



At work in Sardinia, 1958



Detail of mural in Olivetti showroom, New York, 1953

Pioneering Technique

Originally created by celebrated sculptor Costantino Nivola for the Manhattan showroom of Italian business machine manufacturer Olivetti, this bas-relief represents a unique achievement in artistic technology.

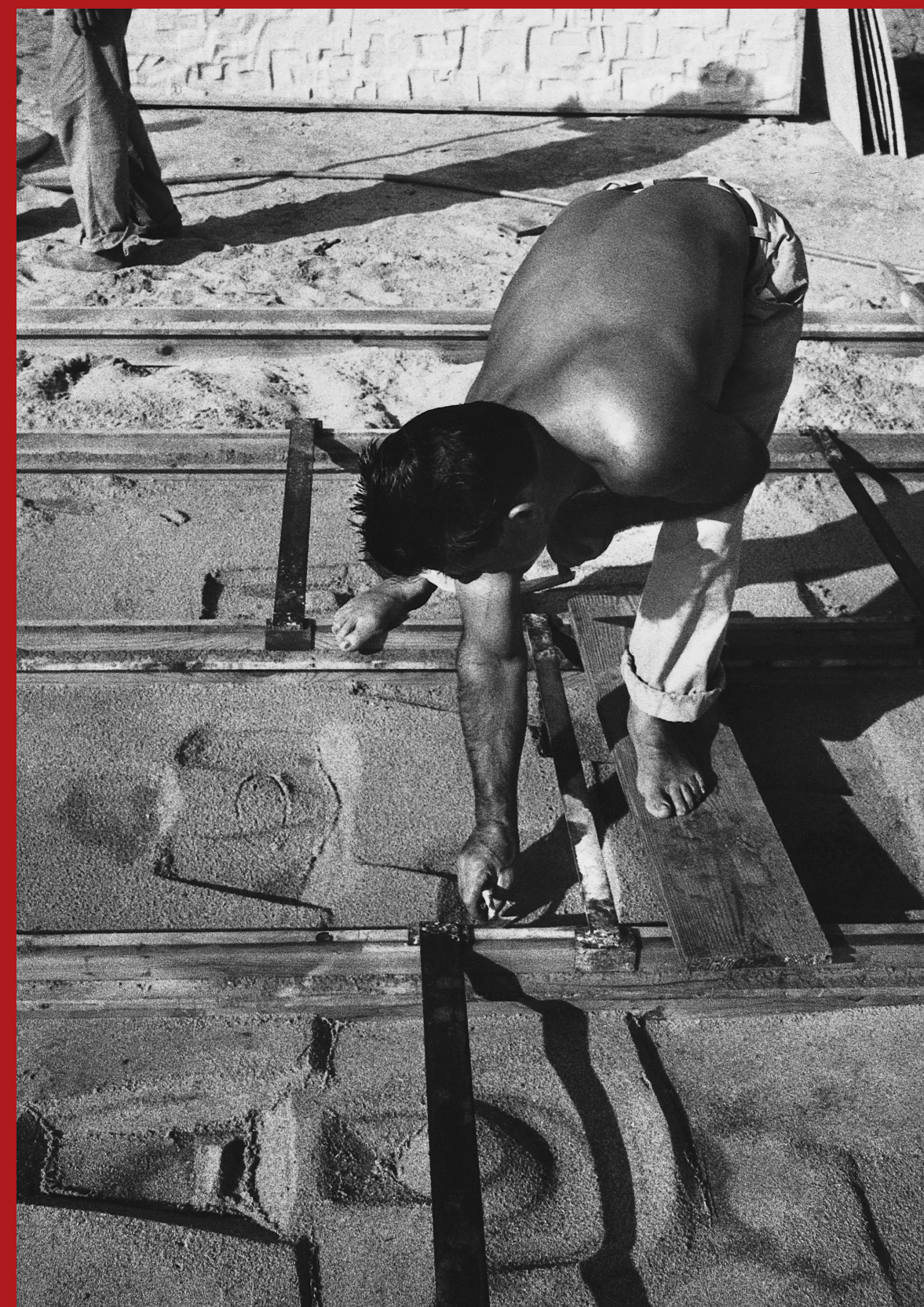
Inspired by time spent with his children on the beaches of his adopted home on Long Island in the US, Nivola developed a technique of carving geometric shapes in stretches of wet sand, which were then used as a mold for plaster or concrete. This method resulted in expressive sculptural elements that were able to be integrated into a variety of dimensions, structurally light and versatile, easy to transport—qualities highly prized by Nivola's many collaborators.

Nivola trained as a mason during his youth in his native Sardinia, and was later educated at the Istituto Superiore per le Industrie Artistiche (ISIA) in Monza, Italy. His creative process was thus influenced by an aesthetic that was characteristically Mediterranean, but also truly cosmopolitan. While never a strict adherent of any one artistic movement, with this mural, Nivola was exploring mid-20th century Modernism. The Modernists sought to reclaim a monumentality that had become associated with the nationalist and totalitarian ravages of the World War II era. They did this by creating works which broke with traditional forms, were aspirational and subjective, rather than oppressively dogmatic or grandiose.

Nivola was named director of the Design Workshop at Harvard's Graduate School of Design in 1954, and held the post until 1957. During this period he completed a graffito and sand-cast in Quincy House, and another bas-relief sand-cast in the International Legal Studies building at the Law School. He returned to Harvard as Artist in Residence and instructor at Harvard's Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, 1970–1975.

Following the closure of the Olivetti showroom in 1970, Nivola offered this mural to his friend, modernist architect and urban planner Josep Lluís Sert, who was designing this building at the time.

*Photos courtesy of Museo Nivola, Costantino Nivola Foundation,
& The Estate of Hans Namuth. Special thanks to Claire A. Nivola & family.*



Utilizing sand-casting technique, 1957

Costantino Nivola (1911–1988)

Untitled, 1953

Sand-cast plaster relief

Subsequent polychrome