



Hurray for William McKinley

By Jonathan Curiel

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The stories behind the statues in Golden Gate Park and the Panhandle are laden with triumph, tragedy, and irony — a history that the statues themselves rarely reveal. It takes someone like artist Robert Minervini to come along and recontextualize the statues' epic backgrounds. So it is with *William McKinley (with interpretation of Graffiti Barrier)*, one of Minervini's posters in the latest San Francisco Arts Commission series that puts art in Muni kiosks along Market Street. Minervini imagines what the Panhandle's McKinley memorial statue — a tribute to the assassinated American president, and dating from 1904 — will look like when it gets a graffiti-prevention fence. The white fence makes the statue look almost heavenly. In real life, taggers almost constantly deface the statue.

When city officials unveiled the McKinley statue more than 100 years ago, President Theodore Roosevelt attended, then traveled with John Muir to Yosemite which led to legislation protecting it as a national park. Minervini connects the dots between Yosemite's safeguarding and the possible protection of McKinley's memorial, having researched it in his poster series, which is called *Invisible Reflections: A Narrative of Six Monuments*.

"Once I found the stories, I had to figure out how to make the connection visually," Minervini says. "I decided to make an image of the statues as they stand, and then I superimposed white line drawings on top of the images that are interweaved with the image. That symbolizes the unseen part that we don't think about or know about. Hopefully, it makes people think about the story behind the monuments."

Another monument that Minervini spotlights is the park memorial to Sarah B. Cooper, a faceless work that's chipped and seems abandoned. In Minervini's reinterpretation, Cooper — a prominent educator who died in 1896 — is drawn in profile. The memorial is bathed in fall-foliage red, and the San Francisco elementary school named after Cooper floats above in the celestial white that Minervini uses in each of his works. Cooper, who opened one of the first kindergartens in the western United States, was also a prominent women's rights advocate. A decade after her husband committed suicide after suffering financial distress, she died at the hands of her daughter.

"She has this really heroic and tragic life," says Minervini, whose work is scheduled to be up through the end of May. "She and her family fled the South to escape the Civil War and came to the Bay Area. The statue is made of limestone and has been deteriorating for years. It's a sweet memorial but also very sad. It's kind of a downer, but very surprising."