

Significance of the Architecture and Landscape Architecture of the Site Commonly Known as the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts

Description of the Site History and Development

Address:

929 North Water Street, Milwaukee WI

Architects:

Harry Weese & Associates (Chicago) 1966-1969 with Landscape Architect Daniel Urban Kiley
Kahler Slater Torphy (with Robert Davis, New York), Engberg Anderson Design Partnership 1994-1997

In 1965 landscape architect Dan Kiley and Chicago architect Harry Weese were working together on the design of an arts complex at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. The two men had just completed their work on the IBM Headquarters in Milwaukee. During this period of fruitful collaboration, Weese was also commissioned to design the Milwaukee Performing Arts Center (now the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts) at 929 East Water Street in Milwaukee, and he asked Kiley to join him on the project. This would be a continuation of a long-term working relationship that included the Rochester (New York) Institute of Technology, Reed College in Portland, Oregon, the First Baptist Church in Columbus, Indiana (now a National Historic Landmark), Grant Park in Chicago, Illinois, and Forest Park Community College in St. Louis, Missouri.

Construction on Milwaukee's new Performing Arts Center began in June 1966, with Kiley's design for the surrounding grounds well in hand by then. Kiley was known for the keen architectonic sense he brought to many projects, which, in this case, was matched by the special interest that Weese took in the landscape. The dialogue between the two practitioners, each at the top of his respective profession, is evident in the seamless dialogue between the landscape and the architecture. The facades of Weese's building were articulated in bold but simple planes of travertine. Kiley's landscape was equally bold in form and simple in materiality.

This iconic Milwaukee structure was designed by Harry Weese and completed in 1969. At this time the arts were a sector that experienced substantial infrastructural growth with help from a Federal program known as Great Society. The Marcus Center for the Performing Arts is an excellent example of a substantial arts project constructed during this period. The building, originally known as the Milwaukee Center for the Performing Arts, exemplifies the Chicago architect's brand of Brutalism. This nationally recognized style propelled Weese to fame with his completion of the Washington, DC metro rail system just several years prior to the start of the Marcus Center. Construction on what became the Marcus Center began with Weese's blueprints dated June 1966. The design of the theater complex is notable for a couple reasons. First, although originally clad in Italian travertine marble (now limestone) instead of raw concrete this structure is widely regarded as one of the finest examples of Brutalist architecture and one of the enduring legacies of the Great Society. The arts complex is an excellent example of form following function with the foyer, auditorium, fly loft and flanking banks of elevators all clearly articulated from the outside. The Modernist design of the Marcus Center is seen in the arrangement of interlocking cubes and a geometric pattern of rectangles and diamonds. In 1994, the Marcus Center travertine was replaced with two different stones. A lower course of Diamond Pink Granite, is topped with exterior walls of Winona Travertine, quarried near Winona, Minnesota. Original building plans called for a major music hall, a thrust stage auditorium for live theater (intended as a rehearsal space for the Florentine Opera) and a recital hall. Milwaukee County agreed to establish two parks in conjunction with the new center, Red Arrow to

Significance of the Landscape Architect and Landscape Architecture

Daniel Urban Kiley was one of the most important post-war landscape architects in the U.S. He is considered a visionary of the Modernist movement and is acclaimed for more than 1,000 landscapes worldwide.

Kiley was born in Massachusetts in 1912. In 1932, he began a 4 year apprenticeship with Warren Manning, the planting designer who worked with Frederick Law Olmsted and who oversaw the development of Milwaukee's Olmsted designed Parks (River, now Riverside, West, Now Washington, and Lake) and a founder of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

Kiley entered the Harvard Landscape Architecture program in 1936, which he left before enlisting in the Army. He was named as Presentations Branch Director of the Office of Strategic Services, being nominated for the position by Architect Eero Saarinen who was stepping down. Kiley first met Saarinen through Louis Kahn while he was employed at the U.S. Housing Authority. The two would later collaborate on iconic American projects such as the Miller House and Garden (Columbus, IN), the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial (Gateway Arch) (St. Louis, MO), and Dulles Airport (Washington, D.C.).

While at this position, Kiley was tasked with laying out the courtroom for the war crime trials in Nuremberg, Germany. He was able to travel after this assignment and the sites he saw left a great impression on him and largely shaped his approach to landscape design from then on.

"[T]he opportunity to travel around Western Europe and, for the first time in my life, to experience formal, spatial built landscapes (as championed in France by André Le Nôtre at its grandest, most rarefied level, yet found on every street of tiny towns and cities). THIS was what I had been searching for – a language ... to reveal nature's power and create spaces of structural integrity. I suddenly saw that lines, allées and orchards/bosques of trees, tapis verts and clipped hedges, canals, pools and fountains could be tools to build landscapes of clarity and infinity, just like a walk in the woods." (from The Complete Works of America's Master Landscape Architect).

Dan Kiley had a great Architectonic sense – his ability to respond to architecture was one of his strongest attributes. In terms of the rise of Modernism, we see evidence of that in the actual physical makeup of Kiley's spaces. The modernist agenda calls for good design available to all (egalitarianism) and honesty and simplicity in the use of materials. These important markers of Modernism are explicitly evident in the design of this Grove – concrete, gravel, and trees. This is definitively simple materials used in elegant ways and accessible to the public.

Kiley's work on the Performing Arts Center is significant for many reasons. It is a masterful demonstration of the skill and vision that brought him international acclaim as a pioneer of Modernism in designed landscapes and as a recipient of the National Medal of Arts (1997), a rare achievement for a landscape architect.

His final public commission to be realized during his lifetime is the Cudahy Gardens at the Milwaukee Art Museum, which opened to the public in 1998. To have, within blocks of each other, two public projects that bookend the civic career of one of the most important postwar landscape architects is of great cultural significance for the City of Milwaukee—a distinction that once forfeited can never be regained.

Dan Kiley continued to practice until his death in 2004.

the east and Pere Marquette to the west. The boat landing along the Milwaukee River was the precursor to the current River Walk in downtown Milwaukee. The Performing Arts Center, as it was known until a decade ago, officially opened Sept. 17, 1969, at a price of \$12.7 million. The gala opening included the Milwaukee Symphony, Donizetti's opera *Luciadi Lammermoor* and guest appearances by stars of the American Ballet Theatre. Touring acts during the first month of operation included the New York Philharmonic, Duke Ellington, National Ballet of Canada, Hildegard and Louis Armstrong.

Significance of the Architect and Architecture

Harry Mohr Weese (June 30, 1915 – October 29, 1998) was an American architect, born in Evanston, Illinois, who had an important role in 20th century modernism and historic preservation. Weese grew up in Chicago's North Shore suburbs and returned to the city to practice after training at MIT and Yale. Known as an architect's architect early in his career, his experience and interests stretched well beyond building. At various times, Weese found himself working as a mechanical engineer on a Navy destroyer, a real-estate developer, a magazine publisher, and a furniture designer, importer and retailer. Weese's urbanism was equally wide-ranging. Believing suburbs wasteful, he argued for giving middle-class families a comfortable place in the city with nature close at hand, an aim achieved in several infill rowhouse and apartment projects. A ceaseless stream of watercolors, sketches, essays and letters to the editor promoted sailing marinas, streets reborn as glazed shopping arcades, novel high-rise structures and Burnhamesque visions, including a 1992 World's Fair on Lake Michigan. He was an ardent if not orthodox preservationist, who tried to put Chicago's "L" stations on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. Largely through Weese's efforts, the Navy Pier was added to the register that same year.

In the 1970s, Weese and his partners bought two buildings in the South Loop and converted them into residential and artists' lofts, a risky bet at a time when the only similar developments were in New York's Soho district. The group ended up controlling two whole blocks of South Dearborn Street, and their name for the reborn neighborhood, Printer's Row, stuck. His firm completed over 200 new buildings and major renovations, including that of Adler & Sullivan's structurally challenged Auditorium Building. The majority are in Chicago and the upper Midwest, but commissions took Weese as far afield as Ghana, India, Saudi Arabia and Singapore. Weese avoided specializing in a single building type, and his work covers an astonishing range of scales and programs, from transit systems to townhomes and hotels to corporate headquarters. The commission that first put Weese on the map, in 1958, was the U.S. Embassy in Accra, Ghana, a handsome rectangle of offices with projecting bays of louvered mahogany. Weese's most poetic work includes a pair of churches built in the early 1960s: First Baptist of Columbus, Indiana, and St. Thomas in Neenah, Wisconsin. The Weese oeuvre is mainly one of brick, concrete and timber, and these obvious material sympathies led him to be labeled an alternative to the "mainstream" modernism of Mies van der Rohe, SOM, and C.F. Murphy.

Weese's last contribution to D.C. is almost unbelievable: the Vietnam Memorial as we know it today would never have been built without him. After Maya Lin's entry board to the 1981 competition had been rejected, Weese, always uneasy with final decisions or consensus, dragged it out from the rear of the airplane hangar where it had been consigned. He swayed the rest of the jury and later championed Lin in the face of intense criticism.

Weese was an architect who was neither a stylist nor an iconoclast, whose work and words responded to a set of progressive social values and a straightforward concern for bettering the built environment.

Other Cultural Significance of the Site

The Marcus Center for the Performing Arts has been a part of Milwaukee County's War Memorial complex. A Flag Day celebration is held each year at the Peck Pavilion to honor veterans for their service.

Bibliographic and Other References

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