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'TRANSFORMATIVE' SCULPTURE SET TO BURN ON NATIONAL MALL TO HONOR VICTIMS OF THE WAR ON DRUGS

Washington, DC – In an act of collective healing, an interactive art installation dedicated to victims of the war on drugs will be burned in the shadow of the Washington Monument on Saturday, November 21, 2015. “Temple of Essence” is the centerpiece of a 48-hour vigil beginning November 20. [Catharsis on the Mall: A Vigil for Healing the Drug War](#) is open to the public and will feature nationally-known speakers, exhibits, art, music, and dance.

Among the speakers: [Billy Murphy, Jr.](#), the nationally-recognized civil rights attorney; [Ifetayo Harvey](#), who lost her father at age four to prison and deportation for a first-time drug offense; and [Anthony Papa](#), sentenced to fifteen years to life imprisonment for a first-time drug offense. The public will also be invited to share their stories during open mic sessions.

“Through art and peaceful expression, we are demonstrating the transition to a more compassionate society,” said event organizer and civil rights attorney, Robert Haferd. “This vigil is the first of its kind on the National Mall, and we are delighted that the National Park Service, Park Police, and the D.C. Fire Department have partnered with us to make it possible.”

The highlight of the vigil will be the burning of Temple of Essence at 11:00pm on November 21. The temple is peace-building structure that offers a space for healing personal and collective trauma, engaging community, and allowing the release of negative energy. Prior to the burn, participants are invited to share their thoughts and stories by writing within the temple’s walls and leaving small mementos.

“People will see they are not alone in this struggle,” said Michael Verdon, temple artist and U.S. Air Force veteran. Verdon’s [most recent work](#) was installed at George Mason University this past May where more than one thousand people participated in its burn. “As the temple burns, we will turn our individual experiences into a collective memory and heal as a community,” Verdon explained. “Afterwards, our vigil will continue with cathartic dancing until sunrise.”

Catharsis on the Mall is organized by Washington DC-area artists, social justice advocates, and Burning Man participants. Speakers and installations will be provided by national and local drug policy organizations, including Law Enforcement Against Prohibition ([LEAP](#)), Students for Sensible Drug Policy ([SSDP](#)) and Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies ([MAPS](#)). The vigil coincides with the [International Drug Policy Reform Conference](#), which will bring more than one thousand researchers, academics and advocates to our nation's capital to work toward ending the war on drugs.

“From the recently-leaked [United Nations document](#) calling for drug decriminalization, to growing [bipartisan support](#) for ending mass incarceration and encouraging [cannabis research](#), we are transitioning from the traumatic war on drugs to policies grounded in public health and human rights,” said Natalie Lyla Ginsberg, event organizer and Policy and Advocacy Manager for MAPS. “It’s time to come together to celebrate and heal.”

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