Commissioned personal monuments contrast sharply with artworks generated solely on the artist’s initiative and under the artist’s control. While the latter find their places in museums or private property, commissioned personal monuments are destined for specified public spaces and their commission carries with it a set of conditions. It is worthwhile investigating these factors, which are specific to the genre, as, in many cases, they are the key to understanding why a monument is erected in a given space and why it looks the way it does. The Wallenberg monuments were, for the most part, commissioned personal monuments and as part of that genre were subjected to specific preconditions and expectations that placed limitations on the artistic works and/or affect the perception of the works. At this point in the study I wish to address these factors, which are often neglected even though they are of great importance for the perception of the genre. Given that this is the first monographic study on the Raoul Wallenberg monuments and because of the chosen art historical focus, the discussion itself will be restricted to the monuments. The Wallenberg monuments are quite recent—most being erected between the years 1983 and 2007—and thus they naturally give rise to a discussion of the genre in its contemporary state, its possibilities and limitations. In concluding the chapter, we will come back to the monuments’ protagonist, Raoul Wallenberg.

Specific genre preconditions

In general, one can confidently state that the monument genre does not invite artistic originality. Monuments have a purpose and they have purchasers and financiers. Moreover, their realization depends on political decision-makers. In democratic societies the erection of a
monument can be a consequence of an official competition or it can be a result of the initiative of a private committee. In the latter case, people from different areas of society come together, united by the desire to commemorate a certain person or event. These people believe in the good intentions of the genre and regard a public monument as suitable to act as an educational instrument. However, the members of these initiatives are frequently autodidacts in the field of art as well as public fundraising. In fact, some Wallenberg projects failed at this early stage and could not be realized; others were delayed for a long time as they awaited fundraising, finding the artist or locating an appropriate setting. Few Wallenberg monuments are realized solely on the artist’s own engagement, and none could be realized, or at least be installed, without the participation of others, as the monuments’ brief histories (see the catalog entries) testify.

Frequently, the monument makers (the initiators, the fundraisers, and the donors) do not only want to remember the historical person being honored, they also want to commemorate themselves, especially in the case of private initiatives. Sometimes this interest affects the artwork, and not necessarily in a positive way. For example, if we consider E. M. Adams’s *Courage and Compassion* in New Jersey, it is striking that the artist had to make compromises with the local committee’s need to find sponsors for the realization of the project. The bricks on the ground around the sculpture contain the names of the donors. Granted it was only through these individuals that the project could be realized at all, nevertheless the bricks look ugly and amateurish. Furthermore, the similarly amateurish-looking portrait-relief was added on the insistence of the committee. In contrast to Adams’s monument, those involving the commissioning of Willy Gordon’s monument acted in a much more respectable manner, even though it too was the result of a private initiative. The inscription on the three entry stones simply says in very general terms that, “The initiative was undertaken by individuals and the monument was financed by many persons, organizations and companies in Sweden.” Furthermore, the design of these stones complements the appearance of Gordon’s monument and does not disturb its aesthetics.

The committees involved with the project of erecting a monument all too often lack crucial knowledge needed for the long-term success of the project, particularly knowledge about the costs involved in creating and maintaining monuments. This can occur no matter whether the project is financed by public fundraising or is a result of a public competition. This is often evidenced by not having adequate budget estimates for a