



Office of the Director

Office of Planning Review of Commemorative Work Application

TO: Commemorative Works Committee
FROM: Chris Shaheen, Program Manager, Office of Planning
DATE: April 29, 2024
SUBJECT: Commemorative Works Application for César Vallejo

Summary of Application and Recommendation

The statue “César Vallejo: Universal Poet of the 20th Century” is proposed in front of the Embassy of Peru at 1700 Massachusetts Avenue NW. The location is at the main entrance to the embassy in a green space between a circular driveway and the sidewalk. The surrounding public space between the back of the sidewalk and property line is paved and used for vehicle parking. Immediately adjacent to the location is a bust of Miguel Grau located on private property. The César Vallejo statue is seated on a bench, appropriately scaled to its surroundings, located on a site associated with the subject, and of a person consistent with the polices and values of the District of Columbia (DC).

The Office of Planning (OP) recommends the Commemorative Works Committee:

- Approve the application in concept;
- Advise the sponsor to consider an alternate location with visual separation from the bust of Miguel Grau and removing paving to create additional landscaped area where the sculpture could be located; and,
- Include an interpretive panel on the subject.

Background

The Embassy of Peru is proposing a statue of César Vallejo seated on a bench at the front entrance to their embassy at 1700 Massachusetts Avenue NW. Vallejo born in a remote village in the Peruvian Andes, was a Peruvian poet writer, playwright, and journalist. His writing contained universal themes of suffering, but also expressed hope for change. He lived and worked in Europe for much of his adult life and his work is an early example of the globalizing effects of modernity, featuring connections to Europe, Latin American, and his indigenous heritage.



The statue is proposed in public space controlled by the DC Department of Transportation (DDOT). It is in landscaped “public parking” at the southwest corner of Massachusetts Avenue and 17th Street NW in the largest area of green space adjacent to the embassy; most of the other public space adjacent to the embassy is paved and used for vehicle parking. The life-size bronze statue of Vallejo is seated on a wooden bench that is five feet long.

1700 Massachusetts Avenue is a DC Landmark, located in two historic districts, and the commemorative work is in public space under the jurisdiction of DDOT. Its location requires the application to complete two additional reviews in addition to the commemorative work review process:

1. Public Space Committee; and,
2. Historic Preservation Office.

The application is scheduled to be heard by the DC Public Space Committee at their May 23, 2024, meeting. The DC Historic Preservation Office has already reviewed and approved the application.

The bronze statue is modeled off an iconic photo of Vallejo seated on a bench and intended to make him more approachable and relatable to viewers. The statue depicts Vallejo reading a book with a furrowed brow, suggesting deep concentration. By locating the statue on a bench, viewers are invited to join him and interact physically with the memorial and Peruvian literary history. The figure is dressed in a suit and tie, like how Vallejo is depicted in the iconic photo and reflecting his association with white European academics.

Vallejo’s lasting influence is most visible in work related to racial and social justice and marginalization, making it relevant to current topics being discussed in the United States (US) today. As the US capitol and home to many Peruvian Americans, DC is an ideal place to celebrate Vallejo and educate the public on how his work connects with residents of DC and the US.

There is no direct connection between Vallejo and DC.

Assessment of the Application

Location and Relationship of the Subject Matter

The proposed site at 1700 Massachusetts Avenue is appropriate considering the subject and use of the adjacent building, but an alternative location at the site could make it more of a focal point with fewer distractions from other nearby elements commemorative features:

- The Commemorative Work Location Strategy recommends locating commemorative works on primary corridors, including this section of Massachusetts Avenue NW, and in landscaped “public parking”;
- There is a direct connection between subject and the site - a native of Peru and the Embassy of Peru;

- There are nearby memorials to Daniel Webster, General Windfield Scott, and Samuel Hahnemann that are not associated with Vallejo, but due to their location and scale they do not completely compete visually with each other;
- A nearby bust of Miguel Grau located on private property to the right of the embassy's main entrance is similar in scale and within 50 feet of the proposed statue of Vallejo, which diminishes the prominence and importance of both; and,
- The commemorative work's setting is within a small landscaped green space close to the sidewalk, but it is otherwise surrounded by circular driveway and concrete paving used for vehicle parking.

Proposed Work's Compatibility with District Policies and Values

The proposed commemorative work appears to be consistent with District policies and values:

- The commemorative work is located in an area outside of the Monumental Core, a location encouraged by DC's Comprehensive Plan;
- The subject appears to be consistent with values defined in the final report of Mayor Bowser's District of Columbia Facilities and Commemorative Expressions (DCFACES) Working Group that emphasized discouraging subjects that participated in slavery, systemic racism, mistreatment of, or actions that suppressed equality for, persons of color, women and LGBTQ communities and violation of the DC Human Rights Act;
- The subject is a native of Peru and consistent with the District's goals to encourage commemorative works that represent a diversity of culture, race, gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability status; and,
- The size and scale of the commemorative work is appropriate for the MU-1/DC zone – a zone that allows mixed-use projects including a broad range of commercial, institutional, and multiple dwelling unit residential development at varying densities specific to Dupont Circle - where it is located.

Materials Used in the Commemorative Work

The materials proposed for the commemorative work are durable and appropriate for the subject. The statue is reconstituted bronze with polyester resin and fiberglass, and the bench is made of American pine. Bronze is a material that has historically been used for outdoor sculptures because of its durability. There is no additional landscaping or interpretive panel included as part of the proposal.