

# Rise

THAT WE MAY  
FEEL YOUR

# Light



COLLEGE of  
CHARLESTON

DEPARTMENT OF ART AND  
ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

An exhibition of student designs for a monument honoring thirty-six Charlestonians of African origin and descent, buried near Anson Street in the late 1700s



In 2013, construction on Anson Street for the Gaillard Performing Arts Center uncovered the long-forgotten bodies of two infants, four children, sixteen men, ten women, and four other undetermined people. No map attests to the presence of a burial ground at this location, but early dental analyses made it clear that some of these people were born in Africa--primarily Western and Central Africa, but also Madagascar and Morocco. They are, therefore, precious ancestors of the African-American Charlestonians living today, and their discovery offers a rare opportunity to honor first-generation endurers of the terrible slave trade, and celebrate the genius and resilience that filled their minds and hearts, and were passed on to their descendants. Their place of rest is a point of tangible connection between the past and the present, and between America and Africa. It is a sacred place.

The Gullah Society, with the support of the City of Charleston, the College of Charleston, the University of Pennsylvania, and the National Geographic Society, is now leading a public conversation about the best ways to honor these ancestors. Under their leadership, the students of the College of Charleston Art & Architectural History course ARTH 396 *The Architecture of Memory* conducted research on monumental and sacred design traditions from around the world, especially West Africa, and formulated the proposals in this exhibition. It is hoped that their ideas will help kindle public debate.



Student designers were inspired by Egyptian and Ethiopian obelisks, as well as by the monolithic stone circles used to honor the dead in Senegal and The Gambia. They studied the African heritage of South Carolina's sweetgrass baskets, and they were moved by the beauty of African metallurgy, including the ironwork that links Charleston to West Africa, and also the Akrafokonmu, a traditional Asante golden disc that represents the power of the human soul to absorb the warmth and light of the sun and transmit it to others.





In addition to studying African precedents for their designs, students also worked to honor present-day community hopes for the burial ground monument. Suggestions for ideal design impacts were collected by the Gullah Society over the course of several public events, and a partial collection of them is given below. Further public comment is needed for this project to advance. Please mark up the blank board nearby with your wishes and ideas, and please also visit <http://www.thegullahsociety.com>

## RESPECT THE ANCESTORS

INSPIRED AND EDUCATED

A MEMORIAL THAT STOPS PEOPLE WALKING BY AND CAUSES THEM TO PAUSE, THINK...

EMPOWERED, RESPECTED, VALUED, PROUD

SOMETHING THAT MAKES ME FEEL MY ANCESTORS ARE RESTING

SAD

JOYFUL

RECOGNIZE THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

I WANT TO FEEL AS THOUGH...THESE UNSUNG HEROES WERE MY FAMILY MEMBERS  
A SPACE FOR CONTEMPLATION, MOURNING, ENLIGHTENMENT  
ACCOMPLISHMENT OF A WRONG RIGHTED

RELIEF, PRIDE, AND JOY

CELEBRATION OF PRESENCE, REFLECTION

PEACE AND TRANQUILITY

LONG OVERDUE

The Gullah Society and the Art & Architectural History Department of the College of Charleston wish to extend our sincere thanks to John White and everybody at the Addlestone Library, Friends of the Library, Mayor John Tecklenburg, Todd LeVasseur and the Sustainability Literacy Initiative, Ista Clarke and the Old Slave Mart Museum, Robert MacDonald, Julia Eichelberger, Joe McGill, Heather Hodges, Barry Stiefel, Dontré Major, Grant Gilmore and the Historic Preservation & Community Planning Program.

This exhibition was curated by Prof. Nathaniel R. Walker and Anna Schuldt, with help from Leah Bancheri, Kathaleena Chhien, and Pierce Thomason.



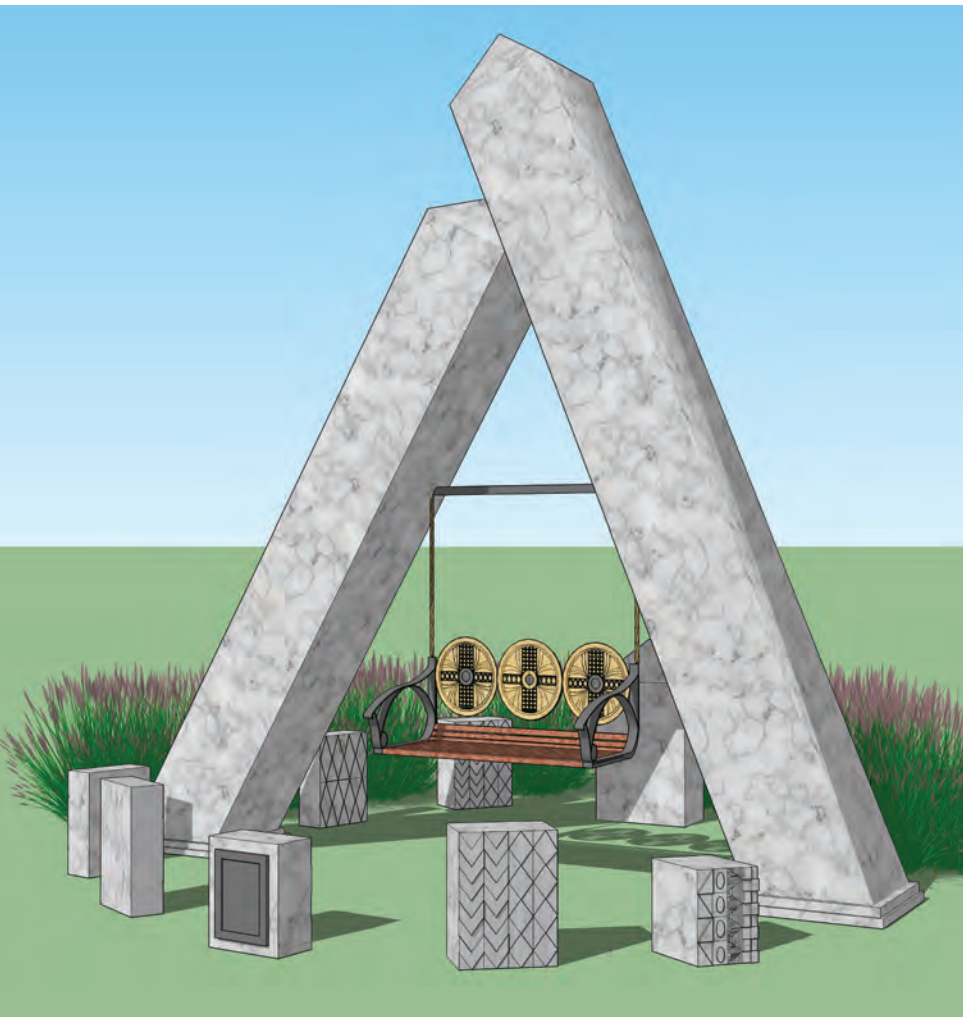
COLLEGE of  
CHARLESTON  
FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY





# LEANING TOGETHER, LIFTING SPIRITS

LEAH BANCHERI



Two African monument types inspired this design: the obelisks of Egypt and Ethiopia, and the stone circles of Senegal. Obelisks usually stand alone to symbolize transcendence of death, but these work together to create a shelter, leaning on each other for strength, and representing the unbreakable power of family bonds. Together they support a swing backed with golden West African soul discs, which will flash in the light as living Charlestonians sit and rock in the breeze, testifying with their bodies to the eternal pull of the lost motherland, and the driving need to move forward into the future together. Thus suspended between past and future, they can remember and reflect, joyfully lifted by the great strength of their ancestors. The surrounding stones represent community, and are engraved with West African patterns that account for the thirty-six individuals buried here—women, men, and children—and provide information about them and the world that they knew.

## SITE PLACEMENT

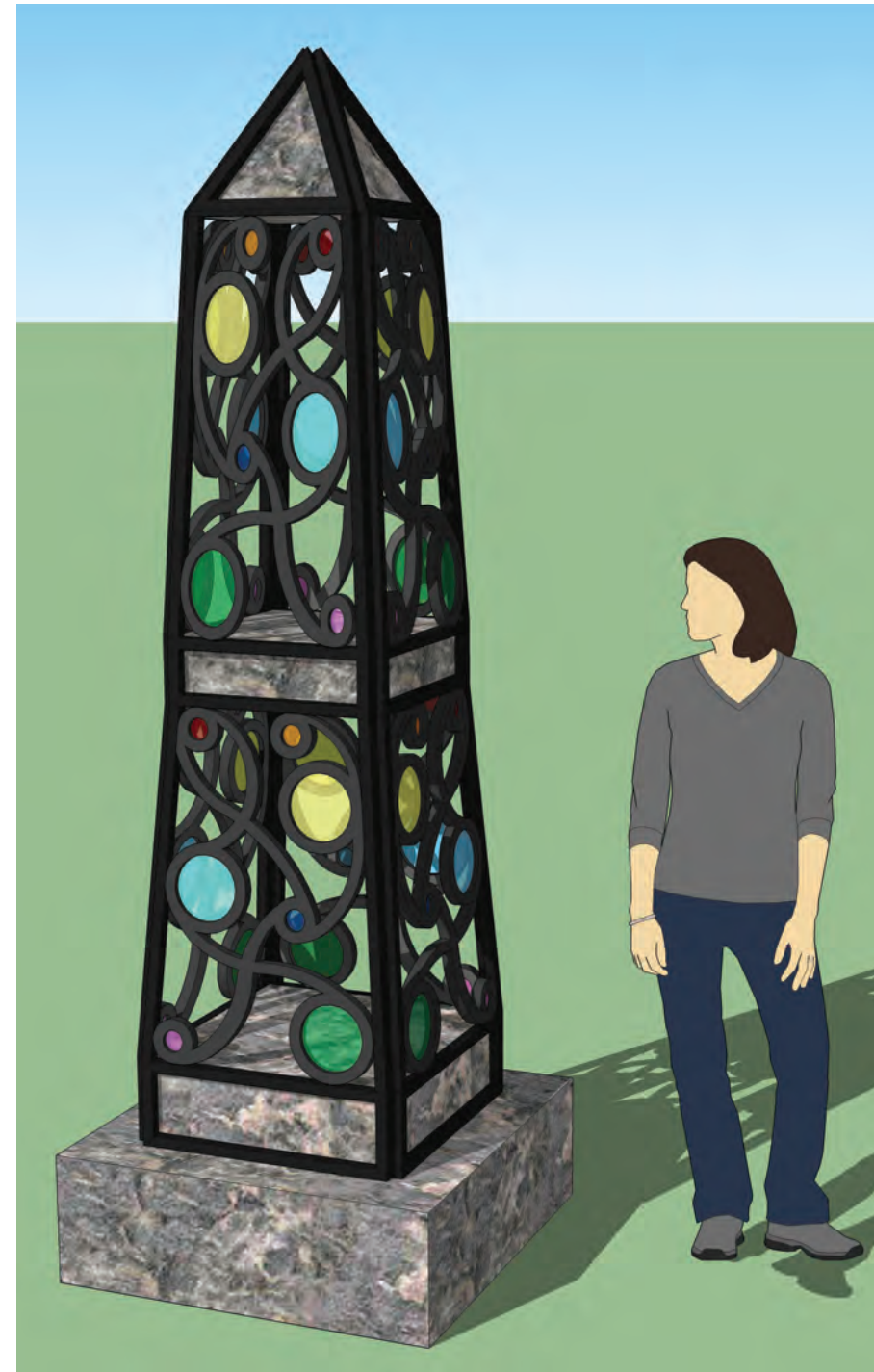


# A MONUMENT IN LIGHT

HENRY CLARK

The great obelisks of northeast and eastern Africa inspired this design. It has been modified to reflect the powerful African-American artistic traditions of Charleston, and to offer a very delicate, human-scaled monument. Obelisks tend to be composed of solid stone and rise in a monumental fashion, but this obelisk is only slightly taller than a person, should feel approachable, even friendly. Instead of a heavy, opaque material, it is composed of lacy wrought iron, paying homage to great Charlestonian ironmakers such as Philip Simmons. It is also filled with thirty-six roundels of stained glass, of different shapes and sizes, to evoke the different individuals buried here. The stone band in the middle will be engraved with information about the people laid to rest on this site. It is hoped that visitors will peek at each other through the iron and glass, feeling ennobled and included in this proud but light monument, which will catch the sun in the day and glow at night.

## SITE PLACEMENT



# WEAVING FAMILY BONDS

KATHALEENA CHHIEN

The thirty-six people buried here are family, connected to Charlestonians living today due to their roots in this city. It is motherhood that renews human life with the birth of every generation, and the strong modern woman represented here feels deeply connected to the brave mothers who came before and helped provide her with the opportunities she enjoys today. She is weaving a sweetgrass basket, revealing that even though she is prepared for the future, she has not forgotten the deep traditions that connect her to her ancestors, and connect Charleston to Africa. Her statue, and that of the little child next to her, should be made of bronze. The palmetto rose in the child's hand should, however, be a real one, renewed regularly by visitors to the statue. The bench that rises from the ground to the woman's side invites visitors to join her. This monument is only complete when living bodies have taken a seat, completing the picture of a beautiful family.

## SITE PLACEMENT





# LIFTING THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD

JED DONKLE



This great, solid granite globe represents the heavy burden placed on the Africans who built Charleston. Kidnapped from their homes, they were brought across the sea, never to see their loved ones again. They were forced to endure a life in which their creativity and labor received no just rewards. Many of the thirty-six people interred at this site came over in the holds of slave ships, and the memory of that horrible passage is thus ingrained in this sacred site. If the burden of slavery was as heavy as the world, however, the spirits of enslaved people and their descendants were and remain deep and irrepressible. A high-pressure bed of water, ushering forth from this sacred ground, supports this sphere, lifting it so that even a child can spin it with one hand. As visitors rotate the engraved globe, they will learn about the thirty-six buried here, about Africa and about America, about slavery, and about the world that enslaved Africans built, including the city of Charleston.

## SITE PLACEMENT

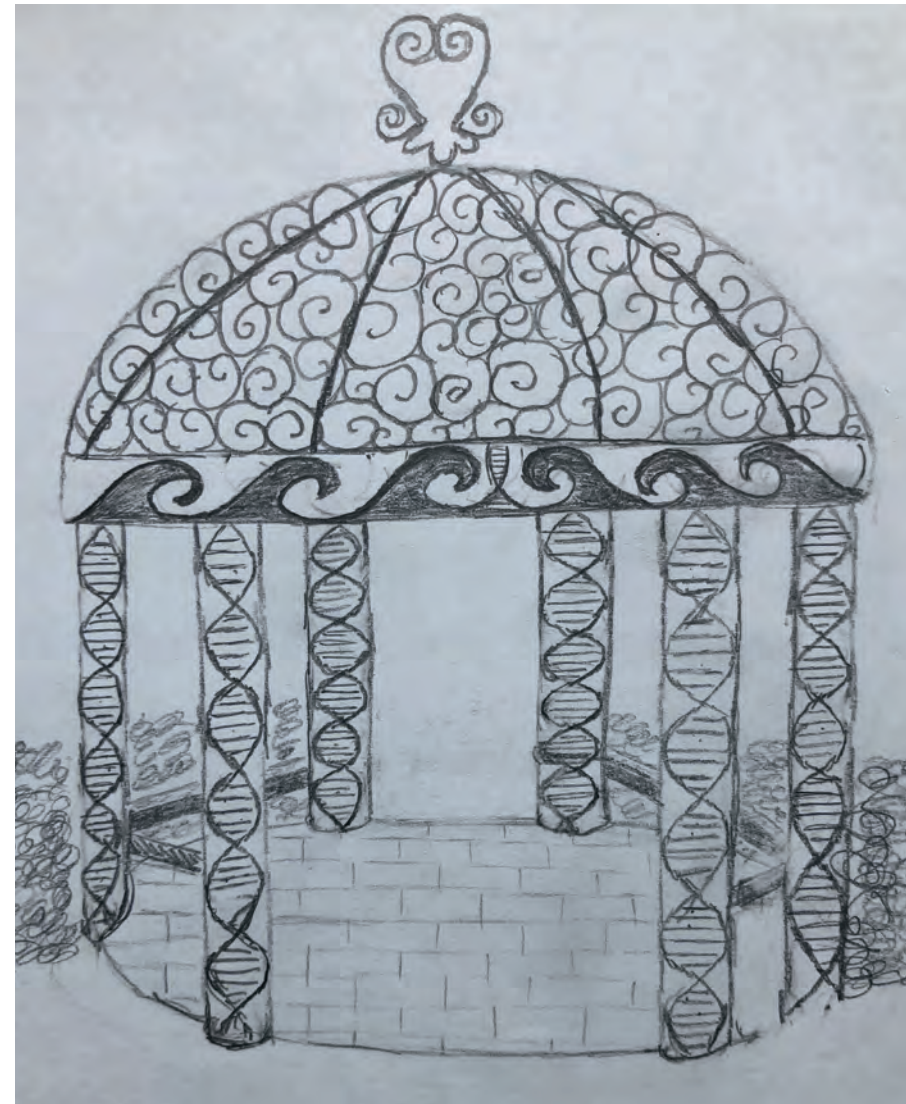


# IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF KINSHIP

ROBERT GORDON

One of the greatest crimes of slavery was that family bonds were shattered as human beings were bought and sold with great cruelty. Today, thanks to the rapidly developing science of genetics, it is possible to reestablish some knowledge of family connections. This pavilion accordingly celebrates the bonds between the thirty-six people buried here and the living people of Charleston and America today. The material is mostly wrought-iron, drawing upon one of the many art traditions that link West Africa to Charleston. Columns emerge from the ground like DNA strands, just as the legacies of the people buried nearby continue to fill the living world. Waves on the cornice symbolize the ocean that bridges Africa and America, while the lacy dome represents a bridge between the mortal realm and heaven, where we will all be reunited. An iron Sankofa crowns the pavilion. This is an Asante Adinkra symbol for learning from the past to move forward into the future.

## SITE PLACEMENT





# THE FOUNTAIN OF FAMILY TIES

KENDALL LEASURE



This monumental fountain will stand proudly near the site of the burial ground, where thirty-six Charlestonians of African descent will finally receive the public honor that they deserve. Iron supports shaped like sheaves of sweetgrass are numbered and bundled together to reflect the different groups of people found here at the site: sixteen men, ten women, two unknown adults, four children, two infants, and two unidentified people. Their lives are poetically depicted emerging from the base of the fountain and then weaving themselves into the three sweetgrass baskets representing the passing sequence of generations. Sparkling water will cascade from the top of the fountain to each basket, representing the never-ending vitality of the African-American people of Charleston. The brick wall will also serve as seating, and an iron plaque incorporated into the wall will provide information about the nearby grave sites. Living sweetgrass and indigo will wrap the site.

## SITE PLACEMENT





# WAVES OF MEMORY

JADE MACAYLO

This intimate plaza will be wrapped by a brick bench that gradually rises and then crests like a great wave, evoking the ocean that bridges Africa and America, which carried so many people to the shores of South Carolina. Capped by oyster shell tabby, this wave wall will also feature an information plaque offering visitors insights into the people who are buried nearby, explaining what we know about their places of origin and their lives. At the center of the plaza is a source of waves of another sort: a great digital drum with four striking pads. When visitors beat this drum, the noise will ring loudly out, echoing the joyful percussive music of many West African societies, as well as the drums of resistance that helped guide the Stono Slave Rebellion of 1739. In the evening, striking the drum will cause thirty-six glass panels in the brick pavement and wall to pulse with light. The music will summon the spirits of the ancestors into a celebration with the living.

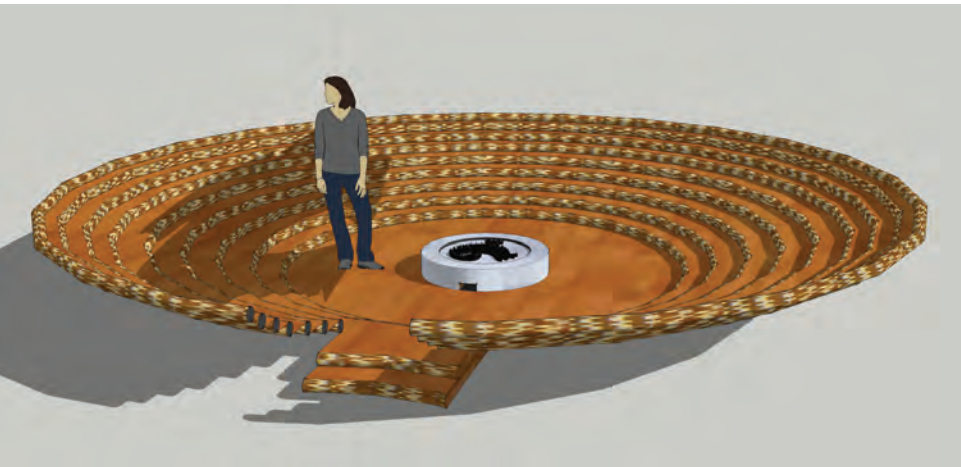
## SITE PLACEMENT





# THE SANKOFA NEST

OLIVIA MANFREDI



The Asante Adinkra symbol of the Sankofa comes in several forms. One is a bird that reaches back to pluck a seed from its back before taking flight, symbolizing the need for humanity to learn from the past in order to move forward into the future. This great enveloping basin, evoking the beautiful, woven form of an African-American sweetgrass basket, is a poetic nest for the Sankofa. This bird is missing the seed on its back because the “seed” is meant to be a living person who stands on the Sankofa pedestal to tell a story, or to share a dream or a concern. The memorial is thus a living place where memories and hopes are gathered and transmitted by living Charlestonians. On regular occasions, a local person will offer information about the thirty-six people buried here and what we know about their lives. This will be safe place to come to learn and to teach, to gather and to sing, about the past, the present, and the future.

## SITE PLACEMENT





# SACRED GROUND

EDEN McKOY

This pavilion rises from the sacred ground of the burial site, lifting a piece of it towards heaven as a gesture of adoration and respect. The six columns are all six-sided, creating a total of thirty-six faces, reflecting the number of individuals interred at this site. The columns are covered in sparkling gold mosaic, attesting to the preciousness of the people buried here and their living descendants. In the canopy of the dome is an Akrafokonmu, a West African soul disc, which represents the power of the human soul to absorb the light and life of the sun and emit its purifying energy to all who are nearby. This symbol of heavenly beauty and power will be reflected in a table topped with a mosaic of thirty pieces of mirror glass and six gemstones, representing the adults and children who are buried nearby. Information panels about these individuals will be arranged around the table, creating an ideal environment for communal reading by a small group of visitors.

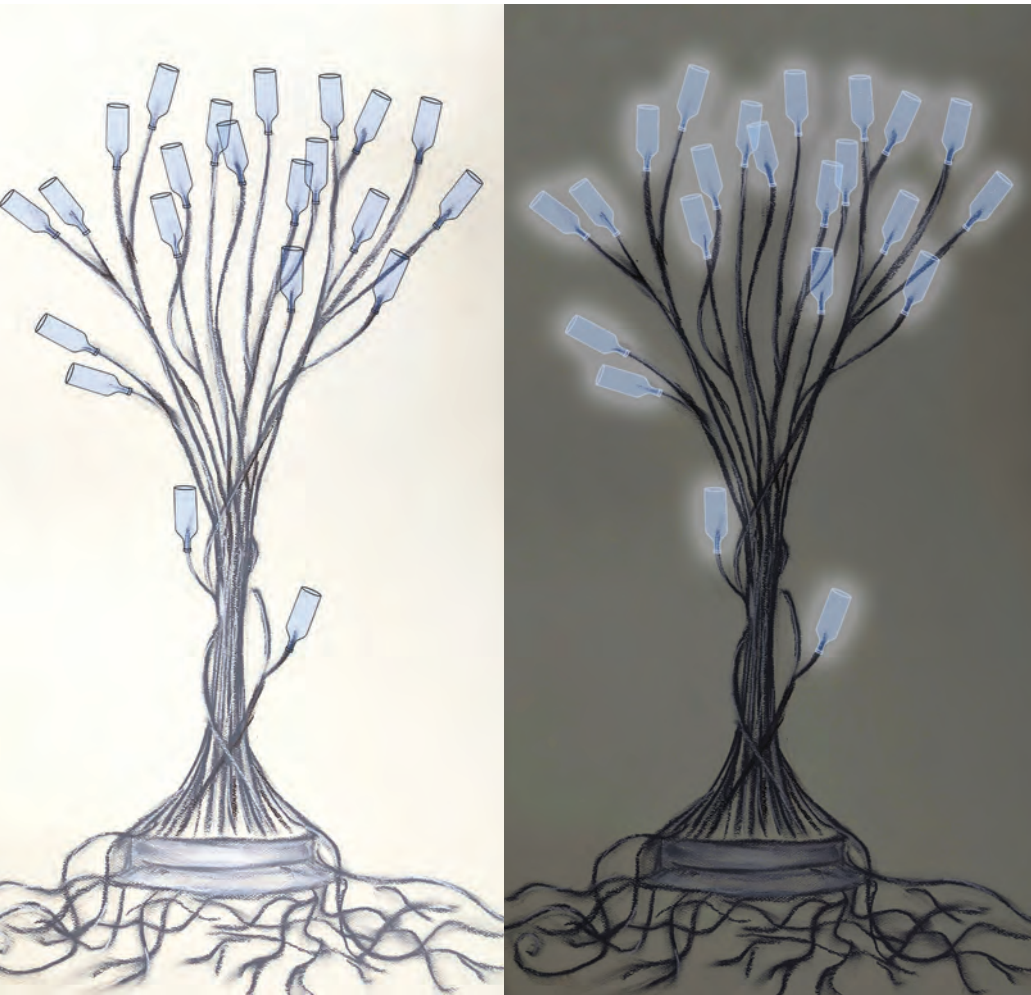
## SITE PLACEMENT





# A SHINING SPIRIT TREE

ABBY SCHNEIDER



Thirty-six thick cords of iron will rise from the ground, like enormous roots, weaving themselves into a magnificent trunk and then expanding into an iron canopy of vibrant branches. Small ones will represent the two infants and four children buried at this sacred site, while heftier branches will evoke the adults. This is a great bottle tree with blue bottles, a deep African-American landscape tradition with African roots. Historically, these bottles have been understood as cages for evil spirits, and this is not inappropriate here—there are dark ghosts in Charleston, a city haunted by brutal slave traders, and even today sick spirits of hatred manifest themselves in modern monsters. Such evil spirits will be captured by this tree by day, but then at night, pulses of light will rise, one by one, up the iron strands to brilliantly illuminate the bottles. These lights represent the spirits of African ancestors, who destroy the dark spirits, transforming the tree into a joyous celebration of light.

## SITE PLACEMENT



# SOUL SUN GARDEN

ANNA SCHULDT

A garden represents the vibrant life that rises from strong roots. The African-American community of Charleston has just such roots, and the thirty-six people of African descent buried at this site are testaments to the depth and resilience of that community's history. The overall form of this garden is drawn from a West African soul disc, with thirty-six planting areas to fill with beautiful plants, including those that reflect the connections between America and Africa, such as benne, indigo, or sweetgrass. The curved wooden benches are drawn from West African sources, specifically Ghana. The paving material will include stone and tabby, an oyster shell concrete that evokes the Gullah-Geechee seashell burial tradition. When this tabby is poured, thirty-six local African-American Charlestonians will be invited to press their feet into it, leaving a circle of footprints, testifying to the cyclical journey of human life, as we follow our ancestors, and lead our children.

## SITE PLACEMENT





# THE TREE OF LIFE

HOLLAND SHARON



The oak trees that cover the site of this burial ground are themselves like living monuments. This design proposes that one of these trees be incorporated into the memorial for the thirty-six people of African descent interred here, acknowledging the sacred significance of trees among many African cultures, including the great baobob, which is revered for its ability to shelter community gatherings. Thirty-six beautiful bronze lanterns will be placed at different intervals among the branches of the tree. Large ones will represent the hovering spirits of adults, and small lights will evoke the little ones buried here. They should be engraved with West African patterns drawn from the art and architecture of places like Sierra Leone and Ghana, and lit from within. Their lights will glow softly until a visitor sits on the circular bench under the tree, which will cause the lights to pulse and grow in intensity, welcoming the passerby who has come to honor African ancestors.

## SITE PLACEMENT



# A RISING AFRICAN SUN

PIERCE THOMASON



An arch, akin to spiritual doorway, will rise near the burial site of thirty-six Charlestonians of African descent. Facing east, it presents an Akrafokonmu, or soul disc, to the rising sun, reflecting its beautiful rays and celebrating the fact that the same sun greeting Charleston just finished warming the nations of Africa, uniting the two continents in light just as they are united by history. This disc will honor the spirits of African ancestors, entreating them to rise and share their wisdom and benevolence with the living people of Charleston today, who long to connect with the past and forge a better future. The bricks that compose the arch enveloping the soul disc will include surfaces darkened by thirty-six fingerprints from living Charlestonians, including sixteen men, ten women, four children, two infants, and four random individuals. These will remind people today that African ancestors built this city, and their descendants are entitled to an inheritance that is long past due.

## SITE PLACEMENT

