histories? What happens when you acknowledge your presence in the artwork? Your "participation" becomes critical to the work; your engagement is in fact "creating" the work, which in essence means you become a part of the monument itself.

We don't have access to Dinah's voice, her thoughts, her dreams. The questions serve to remind us of the historical position of blacks and how often we were not included in the archive (and are, still today, underrepresented). Even when we are included, it's often through someone else's viewpoint, their interpretation of our identity. In this work, we are asked to imagine Dinah's responses, but also to possibly contemplate what can never be recovered from 400 years of subjugation. The questions posed directly to Dinah, in essence, are asked to keep her alive in our memory, alive in the present moment and in the future to come. I believe these interrogations could be an accessible and useful tool for school groups that visit Stenton, providing an opportunity to share, expand and reveal our identities; our hopes and fears.

Fountains have a traditional role in parks and plazas here and around the world. They can be mesmerizing, calming and meditative. The one proposed here will ask us to perhaps question — what remains hidden, out of sight? What is buried and unseen? I am interested in the creek that ran through the Stenton grounds. James Logan wanted to name it after Chief Wingohocking, a Native American he befriended. This creek is no longer visible, but the work's water component will serve as a reminder of the many layers of history that are still unknown or seemingly unreachable. At the same time, it will add a new sensory experience that unfolds over time: the sound of water, crickets, birds and new life in the meadow's growth will intertwine with the histories we're asked to ponder.

I would like to install the original plaque, inserting another historical moment into this one. I thought it would be interesting to include it on the outside. It is a commemorative plaque whose language is intended for a very public audience, providing a contrast to the text on the interior.

I would like to add an additional exterior plaque on the opposing stone slab that would have a similar look to the Dinah commemorative plaque. The new plaque would address the present moment and future in some way. I hope it can function as another entry/invitation into the intimate interior space. I also like the aesthetic/formal symmetry that this additional plaque would create. This plaque would say—

*“Healing begins
where the wound was made.”
-Alice Walker*

*“Never be afraid
to sit awhile and think.”
- Lorraine Hansberry*

My hope is to create a contemplative, restorative, possibly healing space that allows the public to claim and/or reclaim Dinah and acknowledge the important role African-Americans (both before and post-slavery) played in the life of Stenton House and America at large. My aim is to tether the formidable and fragile, disappointment and hope, and the tension that exists in our shifting personal and civic lives in a single commemoration of someone who must remain a personal enigma.