

Women's Suffrage Movement Monument

MARK DONOHUE

California College of the Arts

"There never will be complete equality until women themselves help to make laws and elect lawmakers." – Susan B. Anthony

Women's struggle for equality is an issue that has persisted in the United States from its inception. At the first Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls in July 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton proposed a revision to the Declaration of Independence stating "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal." This statement was included in "The Declaration of Rights and Sentiments" signed by 100 of the 300 attendees to the convention. One of the most contentious and debated articles in the document they signed was women's suffrage. If this was the beginning, it certainly wasn't the end. For the next 54 years Stanton fought for the right for women to vote along side her long time colleague Susan B. Anthony. Neither one would see the day when their life's

work on the part of the women's suffrage movement would come to fruition.

In 1920 the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified giving women the right to vote. One hundred years later 2020, the centenary anniversary of the passing of the amendment, is marked by the continuing struggle with issues of equality and social justice. Organizations at every level and around the country are beginning to ask questions of themselves about their part in institutionalized racism and perpetuating systems of exclusion. Demonstrations have been held in cities across America demanding justice and accountability. Some of the most potent signs of these efforts have been the removal of statues that are associated with oppression calling into question the status and purpose of monuments today.

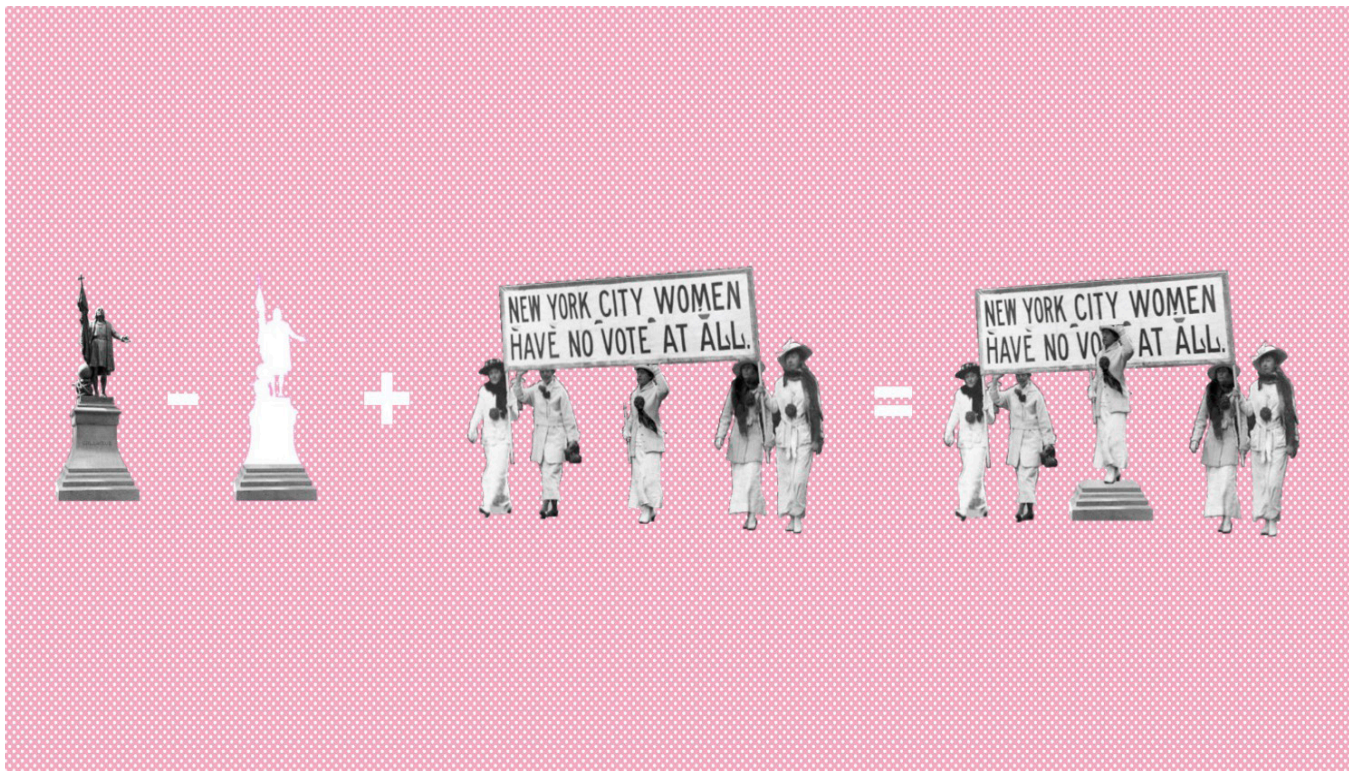


Figure 1. Concept Diagram, Visible Research Office.

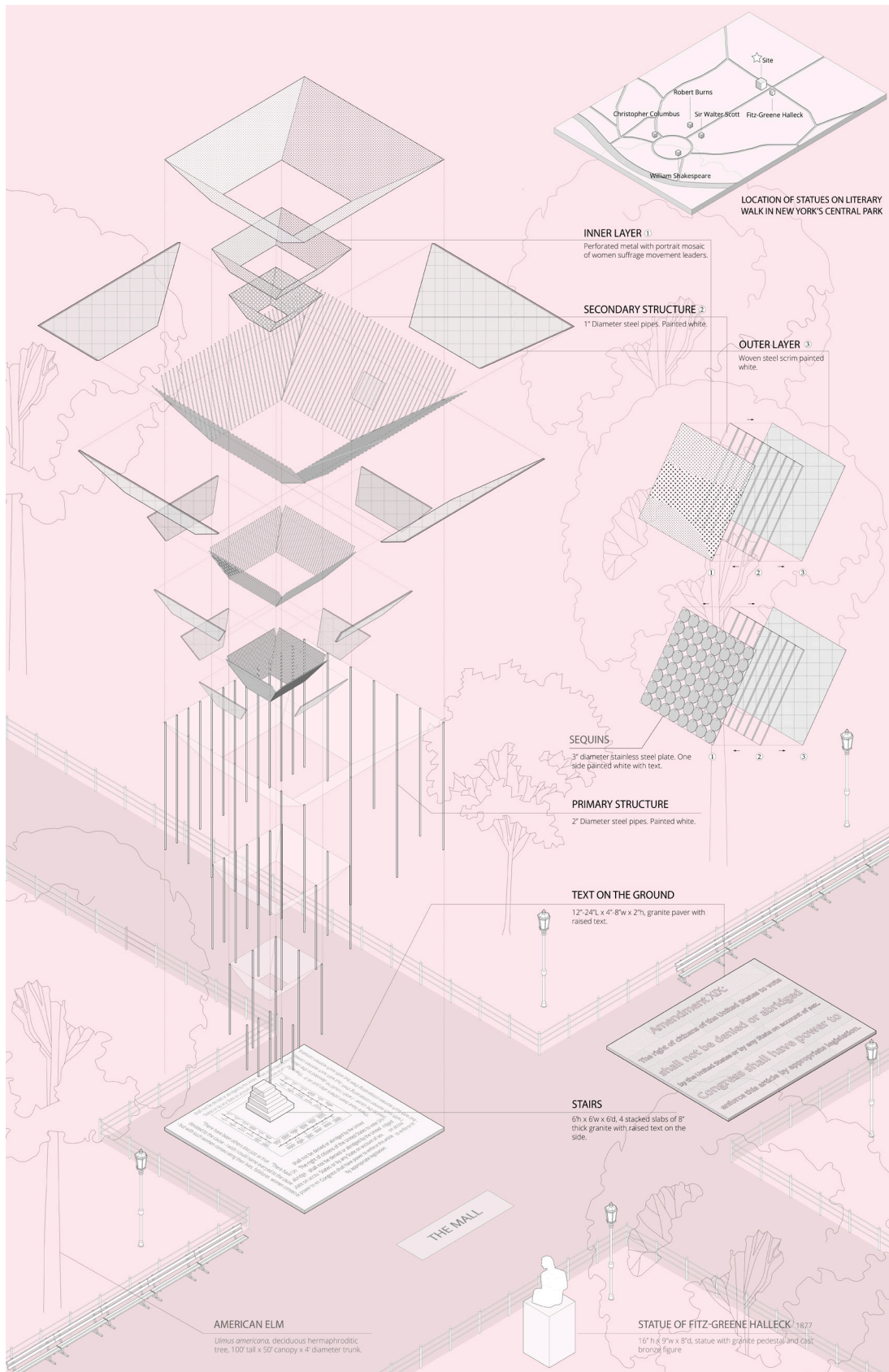


Figure 2. Parts Assembly, Visible Research Office.

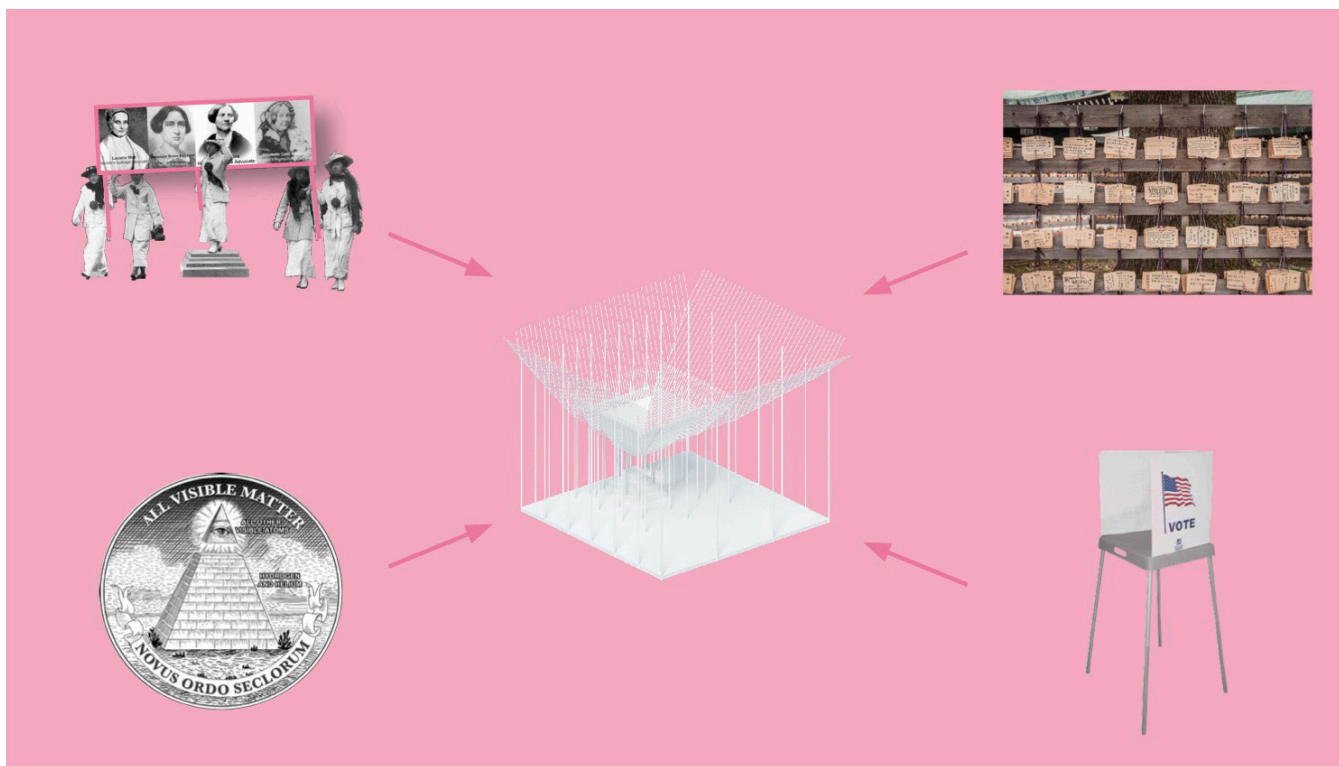


Figure 3. Inspiration, Visible Research Office.

So it is within this time of reckoning that the Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony Foundation sent out a call for proposals to build a statue to honor the women's suffrage movement. The location of the statue is on Literary Walk in New York's Central Park and would be the first statue of a woman in the park. The project offered the opportunity to engage in the national debate about what a monument is today. Development of the design was guided by the question of how to make a monument that is inclusive and engaging while honoring those for who it is intended.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were two central figures of the Women's Suffrage Movement in the US. Giving women the right to vote, the work they committed their lives to, was less about themselves and more about empowering the people around them. Through their words and their actions they engaged people to push for what was right. It would seem that a monument to these two individuals should honor the spirit of their work and the actions that they inspired. Given this context, designing a monument with "engagement" as its central theme, a monument that inspires individuals to have agency in the world today, would seem to be the right response.

In a time when monuments with cast bronze figures are being removed, the question of what we as a society should put in their place naturally arises. The answer could quite simply be you, the public. By allowing individuals to occupy

the monument we could effectively democratize it and give agency to people to carry on the work and legacy of the Women's Suffrage Movement. A monument that encourages civic engagement by being a gathering place for discussion under banners depicting the leaders of the Women's Suffrage Movement and their actions seems like a welcome contrast to the stoic monuments that exist in the park. The proposal also taps into the long history of debate in public spaces such as "Speaker's Corner" in London's Hyde Park, or "Bughouse Square" in Chicago's Washington Park.

The proposal places an inverted translucent pyramid hovering over the ground inviting the public in. The pyramid alludes to the Great Seal of the United States found on the back of every dollar, but turns it on its head removing the singular eye (a reference to divine providence) and replacing it with the eyes of everyone. A lightweight steel structure supports a translucent veil that alludes to the banners carried by the women who marched for the right to vote. The inverted pyramid is set off center to create a larger surface facing Literary Walk to reflect the voices of speakers that have gathered under the pyramid. The ground plane of the monument is envisioned as a call to action using the words of the leaders, and a chronological list of the events they helped organize. Visitors walk across a plaza inscribed with quotes of the women leaders whose portraits are overhead. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony are on the front facing Literary Walk. Others including Sojourner Truth, Lucy Stone, Ida B. Wells, Carrie Chapman Catt,

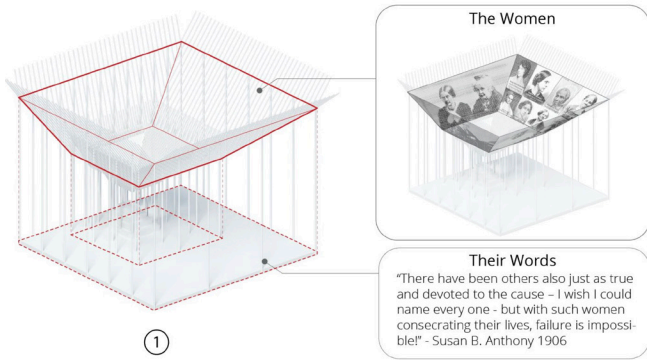


Figure 4. Outer Layer, Visible Research Office.

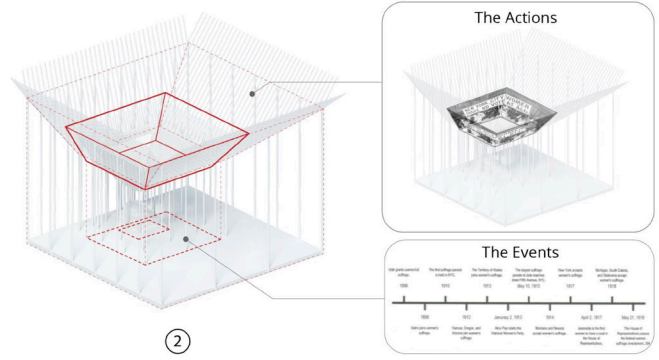


Figure 5. Middle Layer, Visible Research Office.

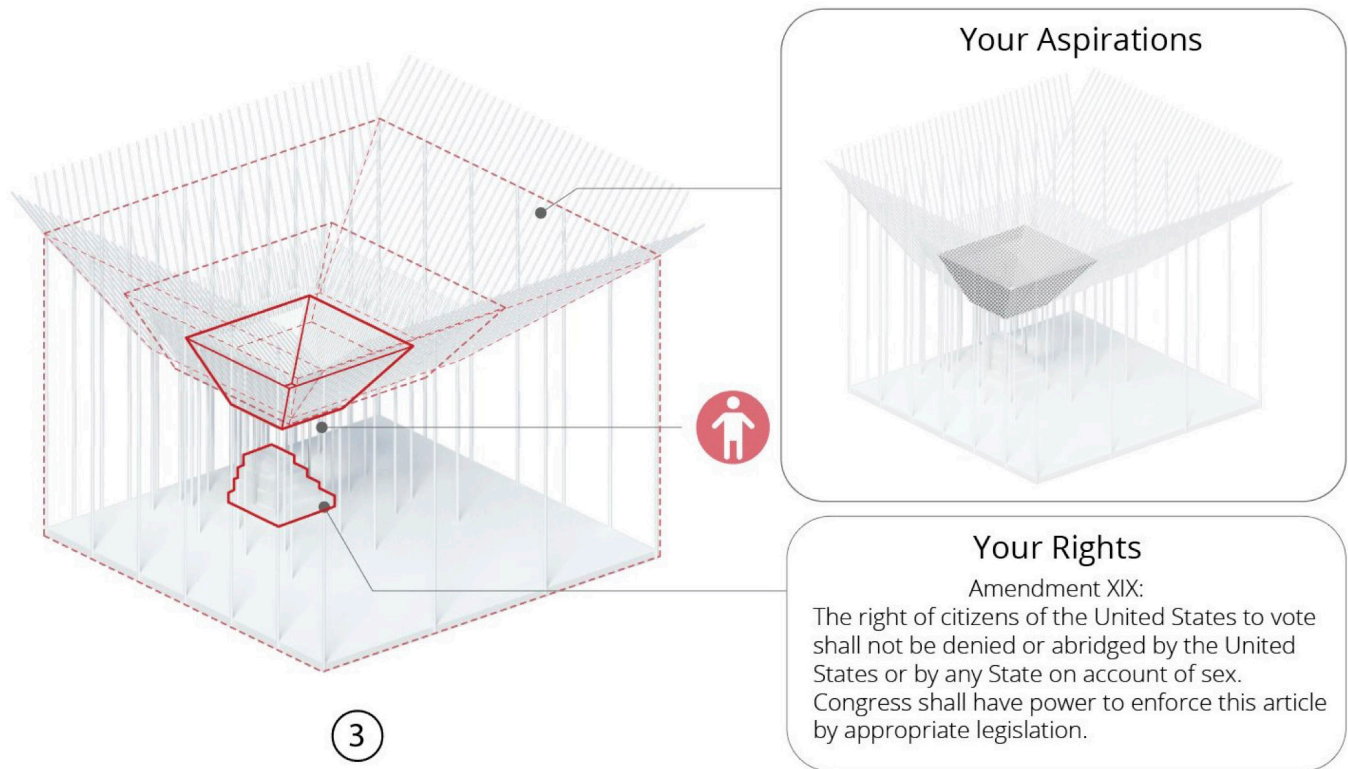


Figure 6. Inner Layer, Visible Research Office.

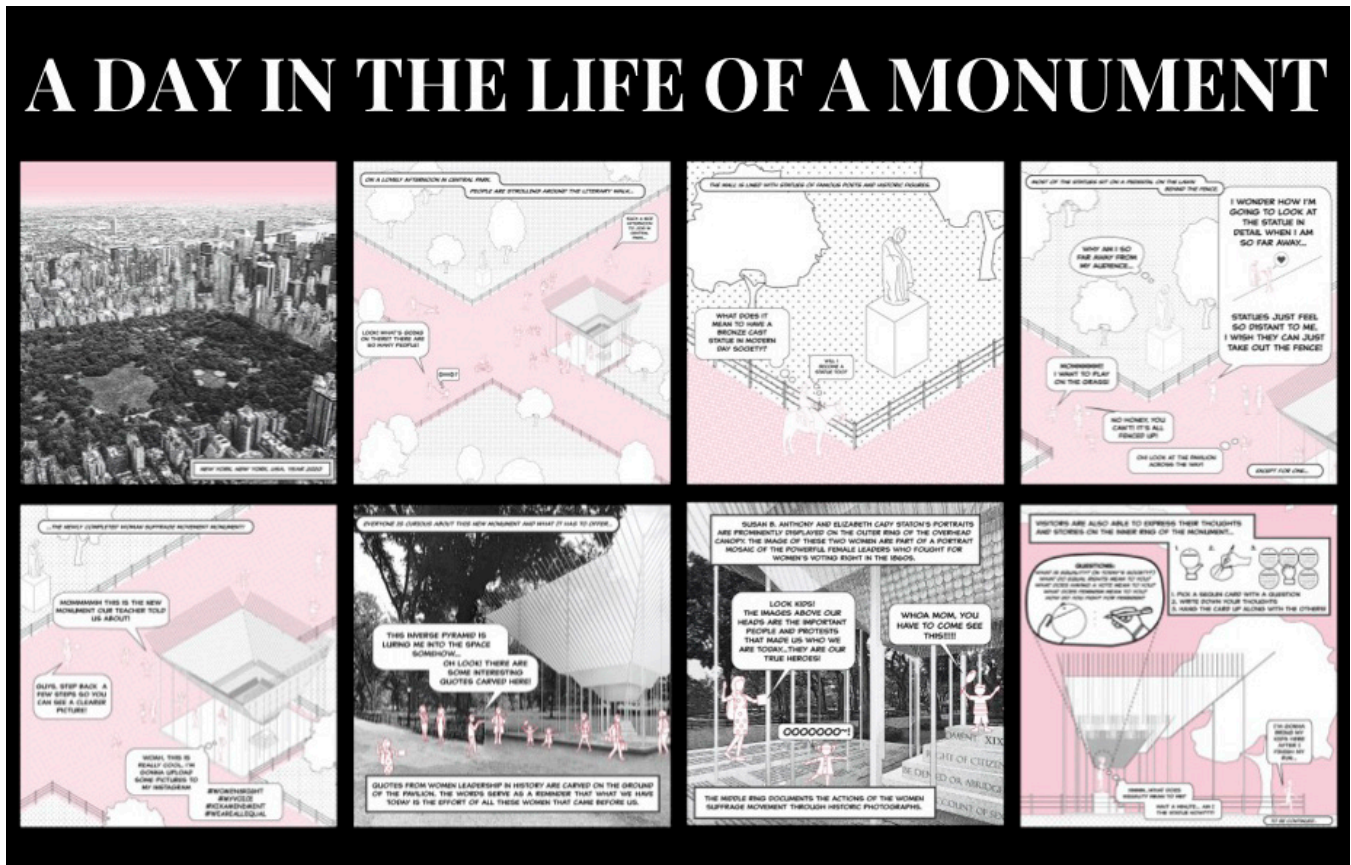


Figure 7. Cartoon Narrative, Visible Research Office.

and Alice Paul are arrayed around the other sides of the pyramid. The portraits are accompanied by a timeline of significant events leading up to passage of the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote. The inaccessible pedestal so prevalent in other monuments has been transformed into a stair engraved with the words of the 19th Amendment. The public can ascend the stair and enter a voting booth scaled space to register their thoughts on metal cards about what equality means to them. The metal card is also a nod to the traditional “ema” or wish cards found at Buddhist temples. Ema are small wooden plaques that carry the wishes of visitors.

By inviting the public in and welcoming their participation in the making of the piece the proposal hopes to create a monument that endures, engages and encourages the next generation of citizen activists.

ENDNOTES

1. The Elizabeth Cady Stanton And Susan B. Anthony Woman Suffrage Movement Monument, sponsored by The Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony Statue Fund Inc. on November 6, 2017. Request for Qualifications due February 18, 2018. Request for Proposals due May 30, 2018. Winner announced June 20, 2018.



Figure 8. View Looking Down Library Walk, Visible Research Office.



Figure 9, Figure 10. Section through Literary Walk and View Inside Monument, Visible Research Office.