Memory – Quilt Wall

On a warm, sunny, Autumn day in 1997, I had the opportunity to view the National AIDS Quilt on display at the National Mall in Washington, DC. The AIDS Quilt is a memorial to the lives of those taken by the AIDS epidemic. The vision of the Quilt laid out in front of the U.S. Capitol served as a reminder to the politicians and their constituents that more money should be devoted to curing a disease that affects everyone.

The AIDS Quilt turned the Mall into a sacred space for two full days. The National Mall is normally a profane (everyday) public space. It belongs to the people and the people use it for all manner of personal and public events. Anyone venturing onto the Mall in the company of the Quilt felt a strong spiritual presence that demanded: no playing, no running and no laughing. This event was one of the most profound and life changing experiences of my life.

Once our loved ones pass away, we want to remember them in warm and positive manner. I was moved to tears by the experience of viewing the National AIDS Quilt. Each cloth of the quilt represented something specific about each victim. The feeling was much more touching than seeing a cold impersonal gravestone.
I have created an architectural element within the walls of Holistic Center to act as a memorial to each resident of the Center. This “Quilt Wall” as I have named it, acts in much the same way as the National AIDS Quilt. Family members and friends of each resident assemble a set of objects which best represent the life of the deceased resident. These objects are placed in two large parallel walls (section DD) consisting of various sized shadow boxes. The aluminium, wood and glass shadow boxes, one for each resident, form a patchwork pattern which can be seen from the exterior of the building. The contents of the shadow boxes can be viewed on five floors within the building. Residents may pass the Quilt Walls everyday as they move from the Library Hall to the Meditation Chapel. These Quilt Walls sit at the intersection of the two Library Walls and the two Meditation Halls. The walls sit at the hinge or pivot point between the three wings of the Holistic Center. It acts as a threshold space into the sacred wing from the Residence and Research wings. The walls also act as a threshold between the (sacred) south wing and the (profane) north wing of the Holistic Center.

There are two main entrance points into the Quilt Wall Hall. The first entrance is found from the first floor at the East and West Entry Vestibules. The second entrance, at the threshold terrace on the fourth floor, is more private and is used mainly by the residents. This terrace looks out over the Great Hall space and down into the Meditation Chapel. A set of stairs and two elevators provide access to all floors of the Quilt Wall.