

ROCKEFELLER FOUNTAIN, Fountain Circle (south of the Concourse Entrance, Pelham Parkway), New York Zoological Park, Bronx Park, Borough of The Bronx. Erected here 1910.

Landmark Site: Borough of The Bronx Tax Map Block 3120, Lot 20 in part, consisting of the land on which the described improvement is situated.

On January 11, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Rockefeller Fountain and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 11). One witness spoke in favor of designation. The Commission continued the public hearing until February 8, 1966 (Item No. 10). At that time two speakers spoke in favor of designation, including the representative of the New York Zoological Society. Both hearings were duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were no speakers in opposition to designation at either meeting.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Dedicated as the Rockefeller Fountain and situated at the northern extremity of the long concourse in New York Zoological Park, this impressive early Eighteenth Century Italian work of art is magnificently sited on a wide grass circle in front of the formal terraced entrance of Baird Court. Combining fantasy and naturalism in its sculptured figures with the architecture of its base, the fountain enhances the area and provides the visitor with a gay, imaginative monument for his enjoyment. It is an important and conspicuous example of works of fine arts given to the City, through the patronage of one of its leading citizens.

In 1902, William Baumgarten & Co., acting as agents for the donor, purchased this antique, marble creation from the City of Como, Italy. The New York Zoological Park accepted it as a gift from William Rockefeller, younger brother of John D. Rockefeller, Sr. The following year it was erected in Baird Court in a basin designed especially for it by the architects Heins & LaFarge. The sculptor's name is unknown, but the work is said to be over two hundred and fifty years old. In 1910 the fountain was moved to a circle in the concourse, where it has remained ever since.

The base of the fountain, an enormous bowl, rests in the center of a concrete foundation and drainage basin which is enclosed by a low granite curb 45 feet in diameter. On the rim of this shapely bowl, crowned with a curvilinear molding, rest four large shells each containing a cherubic urchin playfully astride a sea horse. These shells are individually and alternately supported by heroic size mermaids and neptunelike figures. Centered between these groupings, on the rim, are four grotesque bronze heads. The central shaft rises above the fountain and is composed of three elements. Resting on a bed of rocks are four sea monsters whose serpentine tails are entwined upward around a stem supporting a saucer. This scalloped saucer contains an ornately carved stem which supports a smaller saucer holding a goose from whose outstretched beak water spouts skyward to trickle down over the saucers into the basin thirty feet below. It is an exciting and delightful sculptural composition.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this improvement, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Rockefeller Fountain has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Rockefeller Fountain is an outstanding example of early Eighteenth Century Italian art, that its sculptural figures are utilized with fantasy and humor, that it is exceptionally well sited at an important location in one of our great public parks and that it represents a conspicuous and significant gift from a member of one of the most philanthropic families in America.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Rockefeller Fountain, Fountain Circle, New York Zoological Park, Bronx Park, Borough of The Bronx and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of The Bronx Tax Map Block 3120, Lot 20 which contains the land on which the described improvement is situated.