

## Seeds of Development: An Architectural Account of the Early Fuller Craft Museum

Whether presenting integral works of 20th century New England painters in the early 1970s, or staging ambitious displays of craft-based media in the new millennium, one constant has prevailed—a physical structure fitting to house the aspirations of a changing institution, Fuller Craft Museum. As a peaceful retreat tucked away in the woods, the seamless integration of architecture and nature at 455 Oak Street has been praised not only by 1960s newspaper columnists, but also by today's patrons walking through Fuller Craft's doors for the first time.

While the Brockton Art Center-Fuller Memorial opened with great fanfare in 1969, it was years of tireless preparation that led to the building's inaugural unveiling. When the 1940s trust fund of Brockton-native Myron L. Fuller (editor/publisher of the Brockton Enterprise) reached the necessary \$1 million baseline, the first Board of Directors had the contractual capacity to create an institution geared towards children, natural history, and the arts. Fuller's only stipulation was that "it shall be of the greatest possible benefit to the members of the community."

In 1964, with consultant Frederick P. Walkey (then Director of the DeCordova Museum), the Board meticulously began touring New England in pursuit of inspiration. After seeing patrons "bursting at the seams" of Fitchburg Art Museum, they concluded that an art museum was the path of greatest value. Edouard Du Buron was named the first Director of the Brockton Art Museum-Fuller Memorial in 1965. He sought young architects to construct a museum that would serve as a destination unto itself. Du Buron selected J. Timothy Anderson & Associates of Boston (now Finegold Alexander + Associates Inc.).

Anderson's proposal for a "rural-cultural experience" was inspired by Denmark's modernist masterpiece, the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, which was designed by architects Jørgen Bo (1919 – 1999) and Vilhelm Wohlert (1920 – 2007), who applied "rural cultural" philosophy and an organic manner. For the Louisiana Museum, the vision was that one could traverse the outdoor grounds like a "covered stroll," while continuing this leisurely experience through the interior of the museum that is, in actuality, three interconnected structures. Doris Cole explains, "The Louisiana is a beautiful museum, essentially a series of pavilions with links between them. That is how we designed Fuller Craft Museum."<sup>\*</sup>



North Wing of Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark  
Photo by Jens Frederiksen

In a land exchange approved by Governor John A. Volpe, a plot of territory off of Oak Street was exchanged by the city of Brockton for an area of submerged land adjacent to Upper Porter Pond. With the outline of the premises now in place, construction began on the two-level, 20,000 sq. ft. building on November 20, 1967. The blueprints allowed freedom for expansion in the future. The finished building included nods to modernist ideals of design, a set of beliefs that date back to the early 20th century Bauhaus movement. In his 1966 book *Architects on Architecture*, Paul Heyer wrote:

*"When an architect speaks of quality values in a building, he means many vital concerns. The building must enhance and dignify the lives of those who use it; to do this it must embrace its social purpose. It must develop a rapport with its site, be aware of its environment. It must have a functional integrity and structural honesty, while making an expressive statement."*

This view hints at Louis Sullivan's famed mantra "form follows function," as well as the self-described "organic architecture" of Sullivan's protégé Frank Lloyd Wright.

Doris Cole, one of the architects (along with George Notter and Tim Anderson) who designed Fuller Craft Museum adds:

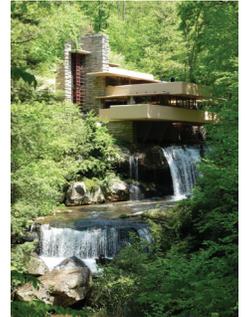
*"The idea was really to make an art museum that used nature as art. That's why as one goes through the galleries and through the links, one has views out to the site, to the forest, the woods, to the pond."<sup>\*</sup>*

The organic modernism of Fuller Craft Museum is representative of a general period throughout the world, not just Europe and the United States. For example, one can look to the stunning works of Oscar Niemeyer (1907 – 2012), who was arguably the most revered Brazilian architect of the 20th century, as he utilized the same vocabulary and post-war ideals in his designs.

At Fuller Craft Museum, the abundance of straight lines and 90° angles offer a clean aesthetic. The sloped and shingled roof forms come out of the 19th century New England vernacular, and are similar to the structures of Maine's Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, an architectural wonder designed by Edward Larrabee Barnes—also completed in the 1960s. At the first preview opening of the Museum reviewers noted its resemblance to an old Pilgrim settlement:

At Fuller Craft, a diversity of space caters to various audiences, while also offering a variety of opportunities for the display of exhibitions. The Museum's outside grounds and views provide a sense of peace. The abundance of natural light that finds its way through the galleries further reinforces humanity's place in the larger environment. As the Museum goes forward in its mission, it is a privilege to have a structure that is an exciting setting for the future.

—Michael McMillan, Assistant Curator



Fallingwater, Mill Run, PA  
by Frank Lloyd Wright



Entrance to Fuller Craft Museum,  
Brockton, MA. Photo by  
Lightchaser Photography



Itamaraty Palace, Brasília, Brazil  
designed by Oscar Niemeyer

<sup>\*</sup>We had an opportunity to sit down and speak with Doris Cole, a part of the team at J. Timothy Anderson Architects, the company that designed Fuller Craft Museum. Look for a full interview of her reflections on the Museum, architecture, and more in the next issue of the Members Magazine.