



Name of Property: The Research Studio (Maitland Art Center)
City, State: Maitland, Orange County, Florida
Period of Significance: 1934-1959
NHL Criteria: 4
NHL Theme: III. Expressing Cultural Values
5. Architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design
Previous Recognition: 1980 Historic American Buildings Survey, HABS No. FL-364
1982 National Register of Historic Places
National Historic Context: Special study

NHL Significance:

- The Research Studio is a nationally significant example of Art Deco-Mayan Revival architecture and decoration, and is one of the most distinctively rendered sites of this style in the country. More than 200 reliefs, carvings, and sculptures—incorporating hundreds of separate pieces—are integrated into the artists’ campus and surrounding tropical landscape near Lake Sybelia in Maitland, Florida.
- Architect J. Andre Smith, a trained architect and also a prominent artist during the first half of the twentieth century, drew from his own “subconscious” thoughts, current trends in the architecture and the arts, and the influences of Art Deco design to create his intensely personal vision of an artistic utopia, a secluded place for modern artists to experiment in their craft without interference.
- Smith’s architectural and decorative interpretations of Mayan culture are an exceptional example of Art Deco fantasy and Mayan Revival art and architecture in the United States, both in the number of unique representations and in the hand-formed methodology. The sculptures and reliefs were created on site by Smith and his resident artists using a special slurry of sand and cement poured onto a tilt table, dried, and carved. The final product is more similar in appearance and texture to carved stone than the more prolific cast-concrete reliefs of the period.
- Smith never abandoned his interest in the Mayan Revival even after the overall popularity of the style began to wane and was, therefore, able to achieve a singular vision executed over the span of two decades, a longevity not replicated in other examples of



this type.

- Mary Louis Curtis Bok funded the construction of the complex and the operation of The Research Studio as an artist's colony remaining the primary patron of J. Andre Smith until his death in 1959. Bok, a publishing-family heiress, devoted the bulk of her energies to philanthropic support of arts and music education.

Integrity:

- The component parts of The Research Studio maintain a very high degree of architectural and artistic integrity, clearly conveying its character-defining form, function, details, and site organization.
- The complex remains largely intact and is in good structural condition, with only minor damage to exterior elements (weather, vandalism, and age), such as cracked concrete reliefs and sinking or shifting pavers. There is surface wear on the concrete, including mold or fungus growth and staining on the blocks and reliefs exposed to the elements.
- The exterior murals painted by Smith are in good condition as most are in shaded loggias, protected from the weather and sun exposure, although there is some fading and paint flaking. In a few areas, such as the Nave of the Chapel, original statuary has been removed to interior areas for protection from vandalism. Overall, the reliefs and carvings maintain good surface detail.
- The iron gates at the original driveway entrance, at entry points to the Research Studio pathways and central courtyard, and at the entry to the Chapel area, are in good condition and were recently restored by professional conservators (2013).

Owner of Property: City of Maitland, Florida

Acreage of Property: Approximately 2.84 acres

Origins of Nomination: The City of Maitland hired a consultant to prepare the NHL nomination.



Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

- Designation will recognize the significance of The Research Studio as an exemplary demonstration of Mayan Revival design and as a key subset of Art Deco design and its proliferation across the United States.
- Recognition as an NHL will help to ensure that a preservation ethic will guide the future management, maintenance, and revitalization of The Research Studio, and encourage civic pride and popular support for the site.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: None known.

Landmarks Committee Comments:

Landmarks Committee Recommendation: Designation. Dr. Mills moved, Mr. Hoyos seconded; unanimous approval.

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of 12/16/13):

William E. Randolph, Jr., Maitland Resident/A&H Museums Maitland Board of Directors, Florida

Barbara E. Mattick, Ph.D., Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer for Survey & Registration, Florida Department of State, Tallahassee, Florida

James S. Williams, City Manager, City of Maitland

Andrea Bailey Cox, Executive Director & CEO, Art & History Museums, Maitland, Florida (owner)

Advisory Board Recommendation: