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## COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 2, MANHATTAN

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April 20, 2018

William T. Castro  
Manhattan Borough Commissioner  
Arsenal West 24 West 61<sup>st</sup> Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10023

Dear Manhattan Borough Commissioner Castro:

At its Full Board meeting on April 19, Community Board #2, adopted the following resolution:

**Resolution in opposition to a project entitled “New York Artist Memorial Garden” scheduled to open on April 30, 2018 on Adopt-a-Bench plaques throughout Father Demo Park.**

### WHEREAS

1. NYC Parks offers an Adopt-a-Bench Program in parks throughout the five boroughs, providing individuals the opportunity to honor a loved one or celebrate a special occasion by installing a single plaque with a personal message on a bench; and
2. NYC Parks has partnered with the non-profit organizations Art Production Fund and White Columns to create a project called “The New York Artist Memorial Garden” in Father Demo Park; and
3. NYC Parks describes “The New York Artist Memorial Garden” as “an extension of NYC Adopt-a-Bench program”, “a collaborative public artwork” and “based on a curatorial initiative of White Columns’ director Matthew Higgs”; and
4. The park is already a memorial for the late and beloved Father Demo of the Our Lady of Pompeii Church; and
5. Art Production Fund invited 34 New York-based artists – some with meaningful connections to the Village, but not all – to dedicate a bench in Father Demo Park to a person, or an entity, that is significant to them and, in several cases, insert the artist’s name on the plaques as well; and
6. The project will use all 38 benches in Father Demo Park, applying dedication plaques to 34 benches at \$1,500 per bench, donor name plaques to 2 benches, the project name on 1 bench and Art Production Fund and White Columns on 1 bench; and
7. All 38 plaques will remain in place on all 38 benches for 10 years; and

8. The two exhibiting organizations raised \$57,000 for the plaques, the entire sum of which will be earmarked for Father Demo Park; and
9. It is the local community that worked tirelessly to lobby local elected officials and raise the necessary funds to transform the formerly dilapidated Father Demo Park to its current rehabilitated condition and that continues to raise and spend thousands of dollars each year to maintain the park; and
10. A board member reported at the April 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting that NYC Parks informed him a year ago that the department wanted to sell plaques on benches in Father Demo Park and was told at that time that he had no say in the matter; and
11. After this initial cursory engagement, NYC Parks never followed up with the board or the community on the “The New York Artist Memorial Garden”, Art Production Fund, White Columns or anything else related to this project until only recently when the project was already well underway; and
12. Recalling NYC Parks’ recent lack of community engagement with regard to the Ai Wei-Wei installation “Good Fences Make Good Neighbors” in Washington Square Park, the committee conveyed concern that NYC Parks, White Columns and Art Production Fund also never included the community – or the church – in any meaningful discussions regarding this project and the selection of the artists invited to participate; and
13. This is first time the Adopt-a-Bench program is partnering with other organizations to procure all of the benches in a park and, as such, the committee considers the size and scope of this project unprecedented and unconventional, and, therefore, feels that the program’s standard \$1,500 donation per bench and 10-year term do not apply in this case and should be modified for this project; and
14. It could easily be argued, simply based on language used in NYC Parks’ materials, that this project is, in fact, an art installation and, therefore, is not in the spirit or intent of the Adopt-a-Bench program; and
15. The committee feels that the 10-year time span for the project is far too long a term, that appropriating all 38 benches in the park for this project is unnecessary and that the \$1,500 donation per bench is far too small a sum for such a lengthy period of time; and
16. Community Board 2 regards the proposed project to be a temporary art installation, as NYC Parks own language and handling of the proposal suggests, and the NYC Parks website specifically states that such installations “may last from two weeks to one year, typically remain, no on view for three to six months.”
17. The committee feels a twelve-months term is sufficient for this project, allowing the benches to become freed up for individual members of the community who wish to make dedications, which would also provide additional operating funds for the park.

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that CB2 Manhattan strongly opposes “The New York Artist Memorial Garden” unless the parties involved agree to cap the term of the project to twelve months and work with CB2 and the community on reducing the number of benches allotted.

**VOTE: Passed, with 30 Board Members in favor.  
with 2 in opposition. (T. Connor, N. Gottlieb)**

Please advise us of any decision or action taken in response to this resolution.

Sincerely,



Terri Cude, Chair  
Community Board #2, Manhattan



Robin Rothstein, Chair  
Arts and Institutions Committee  
Community Board #2, Manhattan

TC/EM

c: Hon. Jerrold Nadler, Congressman  
Hon. Brad Hoylman, NY State Senator  
Hon. Deborah J. Glick, Assembly Member  
Hon. Gale Brewer, Man. Borough President  
Hon. Corey Johnson, Council Member