



Grand Lobby: Photography by Robt Ames Cook



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## Frist Art Museum

919 Broadway, Nashville, TN 37203



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[FristArtMuseum.org](https://FristArtMuseum.org)

### Frist Hours

Monday–Wednesday	10:00 a.m.–5:30 p.m.
Thursday and Friday	10:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m.
Saturday	10:00 a.m.–5:30 p.m.
Sunday (the café opens at noon)	1:00–5:30 p.m.

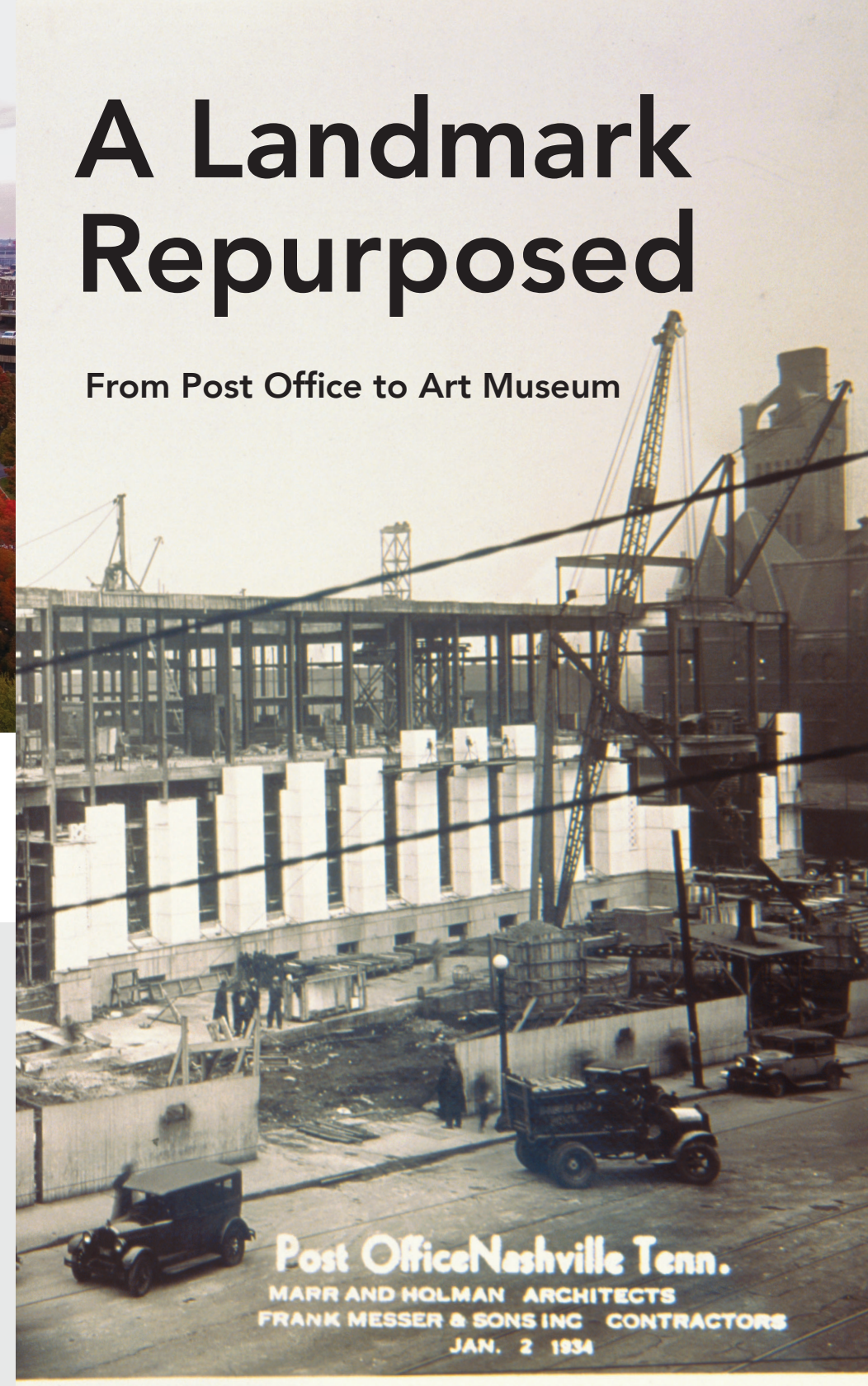
### MAQ Hours

Monday–Saturday	10:00 a.m.–5:30 p.m.
Sunday	1:00–5:30 p.m.

The Frist Art Museum is closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.

# A Landmark Repurposed

## From Post Office to Art Museum



The Frist Art Museum is not only an important cultural focal point for the community, but also a significant architectural structure. The Frist is privileged to occupy one of Nashville's great historic landmarks—the former main post office, located at 919 Broadway. In the early 1930s, the Hoover administration approved plans to build the post office, and construction took place in 1933–34 under the direction of local firm Marr & Holman, financed by the Treasury Department's Office of Construction. Between 1930 and 1939, more than 1,800 post offices were built in the United States—three times the number built during the previous fifty years. Following guidelines from the Office of the Supervising Architect, Nashville's post office displayed the two most distinctive architectural styles of the period: classicism and art deco.

The spare, streamlined exterior—faced in white Georgia marble with gray-pink Minnesota granite—is an example of “starved” or “stripped” classicism. During the Depression, architects working for the federal government were expected to express in their buildings the values of permanence, stability, and order—values that a classical style had traditionally embodied—but in forms streamlined to suggest progress and simplified to lower production costs. Inside, cast aluminum doors and grillwork, as well as colored marble and stones on the floors and walls, follow the more decorative trend commonly known as art deco, which had developed in commercial interiors during the 1920s.

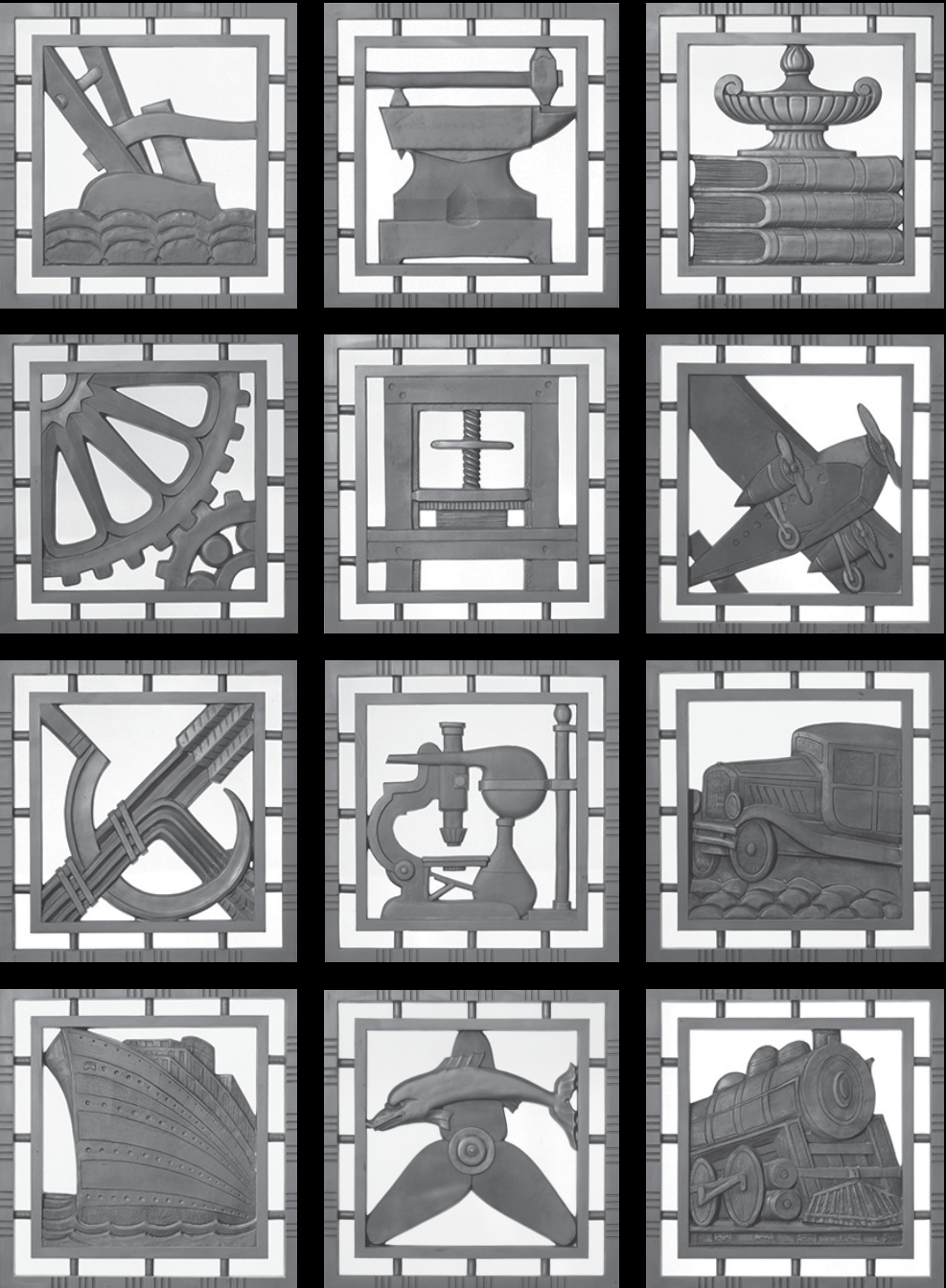


Most of the pierced, low-relief designs in the grillwork were selected by the architects from a federal building planning manual. Twelve of these motifs, running along the top of the grillwork, are icons that celebrate the progress and productivity of American civilization. The four you see immediately upon entering the building from Broadway show modes used by the postal service for transporting mail: an airplane, a locomotive, a ship, and an automobile. The other eight icons, in the upper grillwork of the post office's main lobby, represent a variety of activities: scientific research (a microscope, a test tube, and a flask), farming (a sheaf of wheat, a sickle, and a plow), industry (cogwheels), publishing (a book press), metalwork (a hammer and an anvil), the pursuit of knowledge (the lamp of learning resting on books), and nautical endeavors (a dolphin and a propeller).

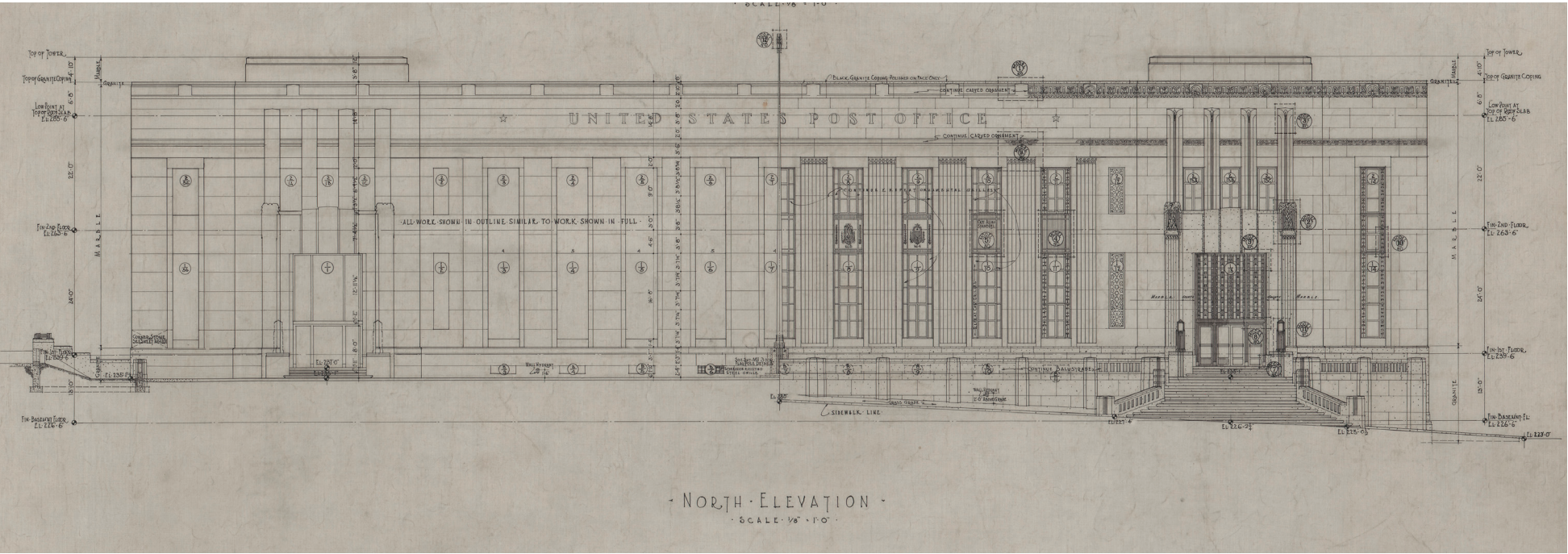
The post office building has been central to the life of the city. During its construction, unemployed workers gathered by the hundreds at the building site, seeking jobs. World War II soldiers sent last letters to loved ones before boarding trains next door at Union Station on their way to the European front. Every April, long lines of last-minute tax filers formed, with postal workers sometimes accepting the returns in the street.

COVER  
*The Nashville Post Office under Construction from the Northeast, January 2, 1934. Photograph. Marr & Holman Collection, Tennessee Historical Society, Tennessee State Library & Archives*

INTERIOR  
*Marr & Holman Architects. North and South Elevations of the Nashville Post Office (detail), 1932. Ink on linen, 31 x 39 in. Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency, on deposit with the Frist Art Museum*



Cast aluminum architectural icons, Grand Lobby. Photography by Bob Schatz. © Frist Art Museum



In 1984, the post office building was officially added to the National Register of Historic Places. Two years later, however, a new main postal distribution center was constructed on Royal Parkway, near the airport, and much of the old building was no longer needed. After years of indecision, a unique public-private partnership arrived at the perfect solution.

In response to community demand, the Metropolitan Nashville government and Dr. Thomas Frist Jr. combined resources to transform the old post office into a visual arts center. The city agreed to purchase the building from the

US Postal Service, to subsidize part of its renovation, and to lease the majority of it to the new museum. Dr. Frist and the Frist Foundation underwrote the rest of the updates to the landmark building, with Tuck-Hinton Architects of Nashville guiding the preservation of its architectural details and spirit. The original pine floors were taken up, refinished, and reinstalled, and the huge high-ceilinged sorting rooms in the center of the original facility were naturally suited to their new role as spacious exhibition galleries. The former skylight in the center of the building, previously covered over in the 1950s, had its function resurrected in the

new design, accompanied by clerestory windows that now light the atrium and the grand staircases.

As the Frist Center for the Visual Arts, the museum opened to the public on April 8, 2001, with the mission to present and originate high-quality exhibitions with related educational programs and community outreach activities. On April 2, 2018, it formally became the Frist Art Museum to convey more clearly what visitors can expect when entering the building.

The Frist Art Museum's vision is to inspire people through art to look at their world in new ways.