

12 January 2021

Ms. Carly Bond
Historic Preservation Specialist
Smithsonian Institute
Office of Planning, Design & Construction
Architectural History and Historic Preservation
600 Maryland Avenue, SW, Suite 5001 Capital Gallery MRC 511 Washington, DC 20013

Re: Proposed alterations to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

Dear Ms. Bond:

The Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) expresses concerns about the proposed alterations to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.

The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden was designed by Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. Joseph H. Hirshhorn's 1966 donation of his extensive art collection to the Smithsonian set into motion a process that resulted in the opening of the new Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in 1974. In 1981, the Sculpture Garden underwent a redesign at the hands of landscape architect Lester Collins, and the entry plaza was modified in the 1990s by Urban & Associates (now called the Office of James Urban). The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden is currently under review for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

The Sculpture Garden references Japanese Zen gardens, utilizing a minimalist palette of materials and landscaping. The current project includes extensive changes that we believe impact the historic integrity of this resource. Adverse effects include the expansion of the reflecting pool, and the addition of stacked stone walls that significantly alter Bunshaft's design and erode the visual relationship between the museum and the garden.

The design and dimensions of the reflecting pool and its visual relationship with the Hirshhorn balcony is an essential part of the design. The proposed enlargement obscures this relationship. Further, during the 1981 renovation the introduction of physical walls was considered but rejected, citing negative impact upon the integrity of the sculpture garden. While stone walls are found at other locations within the National Mall Historic District, they were not part of the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden, and precedent and palette should be drawn from the garden itself.

In addition to the expansion of the reflecting pool and the introduction of stacked stone walls, several other modifications are proposed that, together, intensify the adverse effect upon the landscape. These inappropriate alterations include site modifications to create a performance art space in the West Garden and around the reflecting pool, circulation and grade changes to the southwest corner, the introduction of a new north stair and lateral ramps, the reopening of the underground passage and historic stairs in a new

configuration, and the introduction of amphitheater seating and new hardscape at the expense of existing grass throughout the site.

The Society of Architectural Historians strongly encourages careful reconsideration of these proposed alterations to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B C G' followed by a horizontal line.

Bryan Clark Green, Ph.D., LEED AP BD+C
Chair, Society of Architectural Historians Heritage Conservation Committee

cc: Mr. Kenneth Breisch, Ph.D.; Mr. Jeffrey Cody, Ph.D.; Mr. Anthony Cohn, AIA; Mr. David Fixler, FAIA; Ms. Priya Jain, AIA; Mr. Theodore H. Prudon, Ph.D., FAIA, Ms. Pauline Saliga; Ms. Deborah Slaton; Ms. Victoria Young, Ph.D.; Members, SAH Heritage Conservation Committee.