Jane Hammond’s Fallen (2004–ongoing) is not a commissioned memorial. No acts of Congress were involved in its making. No fundraising drives enabled its creation. No committees have weighed its merits or demanded revisions. Instead, it is the work of a single artist, an aesthetic response to current events that is not intended for placement in a town square or on the National Mall in Washington. Nonetheless, Fallen provides an informative lens through which to examine the recent history of war memorials in the United States.
Jane Hammond, Fallen, 2004–ongoing. Each unique handmade leaf has been inscribed, by the artist, with the name of a U.S. soldier killed in Iraq. The installation, on view at the Wexner Art Center in fall 2008, contains 3,994 leaves.
In the end, memorials are for the living, their appearance dictated by the needs of the communities that build them. A brief look at American war memorials from different periods shows how communities have used them to address changing needs, sometimes conflicting ones, in the aftermath of tragic loss. A memorial’s appearance is largely determined by how well the public’s collective memory of the events fits with the needs of those who have actually suffered personal loss, and by how cohesive, stable, and enduring that collective memory is perceived to be.1

For example, shortly after World War I, memorial tablets were shaped by the need to have an enduring, tangible object of remembrance and mourning for the hundreds of thousands of soldiers who died. Thus, after the war, in both the North and the South, one of the most common types of memorials was a life-sized statue of a single anonymous soldier in uniform, like Thea Alice Rugle Kitzian’s Orange Blossom Memorial in Goshen, New York. These memorials may seem ordinary and unimaginative to contemporary viewers, but we cannot underestimate the significance they must have held for families of soldiers who were usually buried on the far-off battlefields where they fell. In an age when news reporting was rare, when knowledge of the war was fragmented, and when people were anxious to know what happened to their loved ones and reflect on the price society had paid for the war, these memorials provided a place to subsume their own personal loss. Isidore Konti’s World War I memorial tablet in Yonkers, New York, is an example of this shift toward the larger significance of the conflict. Personifications of ideals like Peace or Liberty represented the causes for which citizens had fought and thereby gained victory. In an age before photography, these stone soldiers restored the longed-for physical presence of the sons or husbands who would not return.2

By World War I, the need for a substitute body had largely subsided, as technological developments allowed soldiers’ remains to be returned even from battlefields overseas. Advancements in photography also ensured that most people had multiple images to be returned even from battlefields overseas. Advancements in photography also ensured that most people had multiple images to be returned even from battlefields overseas. Advances in technology allowed the public to cope with the shock and pain caused by the war’s unprecedented casualties. A consensus emerged among many civic leaders that figurative memorials, allegorical or not, inadequately served the living. The architect Joseph Hudnut expressed these sentiments in 1946, writing in *Atlantic Monthly*, “Pictures are at their best peepholes revealing the merest fragment of reality.”3 Moreover, many people had seen the newsreels and had clipped photos of the victory celebrations, and these shared, primarily visual, experiences definitively shaped public memory for a whole generation. With the apparently less urgent need for statues in public places, many felt that the most fitting acknowledgement of the sacrifices of veterans would be “living memorials,” that is, civic enhancements that brought communities together in “celebration of democracy, community, the pursuit of ‘better living.'”4 Thus, gardens, parks, and other public amenities came to be memorials simply by virtue of being constructed. In the United States, in the North and the South, one of the most common types of memorials was a life-sized statue of a single anonymous soldier in uniform, like Thea Alice Rugle Kitzian’s Orange Blossom Memorial in Goshen, New York. These memorials may seem ordinary and unimaginative to contemporary viewers, but we cannot underestimate the significance they must have held for families of soldiers who were usually buried on the far-off battlefields where they fell. In an age when news reporting was rare, when knowledge of the war was fragmented, and when people were anxious to know what happened to their loved ones and reflect on the price society had paid for the war, these memorials provided a place to subsume their own personal loss. Isidore Konti’s World War I memorial tablet in Yonkers, New York, is an example of this shift toward the larger significance of the conflict. Personifications of ideals like Peace or Liberty represented the causes for which citizens had fought and thereby gained victory. In an age before photography, these stone soldiers restored the longed-for physical presence of the sons or husbands who would not return. By World War I, the need for a substitute body had largely subsided, as technological developments allowed soldiers’ remains to be returned even from battlefields overseas. Advances in photography also ensured that most people had multiple images to be returned even from battlefields overseas. Advances in photography also ensured that most people had multiple images to be returned even from battlefields overseas. Advances in technology allowed the public to cope with the shock and pain caused by the war’s unprecedented casualties. A consensus emerged among many civic leaders that figurative memorials, allegorical or not, inadequately served the living. The architect Joseph Hudnut expressed these sentiments in 1946, writing in *Atlantic Monthly*, “Pictures are at their best peepholes revealing the merest fragment of reality.” Moreover, many people had seen the newsreels and had clipped photos of the

1 Although the example was chosen specifically in order of the conflicts they commemorate, it should be noted that the history of memorial design and its role in popular culture and the symbolic representation of history in the public sphere is dynamic. It is also important to note that the role of memorials has changed drastically since the conflict. The organizers of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, primarily Vietnam veterans themselves, recognized that to prevent the divisiveness the conflict caused, prompt action on a national scale was needed to redirect the intense emotion that had fueled both support for and protest against the war. They harnessed the tug-of-war concept and eventually won the support of the Vietnam Memorial competition explicitly stated that the memorial should “promote the healing and reconciliation of the country after the divisions caused by the war,” and at the same time “make no political statement” about it.5

2 A remedy did not come easily. One scholar summarized the problem potential designers faced: “How does a society commemorate a war for which the central narrative is one of division and dissent, a war whose history is highly contested and still in the process of being made?”6 Here too, the inadequacy of imagery was strongly felt, but for different reasons than after World War II. The flood of media images from Vietnam did little to explain or justify the carnage, which people now saw in vivid color pictures that simultaneously overwhelmed them and frustrated their desire to understand the violence of war and its impact.7

3 In her winning submission, Maya Lin erased representation entirely, creating a memorial space where people are able to bring their own experiences of the war without being confronted with a potentially conflicting narrative.8 Lin went a step further by altering the way in which her memorial related to the human body. Recognizing that the vertical orientation of most earlier memorials was ultimately too triumphal and therefore polarizing, Lin turned the conventional form on its side and made the memorial move horizontally into and then out of the ground. Even at its apex, where the two black granite panels meet, the height is just over ten feet; visitors feel immersed in the space, but not dwarfed by it. Though its political neutrality was disputed initially, from the moment it opened to the public, Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial has successfully permitted a wide range of personal responses without judgment and simultaneously incorporated those responses into a larger communal discourse on the war and its aftermath.
The need to transcend deep societal schisms and make sense of an overload of media images is equally relevant to any discussions on how to commemorate the current war in Iraq. As a response to an ongoing conflict, Fallen is a recognition of the urgent need for healing and a respite from divisive rhetoric. Jane Hammond (b. 1950) has acknowledged this, stating that the work “has at its heart our collectivity.”

Fallen departs in many ways from the conventions of traditional memorials. Instead of stone or bronze—heavy, durable materials that comporte permanence and solemnity—Hammond has used paper and ink to create more than four thousand unique reproductions of leaves that she places on a low rectangular platform. On each leaf is written the name of an American soldier killed in Iraq. Rather than tower over the viewer, literally elevating the deceased or the cause for which they died, the work spreads out below the viewer on a determinately human scale. As a work of art, Fallen is also unusual in that the artist does not ultimately control its completion or its dimensions.1

The inspiration for Fallen came to Hammond in a dream in which she was walking through a grove of trees. For Hammond, the image of leaves fell from the trees, she said, that each was imprinted with the name of an American soldier. She soon began collecting real leaves and has continued to do so all across the country each autumn since beginning the work in 2004. Hammond quickly scans the leaves to preserve their appearance, precisely aligns images of both sides, and digitally prints them onto an archival paper. She then cuts each leaf by hand with painstaking care to reproduce its unique contour, including any holes or blemishes. Hammond next thickens the stems and paints it, and the edges, by hand, at which time she writes the name of a fallen soldier on the leaf with Sumi ink and a brush pen. Last, she molds and shapes the leaf to give it a realistic three-dimensional presence. As they are added to the low platform on which Fallen is displayed, the leaves form a blanket. Although every leaf has a name on it, many are overturned or covered by other leaves, so only a portion of the names of the dead are visible at any time.2 In this way, Hammond intends that each viewer first experiences the piece as a familiar encounter with the beauty of nature, and only after connects it with loss, a sequence that is aligned with the dream that inspired the work.

The metaphor of a fallen leaf as a symbol of a life lost is not new, as the families of those killed in Iraq and society at large wish to remember these fallen soldiers. The metaphor of a fallen leaf as a symbol of a life lost is not new, just as the families of those killed in Iraq and society at large wish to remember these fallen soldiers. However, Hammond’s use of leaves takes on additional significance when considered in this light. Fallen uses a feature common in many living memorials and reinvests it with an overt call to reflection and remembrance.

The labor-intensive process of creating the leaves is in itself an evocative metaphor for the shaping and preservation of a collective experience that is the primary function of any war memorial. At the same time, Hammond’s artistic choices are an admission that both individual and collective memory are fragile and, like autumn leaves, are shifted and rearranged with the passage of time. Her re-creation of the organic and the ephemeral in a more stable material is a moving attempt to stop time, to preserve something at a moment of particular beauty, just as the families of those killed in Iraq and society at large wish to remember these fallen soldiers.3

Fallen will be installed at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego in spring 2009.

8 Statements from the artist come from a selection of notes she generously provided and a presentation to a docent at the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University, 8 May 2004.
9 As the number of leaves has grown, the length of the platform has increased, but the breadth has not changed proportionally. At its exhibition at the Wexner Center for the Arts in the spring of 2006, it was more than two and a half times its original size. Hammond created a new platform for each space, preferring a design that is “rectangular and proportionate” so that the viewer walking alongside the work is always able to read the names that appear in the center.

15 Hammond has committed herself to making a leaf for every soldier killed in Iraq as long as the war continues.
16 At the Wexner Center, Fallen was accompanied by hand-bound books that contained the names of many soldiers included in the piece, visible or not. Hammond intended the books for updated lists to be sent to the family future installations. People looking at Fallen share this inability to view the names of all deceased with visitors of another contemporary memorial, the AIDS Memorial Quilt, which can only be viewed in fragments because of its great size.
17 For example, Germany dropped leaf-shaped messengers over French troops in 1915, reading in part, “The leaves fall. We fall if they do. No spring, we no will recall either the dead leaves or the fallen soldier.” Oval-shaped leaflets stating “To Russia, fallen leaves, cover fallen soldier” were dropped by the British over Germany in 1941. See Marcia Richards, “Aerolabel,” in Encyclopedia of Espionage. A Guide to Espionage Documents of Everyday Life, ed. for the Collector, Curator, and Historian, ed. Michael Twyman (New York: Routledge, 2000), 10–11. My thanks to Ann Fenn for bringing this to my attention.
18 See note 7.
19 Journal, “Iraq War Memorial Gets Temperate Ablaze, Creates Day Skyline” San Francisco Chronicle, 10 November 2004. Similar memorials have been erected around the country, including in Washington, Vermont, and Waterville, Maine. Another variant on this theme is the American Friends Service Committee, “Eyes Wide Open,” a traveling exhibition whose mission is to create public interest for each soldier killed in Iraq. See American Friends Service Committee, “Eyes Wide Open,” http://www.afsc.org/eyes/ (accessed 16 June 2008).
20 Indeed, the anxiety caused by that realization contrib- utes to the urgent calls to build a National World War II Memorial and strongly in- fluenced its design, which includes twenty-two rectangular red granite reliefs by sculptor Raymond Kaskey depicting scenes of American military action during the war. With the loss of more veterans every day, these reliefs provide a stum- bling visual record of the World War II soldiers’ and families’ experiences and encapsulate a cohesive public memory of the war, not an emotional response. This Last Battle: The Fight for the National World War II Memorial (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

Hammond has also clea- rly expressed this unknowing, ensured that the names of these men and women will not go unremembered to generations to come. In order to be preserved, the delicate paper leaves of Fallen will require a high level of care by museum professionals (like gelatine or bronze). Permanently, Hammond’s Fallen will ensure in future generations the remem- brance and reactivation of memory of the soldiers killed in Iraq.