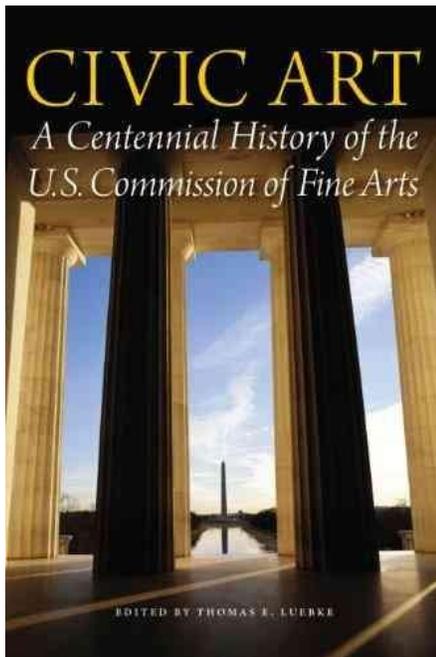


**Civic Art: A Centennial History of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts**, ed. by Thomas Luebke. University of Massachusetts Press, May 2013. 636 p. ill. ISBN 9780160897023 (cl.), \$85.95.



"Make no little plans," Daniel Burnham's famous exhortation, aptly describes the years of research behind this monumental history of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, for which Burnham served as the first chairman. Following recommendations in the 1901 Senate Park Commission Plan (known as the McMillan Plan), the Commission of Fine Arts was established in 1910 as a board of "seven well-qualified judges of the fine arts" appointed by the president to advise on monuments and major buildings and thereby create and maintain a designed vision for Washington, D.C. Thomas Luebke, FAIA, Secretary of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts since 2005 and editor of this volume, writes in his preface: "The most important issues facing the commission have been ones of national representation—memorials, monuments, museums, medals—the tangible icons of our shared national identity." The Commission's charge developed out of Progressive-era ideals of improving society via the built environment and educating people about American values through public art and monuments.

The most recent retrospective was Sue A. Kohler's *The Commission of Fine Arts: A Brief History, 1910-1995*, published in 1996 by the Commission to update earlier histories. *Civic Art* dwarfs that 250-page publication: 626 clay-coated pages are densely illustrated with 424 color and 494 black-and-white illustrations, including photographs, drawings, models, and plans from the Commission's archives.

After a foreword by Earl A. Powell III (now in his third term as chairman of the Commission) and Luebke's preface, the book is organized chronologically by leadership periods. Critical essays based on presentations at a May 2010 symposium organized by the Commission and the National Building Museum accompany each section. Appendixes list the legislative history affecting the Commission, as well as capsule biographies of members of the Commission and the Old Georgetown Board, contributing staff, and essay authors. Following are thirty-eight pages of notes on the text, a list of abbreviations and acronyms (vital for any book on federal agencies and organizations), and a fifteen-page index to the text.

Particularly valuable are the narrative histories for hundreds of individual buildings, parks, and monuments, often quite detailed and illustrated with multiple images. Beyond its grand scope, *Civic Art* is notable for its thoughtful treatment of Washington's transformations in recent decades, reacting to needs for historic preservation alongside security and sustainability. This comprehensive publication encompasses American art, architecture, urban planning, history, politics, memory, and national identity--superlatively delivering on its stated purpose of providing a foundation for future research.

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