

FAIRMOUNT PARK ASSOCIATION, FOUNTAIN COMPETITION

Architect: Venturi and Rauch with Denise Scott Brown

Location: Philadelphia, PA

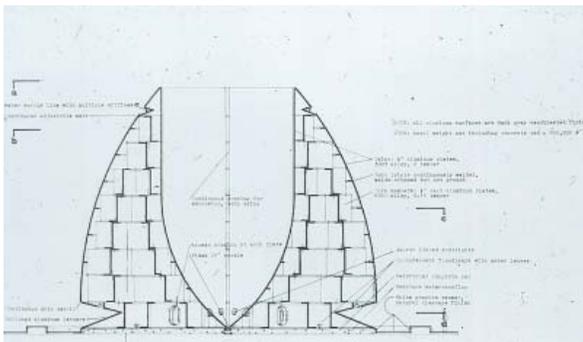
Client: Name

Completion: 1964 (competition entry)

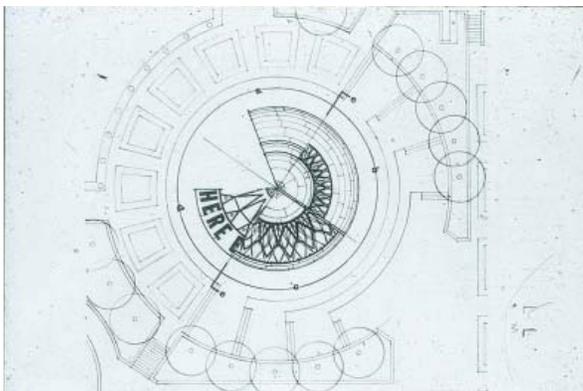
This fountain was to be located within the open city block that terminates the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in front of City Hall. The block is common to the gridiron plan of the center of the city and is surrounded by streets with plenty of local traffic. Beyond it, except along the through-axis to the Parkway, looms a jumble of high office buildings. The interior of the almost square block contains an existing round pavilion called the Information Center. The landscaping and paving layout, including the 90 foot diameter basin for the fountain itself, were elements established by the competition program. The Benjamin Franklin Parkway is a boulevard whose axis is about a mile in length, and diagonal to and intersecting with the normal gridiron plan of the city. It connects City Hall with the Art Museum and Fairmount Park beyond



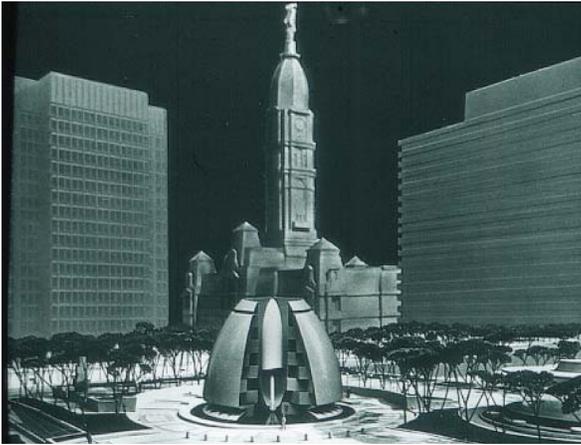
In the other direction it can also be considered an extension of the park into the center of the city because its green trees make a continuity with the park itself, and it is also under legal jurisdiction of the Fairmount Park Commission. The Parkway acts as an important arterial approach to the center of the city and focuses on the dominant form of City Hall—the field against which the fountain is to be viewed. City Hall is light in color, large in size and scale, and ornate in pattern and silhouette. These characteristics of space, form, scale, and circulation, which make up the context of the fountain, largely determine its form



The form is big and bold so that it will read against its background of big buildings and amorphous space, and also from the relatively long distance up the Parkway. Its plastic shape, curving silhouette, and plain surface also contrast boldly with the intricate rectangular patterns of the buildings around, although they are analogous to some of the mansard roof shapes on City Hall. This was not meant to be an intricate Baroque fountain to be read only close-up, or from a car stalled in traffic.



But the action of the water itself, as well as the context of the surroundings, determines the particularities of the sculpture's form. The scale of the water's action matches that of the sculpture: the central jet is 60 feet high and relates to the scale as well as to the axis of the Parkway. Its constant stream is shielded from the prevailing wind by the concave, inner surface



of the sculptural form. It is exposed only toward the Parkway, and it is set off by the dark background of the enclosure. From most parts of the plaza only the reverberations of the great jet within the misty and mossy artificial grotto are evident. The large aluminum shield corresponds to little glass shields that protect the flame from drafts in some kinds of old-fashioned candelabra.

If the inner surface of the sculpture is concave to accommodate to the large-scale water action there, the outer surface is convex to accommodate to the small-scale water action outside. This consists of a constant sheet of water issuing from a weir near the top of the surface and continuously dripping from its lower edge into the pool. The legend *HERE BEGINS FAIRMOUNT PARK* is glimpsed through a screen of droplets. This waterfall, with the polished, 317 elongated letters on the sloping surface of the base behind, relates to the scale of the individual walking around the immediate plaza and is designed to engage his interest.

Lettering is traditional on monuments. The legend designates the dramatic penetration of the biggest urban park in the world into the heart of the city. When the legend is read from the front elevation it appears to say *PARK HERE*, not inappropriately for a monument over an underground parking lot.

The central jet is spotlighted by quartz lamps recessed in the base. In the winter, when the jet is inactive, incandescent lamps with amber lenses flood the angular maze of the in-between core structure with yellow light. The central space is then dark. The angled base is floodlighted by amber-lensed incandescent lamps. This continuous band contrasts with the looming dark body above, and at close range it illuminates the legend.

The material is aluminum to lighten the weight on the spans of the garage below. Its surface is sandblasted to promote a dark, mat, warm gray finish. The sheets are welded, but the joints are not ground smooth. The structure is a skin structure with stacked, bent-plates inside (themselves bent into "Z" sections), which act both as spacers between the contradictory inside and outside silhouettes and as integral bracing, like the inner corrugations of laminated cardboard box sections. The geometry of the inner plates is angular, and it contacts the curvilinear surfaces of the outer plates at welded points. This airy *poché* is exposed at the openings of the enclosure, back and front. A series of vertical manholes for maintenance are located in the lower plates. These contribute a scale that contrasts with the monumental scale of the whole.

This fountain is big and little in scale, sculptural and architectural in structure, analogous and contrasting in its context, directional and non-directional, curvilinear and angular in its form, it was designed from the inside out and from the outside in.