

# Costantino Nivola

## Murals in the lobby of the Charles F. Hurley Building (1969)

The lobby of the Charles F. Hurley Building in Boston hosts one of the most significant murals by Costantino Nivola (1911-1988), internationally recognized for his collaborative work with many of the 20th century's renowned architects.

Italian by birth, Nivola was Art Director for Olivetti in Milan when, in 1939, he emigrated to the United States to escape the Fascist Regime. Once in the U.S., he developed several techniques (sand casting, semi-wet concrete carving, and fresco sgraffito), which allowed him to work at a monumental scale, integrating art and architecture.



There was a constant dialogue between the artist and architects. Nivola was a friend and informal student of Le Corbusier. Over the years, he worked with Breuer, Sert, Saarinen, and other masters of modern architecture, pursuing the idea of art as a means to improve the built environment and provide a cohesive social habitat.

In 1967, the American Institute of Architects (A.I.A.) awarded Nivola the medal for achievement in the field of art in architecture.

The Hurley Building Murals, his largest work in the technique of fresco sgraffito, summed up his experiences over the decade, condensed them and laid the basis for the developments to come in the 1970s.

In the late 1950s, Nivola worked with Shepley, Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott creating several murals for buildings at Harvard. In 1968 they approached him to create two murals in the lobby of the Charles F. Hurley Employment Security Building at the new Massachusetts State Service Center, an important component within the Paul Rudolf master plan.

“Given the fact that the murals are to be part of a Government Center,” Nivola wrote, “and that the building in which they shall be part has a unique and important public function, it occurs to me that the artwork should have direct social content.” The murals also provide a humanizing element, filled with bright, primary colors and anthropomorphic figures playing against the monumental massing of the exterior.

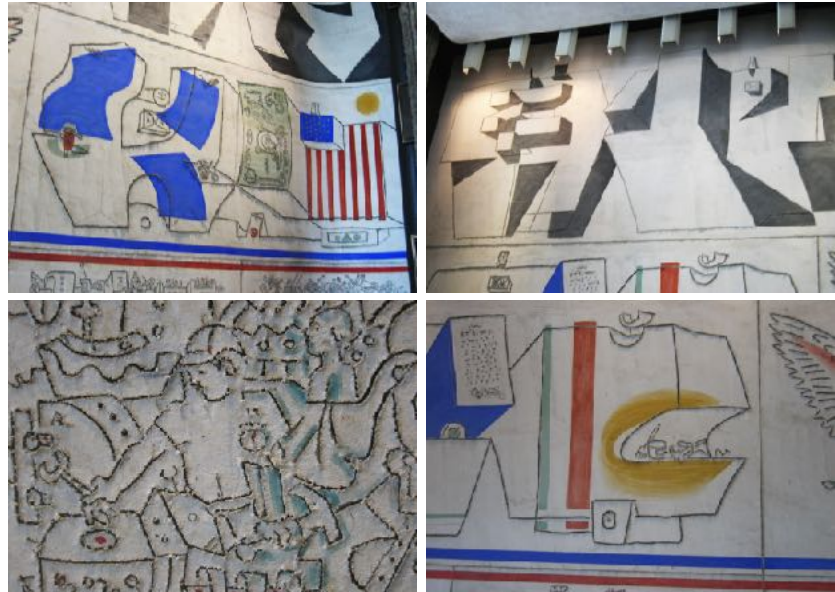
The black and white stylized figures in the upper register are read from a distance and serve to eliminate distractions and focus attention on the form and optical effects generated by the alternation of solids and voids producing three-dimensionality through the advance and withdrawal of the image. The middle register introduces color and moves toward representation, including iconic emblems of the Federal government and the State of Massachusetts.

In the lower register, Nivola brings in further narrative detail, employing the loose style he usually favored for his works on paper.

**The largest work by  
Nivola in the  
technique of fresco  
sgraffito**

**A compendium of  
his artistic styles  
and topics**

**An essential piece  
of Boston's  
social history**



While strictly adhering to a program tightly controlled by the client, Nivola's frescoes reveal a subtle and nuanced critique of 20th century economic and social structures, their predicaments, challenges, and opportunities for the State of Massachusetts. In this regard alone the murals are of great historical interest.

Nivola's public works provided the background to the daily life of generations of students at Yale and Harvard. They punctuate the architectural landscape of the United States, contributing to the visual identity of New York, Boston, Washington, Chicago, Albany, Hartford, Janesville, and other cities.

**Today the existence of the Hurley Building murals is put at risk by a redevelopment of the area.**

**Saving them not only means preserving Nivola's legacy and a piece of lesser known modernist history, but also acknowledging an essential piece of Boston's social history.**

Prof. Giuliana Altea  
President of the Fondazione Nivola

***Please support us in our campaign by sharing this document.***

The Fondazione Nivola and the Museo Nivola carry on Nivola's legacy in his homeland Sardinia, presenting his work alongside that of 20th century and contemporary artists.

[www.museonivola.it/en](http://www.museonivola.it/en)

Ask us more information or let us know about your support, sending us an email at [info@museonivola.it](mailto:info@museonivola.it).

Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter

<https://www.facebook.com/Museo.Nivola.pagina.ufficiale/>

[https://www.instagram.com/museo\\_nivola](https://www.instagram.com/museo_nivola)

[https://twitter.com/museo\\_nivola](https://twitter.com/museo_nivola)