

Statement provided by Lava Thomas, to be read at the July 15, 2020 Visual Arts Committee meeting of the San Francisco Arts Commission:

I'd like to address the 2019 RFQ for a Sculpture to Honor Dr. Maya Angelou for the San Francisco Library. First, I'd like to commend the SFAC staff for their professionalism during that process last year.

When the Visual Arts Committee failed to approve, under political pressure, the selection of my proposal in the 2019 RFQ for a Sculpture to Honor Dr. Maya Angelou, it upheld practices that are rooted in institutional racism. My proposal was selected, almost unanimously, by a panel that included a critical mass of Black women artists and arts professionals in a process that was transparent and democratic. My proposal was grounded in an ethos of inclusion and Black Aesthetics, followed the project and legislative guidelines which have "statue" crossed out and "artwork" written in its place. Supervisor Catherine Stefani then demanded that the project be closed, calling for a traditional statue and weaponizing a European convention of statuary to reject my work by insisting that Dr. Angelou be honored "in the same way that men have historically been elevated in this city" -- the very same men who embody white supremacy in monuments that have recently been toppled and removed. Stefani's manner was rude and arrogant, and she left the VAC meeting before I and the other Black women in attendance had an opportunity to voice our concerns. This public display of disrespect and public rejection of Black women's intellectual and creative labor is an affront to myself and the other Black women who were present.

When will the Arts Commission, the Visual Arts Committee, Supervisor Stefani and the SF Board of Supervisors take restorative action to remedy this egregious injustice?