

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED NATIONAL REGISTER/GEORGIA REGISTER NOMINATION

1. Name: Atlanta-Fulton Central Library

2. Location: 1 Margaret Mitchell Square; Atlanta, Fulton County, Georgia

3a. Description: The Atlanta-Fulton Central Library is a notable landmark of the Modern Movement in Georgia. Architect Marcel Breuer designed the sculptural, Brutalist-style public building, which is located in the heart of downtown Atlanta less than one mile north of Atlanta City Hall. The 245,000-square-foot building has eight floors above ground and two floors below street level. Floor levels are indicated from the exterior by large precast concrete panels, grooved at an angle and brush-hammered to give a rough texture and finish to the building. Floors seven and eight are inset from floor six and are not visible from the street. This monumental geometric exterior design has few windows, irregularly – but strategically – placed to allow for natural light in the most opportune areas of the library. From the corner at Forsyth Avenue and Carnegie Way, each floor projects beyond the floor below, creating a stepped cube with a deeply recessed entrance at the street level on Forsyth Avenue. Windows are also deeply inset and often placed at angles, making them blend in with sporadic voids and vertical slots found on all elevations. The entrance plaza is slightly elevated and includes artist Richard Hunt's "Wisdom Bridge" sculpture (installed in 1990). At the plaza's southwest corner is a slightly sunken amphitheater and former entrance to the children's library, while the main entrance is slightly off-center amid a ribbon of full-height windows. A sunken patio of the library's former café is at the northeast corner of the building, which also includes the exit for the former drive-thru book return. Service and delivery space for the library is located along Fairlie Street, and access to below-ground parking is found on Williams Street. Of the library's ten floors, over half are largely open to the public. The non-public floors include the uppermost levels with administrative offices and book storage, and the parking levels located below street level. The main floor features an open lobby with a circulation desk, an elevator bank, and an angled corner stair. Below in the sub-basement, are the auditorium, reception area, former café, and children's library, while the upper floors largely contain reading rooms, book and media collections, and computing areas. The interior uses strategically placed structural and decorative concrete elements, such as the double-helix central stair, four large skylights, and openings between floors, to animate the large volume of spaces. Although renovated in the early 1990s and in 2002, the library's historic integrity remains intact, as it continues to reflect original design, workmanship, setting, feeling, association, and location.

3b. Period of Significance: 1980

3c. Acreage: less than one acre

3d. Boundary Explanation: The proposed boundary is the current and historic legal boundary associated with the building.

4a. National Register Criterion: C; Criteria Consideration G

4b. National Register Area of Significance: Architecture

4c. Statement of Significance: The Atlanta-Fulton Central Library is significant in the area of architecture as an excellent example of the Brutalist style, a rare architectural style in Atlanta, and as an excellent example of the work of master architect Marcel Breuer. It is Breuer's only identified work in Georgia and his last completed design before his death in 1981. The building, which opened in 1980 as the main public library for the city of Atlanta and Fulton County, remains in use today. According to Isabelle Hyman's essay "Architect Marcel Breuer and the Atlanta Public Library," when Atlanta's new library building was proposed in the late 1960s, library director Carlton Rochell wanted a "world-class building" and believed this was only possible with a "world-class architect." In 1970, Marcel Breuer was selected for the job, and the prolific, Bauhaus-trained architect was the epitome of world class. Breuer was established and held in high esteem long before his New York-based firm was commissioned by Atlanta. He designed numerous, monumental civic structures, such as the UNESCO World Headquarters in Paris and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. In *American Architecture: 1607-1976*, by Marcus Whiffen and Frederick Koeper, the authors state that Breuer, "second to Mies [van der Rohe], had the most illustrious and patronized career as a practicing architect in America." While the renowned architect was selected to design the library in 1970, a variety of delays and disputes meant project construction did not begin until 1977. When completed in 1980, it was touted as "a miracle in concrete" by the *Atlanta Journal* and the Brutalist-style building was heralded for its visionary design. As defined by Whiffen in *American Architecture Since 1780*, the Brutalist style is characterized by its massiveness and weight and by architectural elements such as hard-edged geometric angles, few windows which often appear as voids, the widespread use of concrete which often displays a rough surface, and broad stretches of exterior wall interrupted by deep recesses and vertical slots.

4d. Suggested Level of Significance: The building is being nominated at the state level of significance as an excellent example of the Brutalist style and as the last completed work of master architect Marcel Breuer, as well as Breuer's only known work in Georgia.

5. Sponsor: The nomination is sponsored by Central Atlanta Progress/Atlanta Downtown Improvement District; the Atlanta Preservation Center; Docomomo-US, Georgia Chapter; the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation; and the Architecture & Design Center. Materials were prepared by Dean Baker of Big RIG.