



DC STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY FORM

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Property Name(s): Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden
Street Address(es): Independence Avenue at Seventh Street, SW
Square(s) and Lot(s): Reservation 3A
Property Owner(s): Smithsonian Institution
Please include a current map(s) to indicate the location of the property/properties.

The property/properties is/are being evaluated for potential historical significance as/for:

- An individual building or structure.
- A contributing element of a historic district (specify): National Mall Historic District
- A possible expansion of a historic district (specify):
- A previously unevaluated historic district to be known as (specify):
- An archaeological resource with site number(s) (specify):
- An object (e.g. statue, stone marker etc.) (specify):
- A new multiple property/thematic study regarding (specify):
- Association with a multiple property/thematic study (specify):
- Other (specify):

Description, rationale for determination, photos & other pertinent information (enter below):



Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, facing south from Mall entrance.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Determination of Eligibility is to provide the Smithsonian Institution with an objective and independent professional assessment of the eligibility of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended.

This report includes a brief discussion of the project's purpose and methodology, with more detailed descriptions of the building's physical appearance and the history of its design and construction. A discussion of the building's historic context and evolution over time has also been included. The report also provides a statement of significance and an assessment of the property's historic integrity.

Methodology

This determination of eligibility was completed in accordance with the documentation, analysis, and evaluation guidelines established by the National Register Bulletin *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*. Various primary and secondary sources were referenced to assess the potential eligibility of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and place it within a contextual framework. A number of works on the planning and development of the Mall and the Smithsonian campus, the history of the Institution, and the architecture of Washington, D.C. were also referenced. Primary and additional secondary documentation was collected from the records of the Smithsonian Institution Archives, Library of Congress, and additional repositories and databases. These records contained information relevant to the design and construction of the building, as well as later modifications, and included architectural drawings and site plans, correspondence, newspaper articles, annual reports, and memorandums. Additional sources consulted included a 2006 Cultural Landscape Inventory of the National Mall and a 2009 Historic Structure Report for the Smithsonian Arts and Industries Building. Portions of the narrative text, particularly those describing the alterations to the museum plaza and sculpture garden, were adapted from the South Mall Campus Cultural Landscape Report, 95% Draft, prepared by EHT Tracerics et al. in June 2015.

Interior and exterior examination of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden was conducted between the summer of 2014 and the present to document the building and assess its physical integrity.

DESCRIPTION

Site Context

The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden is located in Reservation 3A along the south edge of the National Mall (Figure 1). The entirety of the site falls within the National Mall Historic District. The museum building and its surrounding plaza are bound by Seventh Street, Jefferson Drive, Independence Avenue, and the Ninth Street Expressway underpass, S.W. The sculpture garden, sunken below street level, faces the museum across Jefferson Drive, and falls within the Mall's south tree panel. The museum is sited on center with the Eighth Street axis, reinforced by the circular design of the National Sculpture Gallery's fountain, and in line with John Russell Pope's 1935 National Archives Building. An open balcony on the north side of the Hirshhorn Museum faces the Archives, the Mall, and the sculpture garden. Located directly west of the museum plaza is the Mary Livingston Ripley Garden, a shaded garden with brick walkways and serpentine planting beds. This garden, along with a small paved parking lot, separates the Hirshhorn Museum from the Arts and Industries Building to its west (Figure 2).

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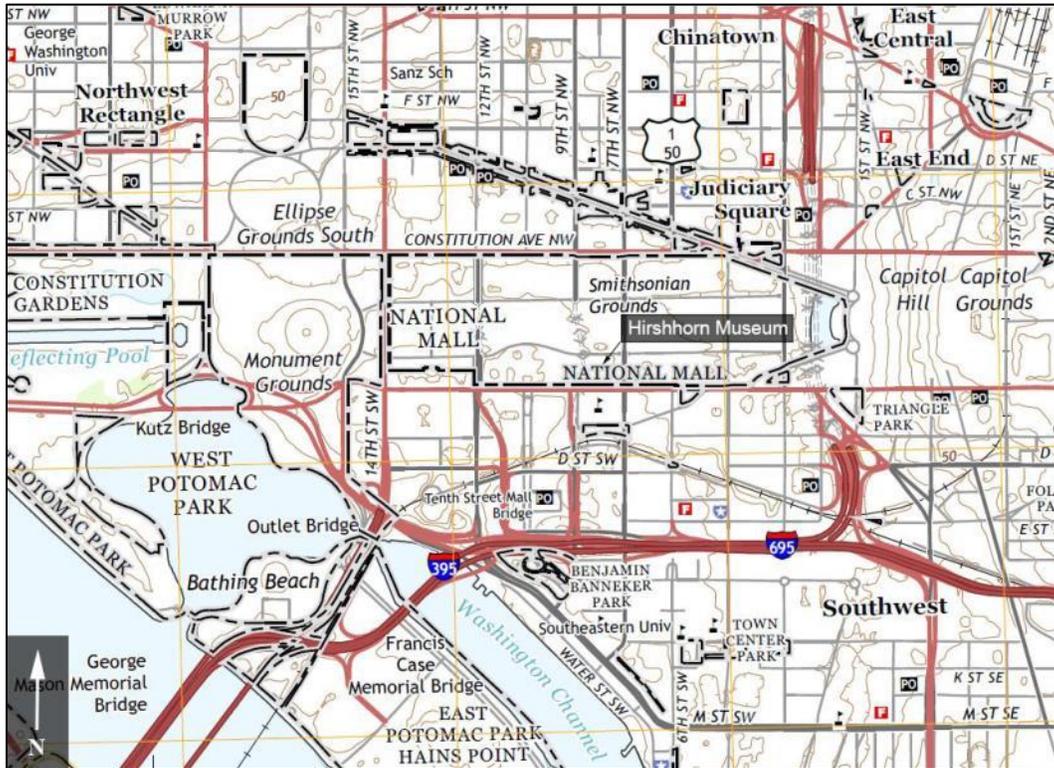


Figure 1. Detail from 2014 USGS Washington West quadrangle showing the location of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (U.S. Geological Survey, 2014).

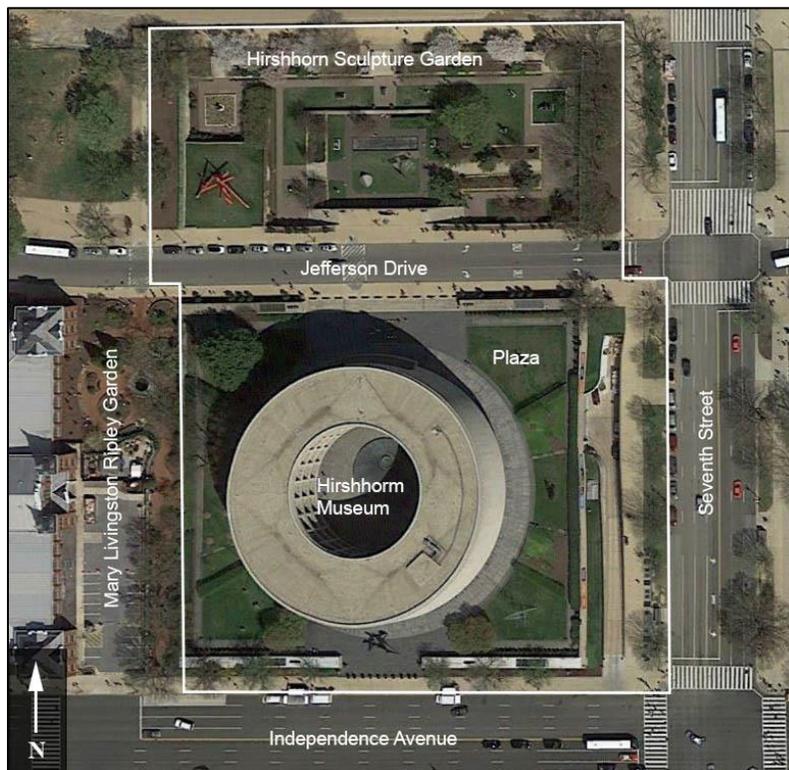


Figure 2. Site Plan (Google, 2015).

Hirshhorn Museum Building

Exterior

The museum building is a cylindrical volume raised fourteen feet above the ground on massive, sculptural concrete piers (Figure 3). The building contains four above-ground stories and a basement, measures 231 feet in diameter, and is clad in precast concrete panels an exposed aggregate surface. The precast panels encircle the building in bands of alternating heights. The joints between the panels are minimal and are nearly imperceptible when viewed from a distance. A single opening pierces the exterior of the drum; located on the third story, it features a glazed recess and balcony facing north toward the National Mall. The underside of the drum's great bulk reveals a smooth, concrete ceiling structure, divided into coffers whose depth measures four feet (Figure 4). The center of the drum opens to a circular courtyard whose diameter measures 115 feet (Figure 5). It contains a shallow, bronze fountain with a sixty-foot basin. The nearly featureless outer shell is contrasted by the walls of the inner courtyard, which are divided into equal, glazed cells, lighting the interior corridors of the building's upper floors. The centers of the drum, courtyard, and fountain are geometrically eccentric yet are symmetrical about the north-south (Eighth Street) axis. The building has a flat roof concealed behind a low parapet wall.

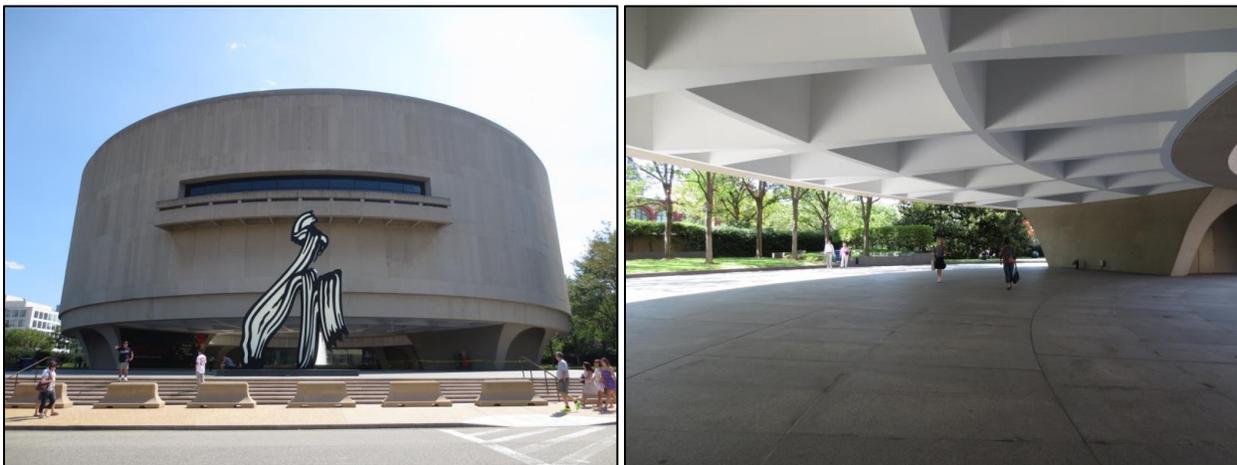


Figure 3. (above left) Hirshhorn Museum building, looking south (EHT Tracerics, 2015).

Figure 4. (above right) Museum drum's coffered underside (EHT Tracerics, 2015).



Figure 5. (above left) Museum courtyard, looking northeast (EHT Tracerics, 2015).

Figure 6. (above right) Front entrance, looking northeast (EHT Tracerics, 2015).

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Interior

The building's public entrance is located in a glazed lobby spanning across the two south piers on the first story (Figure 6). The entrance consists of two revolving bronze and glass doors. Its walls are formed of glass, supported by steel mullions that create curved spans across the north and south sides. The glazed walls of the lobby entrance provide views of the surrounding plaza and courtyard (Figure 7). The entrance lobby has terrazzo floors, and its ceiling is formed by a continuation of the drum's coffered ceiling structure. The building's signature vertical circulation system consists of a pair of slender escalators that extend between the basement and third stories. The southeast pier contains a passenger and a freight elevator; the remaining three contain egress stairs.

The building's basement story is the largest in plan; it has a rectangular footprint and spans beneath a portion of the at-grade plaza. A majority of the basement floor is devoted to mechanical space, art storage and handling facilities, and staff offices and studios. This floor also features a rectangular lobby around the escalators, a museum gift shop, a small auditorium, restrooms and exhibition galleries (Figure 8).



Figure 7. (above left) First floor lobby interior, looking west (EHT Tracerics, 2015).
Figure 8. (above right) Basement lobby, looking northeast (EHT Tracerics, 2015).

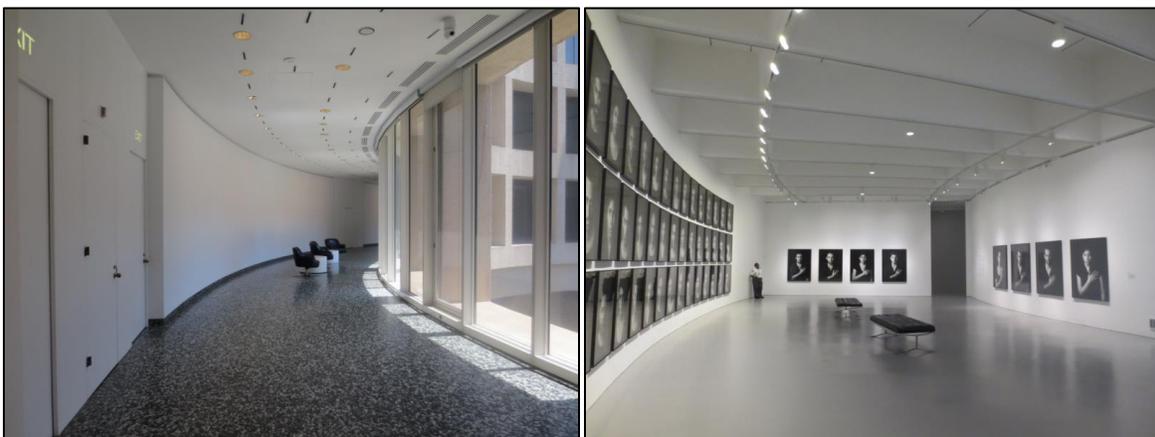


Figure 9. (above left) Second floor corridor, looking west (EHT Tracerics, 2015).
Figure 10. (above right) Second floor gallery, looking west (EHT Tracerics, 2015).

The museum's second and third floors each contains an escalator landing at the south, which leads into a series of connected galleries arranged around a central circular corridor. This corridor features full-story windows that overlook the museum's interior courtyard and fountain, and its floors are of terrazzo. In

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addition to providing circulation, the corridor also functions as an exhibit space containing various works of sculpture (Figure 9). Thirteen wedge-shaped galleries of varying sizes are arrayed around this circular corridor. These gallery spaces flow into one another, and are loosely defined by sections of partition wall. The galleries feature smooth concrete floors, plastered walls, and deeply articulated ceiling joists (Figure 10). The outer walls have no openings and are uninsulated. The northernmost gallery on the third story is currently used as a lounge, with north-facing views provided by a glazed wall and balcony overlook.

The museum's fourth floor is distinct from the two below, as it does not feature the typical gallery-corridor organization. Instead, the majority of space within the drum is a single, open space devoted to art storage. Approximately one-third of the space contains administrative offices and other spaces that are dedicated to staff use.



Figure 11. South side of museum plaza, looking west (EHT Tracerics, 2015).

Figure 12. North stairs, looking west (EHT Tracerics, 2015).



Figure 13. Perimeter of museum plaza, looking south (EHT Tracerics, 2015).

Museum Plaza and Loading Dock

The circular museum building is surrounded by a square plaza, enclosed by battered walls clad in the same finish as the museum drum: concrete with an exposed aggregate surface (Figure 11). The north and south walls are thicker to allow space for air intake and exhaust vents that support the building's mechanical systems. The walls line the east and west perimeters of the site and portions of the north and

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south perimeters. On the south side, the walls have an opening to create a pedestrian entrance from Independence Avenue. There is a larger break on the north side to accommodate a broad flight of stairs (Figure 12). A third, less conspicuous opening is located at the northwest corner of the site, which contains an accessible entrance and ramp from the Ripley Garden.

The plaza is predominantly level across its surface. However, because the site itself slopes downward to the north, the plaza is raised above the ground level where it meets the Jefferson Drive sidewalk. The central area of the plaza is covered with large, granite paving stones, which radiate outward from the central bronze fountain. Beyond the footprint of the museum drum, granite curbs inscribe a circle around the outer edge of the site, which contains raised planting beds and lawns punctuated with trees and sculpture. The outer perimeter of the plaza features raised planting beds, hedges, and paths laid with smaller, square granite blocks (Figure 13).

The museum's loading dock is located adjacent to Seventh Street, immediately outside the exterior of the east plaza wall. The loading dock connects to the building's basement level via a ramp that extends from Independence Avenue to the north toward Jefferson Drive. The walls enclosing the ramp, which are clad in concrete, curve outward near the north edge to meet the west wall of the museum basement. At the street level, the walls terminate in a simple concrete parapet with a metal picket railing. A turf lawn surrounds the loading dock.

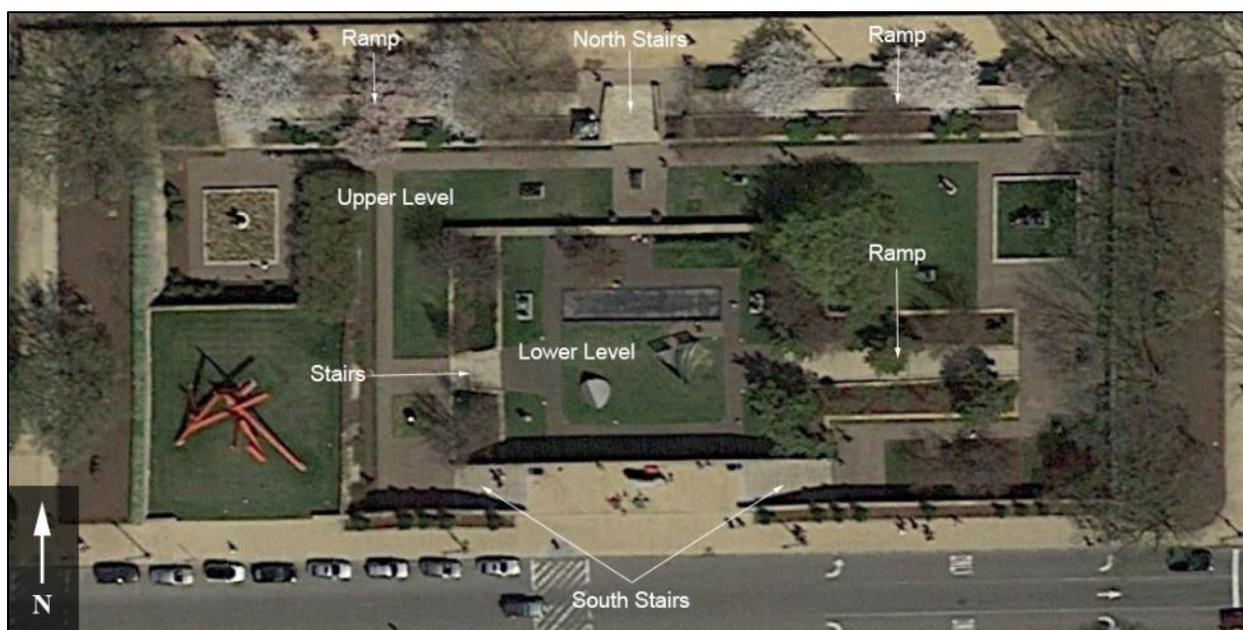


Figure 14. Satellite image of the Sculpture Garden, with site features annotated (Google, 2015).

Sculpture Garden

The sunken sculpture garden acts as a formal counterpart to the bulk and prominence of the museum's elevated drum. It is located north of Jefferson Drive, partially within the Mall's south tree plan. Rectangular in plan, the sculpture garden is nearly symmetrical about the north-south axis. The sculpture garden is depressed as much as one story below the surrounding Mall elevation, on two levels. Freestanding and retaining walls, vegetation, terraces, and stairs orchestrate a series of open-air rooms, throughout which are strategically placed works of sculpture. The walls vary in height and are clad in concrete with an exposed aggregate surface.

The sculpture garden can be accessed from both the north and south. The sculpture garden's upper level is currently accessed from the north (Mall) side by a single central stair and on the south (Jefferson Drive) side

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by a pair of lateral stairs. In addition, a pair of lateral ramps lines the north edge. Within the sculpture garden, an additional ramp connects the upper and lower levels on the east side. On the garden's west side, a set of concrete stairs leads from the upper to the lower level (Figure 14). This upper level, arranged around the garden's perimeter, contains paved walkways and grassy areas, which contain sculpture. Many pieces are elevated on planting beds or display bases (Figure 15).

At the center of the garden, on its lower level, is a lawn containing a rectangular reflecting pool whose length is oriented east-to-west. Also on the lower level, and situated below the overhang formed by the south stairs and terrace, is a concrete wall within which is set an eight-bay section of glass and steel curtain wall containing two single-leaf glass and steel doors. These doors provide entry into a space that currently functions as ARTLAB+, a multimedia arts education center. When the building was originally completed, this opening created access to an open-air tunnel and stair that connected the sculpture garden, beneath Jefferson Drive, to the museum plaza (Figure 16).



Figure 15. (above left) Northeast corner of the Sculpture Garden's upper level, looking southeast
Figure 16. (above right) West stair leading into the lower level of the Sculpture Garden, looking east
(EHT Traceries, 2015).

Sculpture

Works from the Hirshhorn Museum sculpture collection are essential to the appearance and character of the plaza and sculpture garden. Currently, there are a combined total of about fifty pieces of sculpture on display in the plaza and sculpture garden. Pieces are moved or alternated approximately four to five times per year. Although most of the pieces are not site specific, in some cases the Hirshhorn curatorial staff will collaborate with the artists to determine the appropriate display and positioning.¹

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Summary

The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden was designed by architect Gordon Bunshaft of the firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. Construction began in 1969 and the museum opened to the public in 1974. The museum housed the collection of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, a self-made millionaire and prolific art collector who, in 1966, formally offered his collection of modern and contemporary art to the United States. S. Dillon Ripley, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution from 1964 to 1984, had successfully courted Hirshhorn, obtained Presidential endorsement of the project, and secured the Congressional funding needed to see the museum building constructed.

¹ Al Masino, Supervisory Exhibit Specialist, interview with Bill Marzella and Lauren Stahl, October 23, 2014.

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Ripley's tenure as Smithsonian Secretary witnessed a dramatic expansion in the role and prominence of the Smithsonian Institution. Ripley aggressively pursued the establishment of new museums and public programs, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden among them. The timing of the Hirshhorn gift and the construction of the museum building placed Hirshhorn and the Smithsonian at the center of a much larger and protracted debate regarding the appropriate use and design of the National Mall, whose prevailing architectural character was shifting from Classical Revival to Modernist architectural styles.

Historical Overview of Smithsonian Institution

The Smithsonian Institution was created in 1846 through enabling legislation signed into law by President James K. Polk. The law provided structure and definition to the bequest of Englishman James Smithson, whose will gifted his estate to the United States of America, to be used for the creation of a scientific and educational institution (should his nephew and principal heir die without children). Although Smithson died in 1829, the death of his nephew in 1835 freed the funds of his estate, which were claimed and returned to the United States by 1838. Widely divergent views over the appropriate use and mission of the institution delayed its creation by nearly another decade. Under the enabling legislation, the Smithsonian was created as a "trust instrumentality" (or public trust) of the United States, independent of the three branches of the federal government and managed by a Board of Regents. Joseph Henry, a noted physicist and professor of natural philosophy at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), became the Smithsonian's first Secretary in 1846. The organization's first building, designed by James Renwick, Jr., and today known as the "Castle," was officially opened to the public in 1855. Henry was primarily focused on scientific research and publication during his tenure as Secretary, rather than expanding the Institution's collections and facilities.²

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the Smithsonian evolved to become a great national museum, in addition to its role as a scientific research institution. Under the leadership of its second Secretary, Spencer Fullerton Baird, the Institution enlarged its natural history collections, and in 1879 established the Bureau of American Ethnology. Under Baird, the Institution erected a large building to house the collections of the National Museum, which was completed in 1881 (formerly the U.S. National Museum Building, now known as the Arts and Industries Building). In an effort to study and document solar phenomenon, third Secretary Samuel Langley established the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory in 1890. Langley also established the National Zoological Park in 1891.³

The first decades of the twentieth century represented a period of growth for the Smithsonian. In 1911, a new National Museum Building (now the National Museum of Natural History) was completed on the north side of the Mall in order to house the Institution's natural history and art collections. In 1923, the Smithsonian opened the Freer Gallery of Art, its first museum dedicated to the display of fine arts, which was constructed to house the Asian and American art collections of industrialist Charles Lang Freer.⁴

After World War II, the Smithsonian modernized its exhibits and programs and, under the leadership of Secretary S. Dillon Ripley, constructed a number of new museum buildings. The Smithsonian expanded the 1911 National Museum Building with additions during the 1960s, and completed the Museum of History and Technology (now the National Museum of American History) in 1964. In 1968, the Institution transferred the collections of the American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery bureaus to the former Patent Office Building in downtown Washington. The acquisition of the Renwick Gallery, the first home of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, in 1972 provided additional exhibit space for the Smithsonian's art collections. During the 1970s, the Institution constructed the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (1974) and the National Air and Space Museum (1976). The Smithsonian also constructed a pair of new museum buildings to the south of the Castle, an area historically known as the South Yard, between 1983 and 1987. Known as the Quadrangle Complex, it included the Arthur M.

² *Historic Structure Report, Smithsonian Institution Building* (Washington, D.C.: SmithGroupJJR, 2009), 2.1:1-5.

³ *Historic Structure Report, Smithsonian Institution Building* (Washington, D.C.: SmithGroupJJR, 2009), 2.1:14-19.

⁴ *Historic Structure Report, Smithsonian Institution Building* (Washington, D.C.: SmithGroupJJR, 2009), 2.1:19-34.

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Sackler Gallery and the National Museum of African Art. Additional underground space in the complex contains the S. Dillon Ripley International Center, accessed through the Ripley Center Pavilion, also completed in 1987. The National Museum of the American Indian was established in 1989 by Secretary Robert McCormick Adams, and in 2004 moved into a new museum building built on the Mall.⁵

Development of Smithsonian Grounds, 1840s to 1930s

When the Smithsonian Institution was established in 1846, the Board of Regents convened a Building Committee to guide the selection of a site and architect for the Institution's headquarters. By January 1847, they had settled on the south half of the Mall between Ninth and Twelfth Streets, a site amounting to nineteen acres. The Building Committee also selected the architect James Renwick, Jr. to design the Institution Building. Development of this area of the Mall had been virtually non-existent until the Building Committee made its claim. Although the Mall was treated as an open landscape and had been minimally graded and cleared, no permanent improvements had been completed. Renwick sited his building at the center of the plot, shifted slightly west to align with Tenth Street.⁶ Construction began on the Smithsonian "Castle" in 1849; the first portions opened to the public in 1855, although various parts of the building would remain under construction for much of the nineteenth century.⁷

In 1850, the neglected state of the Mall prompted several of Washington's most prominent politicians and businessmen to invite the horticulturalist and landscape theorist Andrew Jackson Downing to develop a plan for its improvement. Completed in 1851, Downing's plan divided the Mall—extending from the base of Capitol Hill to the Washington Monument Grounds, and including President's Park—into six distinct zones. One of these, the "Smithsonian Pleasure Grounds," spanned the entire width of the Mall between Seventh and Twelfth Streets. Downing designed the Smithsonian Grounds in the "picturesque" style, which favored intricacy, variety, and irregular massing, all of which were appropriate to the bold, rugged profile of the Castle. Of the six zones Downing envisioned, the Smithsonian Grounds were the first and the only zone to be improved before Downing's death in 1852. The designs of the rest of the zones were never realized.⁸ Although the Smithsonian Grounds well surpassed the extent of the Institution's initial legal claim to the Mall, the grounds would become popularly associated with the Smithsonian until the early twentieth century, and accommodated the greatest concentration of the Institution's physical growth during that period. In contrast to the mature trees and carriage drives that swept across the northern portion of the Smithsonian Grounds, the area immediately to the south of the Castle was used as a service area, housing a jumble of temporary buildings, enclosures, and parking areas, becoming known as the South Yard.

Constructed between 1879 and 1881, the National Museum Building was the first permanent architectural addition to the Smithsonian Grounds after the Castle, and was designed by prominent Washington architects Adolf Cluss and Paul Schulze. General Montgomery C. Meigs served as consulting engineer.⁹ The building was developed to house the rapidly expanding collections of the National Museum, particularly following the acquisition of artifacts displayed at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. In the 1880s, the War Department funded the construction of a fireproof building to house a museum, library, and archive for the Office of the Surgeon General. Later known as the Army Medical

⁵ Heather Ewing and Amy Ballard, *A Guide to Smithsonian Architecture* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2009), 14-29.

⁶ Peter R. Penczer, *The Washington National Mall* (Arlington, VA: Oneonta Press, 2007), 10.

⁷ Heather Ewing and Amy Ballard, *A Guide to Smithsonian Architecture* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2009), 36-39.

⁸ Thomas O'Malley, "A Public Museum of Trees: Mid-Nineteenth Century Plans for the Mall," in *The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991*, ed. Richard Longstreth (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 64-67.

⁹ Frederick William True, "The United States National Museum," in *The Smithsonian Institution, 1846-1896*, ed. George Brown Goode (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1897), 317.

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Museum, the building (also designed by Cluss) faced B Street (later Independence Avenue) at the intersection of Seventh Street.¹⁰

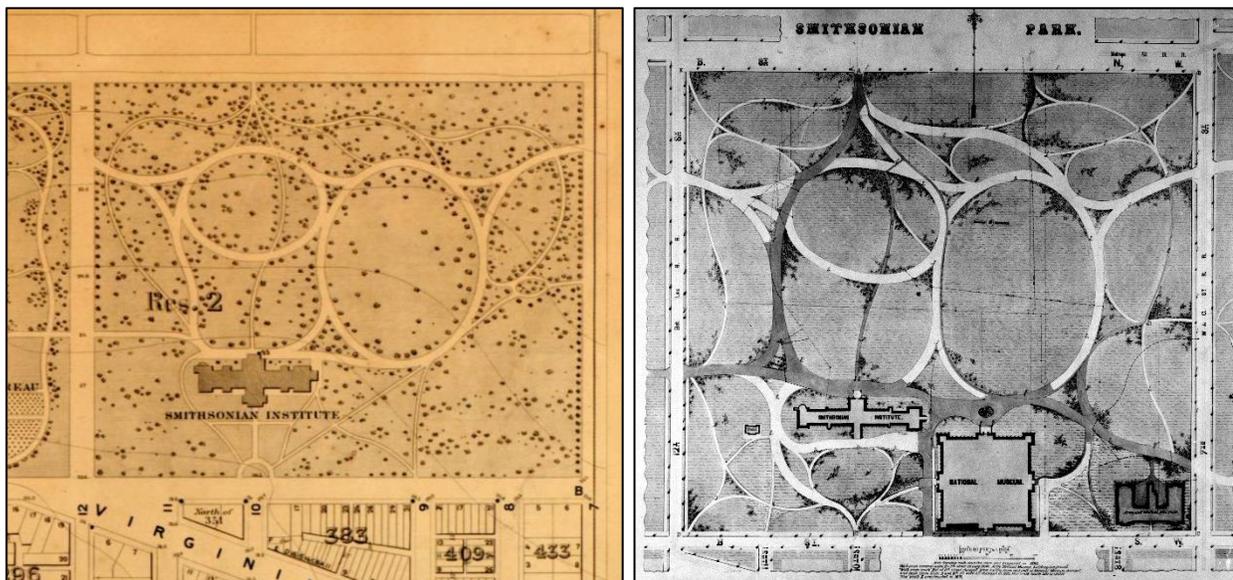


Figure 17. (above left) 1872 Bastert Map of Smithsonian Grounds (Library of Congress).

Figure 18. (above right) 1882 Map of Smithsonian Grounds, showing development of National Museum and Army Medical Museum (Library of Congress).

The development and implementation of the McMillan Commission Plan between the 1900s and 1930s witnessed dramatic changes to the Mall and the Smithsonian Grounds. The McMillan Commission was formed in 1901 in an effort to study and inform the development of Washington's Monumental Core. The Commission's plan for the Mall between the Capitol and the Washington Monument proposed to open up the vista by creating a central swath of grass lined on each side by four rows of evenly placed elms running from the base of Capitol Hill to Fifteenth Street. The elms were to be bound on either side by east-west drives that permitted circulation parallel to the Mall.¹¹ The first Smithsonian building to be completed in accordance with the McMillan Plan, the New National Museum, was opened to the public in 1910. It was located at the northwest corner of the Smithsonian Grounds, directly opposite the Castle. The New National Museum Building was followed by the Freer Gallery (begun in 1916 but not completed until 1923). Mall grading and construction of the east-west drives began in 1931 and was substantially completed by 1936.¹²

By the 1930s, the Smithsonian Grounds no longer existed as a distinct unit within the greater Mall landscape. Instead, the sweep of the McMillan Commission lawns and tree panels created a unified landscape extending between Union Square and the Monument Grounds. In the early 1930s, Ninth Street was extended across the width of the Mall, further segmenting the former Smithsonian Grounds. In 1933, the National Capital Park and Planning Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts recommended the renaming of Reservation 3A (the portion of the Mall between Ninth and Seventh Streets) for Pierre L'Enfant, and L'Enfant Square became the official name.¹³

¹⁰ Pamela Scott, *Capital Engineers* (Alexandria, VA: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 2005), 97-98.

¹¹ Tony P. Wrenn, "The American Institute of Architects Convention of 1900: Its Influence on the Senate Park Commission Plan," in *Designing the Nation's Capital*, ed. Sue Kohler and Pamela Scott (Washington: U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, 2006), 57.

¹² Kay Fanning, Cultural Landscape Inventory, National Mall and Memorial Parks, National Park Service, 2006, 54-66.

¹³ Kay Fanning, Cultural Landscape Inventory, National Mall and Memorial Parks, National Park Service, 2006, 66.

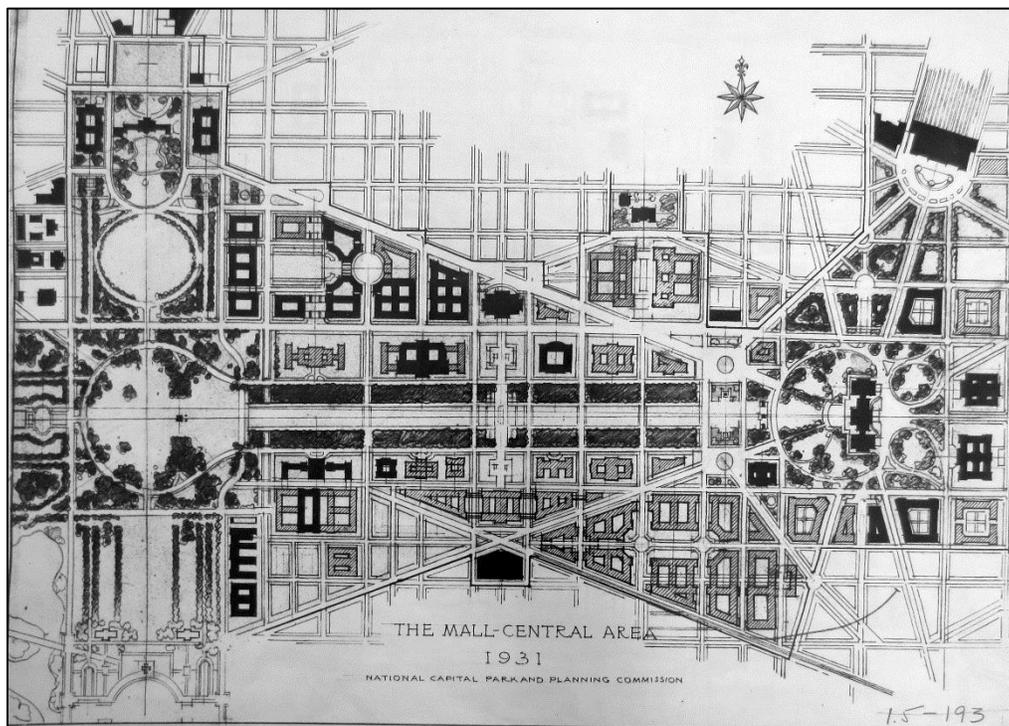


Figure 19. 1931 NCPC Mall-Central Area Development Plan (National Archives RG 328).

Hirshhorn Museum, Early Planning & Development

Impetus for the formation of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture began in 1938, when Congress authorized the Smithsonian to create a museum of contemporary art, and to select a suitable site on the Mall for the construction of a museum. This legislation had been preceded by an Act of Congress on March 24, 1937, which accepted the gift of Andrew Mellon, allowing for the formation of the National Gallery of Art.¹⁴ Unfortunately for the Smithsonian, no similar benefactor presented himself, and the museum languished, unfunded, for several decades.

In 1964, the Smithsonian found a benefactor in Joseph H. Hirshhorn. Hirshhorn was born in Latvia and raised in poverty in Brooklyn, where he, his mother, and his twelve siblings had emigrated in 1905. He made his early fortune in the stock market; managing to preserve his wealth in spite of the 1929 crash, he transferred his investments to lucrative Canadian uranium mines. Hirshhorn's fortune enabled him to collect art vigorously and apparently indiscriminately. Long interested in art, Hirshhorn began collecting in earnest in the 1930s. He cultivated friendships with artists and galleries and was notorious for buying his art in bulk. By the 1960s, Hirshhorn had amassed a collection of 6,000 paintings and sculptures, including 52 works by Thomas Eakins, 47 by Matisse, 21 by Rodin, 22 by Degas, 20 by Calder, 47 by Picasso, 46 Daumiers, 28 Giacomettis, 53 Moores, 31 Smiths, and 42 de Koonings. At that time, it was estimated to be the world's largest private collection of modern and contemporary art.¹⁵

The first major exhibition of Hirshhorn's sculpture collection occurred in 1962-1963 at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. The exhibition was immensely popular, and Hirshhorn was approached by several parties—including the Rockefellers and diplomats from the United Kingdom, Israel, and

¹⁴ S. Dillon Ripley, Statement on S. 3389, "To Provide for the Establishment of the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, June 30, 1966. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Accession 06-225, Smithsonian Institution, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation, Building Files.

¹⁵ Paul Richard, "The Inspired Greed of Joe Hirshhorn," *Washington Post*, September 29, 1974, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

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Switzerland—to persuade him to donate his collection. S. Dillon Ripley, who had become the Smithsonian Secretary in 1964, approached Hirshhorn and was successful in convincing him to donate his collection to the United States under the care of the Smithsonian. In November of that year, David W. Scott, Director of the National Collection of Fine Arts, visited Hirshhorn’s home in Connecticut, and was impressed by the breadth and quality of the collection.

Following that visit, Ripley and Scott began courting Hirshhorn in earnest. In response to Hirshhorn’s request that the Smithsonian create a proposal for the operation and management of the museum, Ripley submitted a detailed memo, outlining his vision for the collection. Hirshhorn’s conditions for his bequest dictated that the size of the museum and sculpture garden be sufficient for the exhibition and storage of his collection, that it be located on the National Mall, that it be named for Hirshhorn himself, and that Abram Lerner (Hirshhorn’s private curator) be given a position as curator of the museum. Ripley satisfied these points, and went as far as to state: “The names of Mellon, Freer, and Hirshhorn would be associated together at the nation’s ‘Court of Honor,’ which is the Mall.”¹⁶

Negotiations between Hirshhorn and the Smithsonian continued for more than a year. The support of both President Lyndon Johnson and First Lady Ladybird Johnson proved crucial to the success of the negotiations. In February 1965, Ripley wrote that “Mrs. Johnson is keenly aware of the importance of your collection for the nation.”¹⁷ In May, Ripley arranged a luncheon at the White House in which Hirshhorn, President and Ladybird Johnson, and he were present, and in August Ladybird Johnson visited Hirshhorn at his Connecticut home to see the pieces displayed there. Following additional negotiation regarding the appearance and operation of the museum, Hirshhorn formally offered his collection (with a \$1,000,000 endowment for future purchases) to the United States. On May 17, 1966, the gift was officially announced by President Johnson, who recommended the enabling legislation to Congress.¹⁸ By act of November 7, 1966, Congress created this legislation, providing statutory authority for the museum and appropriating an initial \$803,000 for preliminary planning funds and for the production of construction documents and specifications.¹⁹

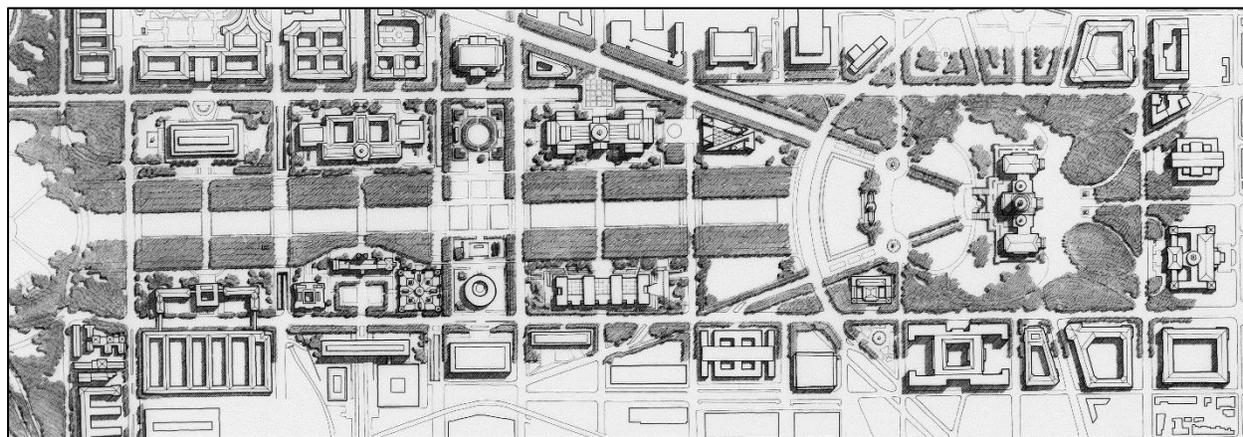


Figure 20. 1974 SOM Mall Plan, Detail (SI).

¹⁶ S. Dillon Ripley to Joseph H. Hirshhorn, December 18, 1964. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Accession 06-225, Smithsonian Institution, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation, Building Files.

¹⁷ S. Dillon Ripley to Joseph H. Hirshhorn, February 26, 1965. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Accession 06-225, Smithsonian Institution, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation, Building Files.

¹⁸ Leroy F. Aarons, “Hirshhorn Gives Art, Hugs Johnson,” *Washington Post*, May 18, 1966, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁹ *Smithsonian Year 1967*, Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), 375-376.

The National Mall Master Plan, 1966-1973

In 1961, an informal President's Council on Pennsylvania Avenue was formed by the newly inaugurated President John F. Kennedy. The Council's report, issued in 1964, was never formally adopted but was implemented in pieces by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation, formed in 1972. In addition to preparing a report on the improvement on Pennsylvania Avenue, the Council also selected the architecture firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) to prepare a master plan for the National Mall. Nathaniel Owings, a founding partner of SOM, had served as the chairman of the President's Council. Both the timing and professional connection were instrumental in the selection of Gordon Bunshaft as the architect of the Hirshhorn.²⁰

Collaborating with landscape architect Dan Kiley and traffic engineers Wilbur Smith & Associates, SOM prepared two iterations of the Mall Plan, released in 1966 and 1973. Both plans borrowed from the recommendations of the President's Council and incorporated planning elements for the Bicentennial. They included both formal and programmatic recommendations for the Mall. The former included strengthening vistas and improving plant material. The latter included removing automobile traffic from the Mall (by converting above-ground roads into underpasses, converting the Mall drives to pedestrian paths, instituting shuttle service that carried drivers from remote parking facilities, and creating several bus-operated sightseeing routes) and inserting pedestrian-friendly visitor services and activities into the shaded areas and sidewalks along the Elm allées.²¹

Relevant to the development of the Hirshhorn site, the 1966 plan recommended that both Seventh and Ninth Streets be converted to underpasses and that the Eighth Street axis be strengthened through the addition of a large fountain in L'Enfant Square (bound by Seventh and Ninth Streets and Independence and Constitution Avenues). The Eighth Street axis had been a prominent feature of both the L'Enfant and McMillan plans. In the former, the axis extended more than ten blocks along a north-south trajectory, terminating in public reservations well removed from the Mall.²² The McMillan plan fortified the axis by consolidating its termini one block removed from the north and south edges of the Mall; they took the form of large public buildings facing open squares. The north square would become the site of the National Sculpture Garden.²³

The revisions in the 1973 report were made to address the Mall circulation systems in greater detail. Only limited portions of the plan were adopted. Both Ninth and Twelfth Streets were tunneled, but others (including Seventh and Fourteenth Streets) were not. The inner row of Mall drives (Washington and Adams) were converted to pedestrian paths, although the outer drives (Jefferson and Madison) were retained.

Site Selection & Integration with the Master Plan

The 1938 legislation had stipulated that the Smithsonian's contemporary art museum would be located on the National Mall. As planning for the Hirshhorn Museum began in earnest, ideas for other, non-Mall sites were briefly considered, including the former Tregaron Estate, the Textile Museum, and the Court of Claims.²⁴ However, both Ripley and Hirshhorn were dedicated to siting the museum on the Mall. In concert with the SOM Master Plan, one existing building (Arts & Industries) and three sites were

²⁰ Kay Fanning, Cultural Landscape Inventory, National Mall & Memorial Parks, National Park Service, 2006, 77.

²¹ Kay Fanning, Cultural Landscape Inventory, National Mall & Memorial Parks, National Park Service, 2006, 77-79.

²² The north reservation was eventually developed as the site of the Carnegie Library.

²³ John Woodbridge, SOM, to James Bradley, Smithsonian, December 20, 1965. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Accession 06-225, Smithsonian Institution, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation, Building Files.

²⁴ David W. Scott to S. Dillon Ripley, March 31, 1965. SIA, Accession 06-225, SI, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation, Building Files.

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identified as potential alternatives. The easternmost site considered was at Independence Avenue between Third and Fourth Streets, S.W.; it was quickly dismissed as too small and remote from the core Smithsonian presence. The two remaining sites were located on opposite sides of L'Enfant Square.²⁵

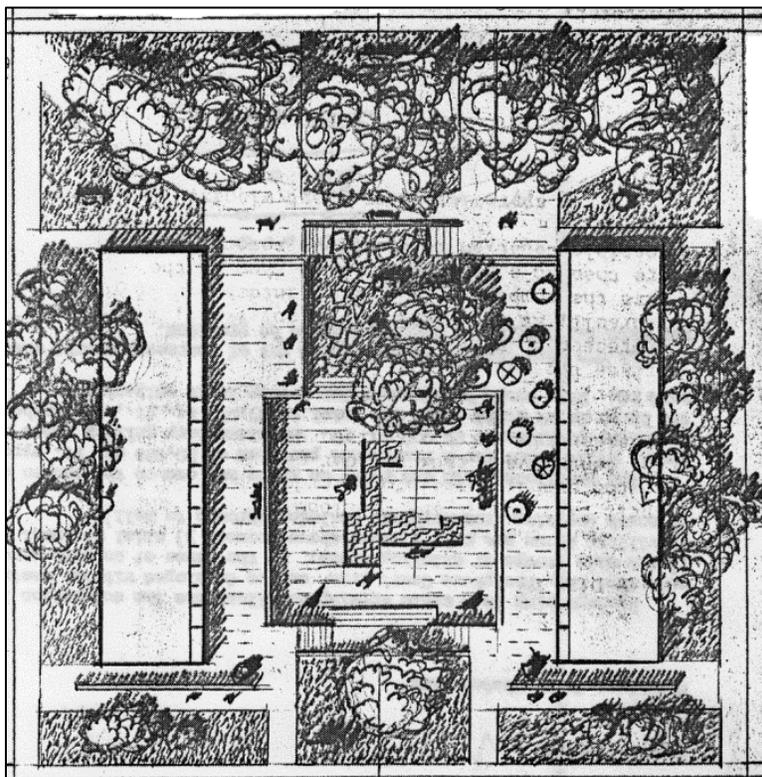


Figure 21. 1965 Sketch of Proposed Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Court (SIA).

The initial concepts for the Hirshhorn complex reflected a close collaboration with the SOM Master Plan. Correspondence between Ripley, Scott, and others during the negotiations revealed that Ripley was committed to SOM being chosen as the architect of the Hirshhorn commission. In July 1965, Ripley had written to Sam Harris, Hirshhorn's legal counsel, that Owings had "invested his staff's design talents in producing a model and perspective drawings for a sculpture garden and gallery which would be suitable for [a] prominent Cross-Mall site along Constitution Avenue."²⁶ The northern site, bordering Constitution Avenue, was Ripley's first choice. Because it sat at the foot of John Russell Pope's 1935 National Archives Building, it was desired that the building should remain small in scale, to preserve views across the Eighth Street axis. In the spring of 1965, Edward Charles Bassett (a design partner in the SOM San Francisco office) prepared a conceptual plan of pavilions dispersed around the site, connected to underground galleries and concealed by earthen berms. In this plan, the trans-mall sculpture garden concept had been fully developed. The sunken sculpture garden spanned the Mall between Jefferson and Madison Drives, its raised walls also concealed behind sloping earthen berms.²⁷ Hirshhorn

²⁵ "Statement of the Smithsonian Institution on the Selection of a Site for the Proposed Hirshhorn Museum," Uncredited Statement. SIA, Accession 06-225, SI, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation, Building Files.

²⁶ S. Dillon Ripley to Sam Harris, July 1, 1965. In this letter, Ripley was clearly trying to subvert Harris's intentions to hold an architectural competition. Anxious that Hirshhorn should see and approve of the SOM model, he added the following note in a postscript: "I am taking the model to Litchfield. Maybe Joe would like to look at it in Greenwich. No one but no one is trying to twist anyone's arm!" SIA, Accession 06-225, SI, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation, Building Files.

²⁷ Richard H. Howland to Frank A. Taylor, "Meeting on Sculpture Garden and Museum," May 18, 1965. SIA, Accession 06-225, SI, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation, Building Files.

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was furious that his collection and legacy were to be buried in so inconspicuous a building. Owings and Ripley backpedaled, granting Hirshhorn the opposing site along Independence Avenue and introducing him to another SOM architect, Gordon Bunshaft.

Bunshaft, whose reputation for monumentality suited Hirshhorn's aspirations, was also connected in Washington, having served on the Commission of Fine Arts since 1963. According to the story promulgated by Bunshaft, after meeting Hirshhorn in 1965, he became the *de facto* architect of the proposed museum: "Joe and I hit it off right away," he said in an interview, "It was all settled in five minutes."²⁸

Architectural Competition

Despite Bunshaft's confidence in his own selection as architect, more than a year would pass before the selection was officially announced. In October 1966, the General Services Administration (GSA)—allegedly at the request of Harris—organized an architectural competition on behalf of the Smithsonian and the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation. It was to be a privately judged, closed competition. GSA and Smithsonian considered a number of architects to invite, including Bunshaft, Philip Johnson, Louis Kahn, Roche & Dinkeloo, Franco Albini, Marcel Breuer, Carlo Scarpa, Mies van der Rohe, Harry Weese, Gunnar Birkherts, and others.²⁹ The parameters for the competition defined the site, size (not to exceed 250,000 gross square feet), and cost (\$12,000,000) of the completed building and sculpture garden. The program also outlined very specific requirements for the location and appearance of the sculpture garden: "The design shall provide for the continued vehicular use of Jefferson, Adams, Washington, and Madison Drives through the sculpture garden. The view from the Capitol Building to the Washington Monument shall not be obstructed by the sculpture garden. The garden level may be depressed."³⁰ It is not known what exactly transpired to cancel the competition (it was admitted during later congressional testimony that it was never held) but it was decided that Hirshhorn and the Smithsonian reserved the right to select an architect themselves.³¹ In January 1967, Bunshaft and SOM were officially named the architects of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.³²

Army Medical Museum

A hindrance to the construction of the Hirshhorn Museum on the chosen site was in the preexistence of a museum there. The Army Medical Museum, housed in an architecturally eclectic brick building designed by Adolf Cluss and completed in 1887, was located at the intersection of Independence Avenue and Seventh Street, S.W. The museum, which received nearly a million visitors a year, was popular, and in 1965 it had been designated a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service.³³ Nevertheless, the building did not conform to the guidelines of the McMillan Plan (it faced away from the Mall, toward Independence Avenue), and it garnered little popular support when proposals were made for its demolition. Although the Department of Defense was supportive of the plan, the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP), which operated the museum, strongly opposed the relocation of the collection and destruction of the building, and they mounted a public campaign to save the building (although the Army

²⁸ Richard Guy Wilson, "High Noon on the Mall: Modernism versus Traditionalism, 1910-1970," in *The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991*, ed. Richard Longstreth (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 162.

²⁹ James Bradley to S. Dillon Ripley, October 28 and November 4, 1966. SIA, Accession 06-225, SI, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation, Building Files.

³⁰ "A Competition to Select an Architect for the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C." Draft October 18, 1966, 10. SIA, Accession 06-225, SI, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation, Building Files.

³¹ James Bradley to A.F. Sampson, Commissioner, Public Buildings Commission, June 16, 1971. SIA, Accession 06-225, SI, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation, Building Files.

³² "Hirshhorn Museum Architect Named," *New York Times*, January 27, 1967.

³³ James M. Goode, *Capital Losses* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 366.

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itself did not object to its demolition).³⁴ AFIP efforts were unsuccessful: the National Park Service issued a statement that the collection, which dated from 1862, was more significant than the museum building itself. The recently conferred National Historic Landmark status was intended to recognize the artifacts and did not extend to the building.³⁵ Despite the opposition of the AFIP, the Smithsonian was successful in obtaining congressional approval for the site; the related bill passed in the Senate in September and the House in October 1966. The collection of the Army Medical Museum was transferred to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, and the building itself was demolished in 1969.



Figure 22. Army Medical Museum before Demolition, 1969 (Library of Congress).

Initial Designs

Gordon Bunshaft's designs for the museum and sculpture garden were presented to the Hirshhorns, Abram Lerner, Smithsonian officials, and a select group of others (including Mrs. Johnson) in May 1967. As they evolved between 1967 and 1971, the designs bore a remarkable consistency and adherence to Bunshaft's original design concept. The only element to change drastically was the reduction of the footprint of the sculpture garden. In his early designs, Bunshaft borrowed the earlier concept of a sunken landscape feature that spanned the Mall between Jefferson and Madison Drives. It was a single, open space with a monumentally scaled reflecting pool at its center. The garden was surrounded by a high retaining wall, and was accessible from the Mall by four stairs slightly removed from the four outer corners. The sculpture garden was linked to the museum on the latter's basement level. A large restaurant, located beneath Jefferson Drive, faced a wall of windows overlooking the garden.

In its initial conception, the museum was nearly identical to its present appearance. The museum building itself was presented as its signature drum, raised one story above the plaza level, and open at the center to reveal a curved, fenestrated wall overlooking an interior courtyard. According to Bunshaft, he designed the museum to be "a piece of sculpture on the Mall." Although large, the building's circular form disguised its mass, and its elevation above ground level enabled views across the site. The thick walls

³⁴ "Doctors Fight to Save Pathology from Arts," *Washington Post*, June 16, 1966, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

³⁵ "Armed Forces Institute of Pathology," Uncredited Statement, May 26, 1966. SIA, Accession 06-225, SI, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation, Building Files.

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that surrounded the plaza were intended to encase mechanical systems and a service ramp.³⁶ One principal difference between these early models and the final design was their use of four vertical strips of windows, located above each of the supporting piers. These were soon scrapped in favor of a single, horizontal opening on the north side opening to an exterior balcony. The plaza's major elements, the circular bronze fountain, the surrounding walls, and the north and south stairs, were established. The plaza was almost entirely paved, with a row of trees at the east side and three scattered trees on the west (two of these were existing, mature trees that were to be preserved). A service ramp was located adjacent to Seventh Street. On the opposite side, there was a service drive used to access the Mall and the east entrance of the Arts & Industries Building. The Hirshhorn plaza partially overlapped the path of the Ninth Street underpass, then under construction.³⁷

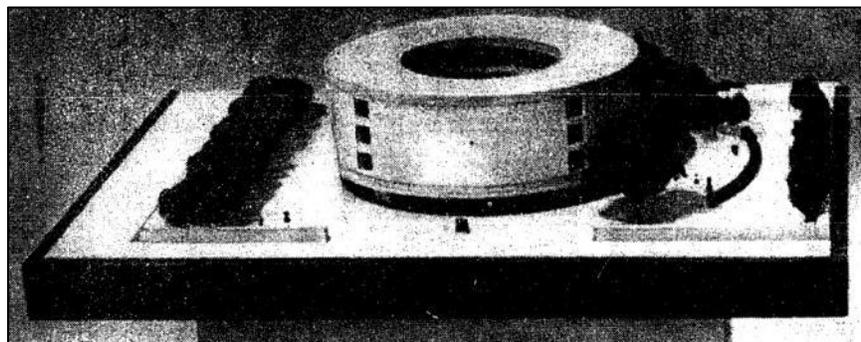


Figure 23. "Sneak Preview" of the Hirshhorn Model, June 1967 (*Washington Post*, ProQuest).

Agency Design Review, 1966-1967

Designs for the museum and sculpture garden were presented to the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) and Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) between 1966 and 1967, and again in 1971 as budgetary restrictions, paired with mounting public concern over the design of the sculpture garden, caused its footprint to be reduced. Considering the controversy that the sculpture garden's appearance on the Mall would later generate, the initial designs breezed through the review process, causing only minor changes to be made to elements of the design, particularly the walls and berms that surrounded the sculpture garden.

SOM (before Bunshaft was officially involved with the project) presented the conceptual design to NCPC in April 1966. NCPC immediately expressed concerns about the effects that the sunken garden would have on the Mall's longitudinal axis. The following July, when the designs were again presented, the concerns of the Commission regarding the effect on the Mall were reiterated, but the design was approved in concept. In their summary, the Commission stated: "The strong but simple form of the proposed museum building relates well to the surrounding structures, respecting their character while supplementing them as a strong architectural statement."³⁸ In conjunction with the July NCPC meeting, the design of the museum and sculpture garden were first officially presented to the public. A large model and multiple renderings emphasized the design of the museum building itself—particularly the drum's massive, coffered ceiling—as well as the architects' treatment of the Eighth Street axis,

³⁶ Richard Guy Wilson, "High Noon on the Mall: Modernism versus Traditionalism, 1910-1970," in *The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991*, ed. Richard Longstreth (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 162.

³⁷ One idiosyncrasy of the plan was the depiction of the landscape, particularly the trees along the Mall, which were presented in rows of six, rather than the four that currently existed, or even the five that SOM had presented in their 1973 master plan.

³⁸ Report of the Federal Planning and Projects Committee, "Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden," National Capital Planning Commission, July 27, 1967. SIA, Accession 06-225, SI, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation, Building Files.

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emphasized by the sunken sculpture garden.³⁹ The final design of the museum and sculpture garden was approved by NCPC in December 1967.

The design was first presented to CFA in June 1967. At the time the Commission included chairman William Walton, landscape architect Hideo Sasaki, architect Chlothiel Woodard Smith, and Bunshaft himself, who recused himself during the proceedings. The Commission approved of the plan, particularly the circular shape of the museum building. Like NCPC, it had reservations regarding the height and “trench-like” quality of the sunken sculpture garden. It was suggested that the extensive paving in the museum plaza be reduced to alleviate summer heat and glare.⁴⁰ In their November meeting, CFA granted approval of the revised design, which had been refined to reduce the height and visual impact of the sculpture garden berms. Designs for the National Sculpture Garden (directly adjacent to Constitution Avenue) were developed almost simultaneously with those of the Hirshhorn. It underwent CFA review in concept in 1965, and further revisions were presented between 1966 and 1971. The central fountain was completed around the time of the Hirshhorn’s opening. (Due to a lack of funding, the landscape and sculpture around the fountain were not added until the late 1990s.)

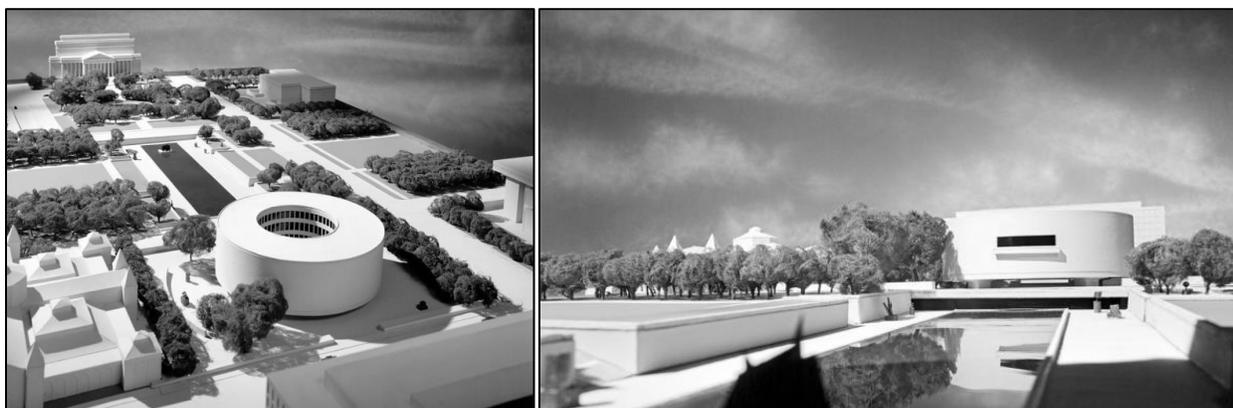


Figure 24. (above left) Hirshhorn conceptual model aerial, facing northeast, 1967 (Ezra Stoller Archive).

Figure 25. (above right) Hirshhorn conceptual model, facing south, 1967 (Ezra Stoller Archive).

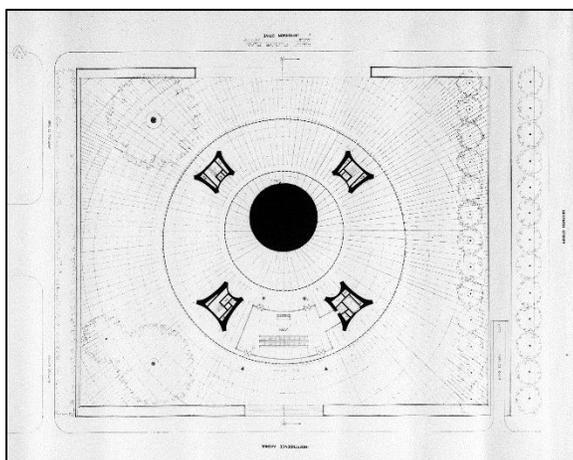


Figure 26. Conceptual Plaza Plan, September 1967 (SI).

³⁹ Paul Richard, “Hirshhorn Museum: ‘Floating’ Gallery,” *Washington Post*, July 28, 1967, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁰ William Walton, Chairman, to Lawson B. Knott, July 13, 1967. SIA, Accession 06-225, SI, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation, Building Files.

Construction Bidding & Cost Reductions

In 1968, Congress appropriated \$2,000,000 to begin construction, and the ceremonial ground-breaking took place on January 8, 1969. Hirshhorn, President Johnson, Secretary Ripley, and Chief Justice Earl Warren all spoke.⁴¹ Actual excavation, however, would not begin for another year. Designs were finalized in March and released by the General Services Administration (GSA) for bid on April 27, 1969 (at this time, GSA managed the construction of Smithsonian facilities). Also that year, an additional \$3,300,000 was appropriated for construction. One aspect of the design proved controversial: the original cladding material selected by the architects and approved by the CFA was Italian travertine limestone, which at that time was only widely available from Italy. Members of Congress and lobbyists from the American Marble Industry objected to the use of a foreign material on so prominent a building, citing the 1933 Buy American Act, which gave preferential treatment to domestic products for government purchases.⁴² GSA revised the bid package to require pricing for three stone options—one Italian travertine and two domestic marbles—and the bids were reopened on May 27, 1969.

GSA and Smithsonian received four proposals, with costs substantially higher than the Congressionally allotted \$15,000,000 budget, even with the use of Italian travertine, by far the least expensive cladding option. Both GSA and Smithsonian recognized the direness of the situation. The Public Buildings Commission sent a letter to Ripley, stating “We are convinced that a complete redesign is necessary to bring the cost down to a figure between \$12,000,000 and \$12,500,000.”⁴³ SOM and Smithsonian weighed two options to reduce the construction costs. The first was a total redesign. The second was the elimination of all stone (foreign or domestic) and replacement with precast concrete panels with an exposed aggregate surface. Stony Creek Granite—the same stone used for the exterior of the Freer Gallery—was selected as the dominant aggregate material for the precast panels. Also included with this option was the reduction of the basement area to shrink the auditorium and remove the kitchen and dining room from the program, thus eliminating construction under Jefferson Drive.⁴⁴

The revised cladding options were presented to and approved by CFA in September 1969. GSA released revised bidding parameters, and three bids were submitted on December 18, 1969. The lowest bid of \$11,874,000, submitted by the Piracci Construction Company of Baltimore, was dramatically lower than the two corresponding bidders.⁴⁵ A day after submitting its low bid, Piracci admitted to having made a mistake in their calculations, and added more than \$700,000 to their initial amount. Not including fees and contingencies, the final Piracci bid was just beneath the \$13,000,000 ceiling GSA had established for construction costs. In February, Piracci was awarded the bid.⁴⁶ Hirshhorn, hoping to counteract the escalation in costs that the delays had created, offered to divert \$1,000,000 from the museum’s art endowment, allowing it to be spent on construction instead. In March 1970, construction began on the museum building.

Reduction of Sculpture Garden, 1970-1971

With the substitution of precast concrete panels for Italian travertine, the Smithsonian and its architects had avoided the controversy surrounding the use of foreign stone. The relief, however, was short lived.

⁴¹ *Smithsonian Year 1969*, Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 439.

⁴² A clause in the Act specified that foreign materials had to be 6% less expensive than domestic options to be considered viable.

⁴³ Robert B. Foster, Jr. to S. Dillon Ripley, June 5, 1969. SIA, Accession 06-225, SI, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation, Building Files.

⁴⁴ James Bradley, Memo, July 31, 1969. SIA, Accession 06-225, SI, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation, Building Files. The gross area of the museum was reduced from 230,000 to 190,000 square feet.

⁴⁵ Meryle Seacrest, “Hirshhorn Bid,” *Washington Post*, December 19, 1969, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁶ John Hanrahan, “Hirshhorn Builder: ‘Few Millions More,’” *Washington Post*, January 31, 1973, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

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Opposition to the sculpture garden's interruption of the Mall vista had mounted slowly, and by the time construction began it had reached a boiling point. Negative publicity surrounding the museum erupted quickly and was directed at nearly every aspect of its development: the business dealings of Joseph Hirshhorn, the cavalier attitude of S. Dillon Ripley towards Mall development, the quality and scope of the collection, the legitimacy of the Eighth Street axis as an interpretation of L'Enfant's original vision, and the collusion of all parties in the selection of Gordon Bunshaft as the building's architect.

In July 1970, New Jersey Congressman Frank Thompson, Jr. prompted an investigation into the operations of the Smithsonian, and introduced a bill that would rescind Congressional authority to build and fund the Hirshhorn. The bill did not pass, and was unlikely to do so considering that the construction contractor had been selected and thirteen million dollars had already been appropriated to plan and construct the project. Nevertheless, it drew negative attention to the sunken sculpture garden. In December, Thompson's committee recommended that construction on the project be suspended. The *Washington Post's* architectural critic Wolf Von Eckardt, characterizing the argument as "Trench Warfare," wrote: "Most people who are disturbed by the trench are not disturbed by its relative prominence, but by the very idea of having anything cross the Mall. They want the magnificent sweep of nature without any monumental, man-made interference."⁴⁷

In the spring of 1971, the design was again presented to NCPC and CFA. In a "cliff-hanging" May session, NCPC members voted to revoke their approval of the conceptual design. After Ripley warned them that the removal of the sculpture garden would prompt Hirshhorn to rescind his gift, the Commission voted in the same hearing to approve the newly designed sculpture garden.⁴⁸ In Bunshaft's revised design, the north-south dimension of the garden had been reduced significantly (from 564 to 140 feet), while the east-west dimension had been enlarged to about 360 feet. The footprint of the reflecting pool was similarly reduced in size. The new dimensions of the sculpture garden corresponded to the width of the museum plaza and the depth of the tree panel contained between Jefferson and Adams Drives (the latter would later be converted to a pedestrian path). The garden remained sunken, accessible on the north side by a single, wide stair (flanked by long rows of hedges) and on the south side by a pair of lateral stairs. These led to an upper gravel terrace, subdivided visually into smaller spaces by plantings. At the center of the garden, a double set of wide, facing stairs led to a lower gravel terrace, in which was placed the reflecting pool. To preserve a mature oak that stood on the southwest corner of the proposed sculpture garden, a large cleft was taken out of the garden in that area. This cleft, which was level with the surrounding Mall elevation—intruded on the rectangular shape of the sculpture garden. A new feature of the garden was an underground tunnel, connecting with a staircase on the museum plaza, which would allow direct access beneath Jefferson Drive. In total, it was estimated that the garden would hold about 200 pieces of sculpture.

After failing to do so at the June NCPC hearing, the Hirshhorn received final approval at the July hearing, in a unanimous vote. NCPC approval cleared the final regulatory approval needed to progress with construction.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Wolf Von Eckardt, "Trench Warfare," *Washington Post*, February 6, 1971, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁸ Sarah Booth Conroy, "Hirshhorn: Okay," *Washington Post*, May 7, 1971, Proquest Historical Newspapers. Accounts differ over the exact proceedings.

⁴⁹ Kirk Scharfenberg, "The End of the Hirshhorn Hassle (Maybe)," *Washington Post*, July 1, 1971, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

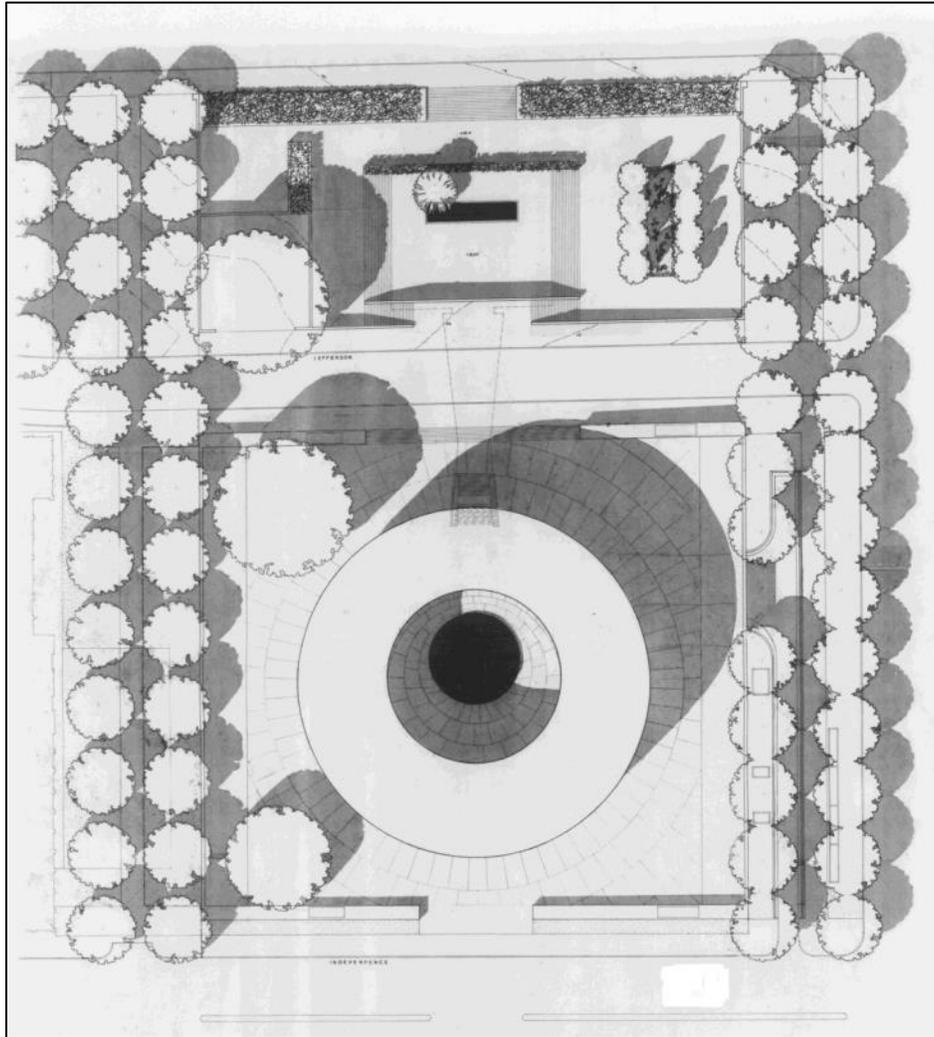


Figure 27. Rendered Site Plan with Revised Sculpture Garden (SI).

Construction & Grand Opening

Construction of the Hirshhorn Museum, begun in 1969, had been on hold while the designs were being revised and approved. Following the July NCPC meeting, the freeze on the original appropriation funds was lifted, and construction was allowed to recommence. Construction progress proved excruciatingly slow. Delays had escalated costs, necessitating several additional appropriations. In November 1971, it was estimated that the building would be completed the following December. In June 1972, the estimated completion date was pushed to June of the following year. By January 1973, the basement had been nearly completed, and the concrete of the great drum was two-thirds completed.⁵⁰ GSA transferred control of the building to the Smithsonian in March 1974, and in May the long process of shipping art, both from storage and from Hirshhorn's house in Connecticut, was underway. In October 1974, after ten years of planning and five of construction, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden celebrated its opening with three nights of gala ceremonies. It officially opened to the public on October 4, 1974.

⁵⁰ Harry Naitchayan, "Old and New," *Washington Post*, January 17, 1973, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

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Figure 28. 1975 photograph of Hirshhorn Museum building and plaza, facing northwest (Avery Drawings & Archives, Gordon Bunshaft Collection).



Figure 29. Undated aerial photograph of Hirshhorn Museum building, plaza, and sculpture garden, facing south (Avery Drawings & Archives, Gordon Bunshaft Collection).



Figure 30. Circa 1974 photographs of Hirshhorn Museum building interior (Avery Drawings & Archives, Gordon Bunshaft Collection).

Critical Reception

Critical reception toward the museum's architecture was mixed, but noticeably chilly. In 1969, writing on the proposed design, *New York Times* architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable had expressed cautious skepticism about the scale and character of the building. She wrote: "The one word to describe Washington's Hirshhorn Museum is formidable. It will be marble. It will be round. And it will be 231 feet in diameter or greater in size than a city block...The Guggenheim Museum would fit inside the building's hollow central court. It will be the biggest marble doughnut in the world."⁵¹ Huxtable found the building's monumental scale grimly (her review was full of funereal imagery) suited for the supersized monumentality of the National Mall. Huxtable recognized that the Mall was a far cry from what Ripley and others envisioned for it: as an active promenade providing shaded cafés, opportunities for four-season recreation, and nighttime diversions. The line between Ripley's vision and the prevailing views of the NCPC, CFA, and others was sharply drawn in the July 1967 NCPC meeting. After reviewing designs for the entire Eighth Street axis, the Commission found fault not with the Hirshhorn's sunken trench (which would later cause such controversy), but rather at the idea that the National Sculpture Gallery's large fountain could be converted to a skating rink in the winter, for the amusement of children "...in the midst of works of art."⁵²

Eckardt, writing three years earlier when the design was less developed, was more optimistic about the possibilities the Hirshhorn presented: "We could have something really unique and...revolutionary. A revolution in architectural design in general and museum design in particular is much overdue—not with more wild, structural abstractions or technical stunts, but in more thoughtful ways of accommodating people."⁵³ Five years later, presented with a fully designed museum whose sculpture garden was facing imminent reduction, Eckardt's optimism had flagged. He wrote: "...Bunshaft's design is not concerned with the grandeur of the Mall. It is concerned with the greater grandeur of his museum and it gives us an

⁵¹ Ada Louise Huxtable, "Marble Home Seen as a Realization of American Dream," *New York Times*, January 1, 1969.

⁵² Paul Richard, "Hirshhorn Museum: 'Floating' Gallery," *Washington Post*, July 28, 1967, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

⁵³ Wolf Von Eckardt, "An Art Museum Designed for People," *Washington Post*, June 12, 1966, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

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awful lot of beaux-arts pavement and pomposity that no longer seem to suit the taste and style of our time.”⁵⁴

Nevertheless, these critiques were in response to an unrealized design. Following the building’s completion, critics reexamined the Hirshhorn and were better able to parse its flaws and successes. Huxtable found that the bleakness of the museum plaza and sculpture garden deadened the sculpture they housed: “the pieces seem to do battle with the hard, bleak geometry of their setting, losing scale and power.” The bulk of the museum, she felt, was similarly unsuccessful. “It totally lacks the essential factors of esthetic strength and provocative vitality that make genuine ‘brutalism’ a positive and rewarding style...Its mass is not so much aggressive or overpowering as merely leaden.” Responding to Bunshaft’s oft-quoted idea that the Hirshhorn drum was designed as “a large piece of functional sculpture,” Huxtable questioned: “To what degree can, and should, a museum building be a work of art in itself, and what kind of balance can be struck between the structure and the objects it serves?”⁵⁵

Critics were generally more forgiving in their assessment of the museum’s interior galleries. Unlike Frank Lloyd Wright’s Guggenheim Museum—against whose spiraling galleries the Hirshhorn was universally compared—the simplicity of the inner ring of galleries provided a rational and pleasant experience for the viewing of art. The curve of the plan limited sight lines (never more than thirty feet clear span) while also being unrestrictive of motion. Views toward the inner courtyard provided variety, scale, and daylight. On the curved galleries, Eckardt wrote: “It has...a charmingly diverse display of sculpture and something I, for one, crave in a museum—a refreshing immersion in daylight. That corridor is a brilliant way to resolve the conflicting need for natural light to view sculpture and artificial light to view paintings.”⁵⁶

Most critics noted that Bunshaft had managed to preserve the integrity of his design in the face of budgetary restrictions, federal bureaucracy, and design review. However, the universal feeling was that the design was inherently flawed. Like Bunshaft’s contemporary body of work, particularly the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, he had confused monumentality with gracefulness and luxury with quality. Art critic Kramer summarized this perception: “The Hirshhorn is obviously a major statement of Mr. Bunshaft’s current phase. This is a kind of architecture that, while not necessarily intending to symbolize anything except high design and good taste, ends up standing for a good deal more than that.”⁵⁷

Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden Rehabilitation

After the sculpture garden opened to the public, the vast expanses of gravel and limited vegetation created an arid, often inhospitable environment. Additionally, the stairs and gravel paving necessary to access and traverse the garden presented difficulties for those with strollers and in wheelchairs.⁵⁸ In 1977, landscape architect Lester A. Collins was commissioned to rehabilitate the Hirshhorn sculpture garden in collaboration with the museum staff and the Smithsonian Office of Horticulture. Architectural and other technical drawings were prepared by the E/A Design Group of Washington, D.C.

Lester Collins (1914-1993) was a Harvard-educated landscape architect who had established his professional practice in Washington in 1953. Although he was best known for his private residential commissions, Collins also contributed to the designs of a number of public and institutional campuses in the region, including Georgetown University, the U.S. Naval Academy, and the National Zoo. Beginning

⁵⁴ Wolf Von Eckardt, “Trench Warfare,” *Washington Post*, February 6, 1971, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

⁵⁵ Ada Louise Huxtable, “Maimed Monument,” *New York Times*, October 6, 1974.

⁵⁶ Wolf Von Eckardt, “Hirshhorn Enclave: You May Admire It, But You’ll Hardly Love It,” *Washington Post*, September 28, 1974, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

⁵⁷ Hilton Kramer, “A Fortress of a Building That Works as a Museum,” *New York Times*, October 2, 1974.

⁵⁸ Valerie J. Fletcher, *A Garden for Art* (Washington, DC: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, 1998), 24-25.

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in the late 1930s, Collins began a lifelong collaboration with Walter and Marion Beck in shaping the Asian-inspired landscape of their Innisfree estate in Millbrook, New York.⁵⁹

The new design proposed a number of insertions into the existing sculpture garden. The south access stairs were retained, while the north stairs were altered to accommodate two flanking ramps, which ran parallel to the north wall of the sculpture garden and replaced the banks of hedges that had originally existed. The two sets of broad, opposing stairs at the center of the sculpture garden that had provided access to the lower plaza were removed. The east stair was replaced with a narrow ramp and planting beds, while the west stair was replaced with a smaller stair and planting beds.

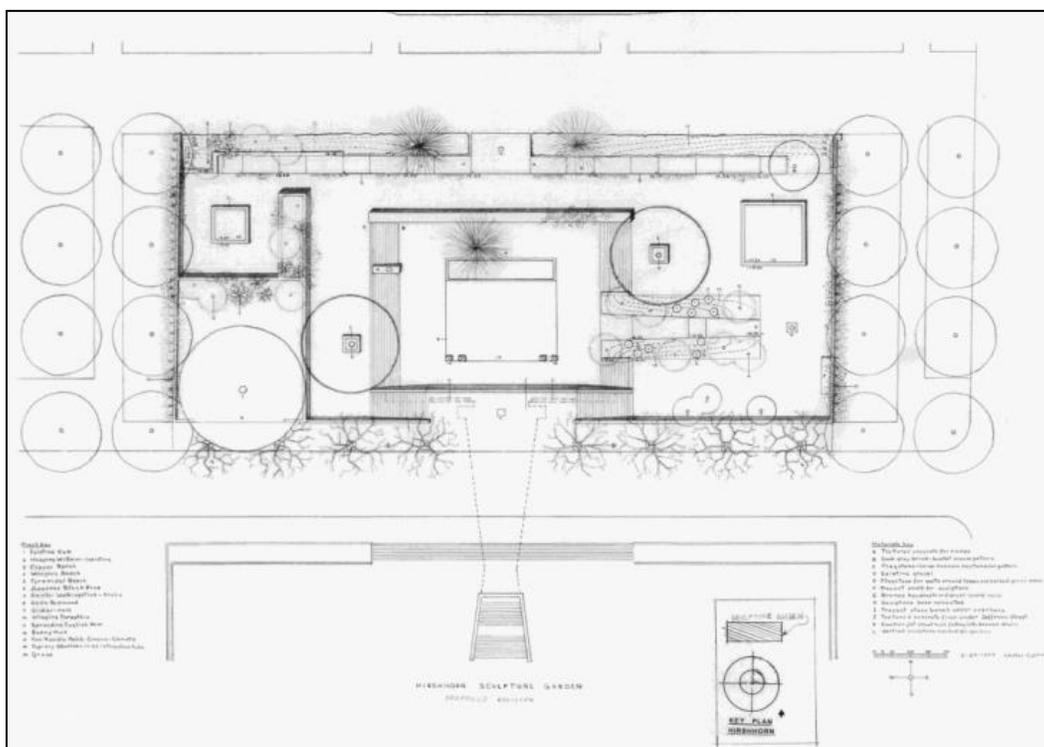


Figure 31. 1977 Sculpture Garden Rehabilitation Plan (SI).

Necessary improvements to the existing water and electrical service in the garden prompted the removal of the original gravel paving. When reinstated, the amount of paving was reduced significantly in the garden, with large expanses devoted to planting beds and sod lawns. The majority of new paving was composed of brick pavers, with limited slate and granite details. New walls were cast in concrete with an exposed aggregate surface to match the existing. The design retained Bunshaft's existing pool at the center of the lower plaza, and also added a new fountain at the east side of the site, aligned with the center of the new ramp. The new fountain featured a single jet and was surrounded by slate pavers that were set flush with the surrounding brick paving. Finally, a new trench and grating were installed along the base of the opening to the plaza tunnel, possibly to allow the tunnel to be sealed.

Apart from the extensive use of sod, the new garden design introduced limited new plantings to the space. The original weeping willow adjacent to the pool was retained, and the hedges adjacent to the new ramps were replaced. Other major, new plantings included several weeping beeches at the southeast corner of the site, multiple Japanese black pines along the central ramp, and two dawn redwoods at the outer north corners.

⁵⁹ Clare Lise Kelly, *Montgomery Modern* (Silver Spring, MD: The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 2015), unpaginated.

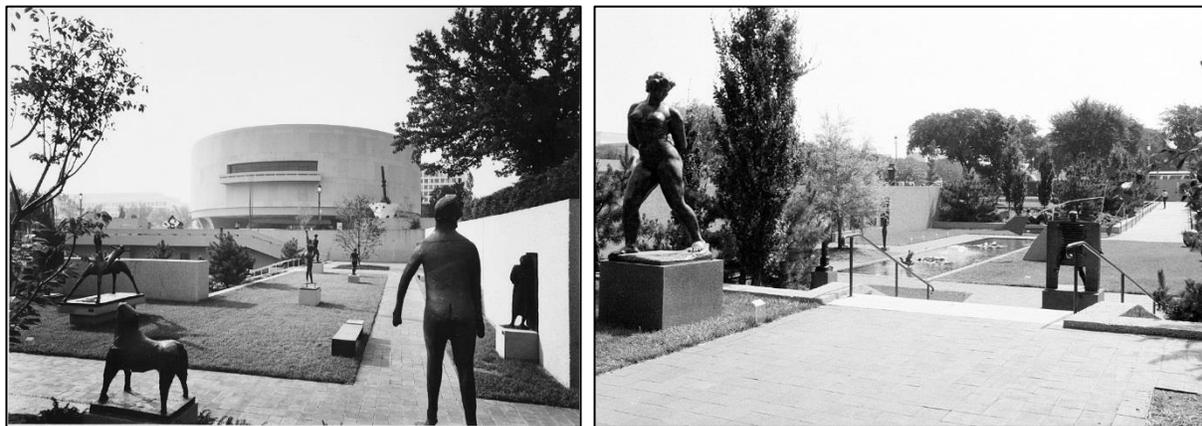


Figure 32. Sculpture Garden after rehabilitation, 1985 (SIA).

The proposed plans were approved in 1978, and construction began the following year. The rehabilitated garden was opened to the public in September 1981 (only twelve days after the death of Joseph Hirshhorn). The new sculpture garden design was received warmly:

What has transpired in that borrowed plot of land alongside the Mall is a rare combination of ingenious, sympathetic design and happy accident...What was needed [in the garden] was a sense of inviting intimacy, which is precisely what Collins has managed to provide by breaking up the space in an orderly way with brick walkways that echo the basic rectangular configuration of the plot, with a profusion of new trees and plantings and, above all, with thick carpets of grass...His plantings reinforce the identity of the garden as a welcoming urban park.⁶⁰

Since the completion of the sculpture garden rehabilitation in 1981, the plant material within the garden has continued to evolve. New plantings, including trees, perennial grasses, groundcover, and woody vines, have greatly increased both the quantity and diversity of trees within the sculpture garden, with the result that its current appearance is quite distinct from its appearance in 1981.

As described previously, when the sculpture garden had been originally designed, a large notch was located at its southwest corner to allow for the retention of an existing, mature oak tree. By 1988, the condition of the oak had deteriorated to the point where it required removal. Plans were made by the museum to replace the tree, but that does not appear to have occurred.⁶¹ Instead, a large-scale work by the artist Mark di Suvero, *Are Years What? (for Marianne Moore)* (1967), was acquired by the museum in 1999 and installed in that space.

Hirshhorn Plaza Rehabilitation

Like the sculpture garden, the Hirshhorn plaza upon completion suffered from a surplus of paving and lack of vegetation. Deterioration of the plaza surface, including extensive spalling and leaking into the interior of the building, prompted the Smithsonian to upgrade the roof membrane and structure. The Smithsonian invited firms to submit proposals for a rehabilitated plaza design. Annapolis-based landscape architecture firm Urban & Associates submitted the successful design. Urban & Associates became the prime consultant and led the design effort, with technical contributions from the architecture firm Cannon, from lighting consultant Claude Engle, and from several additional engineering firms.⁶²

⁶⁰ Benjamin Forgey, "Tending the Garden," *Washington Post*, September 12, 1981, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

⁶¹ James Demetrian to James R. Buckler, August 29, 1988. SIA Acc. 94-035, SI, Office of Physical Plant, Horticulture Services Division, Office of the Director Records, 1972-1990.

⁶² James Urban, interview with Bill Marzella, April 10, 2015.

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Urban & Associates (now the Office of James Urban) was founded in 1978 and is based in Annapolis, Maryland. Founder James Urban has specialized in technical issues surrounding urban forestry. Projects in the Washington, D.C. region have included landscapes at the East Wing of the National Gallery of Art, the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials, and the Bureau of Engraving and Printing as well as streetscape improvement projects for downtown Bethesda and Silver Spring. In 1998, he was named a fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects.⁶³

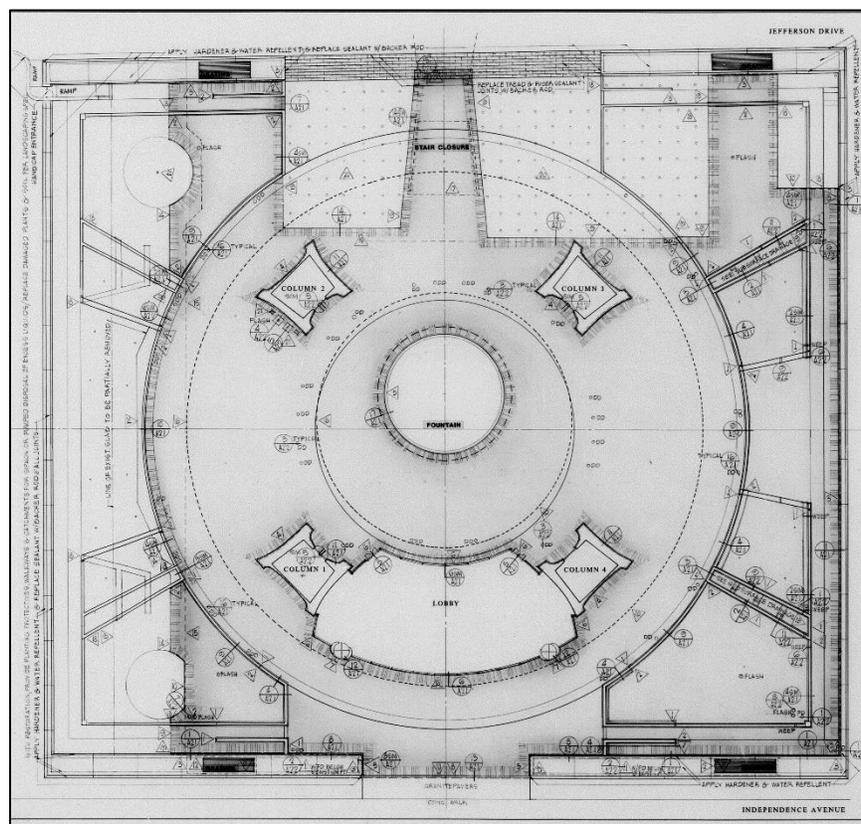


Figure 33. 1991 Plaza Rehabilitation Plan (SI).

Urban also collaborated with Hirshhorn curators and the museum's director, James Demetrian, on the design of the plaza. As the design process unfolded, Smithsonian encountered difficulties with raising the necessary funds to realize the plaza design, including some of its costlier elements, namely the large-scale granite pavers that replaced the original scored concrete. After receiving preliminary approval from CFA and NCPC in the fall of 1989, Smithsonian met an impasse with CFA, who effectively refused to grant final approval to the project if the granite pavers were not used. For a brief period, the plaza rehabilitation effort was postponed as Smithsonian explored options to construct an addition to the museum building.⁶⁴ The potential addition failed to gain traction from both the external review agencies and Smithsonian leadership, and the project was shelved.⁶⁵ With a potential addition no longer being considered, planning for the plaza rehabilitation resumed. In spring 1991, after the original granite had been returned to the design, the project was approved. Contract documents were completed in summer 1991; construction commenced thereafter; and the project was completed in summer 1993.⁶⁶

⁶³ "About James Urban, FASLA," James Urban, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://www.jamesurban.net/about/>.

⁶⁴ James Urban, interview with Bill Marzella, April 10, 2015.

⁶⁵ W. Richard West, Jr. to Justin Estoque, February 3, 1992. SIA, Accession 06-225, AHHP Building Files.

⁶⁶ Benjamin Forgey, "Gallery of Greenery," *Washington Post*, June 12, 1993, C1, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

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Urban's realized design included the large granite pavers radiating from the original circular fountain. The new paving also covered the original stair and tunnel that had provided access beneath Jefferson Drive to the sculpture garden. Beyond the edge of the granite paving, Urban divided the plaza into six separate garden "rooms," which provided intimate settings for the display of sculpture. Each room was divided by raised granite curbs, which extended radially from the plaza's center. The rooms were further divided by planting materials. Four rows of aerial hedges of closely trimmed Sargent crabapple trees formed the divide between each room. The central areas on the east and west sides were planted with groves of honey locusts, planted both in sod and in beds of pachysandra.

Urban had originally specified flowering perennials for the perimeter of the plaza, which would recreate the effect of Joseph Hirshhorn's Connecticut estate, where sculpture had been displayed among beds of flowers. Demetron, however, objected, and instead the perimeter was planted with a more restrained palette of rows of Canadian hemlock, Fraser photinia, and Savin juniper. Paths laid with smaller blocks of granite lined these plantings, allowing and encouraging circulation around the outer edges of the site. Other major plantings included clusters of Japanese maples around the south entrance to the plaza. The trio of magnolias at the northwest corner was retained in place.⁶⁷ To enhance the accessibility of the site, Urban and Smithsonian explored several options to insert ramps at the north edges of the site. The final design created a small opening at the northwest corner of the perimeter wall, which connected to a ramp located near the south entrance of the Ripley Garden.

When the plaza was completed in 1993, its design was warmly received. Benjamin Forgey, art and architecture critic for the *Washington Post*, summarized: "As always, the secret is the sensitive integration of art with setting. Against rather large odds, this is what transpired with the Hirshhorn plaza. Urban provided the superb groundwork—the opportunity. The museum people followed through."⁶⁸

Additional Changes

There have been a number of additional alterations made to the building between its completion in 1974 and the present. Most of these have been concentrated within the interior, particularly the first and basement floors. The public spaces of the basement floor have been most extensively altered in their appearance and use, including improved gallery spaces, new bathrooms, and a new museum shop. Other changes made throughout the building have included changes to finishes and temporary alterations to support changing exhibitions.

Gordon Bunshaft and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) was formed in 1936 as the partnership of Louis Skidmore and Nathaniel Owings. John Merrill joined the firm in 1939, which became SOM. Adept at courting commercial and government clients, sleekly interpreting the aesthetic of an earlier generation of Modernists, and exploiting industrial building materials, SOM quickly became the country's largest and most prolific architecture firm. By the late 1960s, the firm employed approximately 1,000 architects, engineers, and technicians in their offices in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Portland, Oregon. Although it was a corporate firm, SOM had the reputation for nourishing architects of renown and distinction in their own right, including Bruce Graham, Brigitte Peterhans, Natalie de Blois, Edward Charles "Chuck" Bassett, and Gordon Bunshaft.⁶⁹

Bunshaft (1909-1990) was educated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and, after receiving two traveling fellowships to tour Europe and North Africa, returned to the United States in 1937 and joined the firm of Skidmore and Owings. After serving in the Army Corps of Engineers in World War II,

⁶⁷ James Urban, interview with Bill Marzella, April 10, 2015; Benjamin Forgey, "Rounding Off the Hirshhorn Square," *Washington Post*, November 4, 1989, G1.

⁶⁸ Benjamin Forgey, "Gallery of Greenery," *Washington Post*, June 12, 1993, C1, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

⁶⁹ Christopher Woodward, *Skidmore, Owings & Merrill* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 9-12.

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Bunshaft returned to SOM in 1946 and became a partner in 1949.⁷⁰ Bunshaft gained worldwide recognition for Lever House in New York, designed in 1952. Other notable projects include the Hanover Trust Co. (New York, 1961), an addition to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery (Buffalo, 1962), the Chase Manhattan Bank (New York, 1963), and the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (Yale University, 1965). Between 1963 and 1972, he served on the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts.⁷¹ Bunshaft was also the partner in charge in the design of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library in Austin, Texas, which opened in 1971. Bunshaft had likely been chosen by Johnson on the strength of his other library projects, including the Beinecke Library and a library at Lincoln Center in New York. Development of the Hirshhorn Museum and Johnson Library occurred contemporaneously during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

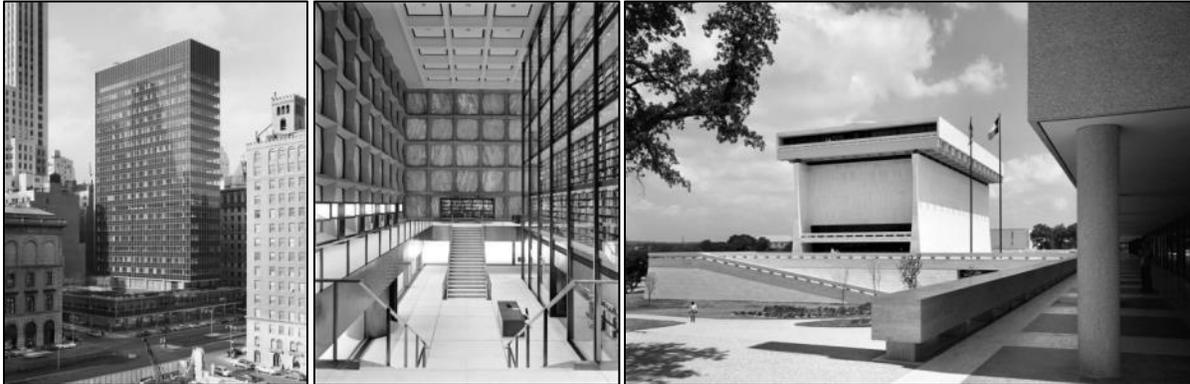


Figure 32. (left to right) Lever House, Beinecke Library, and LBJ Library (Ezra Stoller Archive).

Although Bunshaft’s design aesthetic and material palette evolved throughout his career, his work can be categorized in three ways. The first was in his design approach, which exhaustively studied a building’s program before any visuals were produced. The second was his love of monumentality, and the third was his love of art. Often working with corporate and institutional clients who were financially able to integrate significant pieces of art in their properties, Bunshaft gained a reputation for the meticulous selection and placement of art, mostly sculpture, in his designs. In his 1972 profile of Bunshaft for the *New York Times*, journalist David Jacobs wrote: “He loves architecture as an art, and he frankly loves to design big monuments—monuments to architecture, and monuments to himself. Artlessness offends him.”⁷² When completed, the Hirshhorn would become a consummate expression of Bunshaft’s merging of program, monumentality, and art.

Modernist Architecture in the District of Columbia

Architectural modernism first emerged in Europe during the early twentieth century. Rejecting historical precepts and the elaborate exterior decorative treatment that characterized architecture during previous eras, the movement emphasized the role of materials, industrial technology, and functionalism in building design. Walter Gropius established the Bauhaus in Germany in 1919, and the design school became an influential center for architectural modernism in Europe. In France, Le Corbusier emerged during the 1920s as a leader in modernism and urban design, and his work greatly influenced the development of the modern movement in Europe and America.⁷³ The modernist aesthetic spread into the United States

⁷⁰ Gordon Bunshaft, interview by Betty J. Blum, ed. Detlef Mertins, *SOM journal 3* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 163.

⁷¹ Gordon Bunshaft, interview by Betty J. Blum, ed. Detlef Mertins, *SOM journal 3* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 163.

⁷² David Jacobs, “The Establishment’s architect-plus,” *New York Times*, July 23, 1972.

⁷³ Hasan-Uddin Khan, *International Style: Modernist Architecture from 1925 to 1965*, ed. Philip Jodidio (London: Taschen, 2009), 7-32.

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through design journals and influential émigrés, such as Gropius and fellow Bauhaus architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. In America, the modern movement was locally interpreted, and its expression was influenced by social, cultural, economic, and political currents.⁷⁴

The Modern Movement began to slowly influence the architecture of Washington during the 1920s and 1930s. During the early twentieth century, the city's architectural tastes were conservative and decidedly classical in nature, inspired by the City Beautiful Movement and the McMillan Commission. During the 1920s, modernism in Washington was expressed through the Streamlined Moderne phase of the Art Deco style, with its rounded surfaces, asymmetrical massing, and horizontal emphasis. During the 1930s, the Stripped Classical style was applied to the design of public buildings in Washington. Stripped Classicism bridged the city's conservatism with the modern aesthetic, maintaining the overall massing and form of classical architecture while simplifying, or stripping, exterior ornament.⁷⁵ A good example of stripped classicism in Washington is the Federal Reserve Board Building (1937), designed by Paul Cret.⁷⁶

The expansion of the federal presence in the Washington area during the twentieth century resulted in an environment of heightened construction that enabled the spread of architectural modernism throughout the region. The town of Greenbelt, Maryland, with its Bauhaus-inspired residential blocks, was a federally planned New Deal city created during the 1930s by the Resettlement Administration.⁷⁷ Federal expansion continued into the Post-War Period, resulting in an increase in funding, employees, and construction activity. The General Services Administration was created within this context in 1949 in order to provide building management and general procurement services for the federal government. Central to the GSA's early mission was the need for greater federal office space. During the 1960s, these efforts were directed by the Kennedy Administration, leading to the development of the *Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture*, released in 1962.⁷⁸ President Kennedy also stimulated the spread of modernism in Washington through the President's Council on Pennsylvania Avenue, which was tasked with redeveloping portions of this iconic urban streetscape.⁷⁹

Urban renewal in Post-War Washington also allowed for the creation of a number of new modernist buildings and landscapes in the city. Promoted by European modernists, such as Le Corbusier, who in 1925 unveiled his Plan Voisin for central Paris, urban renewal was enabled in the District of Columbia by the Redevelopment Act of 1945, and was viewed as a preferred strategy for the revitalization of urban residential and commercial districts. In addition, the National Housing Act of 1949 provided funds for slum clearance and redevelopment. In southwest Washington, urban renewal efforts between 1950 and 1970 resulted in new high rise apartments, office towers, mixed-use developments, and public buildings designed by architects that included Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon (formerly Keyes and Lethbridge), Albert I. Cassell, Charles M. Goodman, I. M. Pei, Harry Weese, and Choethiel Woodard Smith, set within integrated landscapes by designers that included Dan Kiley and Hideo Sasaki.⁸⁰

By mid-century, the International Style had emerged as the preferred design idiom for corporate and institutional architecture in the United States. The term, International Style was first adopted following a 1932 exhibition in New York entitled, "Modern Architecture – International Exhibition," which was

⁷⁴ Robinson and Associates, Inc. *DC Modern: A Context for Modernism in the District of Columbia, 1945-1976*, prepared for the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Office, 2009, 13.

⁷⁵ *DC Modern*, 14.

⁷⁶ Pamela Scott and Antoinette J. Lee, *Buildings of the District of Columbia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 210.

⁷⁷ *DC Modern*, 15.

⁷⁸ Judith H. Robinson and Stephanie S. Foell, *Growth, Efficiency, and Modernism: GSA Buildings of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s*, prepared by Robinson and Associates for the General Services Administration, Washington, D.C., December 2005, 28-45.

⁷⁹ *DC Modern*, 66-68.

⁸⁰ *DC Modern*, 27-28; District of Columbia, Department of Transportation, "North-South Corridor Planning Study: Historic Resources Study," prepared by EHT Tracerics, Inc., 2014, 23-30.

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curated by Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock. Mid-century practitioners, such as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and SOM, emphasized form and function over stylistic concerns, as seen in the severity of van der Rohe's minimalist design for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library (1972).⁸¹

Several design trends in architectural modernism surfaced during the Post-War Period, particularly the 1960s and 70s, as a reaction to the International Style. During the 60s, the Expressionist impulse within the Modern Movement sought to break away from the functional rationalism that had defined the International Style. Informed by social and cultural changes during this period, and drawing on new technological developments in the production of precast concrete, Expressionist buildings convey a plasticity of form in comparison to the rectangular plans and curtain wall construction inherent to the International Style. A good local example can be seen in William Tabler's design for the Washington Hilton (1965).⁸² Closely related to Expressionism, New Formalism, which also emerged during the 1960s, looked again to classical building forms, and is characterized by symmetrical elevations, columns, arches, overhanging roofs, the use of marble, and a return to exterior ornamentation in the form of metal grilles and patterned masonry screens.⁸³ An illustrative local example of New Formalism exists in Edward Durell Stone's National Geographic Society headquarters (1963). Brutalism, another divergent design trend within late modernism, first arose during the 1950s. The Brutalist style is known for its exaggeration of sculptural form, its extreme articulation of the building's structure, and its use of exposed reinforced concrete forms. By the 1970s, Brutalism was in use as a prevailing style for the design of public buildings in the United States, Europe, and Japan.⁸⁴ A leading example of Brutalist architecture in Washington is I. M. Pei's Third Church of Christ Scientist (1972, later demolished).⁸⁵

The National Mall, a showcase for architecture and urban planning in the Nation's Capital, reflects the varying aesthetic trends that characterized twentieth century modernism in Washington. New construction and landscape work on the Mall was guided by two master plans for its development in 1966 and 1973, which were produced by SOM.⁸⁶ Noteworthy examples of modernism on the Mall include the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (1974) and the National Air and Space Museum (1976) designed by Gyo Obata of Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum.⁸⁷

Modernist Landscape Context

Much like Modern artists and architects, landscape architects active during the Modernist period (approximately 1920s to 1970s) rejected decoration and classical influences in favor of abstract geometries, compositional balance, and refined plant and material palettes. Although traditional European precedents continued to be important in garden design (landscape architect Dan Kiley, for example, was inspired by the serene, Neoclassical works of seventeenth-century French landscape designer André Le Nôtre), landscape architects also diversified their field of study, finding inspiration from Eastern, ancient, and pre-Columbian precedents. Writers on landscape architecture increasingly appealed to the resources and values of the middle class, with gardens that were geared toward casual, family lifestyles and the integration of indoor and outdoor living (particularly in the temperate climates of the West and Southwest). This, in part, was reflective of changing social values after World War II, as

⁸¹ Khan, 114-28; Scott and Lee, 194.

⁸² *DC Modern*, 80-81.

⁸³ Robert Twombly, *Power and Style: A Critique of Twentieth-Century Architecture in the United States* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 97.

⁸⁴ Charles Jencks, *Architecture Today* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1982), 21-29.

⁸⁵ Scott and Lee, 121-22.

⁸⁶ Richard Guy Wilson, "High Noon on the Mall: Modernism versus Traditionalism, 1910-1970," in *The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991*, ed. Richard Longstreth (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 162.

⁸⁷ Scott and Lee, 91-92.

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the United States became more global in its economy, more relaxed in its social structure, and more focused on consumption as the pathway to a happy and productive life.⁸⁸

Although Modernist landscape architects generally eschewed designs and plant materials that were overly decorative, fussy, or colorful, the display and appreciation of sculpture continued to be important to garden design, particularly to complement and enhance the setting of museums, corporate campuses, and public plazas. Notable early examples of the art-architecture-landscape integration included the Seagram Building and Plaza (Ludwig Mies van der Rohe with Karl Linn and Charles Middelmeer, completed 1958) and the Museum of Modern Art Sculpture Garden (Philip Johnson with James Fanning, 1953 with later alterations).

Like these projects, much of Bunshaft's work has been noted for its integration of art and architecture. Bunshaft was himself a passionate art collector, a trustee of the Museum of Modern Art, and a close friend of and frequent collaborator with such artists as Jean Dubuffet and Henry Moore (both of whom are well represented in the Hirshhorn Collection).⁸⁹ Bunshaft, however, did not frequently share the reasoning behind his design decisions beyond his close colleagues and intimates. He wrote little, did not often give interviews, and left few drawings or letters directly related to his work at SOM. Therefore, any analysis of his work—particularly as it informed landscape design—must be largely speculative.⁹⁰

Within the context of contemporary landscape architecture, Bunshaft's designs for the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden can be viewed as Modernist interpretation of a traditional Zen garden (sometimes called a Japanese rock garden). The practice of designing Zen gardens had flourished for centuries in Japan. The garden aesthetic relied on a limited material palette of raked sand or gravel, rocks, and moss to create compositions that were highly stylized abstractions of natural landscapes. The emphasis on a well-defined visual enclosure and continuous ground plane were essential to create the composed atmosphere of a Zen garden.⁹¹ Bunshaft's Hirshhorn landscape employed both of these elements. In lieu of rocks and moss, Bunshaft used sculpture and specimen plantings to form his compositions.

Others have interpreted the walls of the sculpture garden and plaza as a way to shield visitors from the chaotic urban environment of Washington. During the time the Hirshhorn was being designed and constructed, this portion of Washington was subject to the disruption of urban renewal and social unrest. The construction of the Metro system and Ninth and Twelfth Street tunnels created great craters that were later decked over; the National Air and Space Museum was planned in the 1960s and constructed between 1972 and 1976; and much of the quadrant itself was demolished and rebuilt during the 1960s and 1970s. Beyond the environmental considerations, the functional aspects of the walls' construction—to house air intake and exhaust vents—has been noted.

SIGNIFICANCE AND EVALUATION

The criteria for the evaluation of a historic property are set forth by the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 36 Part 60 and implemented by the National Park Service through the U.S. Department of the Interior. To be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, a building must meet one or more of the National Register Criteria for Evaluation. In addition, the property must possess sufficient physical integrity to convey its historic and/or architectural significance.

National Mall Historic District

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, *Landscape Design* (New York, Abrams, 2001), 436-453.

⁸⁹ Nicholas Adams, "Gordon Bunshaft: What Convinces Is Conviction" in *SOM Journal 9* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2009), accessed April 2, 2015. <https://medium.com/@SOM/gordon-bunshaft-4a52e5b2852d>.

⁹⁰ Nicholas Adams, "Gordon Bunshaft: What Convinces Is Conviction" in *SOM Journal 9* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2009), accessed April 2, 2015. <https://medium.com/@SOM/gordon-bunshaft-4a52e5b2852d>.

⁹¹ Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, *Landscape Design* (New York, Abrams, 2001), 295.

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The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden is currently a contributing resource to the National Mall Historic District. A National Mall Historic District National Register Nomination Amendment and Boundary Expansion is currently being prepared by the National Park Service in cooperation with the Smithsonian and other agencies. When finalized, the historic district will have an expanded period of significance, enlarged physical boundaries, a more comprehensive historical narrative, and a more clearly defined statement of significance. In the amended nomination, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden will remain a contributing resource. The purpose of this report is not to evaluate the property's contributing status to the National Mall Historic District, but rather its individual eligibility for National Register listing.

Determination of Eligibility Findings

This study finds that the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden is individually eligible for National Register listing under Criteria A and C and retains sufficient integrity to convey its historical and architectural significance.

This determination is based on a thorough examination of the property's historical significance based on National Register Criteria, as well as an evaluation of its physical integrity. This determination of eligibility also proposes a period of significance of 1974, the year of the building's completion. In addition, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden meets Criteria Consideration G, for properties of exceptional importance that have achieved significance within the last fifty years.

Criterion A: Properties that are associated or linked to events that have made significant contributions to the broad patterns of our history.

The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden is eligible under National Register Criterion A for its reflection of the evolution of both the Smithsonian Institution and the National Mall during the middle half of the twentieth century. The events surrounding the building's design and construction contributed to a discernible shift toward Modernism in the character of the National Mall, reflective of changing views not only towards art and architecture, but also commemoration, public space, and recreation. With the Air and Space Museum and the East Wing of the National Gallery of Art—and to a certain extent the Museum of History and Technology—the Hirshhorn is reflective of this evolution. The sunken sculpture garden represented a rare incursion on the National Mall landscape. The development of the museum is also reflective of a concentrated period of growth experienced by the Smithsonian during the 1960s to 1980s, in which the Institution embraced the diversity and modernity of its collections and greatly expanded its physical plant to accommodate. The Hirshhorn Museum specifically was shaped by the values of its benefactor, which is demonstrative of the sustained importance of private patronage in the growth of the Institution.

Criterion B: Properties that are associated with the lives or persons significant in our past.

The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden does not meet Criterion B as it does not possess significance as a resource associated with the lives of persons significant in our past. Although the building does have nominal associations with several figures significant in the nation's history—including Smithsonian Secretary S. Dillon Ripley and President Lyndon B. Johnson—its level of association is not sufficient to merit historic significance under Criterion B.

Criterion C: Properties that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possesses high artistic values, or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden is significant under Criterion C as an outstanding example of Modernist architecture by a recognized master in the field, with a design that was closely tailored to its

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urban planning context as well as associated collection of Modern and Contemporary art. Completed in 1974, the Hirshhorn represents the culmination of ten years of planning and design development at the hands of the Smithsonian Institution (led by Secretary S. Dillon Ripley), Joseph Hirshhorn, and SOM architect Gordon Bunshaft. Despite concessions made due to budgetary and other restrictions, the design began as a remarkably clear conception of what the Hirshhorn Museum would be. The design was pressed forward unwaveringly in the face of skepticism over both the image of the museum and the National Mall surrounding it. The building, plaza, and sculpture garden are significant for its evocation of the rigorous Modernism for which SOM, and Bunshaft in particular, is renowned. The design is also significant as a representation of the changing conception of the National Mall, which during the 1960s and 1970s experienced a marked break from Neoclassicism and shift towards Modernism.

The architecture of the building is anchored by its central concrete drum and fountain, both of which are predominantly intact and are the iconic features of the Hirshhorn Museum. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that the surrounding plaza and associated sculpture garden are similarly significant features of the Hirshhorn composition, conceived as a single unit. The plaza surrounding the building—and in particular the battered walls that encase it—define the building’s site and elevate it above its surrounding context. The walls also serve an important functional role for the building, housing air intake and exhaust vents. The sunken sculpture garden, altered by Bunshaft after he was compelled to reduce its size to no longer span the Mall, is significant as it represents the controversy the design of the Hirshhorn engendered, as well as the compromises that became necessary to see it completed.

Criterion D: properties that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden has not been evaluated for its potential to yield archaeological information. However, given the building’s footprint and the extent of excavation completed during its initial construction (as well as that of the Ninth Street Expressway tunnel), it is unlikely that the site retains intact archaeological deposits.

Period of Significance

The proposed period of significance for this property is 1974, the year that construction was completed on the building. Although the events surrounding the museum’s design and development may suggest a more inclusive period of significance, National Register Guidance for Criterion C recommends that the period of significance be limited to the date of construction. Later alterations to the plaza and sculpture garden landscape, although compatible with the original designs and consistent with their roles as settings for the display of sculpture, do not rise to the same level of significance as the original Bunshaft design. Therefore, these elements do not contribute to the individual significance of the site and do not make a compelling case to expand the period of significance.

Criteria Consideration G

The proposed period of significance falls within the fifty-year benchmark generally observed for the evaluation of historic properties. This determination finds that the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden displays the exceptional importance necessary to meet Criteria Consideration G. Since the building’s completion, Gordon Bunshaft has been recognized as a master of the Modernist architectural style, having been awarded both the Gold Medal from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters (1984) and the Pritzker Prize (1988), the profession’s highest honor. The Hirshhorn Museum displayed the hallmarks of his most noted works, including pure formal geometries, limited material palettes, integration of art, and the influence of Asian landscape precedents. Additionally, SOM is regarded as one of the nation’s most significant American corporate architecture firms, strongly influencing the application of architectural styles, materials, and technologies in the United States after World War II. Considering their high regard, both Bunshaft and SOM are underrepresented in the

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National Register of Historic Places, with very few individual listings, which is perhaps a reflection of the recent nature of much of their work.⁹²

Within the District of Columbia, there exists a strong precedent for the designation of historic properties under Criteria Consideration G, particularly when they represent the work of recognized modern masters. These include: Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library (Office of Mies van der Rohe, completed 1972, listed 2007); the Watergate Complex (Luigi Moretti, completed 1971, listed 2005); and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (Marcel Breuer, completed 1968, listed 2008), among others.⁹³ The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden is unique among these properties for its unusual and unwaveringly sculptural geometry and its strong integration of landscape and urban design elements.

Integrity

The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden has retained sufficient integrity to convey its significance under Criteria A and C. The museum's location and setting on the National Mall have remained intact, and therefore the property has retained its integrity of *setting* and *location*. The interior and exterior of the central drum are remarkably intact, as are the concrete walls that define the plaza and sculpture garden, allowing the building and site to convey the character that Bunshaft intended. Therefore, the property has retained its integrity of *design* as a singular architectural and urban landmark. The limited material palette that defines the character of these spaces is generally unaltered, allowing the site to convey its integrity of *materials* and *workmanship*. Spaces on the basement level interior have been more intensively modified; however, these are largely service spaces and are not character-defining features of the building.

Although the plaza and sculpture garden have been modified from their original appearances, the strong formal elements that generate the character of these spaces has been retained, allowing them to retain their integrity of *design*. (In the case of the plaza, it is the perimeter walls and relationship to the museum drum; in the case of the sculpture garden, it is the sunken nature and intimacy of scale in relation to the National Mall). Although the changes removed or altered some of the original materials and circulation patterns, the spaces continue to act as backgrounds for the display of sculpture and as quiet, Zen-like, and contemplative retreats from the surrounding urban environment. Therefore, they continue to convey their integrity of *feeling* and *association*.

⁹² In a limited survey, only two properties were identified: the Inland Steel Building in Chicago (completed 1957) and the Lever House in New York City (completed 1952), although there are undoubtedly others, including many listings in local historic registers.

⁹³ All of these properties were listed under Criterion C, some in addition to other Criteria.

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Contributing Features

The tables below have been developed to identify contributing and non-contributing features throughout the site. Contributing features are those that were present on the site when the museum opened in 1974 and that have retained their integrity to that year.

Table #1: Hirshhorn Museum Building and Plaza Contributing Features

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Contributing/Non-Contributing</i>
Drum-like building form with central courtyard	Contributing
Battered perimeter walls	Contributing
Sculptural, cast-in-place concrete piers	Contributing
Precast concrete cladding panels	Contributing
Painted, coffered concrete ground-level ceiling structure	Contributing
Third-story balcony and fenestration	Contributing
Circular fountain in interior courtyard	Contributing
Glazed entrance lobby with revolving doors	Contributing
Magnolia trees and circular bed at northwest corner of the site	Contributing
Setting for the display of rotating sculpture	Contributing
Loading dock ramp, retaining walls, and fence	Contributing
Vegetation (with the exception of Magnolias)	Non-Contributing
Granite paving, curbs, and raised beds	Non-Contributing
Temporary perimeter security elements	Non-Contributing
Accessible entrance on northwest corner	Non-Contributing
Moveable site furniture, trash receptacles, etc.	Non-Contributing

Table #2: Hirshhorn Museum Building Interior Contributing Features

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Contributing/Non-Contributing</i>
First-floor lobby interior	Contributing
Second and third floor corridors and galleries	Contributing
Terrazzo floors	Contributing
Escalators	Contributing

Table #3: Sculpture Garden Contributing Features

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Contributing/Non-Contributing</i>
Sunken plan	Contributing
Concrete walls (perimeter and inner partition)	Contributing
South stairs	Contributing
North stairs	Contributing
Reflecting pool	Contributing
Setting for the display of rotating sculpture	Contributing
Interior ramps and stairs	Non-Contributing
Raised planting beds	Non-Contributing
Vegetation	Non-Contributing
Paving	Non-Contributing
Enclosed arts education space (at former stair opening)	Non-Contributing
Guard booth	Non-Contributing
Moveable site furniture, trash receptacles, etc.	Non-Contributing

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Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library, Washingtoniana Collection

National Archives and Records Administration

Smithsonian Institution Archives

Bibliographic Abbreviations

RG Record Group

SIA Smithsonian Institution Archives

SI Smithsonian Institution

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PREPARER'S DETERMINATION

Eligibility Recommended

Eligibility Not Recommended

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

Applicable Considerations:

A B C D E F G

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Date: April 11, 2016

DC SHPO REVIEW AND COMMENTS

Concurs with Recommendation

Does Not Concur with Recommendation



David Maloney

Date: May 12, 2016

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