

Pentagon Memorial Competition Stage One Board Text

Entry # 4099

Pentagon Square An American Elysium

Black Box Flight Recorders are potent symbols of the intersection of the tangible and intangible dimensions of memory. Always desperately sought following an aviation disaster, black boxes are precious, vital records of the unique flight event. Originally called 'Flight Memory Recorder' they were colored black. The recorders are now orange, to aid in their recovery.

This memorial begins by taking the mechanistic, factual nature of the black box flight recorder and seeks to make it personal. We proposed 184 'Life Recorders', not, 1 'Flight Recorder'.

The 184 'Life Recorders' are simple prefabricated concrete forms extruded from and pushed into a dark plaza. Each is designed to contain a well of calm water. Set underwater on the base of each 'Life Recorder' is a mirror encased in thick safety glass. In consultation with victim's relatives, an individual's name and other symbolism can be etched into the mirror. Similarly, relatives can be invited to add a memento, which can be set into the glass that encases the mirror. The mirror in the water draws down the sky and etches the identity of a victim into infinity. At night, shifting grades of lighting project from under the two-way mirror.

The orange coloring of real Flight Recorders is translated to the proposed 'Life Recorders' by cladding the concrete exterior with cor-ten steel, which, once oxidized becomes bright orange. The oxidized surface is then sealed with epoxy to ensure tactile comfort and cleanliness. The inside surface of the 'Life Recorders' is polished concrete animated by the play of light from the mirrored sky and the water.

The field of 184 orange 'Life Recorders' containing the sky and water, set in a dark plaza, forms a powerful memorial. As a piece of landscape architecture, it acknowledges the primacy of the Pentagon. Just as the Pentagon stands as a monument to the Nation, the 'Life Recorders' stand for the individual, the fundamental and invaluable unit of American culture.

While powerful, perhaps even sublime as a whole, each individual 'Life Recorder' is humble and human scaled. Each 'Life Recorder' facilitates mourning, contemplation and related ritual in a dignified and profound manner.

I turned and looked at the sky,
Where we still look to ask the why
Of everything below.

Robert Frost "Afterflake"