

## Testimony of Bruce Cole

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for asking me to testify today. I am a Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute and on the Board of Advisors of the National Civic Art Society, but this morning I speak only as a concerned citizen.

My comments are based on my long experience as an academic art historian, university professor, and author of fourteen books on the history of art. I will also draw on my seven years service as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, where my principal initiatives dealt with the need to improve the teaching and understanding of American history for our young people, something they need to become informed and active citizens.

It is of these young people I think when contemplating Mr. Gehry's plans for the proposed memorial to Dwight Eisenhower. For me, Ike is still a living memory: his role as Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces which freed Europe from great evil, and his two terms as the President of the United States are events that I lived through.

But what about our rising generations who lack this first-hand historical memory? What will they know, if anything, about this great American? To teach them not only about Ike and his deeds, but to give them a sense of his greatness and the debt we owe him, is the task of any monument worthy of bearing his name. This mission is admirably summarized in the 1999 law passed by Congress ordering that "an

appropriate memorial to Dwight [D.] Eisenhower should be created to perpetuate his memory and his contributions to the United States.” Such a monument should, therefore, memorialize and educate. In the execution of these tasks, the Gehry proposal not only fails, but fails utterly.

I say this for many reasons, but mainly because a unifying narrative, a story if you will, is absent in both conception and in design. Without this no monument to an individual can succeed.

The Gehry plan is a lot of disparate things of wildly different shapes, proportions, materials and sizes. There are enormous pillars misnamed columns (columns support something and have a capital at the top, these don't), trees, aluminum mesh “tapestries” (tapestries are despite Gehry's claim, not usually an integral part of the history of monuments and these are more similar to chain-link fences), inscriptions, and two large photomurals, all strewn about in a four-acre space. The result is that the whole is less than the sum of its parts.

Compounding the problem is the enormity of the planned space. Few, if any, of the most successful monuments in the history of art are this grandiose, especially in our democratic republic where our presidents, some of whom do not even have memorials, are seen as citizens not super humans: two good examples are the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials. But the present plan for the four-acre site of the Eisenhower Memorial, filled with such disparate elements, will create diffusion and

confusion of message and, if realized, will resemble a huge amusement park rather than a memorial.

Moreover, like an amusement park, there is no overall narrative, no sequential story, and no central focus to guide visitors, especially the many who will arrive with a limited or no knowledge of President Eisenhower. The proposed profusion of digital interactive displays will be costly, difficult to maintain, and fragile. This so-called “e-Memorial” is no substitute for a compelling, coherent narrative which provides knowledge, content, and inspiration.

My remedy for the Eisenhower Memorial would be to go back to the drawing board, institute an open process seeking designs (not simply qualifications), solicit the input of the public, and seek a plan with a coherent and meaningful message that will be comprehensible to visitors for centuries to come. Moreover, I believe that in these hard economic times there is simply no justification for building something that costs taxpayers upward of 100 million dollars. Instead, I would pursue a much more modest, less ostentatious, and more sustainable solution. My only recommendation for the architectural style is that it be worthy of the great man it honors.

Thank you.

Bruce Cole