

**National Capital Planning Commission**  
**NCPC File Number: 7889**  
**Smithsonian Institution**  
**Hirshhorn Museum Sculpture Garden Revitalization**  
November 23, 2020

To the attention of the Commissioners:

As Lester Collins' biographer in the University of Virginia Press' *Pioneers of American Landscape Design* book series published in 2009 and 2018, I write again to express my continued concern about the redesign of the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden and the loss of Lester Collins Modernist sculpture garden from the National Mall.

In June of 2019 I testified before National Capital Planning Commission about the exclusion of the Lester Collins sculpture garden design from the period of significance as presented in the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden Revitalization report in April of 2019. Happily, this is not the case today because of scholarship by Robinson & Associates and Laura L. Knott, Historical Landscape Architect. As reported in the *Hirshhorn Museum Sculpture Garden Significance and Integrity Report*, "Robinson & Associates provides a carefully researched report on the 1981 modifications to Bunshaft's design. They recommend that the period of significance be amended to "1974, 1981", which will become the baseline dates for assessment of proposed changes under the Sculpture Garden Revitalization project".

Yet, even after undertaking this exhaustive research, and sharing its findings with the public, I see no meaningful acknowledgement of these findings in the current proposal and the potential impact on the garden's period of significance as a contributing feature in the National Mall Historic District. In fact, the current Hirshhorn's Sculpture Garden proposals -- in particular the introduction of dry stacked stone walls and the additions to the rectangular pool -- which exists in isolation today (as when Bunshaft conceived it, and Collins' embraced it), remain materially the same as those presented by the Hirshhorn in April 2019.

Throughout the Section 106 review process the consulting parties have time and again made the argument that the linkage of the Museum and Garden by shared elements was central to Bunshaft/Collins design. The Sugimoto design severs that historic relationship by adding incompatible materials to the garden (stacked stone walls) and by absorbing the Bunshaft/Collins rectangular pool as part of a larger programable multi-elevational water feature, complete with its own geometries and materiality.

Although the Hirshhorn has acknowledged that the new pool area and the stacked stone walls result in adverse effects to this significant work of art (as the DC SHPO has referred to it), neither are truly mitigated. Rather than just publishing an on-line story about the Collins design following this significant alteration, why not rehabilitate the Lester Collins Modernist sculpture garden as part of this new work, while also accommodating programming needs here, and on the upper plaza? The Hirshhorn has a unique position: it is the only Modernist Museum and Sculpture Garden on the National Mall. Let us celebrate that connection, not sever it.

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