

i was  
here

N 3 8.0 15.21"  
W 8 14.14 8 7.1"



I Was Here began in 2016 with a set of emblematic Ancestor Spirit Portraits created by photographing contemporary African Americans as archetypal Ancestor Spirits. The portraits embody Family: mother, father, brother, sister. They form cohesive, ethereal images that convey the dignity of the African American individual and family – imagery mostly missing in America's visual history.



The “here” of I Was Here begins with an honest look at the history of place. Ancestor Spirit Portraits have been integrated into key historic sites across America. The project creates a visual for an invisible history, asking us to examine who we are to each other, who we are as a nation and how we can work to repair the wound in our citizenship created by enslavement. Accompanying written and spoken presentations by historians, citizens and scholars help us to remember who was ‘here.’ The project draws attention to sites of African American significance by presenting this wound in our citizenship through a lens of power, dignity, beauty, and sanctity creating visual markers to create a monument to a people.

What I Was Here accomplishes with its public art and public history installations is a mindful, reverent, and powerful acknowledgment of American history; history that may be misunderstood, misinterpreted, ignored, or simply forgotten. The project invites as much as it prods visitors to allow this acknowledgment to hold public space and to accept the echoes layered into the project’s name, I Was Here.

Because of the unique melding of the arts, architecture, history, and geography, the project has been awarded grants and honors from the American Association for State and Local History, National Endowment for the Arts, CODAworx, Kentucky Humanities, and the Blue Grass Trust for Historic Preservation, among others.



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