

Madison Museum of Contemporary Art
Counter-Monument Project, Faisal Abdu'Allah

Project Overview | The Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (MMoCA) has commissioned the creation of a stone counter-monument by the internationally celebrated artist Faisal Abdu'Allah. As communities continue to engage in a public reckoning around racism in the United States and face ongoing debates on the role of monuments in public spaces, Abdu'Allah's intention is to question monumentality itself. What does it mean to memorialize a person? Who gets to be commemorated? Whose story is told, and by whom?

The Counter-Monument | In addition to being an artist and professor, Abdu'Allah is a barber who cuts hair for a largely Black clientele. This aspect of his life has informed much of his work, and is a fitting expertise for an artist whose practice is engaged both with the creation of artworks and with the fostering and critique of community. His stone sculpture will depict a figure seated in a barber's chair, a reference to the barbershop as the site for physical renewal and a space of belonging for many Black communities. Rather than commemorating a specific person of distinction, Abdu'Allah's work celebrates the capacity for greatness that lies within each person.

The seated figure is also a nod to the public artwork *Abraham Lincoln* (by Adolph Weinman), which is situated on the UW-Madison campus atop Bascom Hill, looking down State Street toward the Capitol Dome. In recent years, this iconic memorial has been at the center of heated debates between the university administration and a growing contingent of students who want it removed. The students point to Lincoln's anti-Indigenous policies and his complicated views about racial equity (despite his moral objections to slavery) and argue that the statue should be replaced with someone who stands for the justice of *all people*. Mirroring the former president's dignified seated pose and replacing his armchair with a barber's chair, Abdu'Allah's monument will stand as a contemporary counter-narrative to existing public memorials in our city.



Monument
Initial Rendering (not final!)

Adolph Weinman | *Abraham Lincoln*



Faisal

Abdu'Allah's Counter-

Proposed Location | MMoCA is seeking permission to install the sculpture on the State Street side of the museum’s glass prow. The museum commissioned the sculpture from Abdu’Allah with the intention of centering the work of an artist of color and sparking civic conversations about the role of monuments in society. Given the outward facing goals of this project, the museum would like the work to be as accessible to the public as possible. The proposed location on State Street, in front of MMoCA, would support these ambitions.

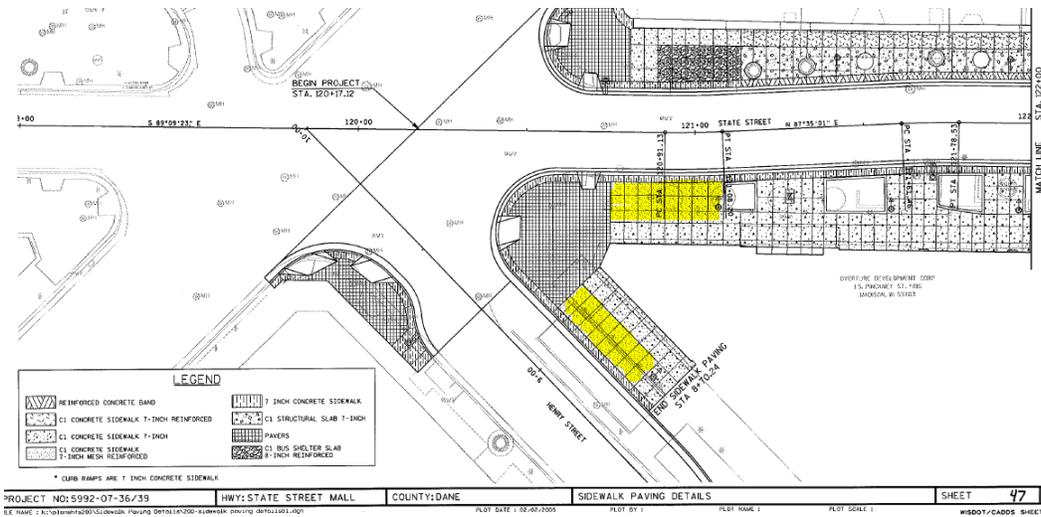


Proposed Location | MMoCA Prow, State Street



Reinforced Concrete | State Street

Considerations for the exact outdoor location are also pragmatic. When the museum was being constructed in 2006, the city intentionally created two reinforced slabs on either side of the prow (on State Street side and also on Henry Street side), both of which are reserved for MMoCA’s use for art installations and/or sculptures. Since it won’t be necessary to reinforce the ground under which the piece will sit, the granite pavers on the sidewalk will not be disturbed.



Reinforced Concrete Locations | State Street + Henry Street



About the Artist | Faisal Abdu'Allah (born 1969 in London) is a British-born, Wisconsin-based artist and barber. He studied in London at the Royal College of Art. He is Associate Professor of Printmaking at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and Faculty Director of The Studio. Abdu'Allah has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the 2012 Mayors prize for sustainability for his film *Double Pendulum*, Decibel Visual Artist Award, London, First Prize at the Tallinn Print Triennial, Estonia, and is a 2016 recipient of The Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant Program for Painters and Sculptors. He is the current President of Southern Graphics Council International and was recently named Chazen Family Distinguished Chair in Art.