



Ordinary Relic

Permanent public artwork installation for the Chicago Transit Authority Diversey Brown Line station, Chicago, Illinois

Mathew Wilson/Industry of the Ordinary

2020

Mixed media installation

Multiple elements displayed or integrated in the Diversey station engage a dialogue between the past and present, challenging the viewer to consider or reconsider public art, monuments, and cultural preservation.

Ordinary Relic is comprised of five elements: The painted track structure over Diversey Parkway; a sculptural replica of the vintage ticket agent's booth which is preserved inside the historic stationhouse, and that original ticket booth itself; a painted concrete plinth embossed with ten dates of local historic significance; and six message panels exhibited on the platforms and in the north-side stairways.

Mathew Wilson (b. 1967, England) is a Chicago-based artist, graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and member of Industry of the Ordinary, a two-person conceptual art collaborative (with Adam Brooks, b. 1959, New York) known for performances and interventions, often incorporating audience participation.

Of *Ordinary Relic*, Wilson and Industry of the Ordinary state, "We cherish our personal memories and keepsake connections to our past as a matter of course. But

we are sometimes less immediately troubled by the corrosive power of indifference for the collective memory. And so, in time, history can be lost.

In this work, several elements combine to celebrate one forgotten fragment of the city's memory. Standing for years, unseen, in the historic station house is an original artifact from the much earlier days of this Chicago neighborhood. Now, this ticket agent's booth has been cleaned, lit and replicated to bring attention to a sliver of the past that has survived and been brought into our contemporary cultural landscape.

Around the station the words 'MEMORY' and 'HISTORY' encourage public acknowledgement of this durable artifact. The girders that span Diversey Parkway are painted a warm, bright yellow, arching from one side of the street to the other, bridging the span between the historic and modern station houses. Around the pedestal that displays the ticket booth replica, years are enumerated during which formative events in local history occurred.

It is the case that cities around the world are full of oversized men staring down from massive plinths at a public who rarely know who these men were. This is troubling - not so much in the sense that the monuments are important works of art - but that the history they represent has been forgotten. This is problematic, whether we want to understand the past or avoid repeating it.

In this work we address the (in)visibility of public art and the disappearance of culture and history. The work invites the public into a conversation about the critical importance of an open dialogue with histories of all kinds."

Dates featured in artwork

1824

The United States Army built a small post near the current intersection of Clybourn and Armitage Avenues. Native American settlements existed along Green Bay Trail, now named Clark Street (after George Rogers Clark), at the current intersection of Halsted Street and Fullerton Avenue.

1850

Birth of Frances Xavier Cabrini MSC (Italian: Francesca Saverio Cabrini). Known as Mother Cabrini, she was the first naturalized citizen of the United States to be canonized by the Roman Catholic Church, on July 7, 1946. Chicago's Cabrini-Green housing project, which has since been mostly torn down, was named after her, due to her work with Italian immigrants in the location.

1852

The German community was well-enough established to begin work on St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church, named for the patron saint of local brewer and land donor Michael Diversey.

1863

Cyrus McCormick sponsored the opening of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary of the Northwest in northwestern Lincoln Park; the school was later renamed for its benefactor.

1865

The area and the nearby park were renamed Lincoln Park for the assassinated president, immediately after his death. It began under inauspicious circumstances, as the land itself had first been a small public city cemetery. Victims of cholera and smallpox, as well as Confederate prisoners from nearby Camp Douglas and potentially thousands of others, were buried in these lakeside graves. As the neighborhood became more residential, citizens grew concerned about the potential health hazards caused by the standing water in the graves flowing into nearby Lake Michigan. Led by Dr. John Rauch, citizens in the area protested to ensure that the land was usable by the public. Dr. John Rauch's efforts marked the beginnings of the park movement throughout Chicago. His efforts ultimately founded Lincoln Park, South and West Parks with the goal of creating a unified park system to encircle Chicago.

1868

The Lincoln Park Zoo was opened, making it among the oldest zoos in North America. It is one of a few zoos in the United States to offer free admission.

1898

St. Vincent's College, renamed DePaul University in 1907, opened near the McCormick Seminary. This intellectual center attracted other cultural institutions including the Chicago Academy of Sciences and the Chicago Historical Society.

1905

At this time Lincoln Park was a working-class neighborhood with a large German population. Lincoln Avenue was originally a trail called Little Fort Road, which led to the settlement of Little Fort, today's Waukegan. The local Germans nicknamed the street Kaiser-Wilhelm-Straße.

1954

The Lincoln Park Conservation Association was organized to serve the entire community area. LPCA pursued neighborhood renewal by encouraging private rehabilitation of property and the use of government tools such as federal urban-renewal funds and enforcement of the housing code. This might be considered the beginning of gentrification.

1969

Members of the Puerto Rican Young Lords and residents and activists mounted demonstrations and protested the displacement of Puerto Ricans and the poor including the demolition of buildings on the corner of Halsted and Armitage streets, occupying the space and some administration buildings at McCormick Theological Seminary. There were civil rights arrests and martyrs including the unsolved murders of United Methodist Rev. Bruce Johnson and his wife Eugenia Ransier Johnson who were strong supporters of the poor.

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Original ticket booth *in situ*





