

Coretta Scott King Gets an Atlanta Tribute

The King Center for Nonviolent Social Change, established by the civil rights activist in 1968, unveiled the new memorial on what would have been her 96th birthday.



Rhea Nayyar May 1, 2023



A general view of the Coretta Scott King Peace and Meditation Garden and Monument at the Martin Luther King Jr. Center & National Historic Site on April 27, 2023 in Atlanta, Georgia (photo by Paras Griffin/Getty Images)

The King Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia, has a new memorial garden and pavilion honoring Coretta Scott King. Designed by New York-based artist Saya Woolfalk, the Coretta Scott King Monument and Peace and Meditation Garden were unveiled on what would have been the author and civil rights activist’s 96th birthday last Thursday, April 27.

The monument component of the memorial consists of an ornate stainless steel and bronze pavilion with a rose pattern around the sheets that make up the dome, referencing the coral-orange hybrid rose named after Scott King herself. The floral motif also appears again on the floor through a ceramic tile mosaic rendering the rose. Along the inner perimeter of the dome’s edge, Woolfalk incorporated a quote from Scott King that reads: “Women, if the soul of the nation is to be saved, I believe that you must become its soul.”

In a nod to Scott King’s career and passion for public speaking, Woolfalk placed a lectern at the center of the pavilion with several cast bronze microphones, one of which is live, to invite patrons to voice their commitments to nonviolent change within the civil rights movement today.

Woolfalk was also selected to bring similar public memorials of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in Los Angeles and conservationist Marjory Stoneman Douglas in Miami to fruition. The commissions were supported by the media streaming company Hulu in acknowledgment of the fact that [fewer than 8% of public statues depict women](#) in the United States.



Artist Saya Woolfalk placed a lectern at the center of the pavilion with several cast-bronze and one live microphone. (photo by Paras Griffin/Getty Images)

In lieu of figurative depictions of these women, the artist chooses to represent them in a metaphorical sense that speaks to their spirit and ideals.

“In conceptualizing each monument, I did not want a physical representation of the women. I make immersive interactive experiences, and it was important to me that the pieces be interactive — spaces where visitors can gather to learn, reflect, and be enveloped by the spirit of these great women in American history,” Woolfalk told *Hyperallergic*. “I also wanted the artworks to become a part of a network of sacred sites, and so I created continuity between each of the pieces by making each take the form of an open-air chapel.”

Coretta and Martin Luther King Jr.’s daughter and King Center CEO Bernice A. King and her 14-year-old niece, Yolanda King, untied the ceremonial ribbon to the Peace and Meditation Garden together and trimmed the pavilion ribbon during the unveiling ceremony that was attended by former Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young, civil rights advocate Xernona Clayton, and many others. Poet laureate Pearl Cleage and Grammy award-winner Jennifer Holliday were among several artists featured in the program honoring the late Scott King for her birthday.

The King Center was established by Coretta Scott King in 1968 following the assassination of her husband. MLK Jr.’s remains were eventually moved from the Southview Cemetary to a custom-built marble crypt on the King Center campus in 1970, and Scott King was buried there alongside her husband in 2006.

Woolfalk said in a statement to *GPB News* that it was meaningful to construct the monument on the “sacred grounds” of the King Center rather than honoring Scott King at any other location. The King Center is free to visit from 10am to 5pm daily.