

State of California & The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
PRIMARY RECORD

Primary #
HRI #
Trinomial
NRHP Status Code
Other Listing: NRHP #04000659, SFDL: #88
Date

Review Code Reviewer

Page 1 of 37 *Resource Name or #: (Assigned by recorder) _____

P1. Other Identifier: Palace of Fine Arts

*P2. **Location:** Not for Publication **Unrestricted**

*a. **County:** San Francisco and (P2c, P2e, and P2b or P2d. Attach a Location Map as necessary.)

*b. **USGS 7.5' Quad** _____ **Date** _____ **T** ___; **R** ___; ___ **of** ___ **of Sec** ___; _____ **B.M.**

c. **Address:** 3601 Lyon St, San Francisco, 94123

d. **UTM:** (Give more than one for large and/or linear resources) #1 Zone 10, 548760 mE/ 4184100 mN #2 Zone 10, 548849 mE/ 4183800 mN #3 Zone 10 548700 mE/ 4183660 mN #4 Zone 10 548540 mE/ 4183940 mN

e. **Other Locational Data:** (e.g., parcel #, directions to resource, elevation, decimal degrees, etc., as appropriate)

See Continuation Sheet Page 1

*P3a. **Description:** (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries)

See Continuation Sheet Page 2-8

*P3b. **Resource Attributes:** (List attributes and codes): HP12 (Civic auditorium), HP29 (Landscape Architecture)

*P4. **Resources Present:** Building Structure Object Site **District** Element of District Other (Isolates, etc.)

P5b. Description of Photo: (view, date, accession #) View facing west on the path parallel to Baker St; 37° 48' 11.25" N, 122° 26' 49.84" W., February 1, 2020

P5a. Photograph or Drawing (Photograph required for buildings, structures, and objects.)



*P6. **Date Constructed/Age and Source:** Historic Prehistoric Both
Original construction: 1915
Reconstructed: 1964-1974

*P7. **Owner and Address:**
Recreation and Park Development, City and County of San Francisco
501 Stanyan Street
San Francisco, CA 94117

*P8. **Recorded by:** (Name, affiliation, and address)
Maybeck Foundation C/O Hans Baldauf, FAIA/LEED AP,
BCV Architecture
1527 Stockton St. 4th Fl
San Francisco, CA 94133

*P9. **Date Recorded:** August 5, 2021

*P10. **Survey Type:** (Describe)
California Historic Landmark

Nomination

*P11. **Report Citation:** (Cite survey report and other sources, or enter "none.")

None

*Attachments: NONE Location Map Continuation Sheet Building, Structure, and Object Record
 Archaeological Record District Record Linear Feature Record Milling Station Record Rock Art Record
 Artifact Record Photograph Record Other (List):

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P2e. Other Locational Data: (e.g., parcel #, directions to resource, elevation, decimal degrees, etc., as appropriate)

Assessor's parcel #0916002

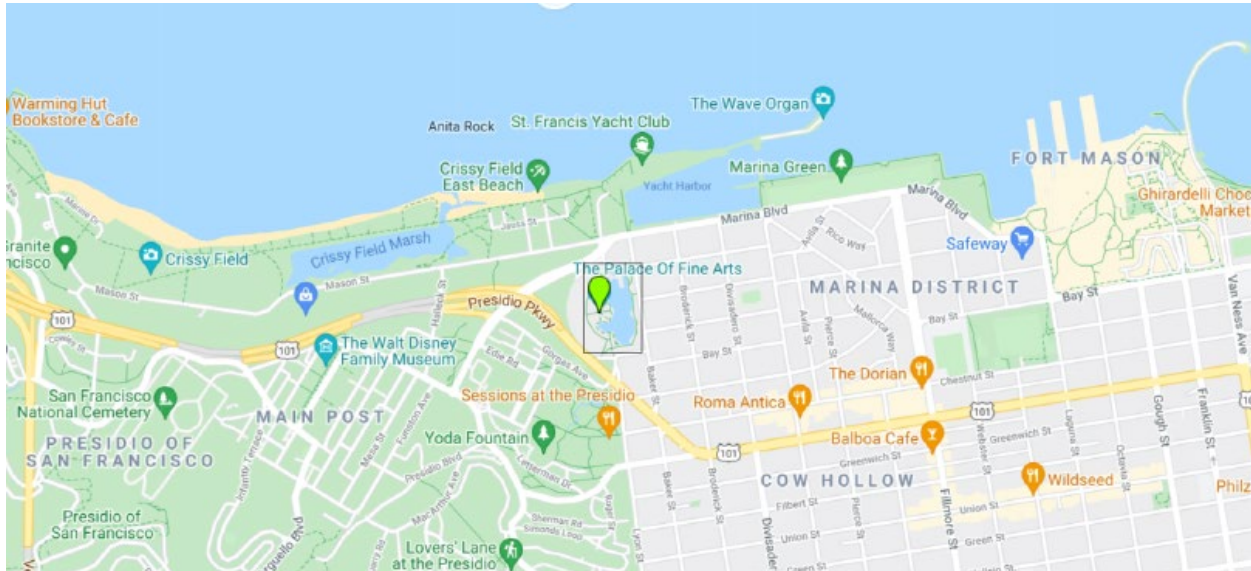
Latitude:
37.801991°N

Longitude:
-122.448656°W

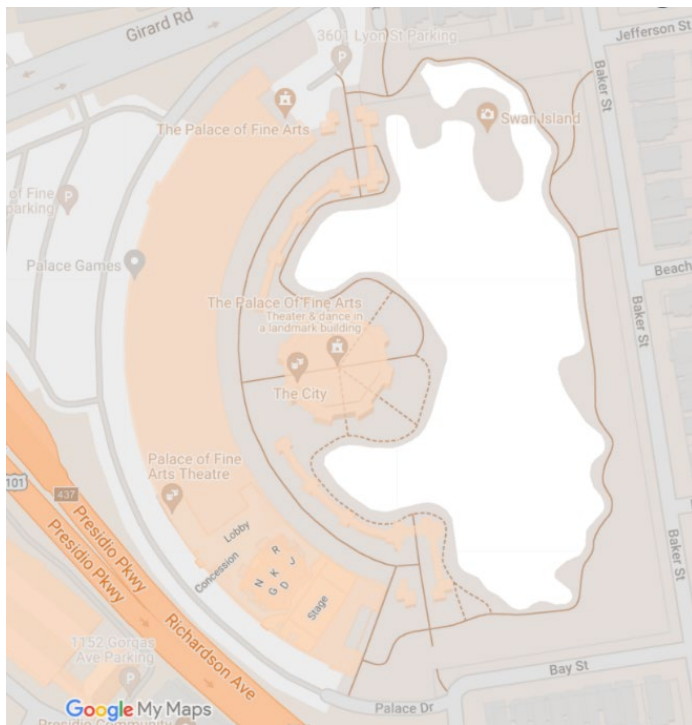


*Map Name: Palace of Fine Arts

*Date of map: 8/04/21



Map of Marina and Presidio Districts. Palace of Fine Arts location indicated on map



Zoomed in map of street surrounding the Palace of Fine Arts.

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***P3a. Description:** (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries)

The Palace of Fine Arts as Reconstructed in 1964-1974

Site Overview

The Palace of Fine Arts, a district consisting of a building and four structures in a park, occupies a 16.99-acre site at the west end of a residential neighborhood, the Marina District, adjacent to the Presidio of San Francisco. The Palace of Fine Arts is separated from a warehouse area in the Presidio in part by approach streets to the Golden Gate Bridge.

In plan, the site resembles the section of a mushroom, with a straight stem and a rounded cap. Part of the park fills the stem of the mushroom; the building, the structures, and the rest of the park are in the rounded cap. The features of the Palace of Fine Arts are arranged so that they face the residential neighborhood to the east. The three freestanding structures — a rotunda and two flanking curvilinear colonnades — are at the center, visible from the residential neighborhood across the park and its lagoon. The curving exhibition building is at the rear, visually terminating the view from the east through the rotunda and the colonnades.

Reconstructed in permanent materials between 1964 and 1974 to the designs of its architect after nearly half a century of preservation efforts, the Palace of Fine Arts is today one of the most beloved works of art in San Francisco and among a few which instantly identify the city. Conceived in 1913 for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (P.P.I.E.) by architect Bernard Maybeck as a forgotten and overgrown Roman ruin, the rebuilt Palace with its lagoon and park constitute an inseparable whole. From the public debut of its model in 1915, authorities have called the Palace a masterpiece and among the most beautiful buildings — or *the* most — in the nation or the world.¹ For that reason alone it was rebuilt at great expense before a use could be found for it, an example of function following form at a far remove.

Structures: The Rotunda and Colonnades

A domed rotunda occupies a small central peninsula on the west side of the lagoon and dominates the ensemble by its placement, mass, height, and sumptuous articulation. A pair of symmetrical curved colonnades flanks it to the north and south, paralleling the eastern wall of a semicircular exhibition building to which the colonnades form a screen. Colonnades and building are separated by redwood trees and by a broad unroofed promenade except at the former's termini where four columnated pylons in

¹For example, when architect Willis Polk argued before the Mayor and Board of Supervisors for the building's preservation, he stated that "In all the ages was never a more beautiful building." "Willis Polk on the Preservation of the Fine Arts Palace." *The Architect and Engineer*, 44, no. 1 (January, 1916), 101.

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quadrangular plan nearly link the colonnades to corners of the exhibition building at the northern and southern extremities of the complex.

The rotunda constitutes an open-air octagon supported by eight piers triangular in plan. The piers frame arches and are articulated on the exterior by paired Corinthian columns set on a high base and on the interior by a single column of the same order rising from the ground level floor. At the springing of each arch on the interior, a giant draped and winged figure holding paired cornucopias — "The Priestess of Culture" by Herbert Adams — gazes downward. The inside of the dome has ornately framed polygonal coffers.

The eight pairs of exterior Corinthian columns of the rotunda rise from a high rusticated podium reached by stepped planters; the podium also serves as a platform for giant ovoid urns. The columns are tinted red to mimic Numidian marble and support angled impost blocks with a rinceau pattern protruding from a plain frieze. The blocks serve to "turn" the rotunda. The entablature supports a high attic story with eight *alto relievo* panels of allegorical subjects. These are separated by deep niches standing on the impost blocks which frame giant male and female figures, the niches themselves surmounted by volutes and paired reproductions of Roman funerary urns. A hemispherical dome rises from a broad cushion ring with guilloche molding. The apex of the dome is 162 feet above the rotunda floor, the diameter of the rotunda 160 feet.

The north and south Corinthian colonnades extend for three bays out from the rotunda. They carry a lintel entablature with a Greek fret architrave, plain frieze, and a projecting cornice supported by mutules with an egg-and-dart molding and the stylized "AM" monogram which Maybeck incorporated in monumental buildings in honor of his wife, Annie. The bays are defined and punctuated by groupings ("pylons") of Corinthian columns which circumscribe ground level planter boxes; the column capitals reach to the tops of the entablature to carry boxy structures originally meant to hold vines and possibly trees. Colossal "weeping maidens" stand at the corners of these boxes looking in. The curved colonnades, as noted above, terminate in similar pylons arranged in a quadrangular plan carrying identical planter boxes.

The colonnades and rotunda are constructed of poured-in-place concrete with precast concrete used for more florid details and architectural sculpture. The concrete is exposed, without a stucco finish. The coffered ceiling of the rotunda is casting plaster.

Exhibition Building

The outer (western) arc of the exhibition building is 1,100 feet, the inner (eastern) arc 950 feet. The structure is 135 feet wide and is supported by a triple-hinged steel truss frame rising to 45 feet at the center. It is a surviving example of wide-span exposition structures first used in the Hall of Machines for the Paris Exposition of 1889. The stucco walls of the building are punctuated with the original doors which consist of a wood stile-and-rail panelized assembly detailed in a clathri pattern. The walls are

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integrally colored and were textured with a wire brush to suggest travertine. (Apart from their texturing, these walls lack the applied architectural ornament that was present on the original structure. This ornament was not replaced for financial reasons. The east wall of the building is screened by redwood trees planted in 1968.)

Lagoon

The lagoon and its setting are integral to the building and other structures of the Palace of Fine Arts. The large central lagoon is surrounded by a grass border with scattered trees around the east end. The edge of the lagoon is irregular where it meets the park on the east, and regular where it meets the colonnades and rotunda on the west.

Two embayments of the lagoon penetrate to the curved footprints of the colonnades on either side of the rotunda while the colonnades in turn, like armatures, reach out to embrace the water. A perimeter lawn area slopes to the lagoon on the east, north and south sides while a small wooded island at its north end provides refuge for egrets, herons, and other waterfowl as it creates a framed vista of Palace structures.

The mature Monterey cypress trees at the northeastern corner of the site date to the time of the Harbor View Inn, a salt-water bathing establishment at the foot of Baker Street which predated the P.P.I.E. The landscaping has been restored in 2013 to evoke the era of the P.P.I.E.

Ensemble

The radius of the exhibition building and colonnades is struck from a point on the eastern side of the lagoon; these elements thus subtly splay out from the rotunda, providing a seemingly infinite multiplicity of perspectives through and to the complex reminiscent of Baroque scenography. The great planter boxes with their curvaceous corner figures mounted at intervals on the colonnades create a punctuated skyline in the lagoon, the structures of the Palace of Fine Arts constitute an inseparable fusion of art and nature virtually unique in monumental Beaux-Arts design. This produced an evocative melancholy which, ironically, long served to preserve Maybeck's "ruin" from demolition and which eventually led to its reconstruction.

Description of the Predecessor — the Original Palace of Fine Arts of 1915

Site Overview

When the original Palace of Fine Arts was built in 1915, it was part of the P.P.I.E. It was located at the west end of the rectangular center of the Exposition devoted to monumental palaces and courts. West of the Palace of Fine Arts in the Presidio were military warehouses to the southwest and athletic fields, livestock exhibits, a racetrack, and various minor features to the northwest. The Golden Gate Bridge and its approach streets had not been built. Immediately in front of the Palace of Fine Arts across Administration Avenue (now Baker Street), stood the Palace of Food Products and the Palace of

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Education and Social Economy on either side of the central axis of the fair so that the Palace of Fine Arts and the Machinery Palace, at the opposite end of the Exposition, faced each other at the ends of this long axis.

As the individual palaces of the Exposition were allocated to different architects, the Palace of Fine Arts occupied a well-defined piece of ground whose design was the responsibility of Bernard Maybeck. The site itself was a complete ellipse in shape, except for a flat edge along Administration Avenue on its east side. In comparison to the boundaries of the district today, it was slightly larger in 1915. The elliptical curve of 1915 was generally the same as the crown of the mushroom cap today from its apex on the west to points corresponding more or less to the ends of the colonnades on each side (the west side of Lyon Street on the south; the east side of Lyon Street on the north). Administration Avenue was the same as Baker Street. Only the areas inside the elliptical curve, from its terminations in line with the ends of the colonnades, to its points of intersection with Administration Avenue/Baker Street are different. These two small, nearly triangular areas were deleted from the Palace of Fine Arts in the 1920s when the site of the Exposition was redeveloped as a residential neighborhood (the Marina District). These areas are identifiable today as portions of several houses on Lyon and Bay Streets on the south end of the Palace of Fine Arts, and as portions of other houses between Lyon and Baker Streets on the north end. The loss of these two areas appears to have resulted in a slight infilling of the lagoon at either end — by no more than half the width of the exposition building.

In summary, in comparison to 1915, the Palace of Fine Arts is slightly smaller overall, due to the removal of two generally triangular areas — one each at the north and south ends for residential development in the 1920s.

Structures: The Rotunda and Colonnades

The colonnades and rotunda of the original Palace of Fine Arts were constructed of staff, a soft and lightweight plaster-fiber mixture which was laid over a wood framework. Like other buildings at the P.P.I.E., the structures were originally veneered with staff treated to resemble Roman travertine; the material was developed by Paul Denivelle and was first used in New York's Pennsylvania Station; it can still be seen used as interior finish on San Francisco's old Main Library (now Asian Art Museum). The impermanence of staff led to the deterioration of the original structures and to the necessity of their reconstruction. In the original structure, the eight outermost coffers in the dome — ornately framed polygons — held murals. The deterioration of the structures resulted in substantial repairs about 1930.

In comparison to the original 1915 structures, the materials of the reconstruction are different, the architectural details are identical, the murals are gone, the colors are omitted or faded, and the texture is similar. The structures' exteriors were originally finished with the lively polychromy of the P.P.I.E. as a whole, and by partially marbleized detailing. By 1964, colors had faded or peeled, tending to a buff tone

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while the paired columns on the rotunda's exterior were russet. These warmer tones were reproduced throughout in the present architectural ensemble.

As it was originally built, a high broken curving hedge in at least four sections ran along the edge of the lagoon east of the rotunda. This appears to have been a variation in design of the hedge, sometimes called the "living wall," that ran along the border between the exposition grounds and the city of San Francisco on Chestnut Street and elsewhere on the edges of the exposition grounds. This hedge was a two-foot thick wooden structure with exterior wall surfaces of Mesembryanthemum, or South African ice plant. The hedges at the exterior of the exposition were twenty-five feet high; these may have been somewhat lower. According to Mullgardt, the disparate parts of the Palace of Fine Arts were "all bound together by the encircling green wall and by the other landscape elements" resulting in "an impression of satisfying unity."² These hedges were removed after the exposition. They were not reconstructed in the period 1964-1974.

Exhibition Building

The exterior of the exhibition building was once lavishly detailed, including piers with urns, clusters of columns, and a rooftop pergola along the east side, to correspond with the other more purely ornamental elements of the composition, but these features were eliminated from the reconstruction due to cost constraints.

The interior of the exhibition building was originally divided into galleries by partitions.

The staff walls of the exhibition building were replaced with stucco; the original steel triple-hinge trusses which create the high and wide span of the building's interior were retained in the reconstruction. The texture of the original walls was similar in the reconstruction but could not be exactly duplicated in stucco. The original roof with wall-to-wall skylights of the original was not reinstalled, although three bays of the original skylights do remain.

The budget for reconstruction did not cover exterior detailing for the exhibition building so it was rebuilt as a plain, utilitarian structure which nonetheless maintains its original plan, doors, steel framing system, and chimneys. The architectural character of the exhibition building originally mirrored that of the colonnades just across the promenade, to create the sense of a unified peristyle. To compensate for the building's lack of adornment, the California Redwood Association in 1968 donated 110 redwood trees which were planted tight to its eastern wall.

² Mullgardt, Louis Christian, *The Architecture and Landscape Gardening of the Exposition*, San Francisco: Paul Elder and Company, 1915, p. 158.

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In summary, the exhibition building retains its original steel structure, its shape, and details like doors. Its exterior walls which are in a new material, retain the color and an approximation of the texture of the original. The substantial pilasters, free standing columns, and ornament of the original is not present on the face of the current building.

Lagoon

The configuration of the lagoon and its setting of lawns remains much as it was at the time of the P.P.I.E. and the reconstruction except for the loss of a small triangle of space at either end and the associated necessity of a slight infilling of the lagoon at either end in the 1920s. During the exposition, the lawn sloped uninterrupted to the lagoon, giving the pond a soft edge — by 1961 it was provided with a hard, asphalt perimeter path. The soft edge was restored in many locations in the 2013 renovation.

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*NRHP Status Code

*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder)

D1. Historic Name: Palace of Fine Arts D2. Common Name: Same

*D3. Detailed Description (Discuss overall coherence of the district, its setting, visual characteristics, and minor features. List all elements of district.):

See Continuation Sheet Page

*D4. **Boundary Description** (Describe limits of district and attach map showing boundary and district elements.):

The boundary encompasses a park consisting of four structures, the lagoon and a building. One side of this 16.99 acre site is nestled next to the Presidio and the other side of the Palace of Fine Arts district is situated at the end of a residential neighborhood in the Marina District. The Palace is bound by Baker Street to the east, Bay Street to the south, Palace Drive to the west and Jefferson Street to the north (Location Map page 2).

*D5. **Boundary Justification:**

The property owned by the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department as defined by the lagoon, structures and surrounding landscaping.

D6. **Significance: Theme** Architecture, Northern California **Area:** San Francisco **Period of Significance:** 1915-1974

See Continuation Sheet Page

*D7. **References** (Give full citations including the names and addresses of any informants, where possible.):

See Continuation Sheet Page

*D8. **Evaluator:** Recreation and Park Development, City of San Francisco

Date: July 29, 2021

Affiliation and Address:

Owner, 501 Stanyan St. San Francisco, CA 94117

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***D3. Detailed Description** (Discuss overall coherence of the district, its setting, visual characteristics, and minor features. List all elements of district.):

The Palace of Fine Arts as a District

The Palace of Fine Arts constitutes a district with three components dominated by an ornamental rotunda and twin colonnades at the center. In addition, the district also contains a park with a lagoon in front (to the east) and an exhibition hall behind (to the west of) the ornamental structures.

As a complex of features, the Palace of Fine Arts establishes its own setting which remains largely intact. Little has changed in the surrounding environment since 1915. The Palace of Fine Arts remains adjacent to a residential neighborhood from the 1920s-30s on the east, south, and partially to the north. On the west and partially to the north, it is bordered by arterial approaches to the Golden Gate Bridge.

While the original structures of the Palace of Fine Arts were built in 1913-15 for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (P.P.I.E.), they were almost entirely reconstructed in the decade 1964-1974. The rotunda and colonnades were accurately and almost completely rebuilt at that time. The exhibition hall was also rebuilt at the same time, retaining its original steel frame, fireplaces, and some of its doors, but the ornamental detail which adorned the original building's exterior was omitted at that time. The Park with its lagoon is original to 1915, although with some changes made incrementally over the years.

Unbeknownst to many, Maybeck was inspired by the *Isle of the Dead* painting by artist Arnold Böcklin when planning The Palace. The columbarium in the painting is swallowed by trees and surrounded by dark water suggesting those transporting the dead must cross the eerie water before arriving at the castle. Maybeck was drawn to the notion of nature's ability to be largely interactive in one's experience with the built world. This was one of the aspects of the site that originally excited Maybeck about the prospect of designing this project. Instead of filling in the pond, he made it central to the character and personality of the site. Visitors are instead encouraged to walk around the entirety of the lagoon before reaching the central rotunda and colonnades thus illuminating the Palace's entwinement with the natural world. The lagoon and surrounding gardens are essential to the experience of the Palace of Fine Arts District. Standing on the eastern side of the lagoon facing the central rotunda, visitors will experience the Palace from another perspective: the reflection of Maybeck's masterpiece on the surface of the lagoon; a reflection informed by the shifting light and moody San Francisco weather. Redwood trees are integral to the environment, scattered purposefully among the colonnades, blurring the boundaries between the omnipresent nature and beaux-arts-esque structures. As one winds through the path, colonnades, statues and vegetation morph at every turn; it is an experience uniquely unbound by the built environment. In addition, Piranesi's engravings heavily inspired the mood of the palace, a tranquil sadness washes over visitors as they engage with the Roman ruin style landscape. Art often evokes a melancholy serenity that Maybeck replicated among the neoclassical architecture of The Palace.

Integrity

Location

The Palace of Fine Arts possesses integrity of location. All components of the Palace of Fine Arts occupy the sites reconstructed in 1964-1967 and 1973-1974.

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Design

The reconstructed Palace of Fine Arts possesses substantial integrity of design. The park and lagoon are little changed.

Setting

As a complex of features, the reconstructed Palace of Fine Arts establishes its own setting which remains largely intact. The Palace of Fine Arts remains adjacent to a residential neighborhood from the 1920s-30s on the east, south, and partially to the north. On the west and partially to the north, it is bordered by arterial approaches to the Golden Gate Bridge.

Feeling

In the design of the rotunda and colonnades and in the relationship between the park and lagoon in front and the rotunda and colonnades in the center, the integrity of feeling is largely intact.

D6. Significance: (Discuss district's importance in terms of its historical context as defined by theme, period of significance, and geographic scope. Also address the integrity of the district as a whole.)

The Palace of Fine Arts qualifies as a historical landmark under the following criteria:

The property is a prototype of, or an outstanding example of, a period, style, architectural movement, or construction, or is one of the most notable works, or the best surviving work in a region of a pioneer, designer or master builder. An architectural landmark must have excellent physical integrity including integrity of location. An architectural landmark generally will be considered on its original site, particularly if its significance is basically derived from its design relationship to its site (note: only preeminent examples will be listed for architectural importance).

The Palace of Fine Arts is one of if not the masterpiece of Bernard Maybeck. Maybeck was not only one of the founders of the bay region style but also the founder of the Architecture School at the University of California where he was entrusted to organize an international competition for the design of the campus. In 1951 Maybeck was awarded the professions' highest honor, the AIA Gold Medal.

At the time that the Palace of Fine Arts was designed, Maybeck was working in the office of Willis Polk. Polk asked his staff, including Maybeck, for ideas for the Palace design and upon seeing Maybeck's proposal, turned over the project to him. Since its construction, the building and its site (which is an integral part of the composition) has been considered a masterpiece which led to its preservation after the fair and reconstruction in permanent materials which was completed in 1974. The reconstruction itself is an important moment in the historic preservation movement, occurring at the time Pennsylvania Station in New York was demolished, the Palace was reconstructed on its original site and incorporates the original steel frame, doors and fireplaces of the exhibition building.

The national significance of the palace of fine arts is reflected by the fact that the palace has twice been selected to be on U.S. postal stamps, first in 1981 and most recently in 2022.

The period of significance for the Palace of Fine Arts is from its opening in 1915 to the completion of its reconstruction in permanent materials in 1974.

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The Palace of Fine Arts at the P.P.I.E.

San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915 was the last and arguably most beautiful of four major U.S. world's fairs whose examples were largely responsible for the City Beautiful movement of the late 19th, early 20th centuries. Beginning with the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, Buffalo and St. Louis hosted subsequent major fairs in 1901 and 1904 respectively, while minor expositions were held during the period 1893-1915 in Seattle, Portland, Nashville, and Omaha. All attempted to create ideal planned cities using the language of classical architecture. Most of their constituent structures were built of plaster laid over wooden armatures to mimic white marble and were detailed by skilled craftsmen. Such construction was cheap and necessarily impermanent, for the expositions were designed to stand for a year or less before demolition.

Nonetheless, the examples of their orderliness, cleanliness, and beauty stood in sharp contrast to the pollution, visual disorder, and social problems of real American cities. They gave social and professional prestige to the well-trained architects who created them, particularly to those who had trained at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris and who knew European precedents from firsthand experience. In the first decades of the twentieth century, these architects and city planners would receive the largest and most lucrative commissions as well as promote plans to rebuild existing cities and create new ones. Their training at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, or in the offices of those who had studied there, encouraged adaptation of famous precedents for reuse in modern structures — such as railway stations and skyscrapers — which often had no historical analogues.

San Francisco's leading businessmen began planning a major exposition in 1909. Nominally meant to celebrate the completion of the Panama Canal and the opportunities they hoped it would open for trade in the Pacific Basin, the Panama-Pacific International Exposition was also meant to exhibit to visitors a city devastated by earthquake and fire in 1906 and largely rebuilt by the time of the fair. Edward Bennett, Jr. of Chicago created the ingenious plan of its eight central exhibition palaces arranged on three north-south and one east-west axes intersecting in three "courts," the walls of which were assigned to notable architects. Bennett had served as architect Daniel Burnham's assistant when the latter was commissioned to re-plan San Francisco in 1904-5, and the so-called Burnham Plan of that time is largely his creation. The waterfront site chosen for the exposition next to the Golden Gate reminded Bennett of Venice, and the courtyard scheme was therefore derived from the Piazza and Piazzetta San Marco.¹ Architect Bernard Maybeck said that if the P.P.I.E.'s plan was made into a Venetian cloisonné brooch, it "would pass as the regular thing in jewelry without causing the suspicion that it represented a plan for a World's Fair."²

Bennett designated two free-standing structures to bracket the eight thematic palaces which constituted the central "city" — a Palace of Machinery on the east and a Palace of Fine Arts on the west, both connected by the major east-west axis bisecting the "city" and its three major courts. (The central axis of today's Palace matches that of the great central avenue of the P.P.I.E.). Willis Polk — a leading San Francisco architect and west coast associate of Burnham and Bennett, as well as chairman of the exposition's architectural committee — was given the plum commission to design the Palace of Fine Arts. Overworked and unable to conceive a satisfactory solution for the

¹Brechin, Gray A. "San Francisco: The City Beautiful." *Visionary San Francisco*, (Paolo Polledri, editor), Munich: Prestel-Verlag and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1990, 40-61.

²Maybeck, Bernard. *Palace of Fine Arts and Lagoon*, San Francisco: Paul Elder and Company, 1915, 2.

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site, Polk invited the Exposition draftsmen to make suggestions. In her pioneering study *Five California Architects*, Esther McCoy recounts how a pond on the designated site inspired Maybeck to make that feature an integral part of his design rather than filling it to extend the east-west axis directly to the Palace:

With his usual loose and atmospheric approach to preliminary design, he sketched a gallery, an elliptical colonnade and rotunda in charcoal. At the back of his mind was the memory of Piranesi engravings; it was this melancholy note in architecture and gardening that he strove to attain. In an introduction to Maybeck's booklet, *The Palace of Fine Arts and Lagoon*, [P.P.I.E. historian] Frank Morton Todd wrote that Maybeck's theme was a building of vanished grandeur in which 'willows and acacias choked its portals, grasses dug into its urns and ivy overran its cornices and dimmed its lines.'

The sketch was passed along by Polk to other members of the Architectural Commission; the person most impressed by the sketch was Henry Bacon of New York, designer of the Lincoln Memorial. 'You will hear of this some day,' he promised Maybeck.³

Ignoring protests from some of the exposition directors who wanted only recognized architects with a demonstrated record of major commissions, Polk magnanimously turned over his assignment to Bernard Maybeck. Then 51 years old, the architect was chiefly known for residential and church design, as well as for his unworldly eccentricity. Despite Maybeck's education at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and his influence as a teacher, many did not take him seriously; a colleague remarked that "those of our profession who know Mr. Maybeck will not dispute the fact that he is a freak."⁴

The Palace was thus the last of the major buildings begun at the P.P.I.E., commencing only on December 8, 1913 with less than fifteen months before the opening of the exposition. Among many others, Maybeck was assisted in his work by William Gladstone Merchant, a young architect who designed many of the Palace's lush decorative details including the Roman funerary urns which surmount the attic of the rotunda. As Maybeck's last partner and professional successor, Merchant would spend the decade before his death in 1962 promoting and planning the Palace's reconstruction.

The completion of the Palace of Fine Arts gave Maybeck international fame and launched him on a second career of designing major buildings and two college campuses as well some of his best-known houses. From the moment that the fair opened on February 20, 1915, the moody Palace on the lagoon was universally acclaimed as the "must see" building at the fair and, like Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum later, upstaged the art exhibited there. Contemporary testimonials such as that of Professor van Noppen of Columbia that "the Palace of Fine Arts is so sublime, so majestic, and is the product of such imagination that it could have graced the age of Pericles," and of Thomas Edison who proclaimed that "The architect of that building is a genius....there is not the equal anywhere on

³McCoy, Esther, *Five California Architects*. New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1960, 38.

⁴Longstreth, Richard. *On the Edge of the World: Four Architects in San Francisco at the Turn of the Century*. Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 89.

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earth" were commonplace during the exposition and reinforced the belief among San Franciscans that the fair had endowed them with an exceptional keepsake that could memorialize the expo and what it meant in the hearts of San Franciscans

Nonetheless, the example of the P.P.I.E. created a powerful impetus for City Beautiful planning in San Francisco and California. Maybeck said at the time that "When the people of California visit the grounds, they should think of the fact that the Fair is an expression of future California cities," and that such an exposition could have happened nowhere else.⁶ It left in its wake the permanent ensemble of the San Francisco Civic Center with its magnificent French Renaissance City Hall. Conceived at the same time that Maybeck was designing the Palace of Fine Arts by two of his former students from the state university at Berkeley — Arthur Brown, Jr. and John Bakewell — the City Hall represents one of the best and most scholarly interpretations of Beaux-Arts principles in the U.S., while Maybeck demonstrated his genius at pushing the classical orders to their proportional limits and creating, in the process, something without precedent except in the fantasias of Piranesi.⁷ Whereas the P.P.I.E. and the Civic Center represented empire at its zenith, Maybeck's palace conjured, according to him, "An old Roman ruin away from civilization, which two thousand years before was the center of action and full of life, and now is partly overgrown with bushes and trees."⁸

Preservation Efforts and the Self-Idealization of San Francisco

Efforts to preserve most or parts of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition began shortly before the exposition closed on December 4, 1915, but all came to naught except for efforts around Maybeck's Palace. A Fine Arts Preservation League gathered 33,000 signatures and \$350,000 before the end of the fair. San Francisco *Chronicle* reporter Ben Macomber expressed popular sentiment when he wrote that "To duplicate it in lasting materials would cost much, but it would be worthwhile. San Francisco owes it to itself and its love of art to see that this greatest of Western works of art does not pass away."⁹ Thus, the salvation of the Palace as an outstanding creation was, from the beginning and through its reconstruction up to the present linked to San Francisco's self-idealization as the cultural capital of the Far West.¹⁰

⁵Brechin, Gray. "Sailing to Byzantium: The Architecture of the Fair." *The Anthropology of World's Fairs* (edited by Burton Benedict). London and Berkeley: Lowie Museum of Anthropology and Scolar Press, 1983, 106.

⁶Maybeck, op. cit., 13.

⁷Willis Polk proposed rebuilding the Palace of Fine Arts across Van Ness Avenue from City Hall, making the polarity of interpretation unavoidable. See Polk, Will. "Willis Polk on the Preservation of the Fine Arts Palace," *The Architect and Engineer* 44, no. 1 (January, 1916), 100-3.

⁸Maybeck, op. cit., 10.

⁹Newhall, Ruth. *San Francisco's Enchanted Palace*. Berkeley: Howell-North Books, 55.

¹⁰During the building's reconstruction in 1966, philanthropist Walter S. Johnson opposed its use for sports, saying: "The reconstruction of the Palace is made of cement and steel and should outlast the ruins of ancient Greece. Let us hope we are making a setting that will create a Homer, an Aristotle, a Michelangelo or da Vinci, or perhaps a Beethoven or Shakespeare. They were all inspired men, and what has been done before can be done again and right here in our beloved area." San Francisco *Chronicle*, March 18, 1966.

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Most of the fair's impermanent buildings were demolished soon after the P.P.I.E. closed; the California Building and the Column of Progress remained for several years on the north waterfront until they, too, were razed. Several minor structures were removed by barge to other locations around the Bay Area; Alma and Adolph Spreckels had a copy of the French Pavilion (itself a slavish exterior imitation of the existing Legion d'Honneur in Paris, which was a copy of the original) reconstructed in Lincoln Park as the California Palace of the Legion of Honor museum.

Nonetheless, the example of the P.P.I.E. created a powerful impetus for City Beautiful planning in San Francisco and California. Maybeck said at the time that "When the people of California visit the grounds, they should think of the fact that the Fair is an expression of future California cities," and that such an exposition could have happened nowhere else.¹¹ It left in its wake the permanent ensemble of the San Francisco Civic Center with its magnificent French Renaissance City Hall. Conceived at the same time that Maybeck was designing the Palace of Fine Arts by two of his former students from the state university at Berkeley — Arthur Brown, Jr. and John Bakewell — the City Hall represents one of the best and most scholarly interpretations of Beau-Arts principles in the U.S., while Maybeck demonstrated his genius at pushing the classical orders to their proportional limits and creating, in the process, something without precedent except in the fantasias of Piranesi.¹² Whereas the P.P.I.E. and the Civic Center represented empire at its zenith, Maybeck's palace conjured, according to him, "An old Roman ruin away from civilization, which two thousand years before was the center of action and full of life, and now is partly overgrown with bushes and trees."¹³

Immediately after the P.P.I.E.'s closing, the San Francisco *Chronicle* began a campaign to have the Palace of Fine Arts rebuilt in Golden Gate Park as an adjunct to the museum that would soon be named after the *Chronicle's* publisher, Michael de Young. At the same time, the rival *Examiner* launched a drive to preserve the Palace where it had been built, and then to turn it over to the San Francisco Art Association and to raise a \$5 million endowment for its maintenance. The personal commitment of Phoebe Apperson Hearst and her son, William Randolph Hearst proved critical to the survival of the Palace at this early stage of its history; in subsequent years, William Randolph devoted much coverage and wrote numerous editorials repeating the theme that "There is one thing in San Francisco which no other city has, and that is the most beautiful building on the American continent. The Palace of Fine Arts is awarded that distinction by Americans and Europeans."¹⁴ Hearst went so far as to editorially call the Palace the "Taj Mahal of the West" and to predict that it would draw millions of visitors to San Francisco.¹⁵

The Palace of Fine Arts with its lagoon and park was thus the only fair building to remain *in situ*, partly because it was largely located on Presidio (i.e., non-speculative) land, but also because of persistent citizen efforts first to prevent its destruction and then to reproduce it in lasting materials.

¹¹Maybeck, op. cit., 13.

¹²Willis Polk proposed rebuilding the Palace of Fine Arts across Van Ness Avenue from City Hall, making the polarity of interpretation unavoidable. See Polk, Will. "Willis Polk on the Preservation of the Fine Arts Palace," *The Architect and Engineer* 44, no. 1 (January, 1916), 100-3.

¹³Maybeck, op. cit., 10.

¹⁴San Francisco *Examiner*, March 3, 1917. Editorial. The previous spring, the *Examiner* devoted much of front page to a gala preservation benefit ball at the California Building after sponsoring a double benefit at Tivoli Theater. See *Examiner* for April 29, 1916 and May 1, 1916.

¹⁵San Francisco *Examiner*, October 23, 1916.

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The exhibition building continued to be used as an art gallery until 1924 when the San Francisco Museum of Art vacated it. From then on, the building was used for tennis courts and occasional art exhibitions, and, during the Second World War, by the Army as a warehouse during which time it and the attendant structures suffered much damage. Sporadic efforts were made to halt the ensemble's decay, and during the 1930s, WPA artists created new murals in a neo-classical style to replace the originals on the inside of the rotunda. Nonetheless, the temporary structures continued to decay and to suffer vandalism, aided by jurisdictional disputes over which agency or organization had responsibility for the Palace and its grounds. (In 1929, for example, the San Francisco Museum of Art announced that it would raze the Palace but was balked by the Parks Commission secretary who threatened to station guards to stop it from doing so.)¹⁶

Popular sympathy preserved the Palace of Fine Arts well into an advanced state of decrepitude. Successive mayors learned that they risked political suicide by threatening to demolish the structures, though no one could agree either on how to preserve them, how such preservation or restoration would be paid for, and to what use the buildings should be put. The *Chronicle*, on April 11, 1929, editorialized that "It may turn out to be unfortunate that it was not wrecked with the rest of the Exposition buildings. Better a beautiful memory than a shabby ruin!" By 1947, however, the same newspaper opined that the city had, up to that point, spent \$596,000 attempting to restore it with no end in sight, but that it should be saved whatever the use.¹⁷ In 1961, as costs for rebuilding continued to climb, the *Chronicle* editorially insisted that the "Palace Must Be Saved" even if it meant eliminating practical functions from the exhibition building.¹⁸

By 1952, the buildings of the Palace had grown so dilapidated and dangerous that the city closed them to the public. Rehabilitation cost was then estimated at \$3,500,000. In that year, attorney Caspar Weinberger made the Palace's restoration key to his successful campaign for State Assemblyman, initiating a serious and persistent effort that would lead to the buildings' reconstruction twelve years later. Despite a recommendation by the American Institute of Architects that the peristyles and rotunda be destroyed and the latter replaced with modern sculpture,¹⁹ Weinberger submitted the first of several bills to the California Legislature to have the State finance rehabilitation. The San Francisco Supervisors endorsed his bill, along with the Recreation and Park Commission, the Planning Commission, and numerous civic, cultural, and improvement associations as well as individuals. The elderly Maybeck himself complicated matters when, on January 18, 1953 he told the *Chronicle's* leading columnist Herb Caen:

I think the main building should be torn down and redwoods planted around — completely around — the rotunda. Redwoods grow fast, you know. And as they grow, the columns of the rotunda would slowly

¹⁶San Francisco *Chronicle*, March 14, 1929.

¹⁷San Francisco *Chronicle*, August 30, 1947. Editorial

¹⁸San Francisco *Chronicle*, September 19, 1961. Editorial, "Palace Must Be Saved." Contains the statement that "Public enthusiasm for the Palace has never been based on its practicality, usefulness or necessity — except, of course, in the sense that it sets off this city from thousands of drab, unexciting collections of shapeless buildings and thereby handsomely pays its way as a delight for residents and an attraction for visitors."

¹⁹San Francisco *Chronicle*, December 26, 1952. In response, Dr. Harry Hambly, Chair of Citizens' Committee for Rehabilitation of the Palace of Fine Arts, wrote a letter to the editor on January 8, 1953 castigating architects for recommending that it be demolished, saying that he had a letter from Maybeck stating that "Since the Palace of Fine Arts belongs to the city, it should be rehabilitated."

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crumble at approximately the same speed. Then I would like to design an altar, with the figure of a maiden praying, to install in that grove of redwoods.

Later that year, the 91-year old Maybeck said that he was studying how to preserve the buildings with plastic fixatives. Though he privately changed his mind just before his death — sending a telegram to Governor Goodwin Knight asking him to budget money for the Palace's restoration²⁰ — Maybeck's own mercurial intentions would be used by those opposed to the reconstruction.²¹

The ensuing controversy over the Palace — and thus its significance under the Conservation category — must be seen in relation to the triumph of Modernism in the post-war period and the corresponding ignominy into which the Beaux-Arts and other historical styles had fallen. Even before the Second World War, curriculum at U.S. architecture schools began to change as a historical functionalism rooted in an industrial-based esthetic, increasingly replaced the emphasis on precedence and craftsmanship inherited by mentors educated at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. In 1931, critic Lewis Mumford passed a harsh judgment on the 1893 Chicago exposition that would soon be axiomatic within the architectural profession: "The continuity of American architectural tradition was broken, and instead of advancing solidly toward modern forms, our architects wandered for forty years in the barren wilderness of classicism and eclecticism" before returning to the high road toward which Richardson had pointed.²² While the AIA awarded Maybeck with its prestigious Gold Medal in 1951, it did so largely on the basis of his residential work which was regarded as a regional forerunner of modernist design, and not for the monumental structures in which he so idiosyncratically employed classical and other revivalist vocabulary.

In his detailed analysis of the Palace of Fine Arts, architectural historian William H. Jordy spoke for the perplexity which it aroused in doctrinaire functionalists:

From a modern point of view, the perversity of the petty compartmentalization of the interior [for the original ceilinged gallery rooms] is only surpassed by the plaster architectural screen of the entire structure on the outside. Here, in its final years, the wood and metal supports poked through the magnificence, like the armatures for spent fireworks. The Palace is unabashedly scenographic. Yet [and it was a "yet" that all but the most hardened modernists acknowledged feeling] the visual weight and scale of the elements, the magnificent play of light and shade, the legato rhythms, the sumptuous ornament, the coloring in warm

²⁰Maybeck's professional successor and supervising architect of the restoration Hans U. Gerson in 1963 discovered the telegram in Maybeck's files, dated January 12, 1957: "The Palace of Fine Arts is probably the last of the traditional pieces of architecture to survive the modern age. The main structure occupies about 130,000 sq. ft of rentable area. Because of its beauty it has become a tourist attraction for the State of California. Kindly sign the bill for its restoration and I will be thankful." *San Francisco Progress*, March 31, 1963. On October 3, 1957, Maybeck died.

²¹E.g., see *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 30, 1964 wherein Ansel Adams tells Mayor Shelley that restoration "is one of the silliest and most adolescent gestures imaginable....Bernard said to me personally that he was deeply disturbed over the fact that this very 'temporary' structure was not taken down with the rest of the 1915 Fair bldgs. It was a beautiful, inspiring and very appropriate part of the Fair. It was also a fantastic 'stage set' and a purely temporary concept of no significance after the Fair." The *Chronicle* reported that Shelley was being flooded with pro-restoration mail after a radio station carried editorials in favor of more city money for the cause.

²²Mumford, Lewis. "Two Chicago Fairs." *New Republic*, 65, no. 242 (January 21, 1931), 271.

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tints, all summon the 'grandeur that was Rome' with a splendid abandon found in few other American buildings.²³

In 1953, the *Chronicle's* art critic, Alfred Frankenstein, quoted architect and AIA spokesman Frank Ehrenthal as saying that the Palace was built strictly for a fair "where the element of time is negligible when it is the moment only that counts, when the invitation is to a flight of fancy or even to create illusions. Theatrical, scenographic art has ephemeral value, and should not be confused with enduring values, such as are required of architecture, and are to be found in many of Mr. Maybeck's other creations." [One wonders if such arguments faced those who rebuilt modernist icons, such as Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion, which was faithfully reconstructed in 1979.]

Frankenstein also quoted architect William Gladstone Merchant who, though converting to modernism in his own designs, had devoted himself to saving the building which, as a youth, he had helped Maybeck create. Merchant countered both Maybeck and Ehrenthal by recommending that the Palace of Fine Arts be saved:

This problem is not a question of preserving the Palace as a relic of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition or because it is the best work of an individual or a profession, but because it is a great work of universal higher art, expressive of our own ideals, loved by the people for its magnificence, as a treasure of our own great historic past, and greatly significant of that great period of traditional architecture of which it is the termination.²⁴

Merchant thus argued that the Palace deserved salvation not only because it was meritorious but because it represented a brilliant last flowering of that seemingly defunct classical tradition in which he and Maybeck had been schooled. That it had been built for an ephemeral fair was irrelevant. Merchant estimated that to copy it in stone and marble would cost \$15 million.

Rising costs became the primary impediment to its reconstruction. On July 17, 1957, California Governor Goodwin Knight signed Assemblyman Weinberger's bill allotting \$2 million in State funds for restoration. Shortly thereafter, the newly formed Palace of Fine Arts League (with Caspar Weinberger as Honorary Chair) estimated the cost of restoration at \$5.6 million. In November 1958, San Francisco voters narrowly defeated a bond measure for the \$3.6 million difference, and Mayor George Christopher said he would raze the Palace.

On May 25, 1959, wealthy local businessman Walter S. Johnson announced that he would personally donate \$2 million for the restoration and raise the difference from fundraising and a new City bond measure. The *Chronicle* quoted Johnson as saying:

It has a soul. It just wouldn't die though I must say it crumbled a good deal. Just as the Eiffel Tower is a symbol of Paris, the Palace of Fine Arts can become a symbol of San Francisco and California. When I heard it was going to be torn down, I became alarmed.²⁵

²³Jordy, William H. *American Buildings and Their Architects: Progressive and Academic Ideals at the Turn of the Century*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1976 (First edition 1972), 288.

²⁴San Francisco *Chronicle*, May 6, 1953.

²⁵San Francisco *Chronicle*, May 27, 1959.

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With such a challenge, voters in November 1959 passed a \$1.8 million bond measure. Estimated costs continued to rise, however, even as the Palace grew more forlorn, its falling plaster sheathing revealing the wooden skeleton beneath. The April 1960 cover of the *Western Architect and Engineer* featured a colored detail of a shattered urn and spalling column base. By 1962, estimates for a complete restoration had reached nearly \$13 million while committed funds totaled only slightly more than \$6 million. Johnson raised another \$750,000 (over half of it his own) to which the City contributed a further \$850,000, enough for a bare-bones restoration alternative which eliminated exterior detailing on the exhibition building and the termini of the peristyles. On July 17, 1964, groundbreaking ceremonies for the restoration were held, although demolition of the original Palace had already begun.

Reconstruction of an Icon of San Francisco

The recreation in permanent materials of a temporary structure in a style then much out of favor proved contentious among professionals and laymen alike during and after reconstruction. Elizabeth Kendall Thompson, the western editor of *Architectural Record*, wrote in 1963 that "A reproduction or copy demands no thought, no creative act. Exact duplication, no matter how reverent, can never stand in place of the awesome moment in which an image is formed in the mind of its creator. The spirit of a created thing is in the thing created, never in its replacement." Architect Hans U. Gerson — Maybeck and Merchant's professional successor and supervising architect of the reconstruction — countered such arguments:

Some people believe it is futile, or in some way even reprehensible, to try and recreate or rebuild a structure from another era. In some instances, this is undoubtedly true. For example, if you tried to rebuild Chartres Cathedral either in San Francisco or for that matter in Chartres, it would be both sacrilegious and an affront to art and even good taste. But the Palace of Fine Arts is not that type of structure. It was designed and built as part of the civic scene — a sort of stage setting which combines a unique monument with a lovely park. Its intent was fanciful — a fleeting dream, not a cathedral. It seems to me the same fancy and inspiration that impelled Mr. Maybeck to employ his interpretation of classic styles in 1915 is just as valid today as it was then.

Donor Walter S. Johnson, an architectural amateur, made the novel argument that the original structure was like an industrial prototype: "The Palace of Fine Arts is like a pilot model made of temporary materials. It has proved its worth and value. Now it is high time we build the production model on a permanent basis," concluding that romantic beauty was reason enough to rebuild: "The new Palace, like the old, will be a place for lovers."²⁶

Reconstruction required over three years as well as artisanal skills rapidly dying out at the time for want of demand. Before it began, *San Francisco* magazine noted that "To recreate the ornate rotunda and colonnades alone, a contractor must virtually rewrite his cost control book. Built in an era when labor could be hired at hourly rates nonexistent today except in the more remote regions of Southeast Asia, the Palace is a monumental mass of architectonic detail."²⁷ The project never would have been possible, it said, without the personal commitment of contractor John Cahill whose bare bones alternative and cost-cutting suggestions were largely adopted by the construction team: Architects: Hans U. Gerson with Welton Becket & Associates; structural engineers Ellison and Sedgwick; and contractor M&K Corporation, with numerous subcontractors. Cahill's proposal stripped the rebuilt exhibition building of its exterior ornament but provided for faithful reproduction of the rotunda and peristyles, albeit without the latter's terminal pylons.

²⁶Unsigned. "Maybeck's Splendid Ruin." *San Francisco*, 6, no. 3 (December, 1963). 18-21 for three quotes.

²⁷ibid.

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Trade magazines stressed the unprecedented nature of the project in the mid-'60s. *Concrete Trends* noted that "The rehabilitation and conversion of San Francisco's Palace of Fine Arts to a permanent concrete edifice is one of the most ambitious restoration projects of our time," and that "almost every known forming technique was used to reconstruct in concrete the original appearance of the plaster in this San Francisco landmark."²⁸ Among those techniques were the latex waste molds used to reproduce the varied, profuse, and intricate details and sculptures which, said *Western Construction* "required the revival of a method of formwork that hasn't been seen in quantity since before World War II: plaster waste molds that are hand formed and then chipped away after the concrete has cured."²⁹ Handicrafts that many believed to be obsolete were revived for the monumental project: *California Plasterer* commented that "The size and nature of the job called for a large crew of shop hands — true artisans of the old school who were not only masters of the mixer, gun, hawk and trowel, but could also do the character work, carve, model, make the molds, cast and place the pieces. Since San Francisco could provide but a small number of such men, qualified craftsmen were recruited from other parts of the country, from Europe and Latin America."³⁰ Subcontractor Joe Minutoli's Travertite Company employed two men whose fathers had worked on the original Palace. The *Chronicle* on August 24, 1966 interviewed skilled craftsman Tony Fernandes who, at the time, could only find work as a cement finisher of a new freeway. The interior of the rotunda called for an almost exact reproduction in plaster, so Fernandes had been hired to patch the damaged detailing of the original from which molds could be made. Asked if he felt unhappy about the gradual extinction of an honorable craft, Fernandes replied "Yes, I felt very sad, especially when I was working on the freeway."

The project coincided with the florescence in San Francisco and the Bay Area of pioneering opposition to modernist interventions. Starting in 1947 with Friedel Klussman's quixotic campaign to save the cable cars from replacement by diesel buses and continuing ten years later with a popular uprising to stop freeways, Bay Area citizens were among the first and most vocal in the nation to challenge current notions of economic and technological progress and inevitability. Even as the campaign to rebuild the Palace gathered momentum and then as it was actually rebuilt in permanent materials, citizens opposed the Bodega Bay nuclear reactor, San Francisco high-rises, urban renewal, additional bridges across the Bay, and indiscriminate Bay fill — often with remarkable success copied elsewhere.

Like other Americans, San Franciscans also grew increasingly concerned for and sensitized to the historic and architecturally significant fabric of their city. This concern was heightened as developers, the State Highway Department, urban renewal, and the city itself razed important and vernacular structures, often with the approval of the architectural establishment. As the movement to recreate Maybeck's Beaux-Arts fantasy gained strength in 1959, developers demolished the historic Montgomery Block for a parking lot. In that same year, Henry Hope Reed's argument in favor of the classical tradition, *The Golden City*, earned scathing reviews from modernists as a reactionary polemic entirely contrary to the mainstream. Despite vigorous campaigns to save them, San Francisco's Fox Theater was demolished in 1963 and the Victorian Allyne mansion fell in 1966. In New York City, the demolition of Pennsylvania Station in 1964 and simultaneous threats to Grand Central Station and Carnegie Hall provoked a rediscovery of Beaux-Arts architecture even as the reconstruction of the monumental Palace of Fine Arts proceeded in San Francisco. The year after the Palace's first-stage completion in 1967, the Junior League of San Francisco published its landmark survey *Here Today: San Francisco's Architectural Heritage* to forestall further

²⁸Unsigned. "Palace of Fine Arts Restoration." *Concrete Trends*, Kaiser Cement Technical Service Dept, Special Report T-15., p. 7

²⁹Unsigned. "Ornamental Forms for Mass Concrete." *Western Construction*, January, 1966, 103.

³⁰Unsigned. "SF's Palace of Fine Arts Being Restored in \$7 Million Project." *California Plasterer*, July, 1966, 13ff

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losses, and in 1971, citizens organized the Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage to advocate for preservation.

Groundbreaking ceremonies were held in mid July 1964. Work began first on the exhibition building. The demolition of the rotunda began October 15, 1964. The rotunda and colonnades were completely demolished although some decorative details, like friezes, were removed separately to be cast for the reconstruction.

The Palace of Fine Arts, funded with no decision as to what it would actually be used for, was reconstructed only because it was too beautiful to lose. On September 29, 1967, a ten-day festival began to dedicate the Palace and to find a use for it. It began with a formal ball and continued with concerts, fashion shows, recitals, ballet and other festivities. Slightly over a year later, physicist Frank Oppenheimer first proposed using the exhibition building for a new kind of participatory science museum.³¹ On December 12, 1968, the Recreation and Park Department and Walter Johnson enthusiastically endorsed Oppenheimer's Exploratorium, which would become a much-studied prototype for other such museums around the world.

With Walter Johnson's further assistance, a 1000-seat theater was built in the southern end of the exhibition building. It debuted on August 30, 1970 when the San Francisco International Film Festival opened its fourteenth season there. The theater has since been a popular venue for lectures, films, musical events, plays, and debates, including a Carter-Ford presidential campaign debate in fall 1976 which showed off the rebuilt Palace to the nation.

The Palace, "completed" to Cahill's cost-cutting plan in 1967, remained incomplete for lack of funds. With an extra \$1.3 million pledged for the purpose by Walter Johnson, ground was broken in September 1973 for reproductions of the columniated pylons that had terminated the curved peristyles.³² A year later, Johnson dedicated the "completed" Palace. At that time the *Chronicle* estimated that Johnson had given a total of \$4.5 million to the recreation of the building he loved.³³ The total cost of reconstruction was \$7.6 million. The exhibition building remained almost wholly bereft of its original ornamentation, however. San Francisco designated the Palace a City Landmark in 1976.

Professional opinion remained divided. Writing in the *New York Times* during the buildings' reconstruction, Ada Louise Huxtable decried the probable result as a dead copy of a lively original in language similar to that of Elizabeth Kendall Thompson. Huxtable cited the hierarchical priorities of the National Trust for Historic Preservation which placed reconstruction at the bottom of preservation options, though none of her analogies quite fit the unique circumstances of the Palace of Fine Arts.³⁴ In an unsigned article entitled "How to Embalm a Building," *Progressive Architecture* derided the sentimentality of both the original and the reconstruction, as well as those who favored the latter: "The melancholy [which] warmed the heart cockles of the local citizenry and saved the structure from the scrapheap to which the temporariness of its function and the impermanence of its materials (wood and plaster) might have decreed it."³⁵

³¹San Francisco *Chronicle*, November 20, 1968.

³²San Francisco *Chronicle*, September 17, 1974.

³³San Francisco *Chronicle*, October 6, 1975. At the time of Johnson's death, the *Chronicle* cited a figure of \$4 million. See obituary, October 2, 1978.

³⁴New York *Times*, May 9, 1965.

³⁵*The Architectural Forum*, November, 1967.

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Such opinion remained the minority voice, however, for at the opening festivities in 1967, a selection of people polled by the *Chronicle* overwhelmingly approved of the reconstruction, including those who had had misgivings. In a 1978 professional survey of San Francisco's best buildings, architect John Woodbridge made no distinction between the original and reproduction and called the Palace of Fine Arts "The most extraordinary fantasy to come out of the Beaux-Arts"³⁶

Maybeck's colossal folly continues to beguile visitors and residents alike, few of whom are aware or care that the structures have been reconstructed. The rebuilt Palace of Fine Arts has become, along with the Golden Gate Bridge, Transamerica Pyramid, cable cars, and Ferry Building tower, among the most universally recognized icons of San Francisco. It has been used for innumerable commercials, movies, and weddings, and was chosen in 1981 by the U.S. Postal Service, along with three other turn-of-the-century buildings, to represent American architectural masterpieces for an 18-cent stamp.³⁷

Noting the reconstruction controversy in 1972, William H. Jordy wrote

That an individual should care enough to save the monument, that a city should care enough to hang onto its ruin, hoping against hope that a way could be found to salvage it, such concern for the visual amenities of the American city is too rare to dismiss the effort out-of-hand.³⁸

Perhaps to signify that in this one unusual instance the priorities established by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and cited by Huxtable could gracefully be set aside in favor of a faithful reconstruction of an inspired creation, the rebuilt Palace of Fine Arts made the cover of the summer 1991 issue of *Historic Preservation* magazine.

Bernard Ralph Maybeck (1862-1957) is internationally recognized as one of the progenitors and the foremost practitioner of what Lewis Mumford in 1947 dubbed the Bay Area Tradition in architecture. With its integral lagoon and park, the Palace of Fine Arts is the most fully realized expression of Maybeck's sophisticated, yet idiosyncratic use of the classicist vocabulary (that he acquired at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts) to express emotional moods and spiritual states. Architectural historian James Ackerman has noted that "No one has done more to give form to the special culture of central California: his testament is far more than the buildings he left us; it is a language that has inspired the architectural development of the entire region."³⁹ Of Maybeck's many and varied designs, the Palace of Fine Arts is generally regarded (along with the First Church of Christ Scientist in Berkeley) as one of his two masterpieces. Though their work and personalities were fundamentally dissimilar, the long careers, humanistic concerns, and influence of Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) and Maybeck often link their names in architectural histories: in a 1948 *Life* profile, for example, Winthrop Sergeant wrote that "In the international architectural world

³⁶*San Francisco Bay Architects' Review*, No. 8 (January 1978).

³⁷The others are Louis Sullivan's Owatonna Bank, Richard Morris Hunt's Biltmore, and Stanford White's NYU Library.

³⁸Jordy, op cit, 284.

³⁹Notes for an exhibition of the work of Bernard Maybeck by the California Redwood Association, May 8, 1973.

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his reputation nudges Frank Lloyd Wright's. European theorists of building have long considered him one of the three or four American architects worth talking about."⁴⁰

Maybeck's intentions about the reconstruction of the Palace of Fine Arts were ambiguous, but months before his death in 1957, he asked Governor Goodwin Knight to appropriate State money to rebuild it.

The following architects were associated with Maybeck and were largely responsible for the reconstruction of the Palace of Fine Arts:

William G. Merchant (1893-1962)

William Gladstone Merchant was a San Francisco architect trained in the offices of John Galen Howard and Bernard Maybeck and at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Merchant obtained his architectural license in 1918, and from 1917 to 1928 worked in the office of George W. Kelham, architect in chief of the P.P.I.E.. Merchant opened his own firm in San Francisco in 1930, and from 1932-1939 was the consulting architect for the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department. He was a member of the Architectural Commission of the Golden Gate International Exposition (1939) and designed several major buildings in San Francisco. As Bernard Maybeck's last partner, the two architects collaborated on a number of projects. As President of the San Francisco Mechanics' Institute, Merchant served as *ex officio* Regent of the University of California from 1949-1961.

Merchant advocated and promoted the reconstruction of the Palace of Fine Arts for the ten years before his death and two years before it began.

Hans U. Gerson (1915-2000)

Hans U. Gerson was born in Hamburg, Germany and fled to England in 1934. He became a registered architect in England in 1940 and immigrated to California in 1946. Gerson joined the firm of William G. Merchant & Associates in 1949, and took over the firm when Merchant died in 1962. He later formed the firm Gerson/Overstreet with Harry Overstreet in 1968. Gerson donated documents related to the original and reconstructed Palace of Fine Arts to the U.C. Berkeley College of Environmental Design Archives.

Gerson worked with original drawings inherited from Merchant and Maybeck to reconstruct the Palace of Fine Arts. Though associated with Welton Becket and Associates of Los Angeles, he largely supervised the project using an office of 12-14 assistants.

***D7. References** (Give full citations including the names and addresses of any informants, where possible.):

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⁴⁰Sargeant, Winthrop, "Bernard Maybeck." *Life*, May 17, 1948, 145.

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The majority of this information was repurposed from the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form Application submitted and written by Michael Corbett, William Marquand, AIA, Gray Brechin, P.h.D, Sara Shreve and Valerie Garry.

Much additional information has also been obtained from the chronologically arranged articles compiled from the San Francisco *Chronicle's* morgue by Valerie Garry for the Maybeck Foundation, and the William G. Merchant/Hans U. Gerson Collection at the U.C. College of Environmental Design Archives.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Palace of Fine Arts

City or Vicinity: San Francisco

County: San Francisco

State: California

Photographer: Hans Baldauf

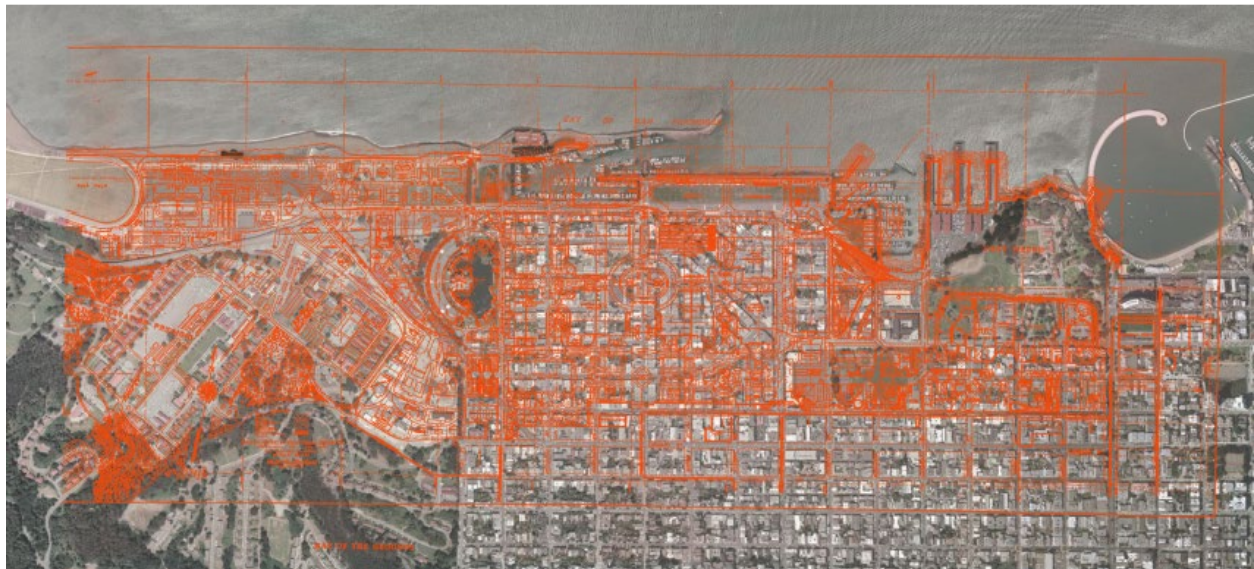
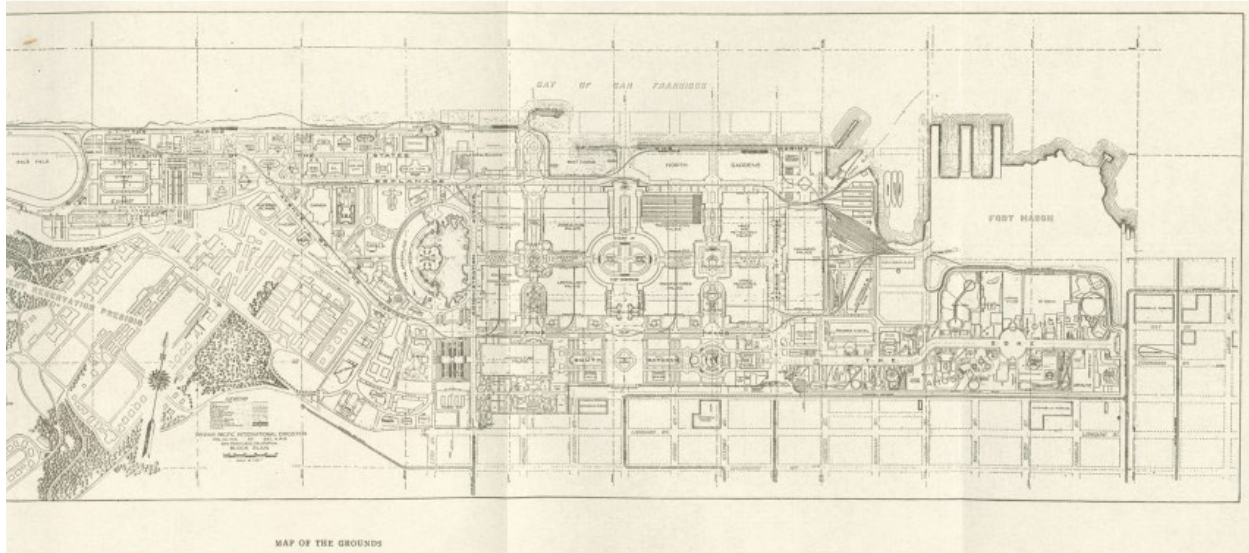
Date Photographed: July 30th, 2021, at approximately 12:50pm

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 13 Plan of the Panama-Pacific International Exhibition 1915 and the Plan overlaid on the Marina District today. Retrieved on August 4, 2021 from Maybeck Foundation.
- 2 of 13 Foot path facing south-west towards the lagoon and rotunda, July 30th, 2021
- 3 of 13 South-eastern corner of lagoon, lawn and foot path facing north-west onto the rotunda, July 30th, 2021
- 4 of 13 Up close shot of the rotunda and surrounding nature facing north-west, July 30th, 2021
- 5 of 13 Colonnades and foot path facing north, July 30th, 2021
- 6 of 13 Foot path on western entrance of the Palace behind the central colonnades and rotunda, facing north, July 30th, 2021
- 7 of 13 Looking north onto the perimeter path, with views of Baker Street to the east, the rotunda to the west and Jefferson Street in the north behind the landscaping, July 30th, 2021
- 8 of 13 Exterior of exhibition hall, bordered by Palace Drive. Doors parallel to center of rotunda, July 30th, 2021
- 9 of 13 Northern entrance to the Palace, accessible from Palace Drive and Girard Road, July 30th, 2021
- 10 of 13 Interior detailing of the rotunda, July 30th, 2021
- 11 of 13 Exterior detailing of rotunda, July 30th, 2021
- 12 of 13 Exterior detailing on western side of Palace rotunda, facing north, July 30th, 2021

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13 of 13 West facing shot of lagoon, rotunda and surrounding colonnades. Building visible in the Background, July 30th, 2021

Photo 1



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Photo 2

Year: 2021



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5



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Photo 6

Year: 2021



Photo 7



Photo 8



Photo 9



Photo 10



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Photo 11

Year: 2021



Photo 12



Photo 13

