



Monumental Lies

Culture Wars and the Truth about the Past

By Robert Bevan

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"From statues of slave traders to pictures of medieval town centres offered as evidence of "cultural superiority", architecture and public art are everywhere in a coarsened discourse. Robert Bevan...navigates the territory delicately and brilliantly"

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"One of the most compelling progressive voices in the heritage world ... Using his nuanced knowledge of architectural history, he is attempting to unpick some of the myths and straight lies deployed when architecture is weaponised."

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"Bevan astutely argues that those who manipulate our cultural past are shaping our future, making the case that historic buildings have become battlegrounds for right-wing and nationalist political arguments."

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One of the best Architecture and Design books of 2022

by *The Financial Times*

How statues, heritage and the built environment have become the battleground for the culture wars

The past is weaponised in culture wars and cynically edited by those who wish to impose their ideology upon the physical spaces around us. Holocaust deniers use details of the ruins of the gas chambers Auschwitz to promote their lies: 'No Holes; No Holocaust'. Yet long-standing concepts such as 'authenticity' in heritage are undermined and trivialised by gatekeepers such as UNESCO. At the same time, opposition to this manipulation is being undermined by cultural ideas that prioritise memory and impressions over history and facts.

In *Monumental Lies*, Robert Bevan argues that monuments, architecture and cities are material evidence of history. They are the physical trace of past events, of previous ways of thinking and of politics, economics and values that percolate through to today. When our cities are reshaped as fantasies about the past, when monuments tell lies about who deserves honour or are destroyed and the struggle for justice forgotten, the historical record is being manipulated. When decisions are based on misinformed assumptions about how the built environment influences our behaviour or we are told, falsely, that certain architectural styles are alien to our cities, or when space pretends to be public but is private, or that physical separation is natural, we are being manipulated. There is a growing threat to the material evidence of the truth about history.

We are in serious trouble if we can no longer trust the tangible world around us to tell us the truth. *Monumental Lies* explores the threats to our understanding of the built environment and how it impacts on our lives, as well as offers solutions to how to combat the ideological manipulations.

Contents

Introduction

1. Killers on Every Corner
2. Style Wars/Culture Wars
3. The Anti-Cosmopolitans
4. Authenticity: The Material Truth
5. The Military-Heritage Complex

6. The Evidence of History
7. White Lies, Misunderstandings, and Well-meaning Myths
8. Subversive Transformation
9. What is to Be Done? The Monumental and Its Limits
- Acknowledgements
- Notes
- Index

About the Author

Robert Bevan is an award-winning journalist, author and heritage consultant, and has been architecture critic for the *Evening Standard* and the *Australian Financial Review* and is the former Editor of *Building Design*.

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