



CITY OF KENT LANDMARKS COMMISSION

PLANNING SERVICES
220 Fourth Avenue South
Kent, Washington 98032

LANDMARK REGISTRATION FORM

PART I: PROPERTY INFORMATION

1. Name of Property

historic name: Mill Creek Canyon Earthworks

other names/site number:

2. Location

street address: 742 E. Titus Street

parcel no(s): 192205-9049

legal description: That portion of parcel 192205-9049 from its westernmost point to a north-south line approximately 765 feet east, and immediately west of the westernmost point of the sediment pond, plus those portions of the rights-of-way of E. Smith, Reiter and Titus Streets between the existing sidewalk and the park parcel.

3. Classification

Ownership of Property:

- ☐ private
☒ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property:

- ☐ building(s)
☐ district
☒ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Name of related multiple property listing:

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

NA

4. Owner(s) of Property

name: City of Kent Parks, Recreation and Community Services

street: 220 Fourth Avenue South

city: Kent

state: WA

zip: 98032

5. Form Prepared By

name/title: Brice Maryman, Landscape Designer

organization: SvR

date: 3/25/08

6. Nomination Checklist

- ☒ Site Map (REQUIRED) ☒ Continuation Sheets
☒ Photographs (REQUIRED): *please label or caption photographs and include an index* ☐ Other (please indicate):
☐ Last Deed of Title (REQUIRED): *this document can usually be obtained for little or no cost from a titling company*

PART II: PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

7. Alterations

Check the appropriate box if there have been changes to plan, cladding, windows, interior features or other significant elements. These changes should be described specifically in the narrative section below.

- | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|-----------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | Plan (i.e. no additions to footprint, relocation of walls, or roof plan) | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | Interior features (woodwork, finishes, flooring, fixtures) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | Cladding | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | Other elements |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | Windows | | | |

Narrative Description

Use the space below to describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance, condition, architectural characteristics, and the above-noted alterations (use continuation sheet if necessary).

Herbert Bayer's *Mill Creek Canyon Earthworks (Earthworks)* is located in Mill Creek Canyon Earthworks Park in Kent, Washington. The Earthworks is a designed landscape composed of a variety of topographic features, pathways, water features and lawns which function together as a public park, stormwater retention facility and landscape art work. The 2 ½-acre site is nestled in the northeast corner of the park. This is the flattest most open portion of the park where the canyon broadens and the creek flattens and slows as it crosses the Green River floodplain to join the river. The *Earthworks* is bounded by East Smith Street/Canyon Road SE (SR 516) on the north, East Titus Street on the west, Reiten Road on the south, and a millpond/sediment pond immediately upstream to the east.

The *Earthworks* is a lawn-covered topographical garden/park superimposed on a stormwater detention facility. Its mounds, ridges, pools and voids mirror and balance each other in the composition of the whole. Stormwater detention makes the *Earthworks* a dynamic landscape: when heavy rains flood the creek, its normal flow continues through a culvert beneath the dam but the excess slowly fills the two-part basin behind the dam. A large upright cylindrical overflow spillway set in the northeast flank of the dam prevents the impounded water from flowing over the dam. During flooding the basin becomes a plane of water, and: "Between submersion and exposure, [the Earthwork's elements] read as islands, atolls, ditches, ponds, and berms, showing the dynamic changing relations between positive and negative form, water and land, solid and void" (Langhurst and Firestone, p. 71).

Site Elements

The site is composed of three distinct spaces: a grassy, bumpy bowl that opens westward, toward Kent's commercial core, and a two-part holding basin behind the dam that is divided by a raised pathway. Mill Creek and a serpentine pedestrian pathway run around and through conical and circular earthen mounds and ponds, and cross under and over an earthen dam and a raised cross-canyon pathway that are both perpendicular to the canyon's east-west orientation. Native vegetation and single rows of poplar trees bound the Earthworks along its north and south boundaries, emphasizing the bowl-like topography. The site further contains the following character-defining features:

- Sculpted landscape forms/topography including
 - a grass-covered earthen dam, called the "large berm" by Bayer that retains stormwater during winter floods. On its west face, the dam is contoured to integrate into the surrounding landforms and mask its functional purposes. Bayer's intent here was "to give the dam a more natural, curvilinear appearance by introducing landforms on both its flanks. While highly geometric, [the landforms] grew out of the linear expanse of the dam, thus softening an otherwise harsh, engineered appearance" (Baird, 2003, p. 71);
 - a six-foot tall, circular grass-covered cone on top of the "large berm" with a diameter of 46 feet at its base. This is the highest topographical point within the *Earthworks*;
 - an eight-foot tall grass-covered 'oval mound' at the west base of the dam, with side slopes of varying steepness. Bayer's intent here was to "extend the total design towards the city and...add design articulation to the west face and vegetation of the large berm" for viewers on top of the dam (Bayer, 1982). The mound's footprint is approximately 40 feet by 70 feet;
 - a smaller, "secondary berm" dividing the holding basin behind the dam into two parts. This cross-canyon berm is raised approximately ten to 12 feet above the basin floor, roughly parallel to the dam, and extends over the creek to the north side of the canyon as a raised walkway;
 - a "cone mound" capped with a concrete viewing platform, located in the middle of the raised walkway; and,

Physical Description (continued)

- a "ring mound," which is a five-foot high, 100-foot diameter ringed-berm of grass that is truncated by arced concrete retaining walls where the path and stream bisect it.
- Water features, including:
 - Mill Creek, in its semi-natural channel;
 - a rock-lined watercourse that runs through the eastern portion of the holding basin and connects the mill/sediment pond to Mill Creek; and
 - a circular pond containing a raised ring of earth, inside the basin to the east of the dam. Measuring almost 90 feet across, this pond is the focal point for the first "catch basin" (Bayer, August 1982). While it was originally designed to empty during the driest periods of the year (Bayer, August 1982), it is currently filled with water throughout the year though the water level fluctuates seasonally. This has been the case for a number of years and may be due to a high water table (dos Remedios, 2007). Water-tolerant plants are now growing year-round in part of the ring pond.
- Circulation features, including:
 - a six-foot wide asphalt path that meanders from west to east through the Earthworks, rounding the mounds, crossing the dam at an angle and passing under the raised cross-canyon walkway on the way to the mill/sediment pond;
 - a ten to 12-foot wide walkway and utility drive along the top of the dam, which connects with a small, raised, wooden walkway leading to a circular observation platform atop the spillway structure. This platform is the same size and shape as the platform above the cone mound to the east, inside the holding basin;
 - a raised cross-canyon wooden walkway with guardrails, connecting the "secondary berm" in the holding basin with the "cone mound" and the north wall of the canyon;
 - both the center of the "ring mound" and to the west of it;
 - a parking lot and entry drive at the level of the dam, approached from the southeast off Reiten Road;
 - a service drive and walkway along the south edge of the holding basin, between the parking lot and the millpond/sediment pond; and,

Physical Description (continued)

- small circulation features including the asphalt paths, wooden bridges, and service roads as well as two stairways leading to East Smith St/Canyon Road SE.
- Vegetation, including:
 - single rows of poplar trees along Reiten Road and East Smith Street/Canyon Road SE (SR 516);
 - grass lawns throughout the site, which create a continuous abstract, curved surface; and
 - large native trees, primarily alders, and understory vegetation on the north and south canyon walls to the east of the poplar plantings.
- Buildings and furnishings, including:
 - a small, rectangular restroom facility added after initial construction, the design and siting of which were approved by Bayer. The one-story, masonry building was designed by landscape architects Jones and Jones, and boasts the City of Kent's first green roof. The roof functions as a viewing platform overlooking the *Earthworks*. The roof is accessible via a small asphalt path from Reiter Road and a concrete staircase on the east elevation of the building; and,
 - original site furnishings including the bollards that line the parking lot and portions of Reiten and Titus Roads. It should be noted that Bayer himself had little to do with, nor did he care all that much about, the original placement of benches, trash cans and other site elements within the park. Though he wanted these pieces as part of the park experience, Bayer left the task of placing those elements to the engineering consultants, URS Company (Baird, 2003, p. 75).

Non-historic elements include:

- white paint on the retaining walls of the ring mound;
- tile mural on the façade of the restroom building;
- rubber-coated metal trash cans, aluminum benches, and a green pipe drinking fountain; and,

Physical Description (continued)

- pipe and rock drainage structure east of the parking lot at the edge of Reiten Road.

Changes to the Site

The significant character-defining elements of the site retain remarkable integrity, including spatial organization, land patterns surrounding the site, topographic relationship between site elements, water features, and the circulation system. Additionally the original site furnishings, structures and objects generally display a high degree of integrity, though some small elements, notably the two sets of stairs leading to East Smith Streets/Canyon Road SE (SR 516), are now degraded to the point of being unusable, while others, including some of the picnic tables, have been removed or relocated. Several newer furnishings have been added to the landscape, including a water fountain and several rubber-coated, metal trashcans, and various aluminum park benches.

Changes to the vegetation are more extensive. When the Earthworks was constructed the visual delineation between what was “natural” and what was built was distinct, due in large part to the minimal plant palette of the lawn and the poplar trees. The simple plantings contrasted strongly with the richly textured foliage and forms of the adjacent wild forest. Today, those sharp boundaries have eroded, particularly near the water. Plans and historic photographs clearly show a continuous surface of grass that covered the landforms and extended to the creek’s edge. Since construction aquatic vegetation has grown within and along the water features. The rock-lined side channel is now filled with vegetation and a large part of the circular pool (both the outer ring and the center) has aquatic plants growing in it. The west (creek) side of the ring mound and the banks of Mill Creek are covered with native and invasive species, including Himalayan blackberry and English ivy.

The presence of salmon in Mill Creek has constrained the hands of the City of Kent’s Parks Department, which maintains the park. While mechanized vegetation management occurred in the riparian areas in the past, today intensive maintenance is not conducted due to regulatory and funding restrictions related to the salmon. This lack of maintenance

Physical Description (continued)

has the potential to significantly alter the site and to return portions of it back to a "natural" state which would quickly diminish its integrity.

Summary

Despite some changes to original vegetation, the *Earthworks* is remarkably well-preserved and maintains the strong feeling of "a walk through sculpture" (Clark-Lanager, p. 28). The earth landforms, the restrained materials palette, and the circulation route are easily discernable despite stresses from a quarter-century of flooding, dynamic disturbance and normal wear and tear. The sculpted landforms are in excellent condition and their topography does not appear to have been altered, other than by settling. The clarity of the original spaces and the visual relationship between the landforms has been obscured somewhat due to the growth of invasive plants, particularly along the riparian corridors. However, overall the Earthworks has sustained minimal change since its construction in 1982.

PART III: HISTORICAL / ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

8. Evaluation Criteria

Kent Municipal Code recognizes five designation criteria for consideration as a City of Kent Landmark.

Designation Criteria:

- ☒ A1 Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of national, state, or local history.
- ☐ A2 Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in national, state, or local history.
- ☐ A3 Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, style, or method of design or construction or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ A4 Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.
- ☒ A5 Property is an outstanding work of a designer or builder who has made a substantial contribution to the art.

Criteria Considerations:

Property is

- ☐ a cemetery, birthplace, or grave owned by a religious institution/used for religious purposes
- ☐ moved from its original location
- ☐ a reconstructed historic building
- ☐ a commemorative property
- ☒ less than 40 years old or achieving significance within the last 40 years

Historical Data (if known)

Date(s) of Construction: 1982	Other Date(s) of Significance:	
Architect: Herbert Bayer	Builder:	Engineer:

Statement of Significance

Describe in detail the chronological history of the property and how it meets the landmark designation criteria. Please provide a summary in the first paragraph (use continuation sheets if necessary). If using a Multiple Property Nomination that is already on record, or another historical context narrative, please reference it by name and source.

The *Earthworks* is significant under Criterion A3 as an internationally-renowned functional art work, an outstanding example of earth art, and a rare example of landscape architecture expressing spare Bauhaus modernism. It is also significant under Criterion A5 for its association with Herbert Bayer who designed the site in 1982. Bayer made substantial contributions not only to the field of earth art, but to American arts and design as a whole. The *Earthworks* is also noteworthy for its association with the historic

Statement of Significance (continued)

Earthworks: Land Reclamation as Sculpture symposium sponsored by the King County Arts Commission in 1979, which made a significant contribution to the development of Public Art in the region and nation.

Site History

The City of Kent, Washington is built on the banks of the White/Green River, south of the City of Seattle. For at least 10,000 years, Native Americans lived in the area. Euro-Americans settlers arrived in the Green River Valley in the early 1850s and settlement boomed in the 1870s and 1880s after conflicts with the Native Americans were suppressed by military force. Henry Yesler of Seattle platted a townsite in 1884 and on May 28, 1890, the town of Kent was incorporated.

Though an agricultural community at first, new businesses and buildings soon came to town, and many civic institutions were in place by the turn of the century. Near the stream that became known as Mill Creek, The Kent Lumber Company started a mill in 1890 to clear the heavily forested slopes above it. "Loggers using caulks and carrying peavey poles would use oxen to pull huge logs along the skid road to Mill Creek canyon. Logs were hauled to the canyon edge and rolled down the slope into the mill pond" (Van Nest, 2007).

Flooding in the Kent valley was a constant threat during the wet months, since the town was built within the flood plain of the White/Green River system. Diversion of the White River near Auburn in the early 1900s reduced the severe flood hazard and allowed the town to expand.

Continental railroads and interurban commuter lines propelled the growth of the town in the early 1900s, and Kent became more prosperous and permanent. Modest growth and the creation of many civic institutions continued apace until the 1960s when the Army Corps of Engineers erected a flood control dam to regulate the flow of water along the Green River. With protected, year-round dry land, the dam also played a large role in moving the local economy away from agriculture and into the mix of land uses that is prevalent today of transportation corridors, industrial uses, housing and warehouses. Expansion followed with larger retail businesses, a new city hall, a library and more post

Statement of Significance (continued)

offices coming to the community. The size of the city changed too, enlarging from one square mile to 12.7 square miles.

As Seattle expanded, Kent became a commuting suburb for the city, and the relatively untouched lands above Kent were developed as a mix of residential suburbs and shopping centers. Today Kent is the 8th largest city in the state with a population of over 88,000.

King County Arts Commission and the Earthworks Symposium

In 1979, the King County Arts Commission (KCAC) convened a symposium entitled *Earthworks: Land Reclamation as Sculpture*, and invited eight artists "to create reclamation plans, conforming to all local and state reclamation standards, in the form of earthwork proposals" (Seattle Art Museum, 1979). The symposium and the associated executed works were hailed as groundbreaking.

Two distinct projects emerged from the symposium. One was a tangible, built work: Robert Morris' *Johnson Pit #30*. Located in SeaTac, Washington (across the Green River Valley from Bayer's *Earthworks*) Morris' piece reclaimed a denuded and degraded gravel pit and transformed it into a carefully terraced landform, with ghostly creosote-soaked telephone poles and tree stumps.

The second project involved inviting artists to look at one of the 104 publicly owned mining sites in King County and to create proposals for how to reclaim the land. The artists who were invited to submit a proposal included: Iain Baxter, Richard Fleishner, Lawrence Hanson, Mary Miss, Dennis Oppenheim and Beverly Pepper. It is unclear whether Herbert Bayer was commissioned as part of this second phase of the symposium (Seattle Art Museum, p. 5), or whether Bayer was hired under a separate, coincident contract by the City of Kent (KCAC, p. 5). City of Kent staff report that when then-Mayor Isabel Hogan heard about these invitations, she asked the KCAC to choose an artist for the Mill Creek site as well. The selection panel, chaired by Charles Cowles, was reconvened and Herbert Bayer was commissioned by the City of Kent (dos Remedios, 2007). The proposals put forth were exhibited at the Seattle Art Museum's Modern Art Pavilion beginning in August 1979.

Statement of Significance (continued)

While resources were not put forth to execute any of the proposals, Jerry Allen of the KCAC noted in the 1979 exhibition catalog: "...it now appears that two will be going forward: Herbert Bayer's project for Mill Creek Canyon in Kent is scheduled for construction in 1981. Richard Fleishner's four hundred acre Lakeside Sand & Gravel Pit is proceeding into an engineering and feasibility study to be funded by the U.S. Bureau of Mines" (Seattle Art Museum, p. 5). Fleishner's proposal does not appear to have moved beyond the feasibility phase, making Bayer's *Earthworks* and the Robert Morris *Earthworks* the only projects associated with the symposium that were built.

The symposium, exhibition and the executed works by both Morris and Bayer were all well received. Writing in the exhibition catalog, Executive Director of the KCAC, Yankee Johnson, noted the dual nature of each of the commissioned works:

On the one hand, the commission would enlist artists to prepare proposals for earthworks that would introduce the work of important contemporary artists to the Northwest. On the other hand earthworks would be employed as a vehicle in land reclamation and might, in fact, offer cost effective alternatives to more traditional modes of reclamation. (Seattle Art Museum, p. 7).

This marriage between art and infrastructure, the aesthetic and the practical, also encouraged an unprecedented number of agencies to contribute to the funding that made the symposium possible including the King County Department of Public Works, U.S. Bureau of Mines, U.S. Department of the Interior, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Monies also came from the local "1% for the Arts" program, the Buckeye Trust, and various other groups and individual donors in the arts community.

Statement of Significance (continued)

Bureaucratically, the symposium created unease within local government, largely due to the unprecedented level of collaboration needed to execute such a complex event. Yet even these issues - though difficult at the time - have since been framed as a net positive for the arts constituencies both locally and nationally. According to a King County Technical Report, the KCAC had to step out from beneath the umbrella of the County Executive's office and collaborate with "its sister agencies" (Jones, p. 64). Rather than operating as an autonomous agency, the KCAC worked with "the County Council, the Budget Division, the Department of Public Works, the Architecture Division, the Parks Division, the Real Property Division and others" (Jones, p. 64).

This inter-agency collaboration was not without its problems. As the KCAC Technical Report notes, "Miscommunications and misunderstandings created obstacles which made the project more difficult to administer". Yet for first-time collaborations on a high-profile project, the Earthworks Symposium was remarkably successful and provided a host of "lessons learned" that made the experience an extraordinary growth experience for the local arts community, and a model for arts organizations around the country. Remarking upon the inter-agency friction, Jones noted, "all of this has created a new awareness within the Arts Commission of its role in County government, and the need to hold dialogue and form working relationships with other branches of the government, all of which are public-serving bodies" (Jones, p. 65).

The impact of the *Earthworks: Land Reclamation as Sculpture* series was felt throughout the country, not just in King County. After closing at the Seattle Art Museum, the exhibition traveled across the United States and Canada for the next two-plus years. Beginning in December 1980, and finally returning in February of 1983, the Earthworks exhibition traveled to the San Jose Museum of Art, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, Phoenix Art Museum, Amarillo Art Center, Tyler [Texas] Museum of Art, The Winnipeg Art Gallery, University of Iowa Museum of Art, South Dakota Memorial Arts Center, Springfield Art Museum, The Center for the Visual Arts Gallery at Illinois State University, Kentucky's J.B. Speed Art Museum, and the Toledo Museum of Art.

Funding and Supporting Bayer's *Earthworks* in Kent

The construction funds for Bayer's *Earthworks* were as diverse as the funding sources of the symposium as a whole. The KCAC Technical Report indicates that funding came from the National Endowment for the Arts, King County Arts Commission, Housing and Community Development, various private contributions, the City of Kent, and the Washington State Arts Commission (Jones, p. 62).

The *Earthworks* was not without controversy of its own. Already, South King County residents were concerned about public expenditures on artwork, particularly after Robert Morris's *Johnson Pit #30* was damaged shortly after completion due to erosion problems stemming from a late planting of stabilizing groundcover. "The community was afraid of a 'fiasco' at public expense" (Jones, p. 63). This minor controversy soon subsided and fundraising began anew. Within the Kent community too, everyone did not initially embrace the *Earthworks*. Several city council members were concerned with the cost since it was "estimated the earthwork would add about \$133,000 to the retention basin project" (*Kent News Journal*, December 12, 1979). However, soil problems gave the KCAC a reprieve, and over the next year it was able to independently raise the funds needed to execute the *Earthworks*. The vast majority of the community was tremendously supportive of the project as a whole, and sold Bayer-designed posters to raise funds to bring the *Earthworks* to fruition.

Today the piece is recognized as "a paradigm of Public Art and public participation" (Baird, 2003, p. 70). Recently, Jerry Allen noted that the *Earthworks* helped "move the field of Public Art away from 'art in public places' and into the realm of 'meaning of place' (Allen, 2007). Previously, Public Art was large-scale studio work that did not consider the uniqueness of place or community. The symposium helped shift the practice of Public Art towards a collaborative discipline that explores specificity. Along with King County, the Seattle Arts Commission also moved to expand the boundaries by including artists on the design team for City Light's Viewland/Hoffman Electrical Substation in 1978. Healthy competition between King County and the City of Seattle caused both jurisdictions to become early adopters of Percent-for-Art ordinances and to remain leaders in the field to

Statement of Significance (continued)

this day, routinely including artists in the earliest phases of construction projects. However, even in this region, functionally integrated artwork remains rare.

In short, Bayer's *Earthworks* played a highly significant role in the evolution of Public Art. First, it was instrumental in shifting the practice of Public Art toward environmental design, wherein the art is integrated directly into whatever is being constructed - during the construction process - rather than being an add-on at the end of a project. Second, the symposium and the *Earthworks* were instrumental in shifting the concept of Public Art from one of placing discrete works of art in public locations to creating artful public places with strong aesthetic qualities.

Herbert Bayer

By the time an elderly Herbert Bayer came to Western Washington to execute the *Earthworks*, the former Bauhaus student and instructor had already proven himself a remarkable designer within the fields of typography, exhibition design, product design, sculpture, and photography. With his emphasis upon the Bauhaus ideal of "design for living" - i.e. incorporating aesthetic, humanizing concerns into every aspect of our lives - it is little wonder that much of his work is portable, accessible and mass-marketed. Within this context, Bayer's work in Kent is one of his first attempts to create a design that is rooted within the democratic concerns of Bayer's training at the Bauhaus, but which is also thoroughly grounded in the phenomenon of place.

Herbert Bayer was born in Haag, Austria on April 5, 1900. His father, a government revenue officer, and mother encouraged young Herbert's interest in nature and art, allowing him to roam in the hills and mountains near his childhood home in Linz with his sketchbook; this experience instilled a lifelong love of mountain landscape in Bayer. Although he had aspired to attend art school in Vienna, his father's early, unexpected death dashed those plans. Instead, Bayer took a position as an apprentice in the local architecture and decorative arts studio of Georg Schmidhammer, where he gained valuable skills in graphic design, drafting and production. Looking for a change, Bayer migrated in 1920 to Darmstadt, Germany, where he worked for the architect Emanuel Margold. Between his duties creating package designs, Bayer heard stories of an

Statement of Significance (continued)

emerging national design school in Weimar. Bayer was accepted into the Bauhaus in October 1921.

The education Bayer received at the Bauhaus shaped the rest of his life. Under the influence of Walter Gropius, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and Wassily Kandinsky, Bayer gave himself over to the school's philosophy of functional design. Though he maintained interest in painting and photography, he was encouraged by Gropius to focus in the areas in which he excelled: typography and graphic design. In 1923, Bayer took a break from his studies to travel in Italy. As in his boyhood, Bayer walked extensively, stopping to sketch or paint when the mood suited him. Complementing his academic focus on the functional arts, Italy nourished Bayer's respect and appreciation for nature and art. Upon returning to the Bauhaus in late 1924, Bayer continued to experiment with and explore a variety of techniques. After passing his examinations in February 1925, he was invited to the school's new home in Dessau to teach typography and graphic design.

Bayer's tenure as a master at the Bauhaus was as important to him as his education there had been. His Bauhaus position allowed Bayer to accomplish two important goals. First, he was able to continue his experimentation with various media, resisting categorization into a single art form. And second, he was able to initiate his professional design practice. Bayer was also instrumental in making the Bauhaus synonymous with an emerging, modern design aesthetic. Beginning in 1925, the Bauhaus adopted a fresh graphic design identity to use in all of its correspondence and publications. The Bauhaus graphics incorporated a newly created sans-serif lower-case typeface called Universal, which was designed by Bayer.

In 1928, Bayer along with Gropius, Moholy-Nagy and Marcel Breuer left the Bauhaus for Berlin. There, Bayer established his own design firm. Berlin gave Bayer opportunities to increase his professional scope and acclaim. Working with such clients as *Vogue* magazine and the international advertising agency Dorland, he used his photography, which revealed the influence of surrealism and Dadaism on his work, into his graphic design commissions. Bayer was also asked - along with Gropius, Moholy-Nagy and Breuer - to design an exhibition for the *Societe des Artistes Decorateurs* in Paris. Other

Statement of Significance (continued)

design commissions to create exhibitions followed, including work for the Building Workers Union, Berthold Type Foundry, German Cork Industry and various industrial and traveling exhibitions. This experience and his reputation as a modern exhibition designer would prove important for Bayer's successful move to America.

Fleeing the repression of Nazi Germany, Bayer moved to New York in 1938 and established an office below the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), then housed in Rockefeller Center. Spurring Bayer's emigration was his nomination – by a group of his former Bauhaus colleagues – to assemble the first major Bauhaus exhibition in the United States, to be held at MoMA. Upon its opening, *Bauhaus 1919–1928* was hailed as a pioneering moment in American exhibition design. The acclaim of this success quickly led to two more exhibition design commissions for: *Road to Victory*, directed by Edward Steichen at MoMA, and *Airways to Peace*, an exhibition on flying. Parallel to this exhibition design work, graphic design remained the mainstay of Bayer's practice, and he worked for a variety of high profile clients while in New York. *Life* and *Fortune* magazines both used his services, as did book publishers and corporations, including General Electric and the Container Corporation of America.

During the holidays of 1945, Walter Paepcke, the head of the Container Corporation, had Bayer as his guest in the rundown mining town of Aspen, Colorado. There Paepcke offered Bayer a position as the design consultant to both his company and to the dilapidated town as it was being transformed into a world-class ski resort. The allure of the mountains combined with the scope of the project trumped Bayer's reservations about abandoning his successful practice in New York. Bayer moved to Aspen, where he remained until 1974.

Among several smaller projects in Aspen, Bayer's largest responsibility was the design of the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies. This project was Bayer's first opportunity to work within a site-specific context to create a physical intervention that worked with its environment. Bayer's scheme harmonized the program elements of a conference center, hotel rooms, restaurants and a health and exercise center with the surrounding natural topography. Bayer relished this environmental design challenge and began to create

Statement of Significance (continued)

several landscape pieces. Reflecting on his work in 1967 during the height of his design career at Aspen, he seemed to reflect upon in the work of his career “and art, now produced for a minority, must become art with meaning for the majority” (Bayer, 1967, p. 142).

In 1955, the first of Bayer’s sculptural environments was built in Aspen. *Marble Garden* consisted of a series of up-ended marble slabs set onto a plinth to provide refuge from the open lawns of the Aspen Institute. Adjacent to this piece was *Earth Mound* (also called *Grass Mound*), dubbed by Jan van der Marck in his book, *Herbert Bayer: from Type to Landscape*, “the first instance on record of landscape as sculpture”. A 40-foot diameter berm, *Earth Mound* formed a circular mound within the grassy plane, a place to sit and read within Aspen’s expansive meadows. Although Bayer himself never acknowledged the relationship between his work and earthworks – he did not like the appellation, nor did he like being labeled – Bayer’s outdoor work in Aspen formed the precedent for the earthworks movement that was to emerge a full decade later.

Though he continued his design work, developing marketing materials for Aspen and the Container Corporation, Bayer did not work with earth again until 1973 when he designed Aspen’s Anderson Park, the largest of his environmental projects. Borrowing elements from *Marble Garden* and *Earth Mound*, Bayer created in Anderson Park a series of paths that meandered over and around geometric berms, divots and rings.

Bayer’s work in the landscape expanded into outdoor sculpture as well, including Aspen’s *Kaleidoscreen* (1955); *Articulated Wall* (1968), a commission for the Mexico City Olympics; and *Double Ascension*, built for Atlantic Richfield (ARCO, 1972). Bayer also remained active in graphic design, book layout, mural painting, publishing, exhibition design and industrial beautification. His painting also flourished, with imagery influenced by surrealism, modernism and color theory as well as Bayer’s personal experiences.

Though these years were pleasant and productive for Bayer, the harsh extremes of Aspen’s climate were taking a toll on his health. In 1975, Bayer moved to Montecito, California. Though removed from the place that he had shaped for 30 years, Bayer still

Statement of Significance (continued)

continued to work on a variety of projects. His work for ARCO occupied much of his time, particularly the Breakers project, which involved renovating and redesigning the interior and exterior spaces of an aging mansion overlooking the Pacific Ocean, making it into a plush executive training headquarters. And as always, Bayer continued to paint. In California, his visual language became more introspective and regressive. Lifelong themes of mountains and geology, nature and color come to the fore in his *Anthology* series of paintings.

Bayer's environmental work, however, was not yet complete. His final environmental work in Kent's Mill Creek Canyon Park combined the sculptural vocabulary of his Aspen projects with ecological functionalism. The 2 ½-acre site was designed to retain Stormwater from the eponymous watercourse as it flowed down through a narrow canyon. A series of berms, mounds and excavated rings provide sculptural interest for viewers as they meander through the composition.

The site reads like a graphic composition, drawing upon Bayer's core skills as a print designer. In this respect it is unique to the genre, an exceptional example of earth art. While the compositional underpinnings relate the work as an extension of his oeuvre, *Earthworks* is Bayer's most publicly acclaimed work due to its successful resolution of two perceived competing interests: art and ecology. However, the Bauhaus master likely saw both of these components as merely integrated parts of the larger field of design practiced in its myriad of expressions – an approach he had employed for his entire, remarkable professional career. Herbert Bayer died in Montecito, California, at the age of 85.

Land Art

In 1979, the idea of earthworks as a legitimate medium for art was seen as both ancient and unassailably modern. Aside from appreciation of pre-historic examples like Stonehenge, the Great Serpent Mound at Chillicothe, or South Asian stupas, the contemporary vogue for earthworks/land art/earth art/environmental art began at the beginning of the environmental movement in the mid-1960s. Largely frustrated by

Statement of Significance (continued)

American society's treatment of the natural world and by the commoditization of art by the art scene of dealers and galleries, a line of New York artists began to look toward the Western United States not only to remove their artwork from the pedestal, but also to re-write the rules of capitalism within the art market. Who owns an artwork when it is on public land? Is the photograph of the piece the commodity? Who can visit the artwork? And when a piece is too large to take home, how can collectors and patrons possess and own the art?

Some of the earliest and highest-profile earth artists were Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, Michael Heizer, Walter de Maria, James Turrell and Nancy Holt. True to the revolutionary spirit of the 1960s, these 20 and 30-something artists were actively seeking a new way to engage nature and to transform art. The limitless expanses of the American West was often their canvas, and early experimentations took the form of lines placed in the desert; holes dug into the landscape; and meditations of form/void, natural/man-made among the outcrops and sage brush of the basin and range country.

While these artists often looked toward ancient examples of earth art, they also found elder statesmen who had already begun to experiment with the earth as an artistic medium. Of these, it was Herbert Bayer who was most actively pioneering the exploration of the subject. As the earth artists of the 1960s looked for early examples, Bayer's 1955 *Earth Mound* at the Aspen Institute was one of the few that began to illustrate what they were trying to achieve (Kastner and Wallis, p. 14).

In 1967, Bayer himself seemed to presage the execution of the *Earthworks* 15 years later: "The structures which man erects will not compete with nature nor set themselves up against it. Both natural environment and man-made environment can exist with each other if their boundaries are understood" (Bayer, 1967, p. 150). Bayer clearly saw what he was doing in Kent as a tightly composed artwork with a function. Bayer described the *Earthworks*, "They express a play of positive and negative three-dimensional bodies, light and shadow, surface textures, water, motion, and sound, all qualities of sculptural art, to make a walk through it an enjoyable experience of diverse facets of tranquility and

Statement of Significance (continued)

serenity. In particular, it is an experience of contrast of geometry and harmony with nature” (Bayer, August 1982).

It is important to note that this particular work represents the single purest expression of Bayer’s Bauhaus ideals of design as part of everyone’s lives. By marrying form and function in a highly-visible public setting just footsteps from downtown Kent, which is surely a geography of the “everyman”, Bayer’s continuing commitment to democratic design was executed in a manner that is most meaningful to “the new audience, ordinary people” (Clark-Lanager, p. 14). Here was a place that expertly fulfilled its functional requirements while also creating a welcoming, egalitarian, joyful artwork for everyone to enjoy as a recreational amenity.

In this way, the *Earthworks* is distinct from the works being executed by the younger generation of land and environmental artists. Surrounded by suburban homes, there was little of the stark appearance, contrast and or inaccessibility (geographically or intellectually) that was a hallmark of the works of other 1970s earth artists such as Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson and James Turrell. Bayer’s work was intended to be art at the service of the people in the vicinity, integrated with other functions, and in partnership with nature. Despite these non-assertive motives, the piece was still immediately recognized in the design and aesthetic communities as representing a new vanguard for environmental design, and a significant evolutionary moment in the fields of environmental art, landscape architecture and civil engineering.

Commenting on the evolution of Bayer’s work, Sarah Clark-Lanager notes, “From his initial grass mounds at Aspen Meadows – later incorporated into Anderson Park, Aspen Meadows, 1973-1974 – to his proposal for the reclamation of Mill Creek Canyon, City of Kent, Bayer’s lifelong concerns are easily discerned: effective visual communication, ability to grasp the particular qualities and conditions of a given place, interest in geology, love of mountainous environments, and inclination toward primal elements” (Clark-Lanager, p. 28).

Statement of Significance (continued)

For the internationally renowned sculptor and Public Artist, Beverly Pepper, it was Bayer's use of form and material for psychological effect that has resonated for her:

He used grass before any of us – and knew how to make mounds feel deeply mysterious: grass mountains, so earth-laden and earth-derived, and yet still feeling like they came from another planet. Looking back, I realize how much of an influence that sense of mystery exerted on my own use of material and making of shape – clearly Herbert Bayer was an important influence on many land-art (earth) sculptors, as well as landscape architects (Pepper, 2007).

The “first wave” of earth art crested with Robert Smithson's monumental *Spiral Jetty*. A static gesture thrust out into the entropic plane of Utah's Great Salt Lake, the piece became the icon of the environmental art movement. While *Spiral Jetty* was a high point, those engaged in the creation of earth art continued to look to the next horizon. Early practitioners continue to engage the medium including Kim Jones, James Turrell, Dennis Oppenheim, Michael Heizer and others; while artists like Lorna Jordan, Mary Miss, Mark Dion, Mel Chin, Andy Goldsworthy and others take environmental art into different aesthetic and natural media arenas. The aesthetic engagement in the natural world seems to have taken on an even greater importance today with the growing awareness of global climate change and our interrelationship and interdependence with the natural world. Near Bayer's *Earthworks*, in the city of Mercer Island, the artist and landscape architect John Hoge also completed a significant earthwork called *The Source* in 1980, which was likely informed by the Earthworks symposium the year before.

The Bayer *Earthworks* has tremendously influenced contemporary artists. Installation artist Stacy Levy recalls:

The Herbert Bayer [*Earthwork*] in Kent was the first art piece I knew that had two distinct lives: one wet, one dry. And that concept – that a piece of sculpture could show you the changes in the landscape – was pivotal to me. (Levy, 2007)

Statement of Significance (continued)

And artist, architect and landscape architect Tom Drugan's sentiment connects contemporary artistic practice with the entire experience of the *Earthworks: Land Reclamation as Sculpture*, and the Bayer *Earthworks*:

Luckily for us, enlightened artists such as Bayer, and enlightened public agencies such as King County and the City of Kent showed the world how Public Art can reach beyond the metaphorical and iconic, and through collaborative efforts create a multidimensional environment that is both aesthetically rich and functionally dynamic. (Drugan, 2007)

It was this quality of function and service that was also a radical departure for the artistic community. Here, in King County and the City of Kent, art had apparently assumed what its critics complained it did not have: utility. "Then the idea of using artists to restore nature was revolutionary. It challenged the very notions of what art could, or should, be" (Ament, 1993). As Tim Baird has recently framed the issue:

Herbert Bayer's work was unique at the time in that one of the driving forces behind it was his strong dedication to the idea that art should have social utility, an approach attributed to his Bauhaus training and his ability to bridge many disciplines. He felt strongly that his work would more fully engage the public through the fusion of art and technology. If the lay person or casual observer of art could come to appreciate a function that related to their lives, such a relationship would encourage them to appreciate and possibly understand the art (Baird, 2007).

From the perspective of the formal, material and motivational aspects of the work, the *Earthworks* is a pivotal piece in the history of environmental art. For Public Artists, Bayer stretched the meaning of what it meant to be a creative person, bringing art to people in a place where it could be both functional and aesthetically engaging.

Modernism in Landscape Architecture

Statement of Significance (continued)

Built in the early 1980s, the *Earthworks* was created at the start of a retreat from the austerity of landscape modernism to a more complex phase of landscape architecture that juggled the concerns of post-modernism with a growing interest in ecological design. However, the *Earthworks*, unlike nearly all other American modernist landscape designs - save, perhaps, those by sculptor Isamu Noguchi - was not a reinterpretation of modernist styles in the medium of the landscape, as was the work of Dan Kiley, Richard Haag, Robert Zion, Thomas Church and others. Rather, Bayer's landscape work embodies a consistent, Bauhaus-infused philosophy of artful design combined with technology to be incorporated into everyday experience. Using ideas, forms and patterns explored over a long career as a designer - particularly in the graphic arts - Herbert Bayer transliterated, rather than translated, a highly refined design vocabulary drawn large on the landscape.

Adoption of modernism in American landscape design trailed the adoption of modernism in other design fields. Through the end of World War II landscape architecture largely adhered to the formal strictures of Beaux Arts design. Returning GIs who later became landscape architects had seen the modernist art and architecture of Western Europe or had been influenced by the clean lines and simplicity of Eastern gardens. They sought to bring these influences to American landscape design.

Post-war practitioners such as Hideo Sasaki, Garrett Eckbo, Thomas Church, Lawrence Halprin, Peter Walker, Richard Haag, Dan Kiley and others sought simplicity, abstraction, economy and elegance in contrast to a highly ornamented and formalized landscape design vocabulary and aesthetic. Their designs differed from those of their Beaux Arts-trained teachers in a number of ways. Incorporating the maxims of Bauhaus designers and other Modernists, they placed a greater emphasis on open space, line, abstraction and form. Cluttered, decorative ornamentation and complicated planting palettes were abandoned in favor of a new, simpler, more refined vocabulary. Echoing the graphic arts, architecture and minimalism in high art, more abstract organization, geometric forms and minimal materials were favored.

Along with this new aesthetic orientation and visual language, the sphere of practice for landscape architects also expanded from the 1940s to the 1970s. Corporate

Statement of Significance (continued)

headquarters, new residential communities, and college campuses all came under the design direction of landscape architects to a much greater degree.

In the late 1960s landscape architect and planner Ian McHarg challenged Modernist design with the publication of *Design with Nature* (1969). McHarg strongly advocated an environmental and ecological basis for planning and design. Modernist landscape architects such as Peter Walker focused on the aesthetics of landscape architecture as a cultural force: the landscape as art. McHarg-influenced environmental designers were driven in part by a deeply held environmental ethic and saw maintenance of ecological functions as a primary responsibility for environmental designers.

Over time the division between stylistic and ecological design became substantial. Projects like Bayer's *Earthworks* began to bridge the divide. It addressed the issues and concerns of both schools and struck a middle ground projects like the *Earthworks* undertook design of public landscapes that were in part ecological in function but which were also deliberately abstract, manmade and culturally derived.

The work of younger landscape architects influenced by both schools, such as Martha Schwartz, George Hargreaves, Kathryn Gustafson, Michael van Valkenburg, and James Corner, drew from both culturally resonant and ecologically founded design roots. Charles Birnbaum, landscape historian and architect stated that, "The Herbert Bayer *Earthwork* is one of the premier extant examples of the integration of art, landscape and water management . . ." (Birnbaum, 2007). Fusion of ecological functions and aesthetic meaning became the dominant mode of practice for both American and international landscape architects. This is evident in the well-received 2005 MoMA exhibition *Groundswell: Constructing the Contemporary Landscape*, which focused on reclaimed, functional landscapes from around the world.

Public and Professional Response

Since its initial proposal the *Earthworks* has been well received by the public and the professional art and design community. Writing in the *Earthworks* Symposium's Technical Report in 1981, David Allen Jones stated that, "The Bayer *Earthworks* has tremendous

Statement of Significance (continued)

support in the community, local government, press, business sector and civic organizations" (Jones, p. 63). "The more general success of the project locally can be understood by considering the Bayer *Earthwork* project in Kent. This community borders the more controversial Morris earthwork, and was a focus for critics of this project. Yet the Bayer project is now underwritten and readying construction. Its greater acceptance is probably due to its having a more obvious role as a public park, its function as part of an erosion prevention measure, and more subtly, a clearer perception by the public that it will meet a real need that exists" (Jones, p. 64).

Within the Public Art community, the King County symposium was highly praised locally and nationally, particularly in art and architectural journals. No other municipal agency has tried to replicate the scope of the symposium and project as a whole. The symposium's lasting value may come largely from the inter-agency collaboration necessary to integrate art in a functional way, to serve as a societal good. The organization Americans for the Arts noted that, "King County's *EARTHWORKS: Land Reclamation as Sculpture* symposium is one of the shaping projects of contemporary public art" (Americans for the Arts, 2007).

The *Earthworks* has been featured in numerous local and national publications. Even before the completion of the symposium, national publications took note of the project. In 1978, Grady Clay, then Editor-in-Chief of *Landscape Architecture* magazine was interested in "devoting an entire issue to it" (Clay, 1978). The organizers recognized the broad importance of the project. In the symposium program, Joan Mann noted, "We know ... people through the country have their eyes on this event, and we believe that when it is concluded their eyes are going to be opened a little wider" (Mann, 1979). The project's treatment in recent monographs about land art and environmental art confirms the *Earthworks'* lasting and canonical import. In *Earthworks and Beyond: Contemporary Art in the Landscape*, John Beardsley calls the *Earthworks*, "a landmark in park design and a revolutionary concept in solving the problem of how to control surface water" (Beardsley, 2006, p. 97). The piece has also been prominently featured in the monographs *Land and Environmental Art* (1998) and *Destination Art* (2006).

Statement of Significance (continued)

Author and Professor C. Timothy Baird praised both the original execution and continuing legacy of the park. He noted that, "Herbert Bayer's Mill Creek Canyon *Earthworks* is a reclamation that clearly articulates - through its serene beauty, evocative experiential quality, and usefulness to society - the artist's goal of unifying art and life with technology". Baird concluded that, "The Mill Creek Canyon *Earthworks* is not only an exemplar of public art and the public process, but it is also a carefully conceived and masterfully executed landscape" (Baird, 2003, p. 75). In an accompanying article, Langhorst and Firestone also praised the executed design in 2003, noting that "Mill Creek Canyon Park is a captivating design that mitigates environmental impacts, reveals natural process, creates a fascinating experience of place, and allows for a variety of uses . . . its seductive simplicity absorbing the complexity of an urban hydrological system" (Landhorst and Firestone, p. 71).

In 2007 the *Earthworks*' 25th anniversary was marked with a public celebration. Organized by the City of Kent's Visual Arts Coordinator, Cheryl dos Remedios, the event featured an outdoor exhibition, original installations and performance art, and a gallery show entitled *channeling herbert: earthworks artworks public works*. The event "explore[d] the ongoing importance of Herbert Bayer's *Earthworks* through the contributions of regionally and internationally renowned artists, landscape architects and historians" (City of Kent, 2007). Contributors included more than two dozen prominent international and regional artists, landscape architects, landscape historians and others.

Stormwater Management and Green Infrastructure

Finally, the *Earthworks* at Mill Creek Canyon must be considered within the context of civil engineering, particularly stormwater management. As novel as it was for an artist-designer to be creating functional public art, it was equally new for engineers to be engaged in art work and the aesthetics of place making. While projects like Frederick Law Olmsted's plans for the Boston Fens during the late nineteenth century also sought to marry these concerns in general ways, the *Earthworks* is one of the first modern examples of the re-alignment of disciplines that have been allied in the past but are now often mutually exclusive.

Statement of Significance (continued)

In the *Earthworks* Bayer attempted to reach a broad audience and simultaneously meet the needs of natural, aesthetic and engineering functions. The project departed from traditional one-dimensional problem-solving, and demonstrated the benefits of solutions that achieved multiple objectives, becoming a truly “public” work with multiple public benefits. Other less ambitious projects in the region, like Yaeger Park in Olympia, and small scale recreation/stormwater detention facilities in Bellevue, for example, have a precedent in the *Earthworks*.

Locally, the legacy of the *Earthworks* is apparent in several later artist/engineer collaborations, including Seattle’s Meadowbrook Pond and Lorna Jordan’s *Waterworks Garden* in Renton, Washington. Both are notable artistic works significant for broadening the reach of Public Art and creating distinctive places that reveal the effects of stormwater and hydrology in the city.

Combining function and aesthetics is also apparent in a rapidly growing civic concern for low-impact development/green infrastructure techniques and projects such as Seattle’s SEA Streets and projects in the High Point community in West Seattle, which seek to bring together the aesthetic, functional and natural requirements of a place into its built form.

Exceptional Significance

Although it was constructed less than 40 years ago, the *Earthworks* possesses exceptional significance as: 1) the major public work of internationally renowned Bauhaus designer Herbert Bayer; 2) an early and extremely influential example of integrated and functional Public Art; 3) a notable work of functional urban environmental art; and, 4) one of the first projects to successfully merge the cultural/aesthetic and environmental/ecological schools of American landscape architecture.

Herbert Bayer created only a few earth art installations during his long career. His first, Anderson Park in Aspen, Colorado (1955) is notable as the first modern piece of earth art, but Bayer’s fullest aesthetic expression using the landscape as a medium is in the

Statement of Significance (continued)

Earthworks. The *Earthworks* is larger and more complex than his other work, and the only one which integrates non-aesthetic functions.

The *Earthworks* functions as a stormwater management facility, a recreational park, and a work of art. Unlike contemporaneous works such as Robert Morris' *Johnson Pit #30* in Seatac, John Hoge's *The Source* in Mercer Island, and Mary Miss' *South Cove* at Battery Park City in New York; parks like George Hargreaves' *Byxbee Park*, Richard Haag's *Gas Works Park*, and Peter Walker's *Longacres Wetlands Park* in Renton; and a myriad stormwater management facilities engineered during this time, the *Earthworks* successfully integrates and fulfills three very disparate functions.

The *Earthworks* is also significant for the role it played in altering the course of public art, environmental art and landscape architecture. As public art, the *Earthworks* embodied the shift from art that is not only in, but forms an *inseparable part* of, the functioning environment and which contributes to creating a distinctive sense of place. As environmental art, the *Earthworks* operates as a working stormwater detention facility, in which the filling and draining of water has an important aesthetic role. As landscape design the *Earthworks* combined and balanced cultural and ecological concerns and served as an example of how to transcend the division between the schools of "artists" and "ecologists" within the field. Landscape architects continue to search for balanced solutions that address both the natural and the manmade.

PART IV: MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

9. Previous Documentation

Use the space below to cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form (use continuation sheet if necessary).

Previous documentation on file:

- ☐ included in Kent Historic Resource Inventory #:
- ☐ previously designated a Kent Landmark
- ☐ previously designated a Community Landmark
- ☐ listed in Washington State Register of Historic Places
- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing
- ☐ (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings, Survey #:
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering, Rec. #:

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☒ King County Historic Preservation Program
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other (specify repository)
4Culture Public art Program

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