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A Critical Reading of The Canadian Fallen Firefighters Memorial

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ABSTRACT

The Canadian Fallen Firefighters Memorial, designed by Douglas Coupland in collaboration with PLANT Architect Inc., was unveiled on September 9, 2012 in downtown Ottawa. Designed to commemorate the work-related deaths of firefighters in Canada, this memorial is dominated by a two-and-a-half times life sized, golden statue of a fireman. This study looks at the memorial as part of the continual process, undertaken by the federal government, of defining and anchoring narratives of national identity through monumental representation. The multitude of traditions and narratives that the memorial references and employs is critically interpreted, revealing the codes borrowed from Christian religious worship, war remembrance ritual and the contemporary post-9/11 ‘defender of the nation’ paradigm. These religious, nationalistic and religious codes of remembrance provide the gravitas and emotional punch, which symbolically elevate the occupation of firefighting to the status of a peer of the armed forces members. Also layered within the landscape’s design are more familiar, non-militarized and non-religious narratives of the imagined identity of Canada. These ‘softer’ symbols, and their associated narratives, are used to temper the hawkish and jarringly Christian and militaristic symbolism in the landscape’s design. Critical analysis of this landscape breaks through the layering and tempering of the memorial’s messaging, arguing that the memorial’s anchoring of a masculine, heroic and militaristic conception of Canadian identity, as dramatically exemplified by the golden, colossal fireman, is a problematic addition to the monumental representation of Canadian Identity in Canada’s capital.

KEYWORDS
Firefighters Memorial + Douglas Coupland + Canadian Identity + Militarism
Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desart. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away

- Percy Bysshe Shelley

“That’s huge. He is larger than life.” These were the thoughts that flashed through my mind when I first saw the golden firefighter who now occupies the northeast corner of Lebreton Flats in Ottawa. Since that first view of the Canadian Fallen Firefighters Memorial, I have revisited it a number of times and observed that

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1 Shelley, Percy Bysshe “Ozmandias” Poets.org (From the Academy of American Poets)
http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15691
when approaching from any direction it is impossible to miss the golden figure of a young fireman measuring a full two-and-a-half times life size.² He stands as a colossal way-finder, gesturing with an outstretched hand, finger pointed towards the memorial’s adjacent granite wall, in a call for those that pass to stop and take notice. This role of way-finder, or spokesperson, assumed by the golden fireman is reinforced with the declarative title of the memorial, *We Were There*.

In the discussion that follows, I explore the multitude of traditions and narratives that the landscape of the Canadian Fallen Firefighter Memorial references and employs in its construction of a space, which anchors a national identity centered on the hero worship of a certain profession. This will show how the landscape relies heavily on references, codes and tropes borrowed from Christian religious worship, war remembrance ceremony and ritual, and the more contemporary post-9/11 ‘defender of the nation’ paradigm that has become predominant in North America in the ceaseless era of the War on Terror. These nationalistic and religious codes of remembrance provide the gravitas and emotional punch, which symbolically elevate the occupation of firefighting to the status of a peer of the armed forces; anointing them, as part of the group deemed worthy of the ultimate sacrifice, death in the name of the nation. I argue that these startling themes and messages are tempered in the landscape’s design by being layered onto more familiar and non-militarized and non-

² Canadian Fallen Firefighters Memorial Design Statement. Plant Architects.
http://www.branchplant.com/landscape/cfm.html
religious narratives of the imagined identity of Canada. These more benign narratives and their symbols of Canadian identity construction, the lone pine on a windswept shore, the roadside gigantic sculpture of the TransCanada highway and the narrative of Canadian identity as staked out and exemplified by the nation’s ‘founding hero’s’, the voyageurs and lumberjacks of pre-Confederation, are all referenced in the memorial landscape. I will argue that these ‘softer’ symbols and their associated narratives are used to temper the hawkish and jarringly Christian and militaristic symbolism in the landscape’s design.

The National Capital Commission (NCC) built the memorial as a joint project with the Canadian Fallen Firefighters Fund (CFFF), a not-for-profit organization, “dedicated to honouring Canada’s fallen firefighters.”3 Underscoring the federally funded NCC’s commitment to this memorial is the 2.5 million dollars in financial support that its construction received from the Harper Government, with another 2 million dollars contributed by the CFFF.4 This financial commitment, and perhaps more importantly the physical scale of the memorial that was approved, signal the

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4 Pearson, Matthew “‘Never to be forgotten’: New monument to fallen firefighters dedicated Sunday” Ottawa Citizen September 10, 2012

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commitment that the NCC and Harper Government have to the memorial and its messaging.

My approach to understanding the memorial’s landscape has been guided by Claudette Lauzon, assistant Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art History and Theory at the Ontario College of Art and Design University. Lauzon argues that “[p]ublic monuments represent and contribute to the construction of national identity by imposing on public spaces a colossal presence with inculcating narratives rendered timeless by virtue of the material—invariably stone, bronze, or marble employed to monumentalize a preferred version of national history.”

These attempts at a permanent, physical anchoring of identity and history of the nation through the construction of national memorials and monuments can be understood as working to counter the inherently fluid nature of national identities. Brian Osborne, Professor Emeritus of Geography at Queen’s University, whose research has looked at symbolic landscapes, monumentalism and preformed commemoration, has guided this fluid understanding of national identity in my discussion. Osborne declares that, “rather than being primordial entities national identities are in fact “generated,” and are “constantly being reconstituted.”

This memorial, designed by the noted and prolific

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5 Lauzon, Claudette “Monumental Interventions: Jeff Thomas Seizes Commemorative Space” Imagining Resistance: Visual Culture and Activism in Canada Editors: J. Keri Cronin and Kristy Robertson

Canadian novelist and visual artist Douglas Coupland, in conjunction with the architectural firm PLANT Architect, employs a cacophony of symbolic tropes. In this study of the landscape of the Canadian Fallen Firefighters Memorial, I will identify the multitude of codes of remembrance, religious ceremony and memorialization that are being referenced to understand the characteristics of national identity that are reconstructed through both the memorial’s content and its colossal scale. This research will understand which narratives of Canadian nationalism are being made to appear timeless and primordial in this landscape. My approach to understanding this very contemporary landscape, unveiled in September 2012, is inspired by French philosopher and social theorist, Michael Foucault’s approach to understanding the cultural moment. For Foucault, "The game is to try to detect those things which have not yet been talked about, those things that, at the present time, introduce, show, give some more or less vague indications of the fragility of our system of thought, in our way of reflecting, in our practices."7 In the pages that follow, I have worked through a critical reading of the landscape of the Canadian Fallen Firefighter Memorial in an

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7 Foucault, Michel Foucault Live (Interviews, 1966-84) Ed Sylvere Lotringer. New York : Semiotext(e), 2nd ed. 1996. P. 411
effort to understand what this landscape recreates, references or relies on in its construction as a national memorial.

Upon the first encounter with the fireman, it takes the viewer a moment to realize that the tall pole next to the statue is part of the sculpture. It is in fact a representation of a fire pole sitting just behind the fireman statue, coloured a similar golden shade. Once the pole is viewed as part of the sculpture, it draws the gaze upwards, away from the granite base, Lebreton Flats, and away from the earthly plane altogether. Soaring heights have been employed for centuries within Christian architecture to create both an experience of confronting the sublime in the faithful within places of worship, as well as serving as a physical metaphor of the resurrection of Christ. The prolific and radically conservative British architect Augustus Pugin argued in his nineteenth century text *Contrasts* that this principle has been, “beautifully exemplified by the great heights and vertical lines, which have been considered by the Christians from the earliest period, as the emblem of the resurrection.” The twenty-meter fire pole is this memorial’s version of a towering spire. It creates the connection between the ethereal heavens above and the physical world below. This ethereal connection also changes the way the viewer interprets the role of the golden fireman statue. The fireman takes on an ethereal quality himself; authoritatively standing in front of the pole, he can be read as an angelic presence, descended from another

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8 Pugin Augustus *Contrasts* Charles Dolman, London 1812
realm above to deliver his message. This influence of Christian vertical architectural
style is the first signal sent by the designers that this landscape is to be understood as
the site of religiously inspired ritual.

The architectural firm that co-designed the memorial with Coupland
describes its function as, “both to memorialize fallen firefighters and provide a place
for their annual Ceremony Service on Ottawa’s Lebreton Flats.”9 This focus on the
annual ‘Ceremony
Service’ means that
looking at how the
space is used for this
ritual is important in
understanding this
landscape. Ritual and
ceremony shape the
way we understand
space, and the clear influence for the annual ceremony at the memorial, first held
September 9, 2012, is Christian worship. The entire memorial is shaped to create a

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9 Canadian Fallen Firefighters Memorial Design Statement. Plant Architects.
http://www.branchplant.com/landscape/cfm.html

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central sanctuary space behind the fireman statue, and his pole. This flat sanctuary is bounded on the north by a long mound with a granite face designated the Name Wall, and to the east and south by a smaller mound and a stand of maple trees, which “enclose and define the central ceremony area.” The inaugural ritual within this space was arranged as a Christian church service with chairs ordered in rows, all facing an altar table draped in red cloth. (Fig. 1) The helmets of firefighters killed in the line of duty the previous year were placed in honour on this altar table. The Christian designation of the memorial service was completed and sanctified by the presence of a fire department chaplain at the service. This association with Christian themes is extended beyond the annual Fallen Firefighters Ceremony into the physical monument through a brass plaque on the north corner of the granite Name Wall, which is inscribed with *The Fire Fighters Prayer*, a prayer written by American Firefighter A.W. Smokey Linn. This prayer opens with the line, “When I am called to duty, God”, suggesting that the choice to pursue the profession of firefighting is a calling from God. The final stanza of the poem delivers a powerful statement, one that ties the message of the memorial to Christian notions of sacrifice:

And, if according to Your will

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I must answer death’s last call
Bless with Your protecting hand
My family one and all.

In this final stanza, not just the call to the profession, but the memorialized firefighters’ deaths have been cast as occurring according to God’s will. The securing of this prayer to the memorial underscores the religious nature of the memorialization being made. Its evocation of the deaths of the firefighters as being a Christian holy sacrifice in the name of the nation is patterned on the established war-dead remembrance tradition in Canada.

The other national memorials in Ottawa that are comparable in scale and scope to the Canadian Fallen Firefighters memorial are all military monuments. The National War Memorial, which is located about a kilometer down Wellington Avenue from the Firefighters Memorial, offers an interesting comparison. Both memorials strive to honour the
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deaths of a certain group of Canadians and provide a national meaning for their deaths. The National War Memorial has been designed so that visitors walking through the landscape feel a connection with war-dead remembrance. The design statement from the memorial’s architects speaks to this intentional linkage, describing their plan to make the memorial park feel, “connected with the Canadian War Museum”, which sits kitty-corner to the Fallen Firefighters Memorial across the intersection of Booth Street and the Ottawa River Parkway.¹³ This physical proximity to the museum is not the only connection that the memorial makes with war remembrance. The inaugural ceremony to Fallen Firefighters took much inspiration from Remembrance Day ceremonies and included a ceremonial march with representatives of all the branches of the Canadian Forces in uniform along with police and firefighters, and a formal colour party.¹⁴ The Governor General officially opened the memorial and addressed the crowd with his military medals pinned to his suit jacket. Also replicating Remembrance Day practice at the National War Memorial, firefighters stood guard around the altar table in a mournful sentinel posture (See Fig. 2). The physical memorial also extends the re-appropriation of national war-dead remembrance in this context for firefighters. The ‘Name Wall’ that forms the north perimeter of the sanctuary space continues after a break for an opening from the

¹³ Canadian Fallen Firefighters Memorial Design Statement. Plant Architects. 
http://www.branchplant.com/landscape/cfm.html

¹⁴ Matta, Linda Canadian Fallen Firefighers Memorial Photo Gallery, 
http://www.phase.com/wakenphotography/image/145993483
north, forming a small section, which serves as the focal point of the ceremonial space. It is here that the altar table was placed during the ceremony in September. Above the altar table, carved in large letters, are the phrases:

NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN
GRAVE DANS NOS MEMOIRES

These statements of remembrance are very similar to the most common phrase used in Canadian War-Dead remembrance, ‘Lest We Forget’. Many Canadian war memorials bear this inscription in the same way the Fallen Firefighters Memorial is inscribed with the imperatives to not forget outlined above. The phrase, ‘Lest We Forget’ originally appeared in Rudyard Kiplling’s poem *Recessional*, and was adopted as a popular call to remembrance after the First World War. The phrase still appears as part of the official Remembrance Day liturgy in the Royal Canadian Legion’s Ritual and Insignia manual.

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15 Kiplling, Rudyard “Recessional” The Kiplling Society
http://www.kipling.org.uk/poems_recess.htm
16 Royal Canadian Legion Ritual and Insignia Manual
http://legion.ca/_PDF/Manuals/RitualandInsignia2011_e.pdf

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In employing the term ‘fallen’ for those who have died, the name of the monument itself is referencing another popular war-remembrance poem, *For The Fallen*. The official Royal Canadian Legion act of remembrance, with its own iconic refrain of “We Will Remember Them”, is a stanza from this longer poem written by Laurence Binyon about the mounting human cost of the First World War. The use of the term ‘fallen’ as a synonym for dead, references this First World War connotation and underlines the linkage being made in the memorial with war dead through re-appropriation of familiar ritual and language of remembrance.

A further comparison with the Canadian War Memorial needs to be made in relation to the employment of the symbolism of the Unknown Dead. Matching the Canadian War Memorial’s accompanying reference to the Unknown Dead through the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the Fallen Firefighters Memorial references the same concept with the inscription high on the Name Wall of ‘Unknown Firefighters/Les Pompiers Inconnus’. As discussed below in more detail, the Name Wall is inscribed with the names of firefighters whose deaths were related to their profession. Adding the ‘Unknown Firefighters’ to this roll of the dead is a powerful device being utilized to provide a nationalistic context for the deaths. In his seminal text on Nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson addresses the use of Unknown Dead in national monuments declaring that, “No more arresting emblems

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17 Binyon, Laurence, *For the Fallen*. Wiki Source
http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/A_treasury_of_war_poetry,_British_and_American_poems_of_the_world_war,_1914-1919/The_Fallen#For_the_Fallen
of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers.” For Anderson, the imagined nation gains legitimacy through the sacrifice of human lives. If people have died for the nation, it must be more than just an imagined association; it must have permanence and through their deaths be in some way transcendental. The Unknown Dead make these sacrifices universal to all citizens of the nation, for without a name for the dead, there is no specific narrative. The story of sacrifice for the nation becomes universal, timeless; the Unknown Dead represent all past unknown deaths for the nation, but also all the future deaths yet unknown. For Anderson, “void as these tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly national imaginings.” Although the ‘Unknown Firefighters/Les Pompiers Inconnus’ inscription is relatively small at the top of the Name Wall, its appearance plays into the very powerful nationalistic device of the “Unknown Soldier” described by Anderson and is important to recognize as bringing a timeless and universal quality to the memorial’s message; not just those named, but the unknown dead firefighters of the past, present and future can be cast into this memorial’s scope.

19 Ibid. p.9
Another narrative of Canadian nationalism drawing upon conceptions of universality and timelessness, in this case in relation to the imagined expanse of Canadian wilderness, is also drawn upon in producing the Canadian Fallen Firefighters Memorials’ meaning. While the religious and Anglo-Centric war remembrance traditions outlined above are transplanted ideas that would be recognizable and meaningful in a monument in London as much as in Ottawa, this other meta-narrative being utilized places the memorial and its message firmly in a Canadian context. Returning to the design statement, the claim of the architects of this landscape is that “the CFF Memorial is deeply rooted in the nation’s political and physical foundation.”

This ‘deep rooting’ is accomplished in a deliberate fashion, with the names of deceased firefighters being carved directly onto the granite ‘Name Wall’. This wall is an abstracted version of the Canadian landmass, with the political borders of the provinces appearing as lines approximating how they would appear on a map. The top of the wall undulates, with its dips and points matching the northern coast of Canada. The back of the Name Wall slopes away in a mound of earth and rock towards the Ottawa River and the north. This slope is punctuated by rocky formations that have been placed to mimic the geographic map of Canada, lining up with where the Canadian Shield and the mountain ranges of Western Canada would appear on the abstracted map of the Name Wall. Looking back at the massive fireman

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21 Ibid.
statue that called the viewer into the sanctuary space, the figure’s outstretched finger is pointing directly at the center of this Name Wall. This wall ties the deaths of these firemen to the narrative of Canadian nationalism that focuses on the landmass of Canada as the defining factor of Canadian identity.

‘Land Nationalism’ is a common theme in the cultural production of Canadian national identity. Fundamentally, it is a type of primordialist nationalism that links a distinct Canadian character and national traits to characteristics of this particular piece of land, which was politically recognized as Canada through the process of Confederation. This concept comes through in numerous tropes: being tougher because Canadians experience the cold of northern winter, being patient and self-reliant because communities big and small are relatively far apart, and being naturally resilient as descendants of those who were strong enough to survive in the ‘wilds’ of Canada. This Canadian Land Nationalism is found in the reading of the paintings of Tom Thomson as depicting a shared experience of confronting and standing up to the imagined wilderness, through his depictions of Ontario’s near-north landscape. It is apparent in the choice of a loon gliding across a wild lake as the acceptable image of Canada’s nationhood to be stamped on our one-dollar coin. The ultimate Canadian symbol, the maple leaf, also relies on this narrative, with this central symbolic
expression of Canadian nationhood not stemming from a human creation, but from
the natural landscape itself. At the root of all these representations is the concept that
there is a shared and unifying character that Canadian’s share through there stoic and
admirable ability to thrive in the harsh, but beautiful landscape of Canada. Land
Nationalism hinges on accepting that it is the landscape itself that sets Canadians apart
from the rest of the planet, all the while binding Canadians themselves together. The
fact that the Maple tree does not grow in large areas of the country, and that many
Canadian’s have never seen a loon, or that snow does not fall very often in some areas
of the country, is ignored in the narrative of Canadian Land Nationalism. The wildly
varying, day-to-day experiences of Canadians in different geographic regions, and in
rural versus urban settings across the country, and the cultural heterogeneity that
exists within the millions of Canadians who trace no genetic or cultural link with the
‘founding Canadians’, are also largely pushed out of this conception of Canadian
Identity, which ties and sells the ‘Canadian Experience’ as a unifying experience with
an *imagined* national landscape.

The Name Wall plays on the narrative of Land Nationalism in its abstraction of
the political map of Canada, and by reflecting the physical characteristics of the
landmass Canada sits on. By choosing to organize the names of the deceased
firefighters provincially, the tragedy of these deaths becomes a national phenomenon.
Like the experience of the weather across the nation, or the national landscape and its
wildlife, the tragedy of firefighters dying has become a national characteristic. The varying circumstances of these firefighters’ deaths are erased. The wildly differing realities of working conditions at different periods of Canadian history for firefighters, the differences of working in cities and rural areas, and the very different experience of accidental death on a call versus the slow agony of a work related illness, are silenced into a unifying experience of dying as a heroic firefighter in Canada.\(^{22}\)

Apart from the Name Wall, another symbolic device of Land Nationalism is utilized through the memorial’s “White Pine Tree Rock.”\(^{23}\) This section of the granite wall is where the altar table is placed during the annual ceremony at the memorial. This ‘rock’ is set off of the Name Wall by the opening in the granite-faced mound that allows entrance from the north, off of the Ottawa River Parkway (See Fig. 3). Its center is filled with soil and planted with a lone white pine, which will grow above the inscription, “Never To Be Forgotten/Grave Dans Nos Memoires”. As it grows, the pine will tower over the opposite end of the sanctuary space from the fireman statue and his pole. The choice of a solitary pine plays on a well-versed trope from the Canadian national art vernacular. Iconic paintings, such as Tom Thomson’s *West Wind*

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\(^{22}\) Canadian Fallen Firefighters Foundation Web Site. [http://www.cfffa.ca/EN/index.html](http://www.cfffa.ca/EN/index.html)

and Fredrick Varley’s *Stormy Weather Georgian Bay*, are centered on the lone pine standing against the elements of the Canadian landscape. Jonathan Bordo, professor of Cultural Studies at Trent University, has described this focus as signifying the “human presence in the Group[s work] manifested only as a symbolic deposit, most characteristically as the figure of the tree.” The tree then, in this symbolic system, represents the human presence of the white settler society stubbornly claiming and thriving in a hostile landscape.

![Design of Canadian Fallen Firefighters Memorial](image)

**Figure 3 - Design of Canadian Fallen Firefighters Memorial**

Source: PLANT Architects website

The lone pine on the ‘White Pine Tree Rock’ adopts this anthropomorphic role in representing the human presence of the deceased firefighters which the memorial was built to honour, thereby fitting the description by Bordo of the lone pine trope in these iconic paintings. Bordo describes the pine as, “a sentinel rooted in rock, its defiance made vulnerable by the immobility of its very position as guardian of the

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If the golden firefighter is the way-finder of the memorial, dressed in contemporary firefighting gear, standing in front of the ethereal fire pole to draw our attention to the memorial, then the pine tree is a less specific symbolic representation, allowing for the presence of each individual named in the memorial. The use of a symbolic tree allows each firefighter who has died, and all of those unknown past and future firefighters also referenced on the Name Wall, to be represented, as it stands sentinel, rooted in the rock of the memorial.

The Canadian Fallen Firefighters Memorial sits in the larger landscape of the Lebreton Flats of Ottawa. This flat plane, on the Ottawa River directly beside the Chaudière Rapids, was a

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25 Ibid. p. 51
landmark on the staples trade route that the river has acted as in the centuries since European settlers realized that there was a fortune to be made in the resources of the Canadian landmass. The rapids, especially before they were damned into their current tamed state, formed a natural impediment for first voyageurs and lumber crews as they moved up and down the Ottawa River. The fur and lumber trades, in the eras in which they were dominant, were instrumental in the development and expansion of the territory that would become Canada. These staples trades, and the male labourers who worked in them, became central in the subsequent construction of Land Nationalism narratives which focused on the hardships the land presented to those looking to live and profit on it, and to the imagined development of the 'Canadian Character', typified by the perseverance of these mythical staples labourers to endure and overcome these hardships.

This casting is reflected in the landscape of Lebreton Flats and is endorsed by the National Capital Commission in two smaller monuments tucked behind the Canadian War Museum, dedicated to the lumbermen and voyageurs respectively. These two monuments share similar forms, being composed of life-sized silhouettes shaped out of steel, which create the outline of human forms engaged in the work of these trades. The lumbermen monument includes a replica of a lumber raft that the observer can step onto, sharing the space with the lumberman silhouette. While the

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26 Jenkins, Phil An Acre of Time, Macfarlane, Toronto 1996
voyageur monument, a little further west along the shoreline, allows the viewer to walk right into the abstracted steel canoe the figures are placed in; with a seat left open beside the abstracted paddler in the stern of the boat, allowing passers-by to pause, sit with the paddlers, and look out onto the centuries-old trade route. The Canadian Fallen Firefighter Memorial, with its relation to Canadian Land Nationalism outlined above, casts the firefighter into a similar mythical role as the voyageur and the lumberjack. The way that these different professions are portrayed through memorialization on Lebreton Flats is an interesting comparison. The form of the golden fireman represents a colossal turn away from the more accessible and understated monuments to the voyageurs and lumbermen, professions in which the risk of death was always present.

The golden fireman’s scale makes it stand out among the monuments of Ottawa, however it does have a similarity in its proportion and placement with a quite different genre of popular public art, the roadside gigantic attraction. Most people who have made the trek across Canada on the TransCanada Highway will smile and nod at the mention of the Wawa Goose or the Big Nickel. These sculptures are two of the most well known of a genre of sculpture that appeared along TransCanada after its opening, as vacationing by car along the highway became more and more popular.
Both the Big Nickel and the Wawa Goose were built in the early 1960s, becoming landmarks on the completed highway that stretched from coast-to-coast. Conceived as attractions that would literally stop travellers in their communities, many towns along the route began to erect their own gigantic sculptures in the hopes of reaping the economic benefits of the new cross-country traffic. The design of these sculptures was often chosen to reflect a component of local culture or history; for example, the Big Nickel was chosen to reflect the nickel mining that was an economic driver of Sudbury. The sum of all these sculptural works creates a slow, widely spaced parade of kitschy, idealized elements of the culture of small communities across Canada as the traveler makes their trip along the highway. Not only has this genre of gigantic roadside sculpture slowed the progress of travelers as they stop for photos along the TransCanada, but over time these sculptures have taken on a wider cultural significance, underscored by a Canada Post series of stamps featuring some of the roadside gigantic sculptures. For some Canadians, these sculptures serve as a nostalgic reminder of long trips across Canada’s expansive landmass, but their significance can also be attributed to the powerful code of representation they utilize, described by literary critic, poet and Princeton University Professor, Susan Stewart in her text *On Longing: The Miniature, The Gigantic, The Souvenir and The Collection*. For Stewart, “The gigantic, occurring in a transcendental space, a space above, analogously

mirrors, the abstractions of the institutions – either those of religion, the state, or as is increasingly the case abstractions of technology and corporate power.” The gigantic nature of these sculptures reminds the viewer of the abstract concepts of religion, the nation, and even the ‘wildness’, all of which are themselves gigantic in their imagined scope and fundamental to the different narratives of Canadian nationalism referenced in this memorial landscape. Like walking into a cathedral or standing in front of the Rockies, the scale of the roadside gigantic sculpture orchestrates within the viewer an experience of confronting the sublime, providing a physical analogy for the temporal process of understanding the concepts of state, religion and vast wilderness.

The motivation of placing a gigantic golden fireman as the centerpiece and way-finder figure of the Canadian Fallen Firefighters Memorial is similar to the motivation of the small town officials who decided that a gigantic sculpture on the roadside would serve their community well. The fireman’s scale and position looking out onto the passing roadway works to arrest the travelers passing by, but also works at a deeper symbolic level: as a physical analogy of the gigantic, imagined nation. This reading understands the golden fireman as verging on kitsch, with the solemnity and the gravitas of the rest of the memorial needed to keep the viewer from taking the

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statue more lightly as a peer of the roadside gigantic with which many Canadians are familiar. If a traveler driving down the TransCanada from North Bay into Ottawa did not know the golden fireman was part of a national memorial, it would easy to compare the similarities it has with another gigantic statue that sits beside Highway 17 in Mattawa. The mythic character of Ottawa Valley lore, the lumberjack Mufferaw Joe is represented by a massive sculpture along the road in this small town about 3 hours up the TransCanada from Ottawa (Fig. 6). The sculpture in Mattawa bears a remarkable similarity to Douglas Coupland’s fireman sculpture in scale, posture, and even the axe, which both figures hold at their sides. This striking similarity could support the assertion made above of the fireman being cast as a peer to the lumberjack and voyageurs as mythical characters in the Land Nationalism narrative of Canadian identity. However, its massive scale could just as easily lead the passing traveler to understand the golden fireman as another example of the kitschy, gigantic roadside sculptures that sit beside the ribbon of highway that cuts across the Canadian landmass.

Figure 5 Mufferaw Joe Statue, Mattawa. Source: Wikicommuns. Source: Wikipedia Commons

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Despite these similarities in scale and placement, The Canadian Fallen Firefighters Memorial cannot be summed up entirely as a piece of roadside kitsch. Neither can it simply be said that it is a re-hashing of familiar religious and war remembrance codes. This memorial landscape has been constructed to honour and place the deaths of firefighters within a national context, but this cannot be understood only as a placing of the firefighter as a peer to the nation-founding lumberjacks and voyageurs, set in the narrative of Canadian identity that hinges on the collective cultural response and character-building involved in conquering and ‘carving out a life’ on the North American continent. No, there is a more contemporary narrative being utilized in the form, content, and annual ceremony of the Canadian Fallen Firefighters Memorial landscape and this narrative hinges on the casting of the firefighter as a defender of the nation.

The September 11th terrorist attacks in New York City killed 2,753 people. Three hundred and forty-three of these were firefighters and other first responders who overcame the natural response to turn and run, and headed into a horrific scene to try and save others. The majority of people killed on 9/11, however, died in the

29 “9/11 By The Numbers” NY Magazine September 2012
http://nymag.com/news/articles/wtc/1year/numbers.htm
30 Ibid.
midst of the normal day-to-day rhythm of their lives, in a wide variety of occupations. That is the nature of violent attacks against civilians; they strike the civil fabric of a community, not just those individuals designated to defend it. The devastating statistic of 658 employees of one financial firm, Cantor Fitzgerald, being killed on 9/11 in One World Trade Centre, painfully illustrates this point. It is difficult to process the randomness and meaninglessness of a death of a mail clerk or stock analyst just starting work at Cantor Fitzgerald on September 11th, but that is the reality of the majority of the victims of 9/11; they were in the wrong place, at the wrong moment.

The War on Terror paradigm, which emerged out of the 9/11 attacks and has been perpetuated through the long engagement of both the United States and Canada in the War in Afghanistan, has worked to make sense of the looming, yet largely invisible threat of terrorism. To rationalize and justify the terrible cost of war, those who lead a nation to war require narratives of enemy ‘othering’ and the subsequent valorization of those who will confront these threatening others. The Afghanistan War, and the wider War on Terror, has proven over time a difficult narrative to cast an enemy ‘other’ into. The Afghanistan War has been a war where complicated sectarian violence, IED's, suicide bombings, long range bombers and drone strikes all mean the nature of conflict and death in this theater of war cannot easily fit into a narrative which clearly discerns the good guy from the bad. Further greying the picture has been the emerging reality of massive civilian casualties as a result of the

31 Ibid.
war. As an example, between 2006 and 2011 the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan estimates that 3,120 Afghan civilians were killed as a result of pro-government forces actions, including Canadian forces, in the fighting. In the end, the picture in Afghanistan is similar in some ways to New York on September 11, 2001; the overwhelming victims in modern war are members of the civil fabric of their communities, killed in the day-to-day routine of their lives. Yet this narrative will not sell war to the citizens of North American nations whose own day-to-day lives are comparatively safe. War necessitates justification to the public when it is fought in distant lands, at the cost of Canadian or American lives. War narratives need simple dichotomies of us vs. them, enemies vs. heroes. The enemy ‘other’ throughout the post-9/11 epoch has been the 'terrorists'; the heroes have been those who would confront and defend against this difficult-to-define group of threatening enemies. This narrative has found traction with many North Americans and has manifested itself in the phenomenon of ‘supporting the troops’. Yellow ribbon bumper magnets have become part of the landscape of any traffic-jam on the 401, sporting events feature soldiers receiving adulation on the field at half-time, and Don Cherry uses his first period pulpit on Hockey Night in Canada to praise and valorize the troops.

Importantly for this research, it has not been the armed forces alone that have been elevated to this exalted status; firefighters have emerged as peers in this heroic classification. Stemming from the presence of firefighters on the scene in 9/11, and especially because of the deaths of 323 of these firemen on that tragic day, the profession in general has been re-understood in the post-9/11 paradigm as part of the heroic defense apparatus. In the introduction to her text, *Hero’s of Film, Comics and American Culture: Essays on Real and Fictional Defenders of Home*, Lisa Detora describes this positioning as being reinforced by “rhetoric that identifies service men and women fighting abroad and police and firefighters as among the most ‘real’ of American heroes to date.”\(^{33}\) If terrorism threatens the entire fabric of civic life, firefighters have been singled out and elevated out of the weave of roles and responsibilities into a different class of ‘real heroes’, responsible for defense and poised for the possibility of the supreme sacrifice for the nation. The Canadian Fallen Firefighter Memorial can be understood as a massive, physical articulation of this elevation of firefighters to this heroic status. Recalling the design statements intention of creating a "connection with the Canadian War Museum", the golden firefighter’s gaze can be re-understood as looking beyond the roadway directly at the museum, and the statue’s message, which above has been best described as, "Stop and look", can in this reading be better described as, "Hey! Us too."

The memorial unifies the 1,100 firefighters whose names appear on the Name Wall into a narrative that emphasizes their deaths as sacrifices, not simply for the people or property that they specifically were working to save, or the city or municipality that employed them, but for the entire imagined community of the Canadian nation. As Peter Hodgins, Assistant Professor of Canadian Studies at Carleton University, has noted in his study of narratives of the Halifax Explosion, *Why Must Halifax Keep Exploding*, “Sacrifice has always played an important role in forging communal and national unity and in eliminating any lingering sense that nations and communities are artificial constructions.” As was noted above, the placing of the names of firefighters on the map has given the deaths of these men symbolic significance to the nation as a whole. At the same time, the listing of the names by province, and not in chronological order, pulls these deaths out of the context of the passage of time and unites the deaths symbolically as a single collective act of sacrifice for the nation. The significance of this removal of a chronological context to the deaths is significant because of the long period from which the names were collected; the earliest death having occurred in 1848. The memorial does not

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34 Hodgins, Peter “Why Must Halifax Keep Exploding?: English-Canadian Nationalism and the Search for a Usable Disaster”, *Settling and Unsettling Memories* Edited by Nicole Neatby and Peter Hodgins University of Toronto Press, 2012 P. 574
provide any notice of this long time period. What it does communicate is that the first chronological death on the memorial, which occurred 19 years before Canadian Confederation, is somehow deeply significant for the nation of Canada today. The collection of 1,100 names on the Name Wall creates a sense of awe and anguish when viewed as a whole; it creates a Canadian 9/11 and provides the justification for the golden fireman’s epic proportion. The CFFF, co-funder of the memorial with the Federal Government, is eager to utilize the narrative that casts firefighters as heroic defenders; their emblem is a direct riff off of the ‘Yellow Ribbon’ so ubiquitous in the post 9/11 re-militarization of North America (See Fig. 7). This thematic layering is most clearly underscored by the CFFF through the timing of the annual ceremony at the memorial, which is held on the Sunday closest to September 11th.

After reading through the different codes of understanding that the Canadian Fire Fighters Memorial employs above, the reader may have noticed a lot of the use of firemen instead of firefighters. This use of the masculine specific terminology was intentional. The monument as a whole is an entirely masculine landscape. There is no
denying that firefighting is an overwhelmingly male-dominant profession. In the year 2006, women held only 3.6% of positions in the entire field of firefighting in Canada, a meagre rise from 1.4% in 1991. Future female names that may be added to the Name Wall will not do much to shake the heroic, masculine figure of the colossal fireman from his position in setting the tone of the memorial landscape. Furthermore, because firefighting is so thoroughly a male profession, the heroic casting of the firefighter does not challenge the position of males as the dominant heroes of the other narratives that are referenced in the monument. The firefighter is just the latest masculine tough guy in a long line of Canadian nationalism narratives; from voyageurs, to lumberjacks, to infantryman at Vimy Ridge, NHL stars to firefighters in the 21st century. Since only 3.6% of the firefighter workforce in Canada is female, this dominance of heroic status by males will not be challenged in the paradigm that this landscape promotes, which elevates firefighters to heroic status.

Perhaps the most obvious conclusion that can be made in summarizing the Canadian Fallen Firefighters Memorial is that there is a lot going on in this relatively small landscape. This conclusion could be understood as the result of an ambitious scope for the memorial, a view reflected by Emily D’Alterio in her review for the Service Canada Web Site, Occupation Search: Firefighters. 
http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/qc/job_futures/statistics/6262.shtml

CAPSTONE SEMINAR SERIES CAPSTONE SEMINAR SERIES Stains, Stones and Stories: Unsettling Representations of Confederation, Volume 3, number 1, Spring 2013
Canadian Design Source. In trying to understand the scope of the memorial she asserted that, “The memorial stands as not only a testament to fallen heroes, but offers to memorialize Canadian culture as a whole with nationalistic features that contextualize the space and offer a fitting commemoration to those lost in the line of duty.” Any memorial, no matter how large, that “offers to memorialize Canadian culture as a whole,” is destined for the sort of jumble of themes and messaging that we have looked at above. Yet, in this pile-on of references to narratives of Canadian identity there is a common theme; that of sacrifice for the nation. The Canadian Fallen Firefighters Memorial is a clear labeling of who is allowed into the class of defenders, whose deaths will be officially counted as so vital to the nation. For that is what is being accomplished overall with this memorial. The religious and traditional war remembrance structures that are referenced in the memorial provide continuity, placing a Christian and sacred significance to the firefighters’

deaths. The referencing of war remembrance makes the viewer comfortable and feel at home in the casting of these sacrifices as essential to the nation. The adoption of thematic devices which play on Land Nationalism narratives signal the memorial as representing a Canadian phenomenon, which in turn masks the strong referencing of the thoroughly American 9/11 Defender paradigm. The golden fireman sculpture, through its kitschy scale arrests the viewer and draws passers-by to step into the memorial landscape in the same manner as the Big Nickel or Wawa Goose do along the TransCanada Highway. The difference here is the obvious gravitas and solemnity of the religious space that viewers find when they get close enough to understand what the memorial’s content is. Yet, all of these devices can best be understood as underscoring the main message that the memorial communicates; a message that is reinforced throughout the space, but is best exemplified in the same colossal golden fireman that stands, literally, head and shoulders above the rest of the memorial. That message is expressed in the dwarving power that this statue has to all those who walk up to its trunk-like legs. In this memorial landscape, a group of people are now designated as being larger than life; they are elevated above the weave of civic life, and are in this space officially declared heroes of the nation.
As Phil Jenkins explained in his excellent book about the Lebreton Flats, *An Acre of Time*, this small area of shoreline on the Ottawa River has been a meeting place, trade route, and a place to call home for thousands of years.\textsuperscript{37} Looking strictly at the recent history of the last 400 hundred years, the flats have been an important way point on the staples route out of first British North America, then Canada to the European markets across the Atlantic. More recently, by the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} Century a thriving community of 2,800 people lived, loved and died in homes on these flats.\textsuperscript{38} The NCC wiped this community off the map in 1952 in a program of expropriation to make way for national landmarks.\textsuperscript{39} After much delay in using the flats at all, in the first decade of this century the NCC has placed the Canadian War Museum and now the Canadian Fallen Fire Fighters Memorial on this historic acre of Ottawa land. Recalling the iconic poem by Shelley, which prefaced this paper: what would a traveller in the distant future understand about Canadian society in 2012 if walking through the Lebreton Flats they stumbled upon the remains of Coupland’s modern Ozymandias?

As we look forward to another year of the jingoistic celebration of the War of 1812, and further ahead at the prospect of the centenary of the First World War over the next decade, it is important to take a close look at this monument on Lebreton

\textsuperscript{37} Jenkins, Phil *An Acre of Time*, Macfarlane, Toronto 1996  
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid. p.186  
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid. p.186
Flats. We need to ask what sort of narratives we as a society are comfortable with in such colossal and permanent expressions of national identity as the Canadian Fallen Firefighters Memorial. Before more memorials and monuments are erected in the nation’s capital under the Harper Government, collectively we need to ask whether an epic, masculine, heroic, Christian treatment of Canadian identity as it relates to war, defense and the civic fabric of our national community, is not a colossal step in the wrong direction.
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