

Text by Matilda O'Donnell-Macias after Richard Fleischner's "La Jolla Project"

UC San Diego's Stonehenge: The La Jolla Project by Richard Fleischner

I delight in a particular sort of irony in the idea of stone monuments. They are far from a new concept; humankind has been constructing them for thousands of years. Nevertheless, there is a certain sense of irony in the idea of tearing pieces of the earth to reach closer to the stars. We uproot our home to feel closer to the great unknown, trace the patterns seen in the sky with the corpses of the rock below. It has always fascinated me how we find comfort in those celestial movements. Perhaps it is the stardust in ourselves that longs for what once was. Obelisks and pillars, circles of slate and mountains sit in eternal waiting till the sky they were created for slowly erodes them away with falling rain, out of sight from those beloved stars.

However, we found comfort in those imitations of the sky at some point. The art became a pattern itself, immortal in its replication throughout the ages. Rested upon the top of a manicured lawn closest to the halls closed now to construction sits one such imitation. Stone pillars that gleam under the sun's bright rays, casting a shadow over the raised earth.

On sunny days, I will sometimes stroll up the hill, through the woods, and to the almost white stone blocks. As I sit atop the flat grass field, my back against the cold stone as the sun warms my face, I melt into the sense of familiarity this piece brings. Head leaned against the blank canvas; my mind can fill it with endless possibilities. Limitless thoughts and inspirations dance through the pillars and doorways, no set image but infinite experiences carved into the blocks of stone. Or I can let my mind wander. Research shows that monuments such as

StoneHenge were sights of ritualistic practice, the homes of great thinkers. Perhaps that is why we built them to mirror the heavens so that we may ponder them. Perhaps that is why these slabs of rock are situated so much like Stonehenge: it is a place to ponder.

Thousands of miles and years away, someone looked to the sky and molded the earth in its image. Jutting slabs of tectonic marvel, rough and imperfect but perfect fit. A great balancing act, immortalized in a green field. Here, the marbled stone holds no imposing presence in a far more manicured and gentle slope. The echoes of the ancient behemoths are a meek whisper as these perfectly flat slabs of gray stone stand only a few feet off the ground. In that circle an ocean away, the sun dances among the pillars in the same celestial dance it had done long before it was constructed. However, the stone circle on the edge of this pristine lawn does not bend to the heavens.

I do not ponder the stars all that often here. Like others, I climb the tops of these pillars and look below at seemingly meaningless shapes and placements. While there is no pattern, I still find it reminiscent of the one stone circle I had seen in my life. My parents had taken me on a trip to Ireland the summer after my graduating year in high school, and our vacation had just so happened to fall on the Summer Solstice.

It was the day after we visited my mom's ancestral home in Donegal county. As long as the days had been, being farther north of the equator than we had ever been, nothing could have prepared us for the grueling, sweltering sunlight that shone on us that day. We trekked through a shaded grove parallel to a sheep farmer's wire fence. A couple in their early sixties passed by us on the trail with makeshift walking sticks and pointed us to an unkept glenn peaking through the tree line. As the sun rose above the horizon, its sweltering rays were already beating down against us. Until lo and behold- a circle of standing stones.

I felt a funny sense of Deja-vu the first time I came to campus. I drove in a daze of confusion and anxiety, desperately trying to navigate my way to my newly assigned college. It nearly blended into the tree line as my car scaled the steep hill. The slate seemed nearly invisible among the shaded trees until I reached the top of the hill. Stone blocks jutting from the earth in a gentle shape. Is it spelling out a word? Perhaps a sign to the visitors of welcome. Or a marker to passing students of an upcoming college or building of importance? Is it an homage to Stonehenge? Or are these seemingly flawless blocks reflecting a child's building set?

The sunlight here at Fleischner's project is far less harsh than the morning light of that summer solstice. It dances across the stones, almost blinding in its reflection against those slabs. Still, it evokes memories of that time in my life where academia was all I dreamed about. Dreams of studying and resting against ancient stone pillars come to light under this replica of such places and ideas. Such dreams that my mother, an academic herself and lover of the ancient and classics, had encouraged. Dreams she pursued half my lifetime ago on this same campus. Perhaps she saw this same structure and pondered here as well

How many people sat against these very stones and painted its plain canvases with the pallets of their thoughts? When we stopped looking at the stars and started looking at our creations, I wondered if that inspired us to ponder ourselves. How many dreams did people splatter against this slate? Did the dream in mind match the art the sunlight illuminates on the stone? Or does it cast a shadow over such thoughts, a sign of the passing of time? Of thoughts. Of ideas and dreams.

Or is this just one of the thousands of ways we can subject these stone canvases to our minds? Just as there is no one set way to interpret this monument, there is no singular way to use it.

Perhaps the sunlight is harsh upon a dream. However, like the stone, the reality behind the dream is not dark; it is born of gray rock. I observe these monoliths and see the evolution of a dream, much like the sun moves through the sky and changes directions and positions every day. So too do dreams. Moreover, though not built to replicate such celestial movements, this monument still evokes memories of old versions of the same dream.