



The 2019 configuration of the abstract sculpture at the Armenian Heritage Park. (Matt Conti Photo, from the North End Waterfront)

Tribute to the Armenian Heritage Park as It Celebrates Its First Decade

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BOSTON (Art New England) — Something beautiful and powerful emerged from the Big Dig, Boston's largest and most expensive, urban renewal project

of the 20th century — the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway, a gorgeous greenspace where the ghastly Central Artery and Interstate 93 once loomed. Stretching one-and-one-half miles, The Greenway is speckled with lush flora and fauna, fountains, installations of public art, food trucks, carousel, and the Armenian Heritage Park with its outdoor sculpture and labyrinth.

The year 2022 marks the 10th anniversary of the park. After numerous discussions with former Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, state officials, and the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, the Armenian Heritage Foundation, who raised the funds for the construction of the park, was granted parcel 13 on The Greenway.

The prestigious architectural firm, Tellalian Associates Architects & Planners, was commissioned to layout the space. Don Tellalian, AIA, assembled a Design Concept Committee, including an attorney, an architect, a student, a health-care professional, and representatives from the Armenian-American community of Boston.

Tellalian, renowned in the region, was the principal architect, and designed Abstract Sculpture in the Park as a split rhomboid dodecahedron (solid geometry). In geometry, a dodecahedron is any polyhedron with 12 faces. When asked why he chose geometric art, Tellalian explained, via email, “As an architect, one might say that geometry is our language. But for the park, the geometric figures had to have meaning and engage all ages.” The sculpture is dedicated to those who lost their lives in the Armenian Genocide from 1915 to 1923.

Each spring, Abstract Sculpture is given a new look. A crane pulls it apart and once its core is exposed, Tellalian, referring to the manual he wrote for the process, rearranges the sculpture into various designs depending on the year.

Each page of the manual carries a date, for example, Abstract Sculpture Year 11-2022, along with instructions and diagrams showing how to pull apart the work and reshape it into a stacked configuration. Next year, Year 12-2023, it will be a different stacked formation; Year 13-2024, a leaning arrangement; and so forth, until 2036 when the design reverts back to 2012.

The Abstract Sculpture sits on top of a Reflecting Pool, water washes over the sides representing the tears of Armenia's — as well as all the world's — genocide victims. The water is recycled to a spray fountain in the middle of the Labyrinth (plane geometry) that is emblematic of hope.

The inscription on the Reflecting Pool reads: “Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts have offered hope and refuge for immigrants looking to begin new lives. This park is a gift to the people of the Commonwealth and the City of Boston from the Armenian American community of Massachusetts. This sculpture is offered in honor of the one and one-half million victims of the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923. May it serve in remembrance of all genocides that have followed, and celebrate the diversity of the communities that have re-formed in the safety of these shores.”

The Friends group of the Armenian Heritage Park, in reaching out to communities, arranged a curriculum, Geometry as Public Art: Telling a Story, for fourth grade students in Boston schools. On field trips to the Park, guides explain how the geometric features, the Labyrinth and Abstract Sculpture convey a story. The lessons encourage students to learn how their own ancestors immigrated to America and to feel more comfortable sharing their own immigration experience.

According to fourth grade teachers from Boston's Eliot K-8 Innovation School, the curriculum has been a wonderful success: “(It's) an exciting and engaging

way for students to learn more about their family heritage and reflect on the American immigration experience. The curriculum is a wonderful way for teachers to learn about and better understand their students and for the students to learn about one another.”

Could there be a more important moment in time to reflect upon the unifying message of this sculpture? And to walk the Labyrinth, contemplating how we may take steps in our own lives to end divisiveness and celebrate diversity.

- Frances Folsom