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this is article on cover of fashion wire daily today

Fashionable Preservation: Saving Huntington Hartford's Marble Museum

By Godfrey Deeny

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Rarely has it been so chic to fight for the preservation of a landmark.

A gathering of the great and the good, led by author Tom Wolff, ramped up the attempt this Monday to save Huntington Hartford's famously eccentric Gallery of Modern Art at Two Columbus Circle.

Wolff excoriated the Landmark's Commission as "bridge club" members failing in their duty to stop a radical overhaul in the museum's facade. "When you hear a bang in the city it's someone from the Landmark's Commission hitting the deck," the Bonfire of the Vanities author sneered at a protest meeting in the suitably hip Hudson Hotel.

The in-door demo was held on the same day that the Preservation League of New York State named Two Columbus Circle as one of its Seven to Save, placing it on the group's annual list of threatened historic places.

Adding his voice to the complaint was art and fashion photographer Timothy Greenfield Saunders: "It's a really cool building. One can't say that about most. We certainly don't want to lose this one."

The protestors' goal is to stop its current owner, the Museum of Arts and Design, from altering the façade of the concave white marble structure and its curious blend of Venetian and Asian details.

Hartford, the heir to the A & P supermarket fortune commissioned Edward Durrell Stone four decades ago to design the building in order to house his art collection. The founder of Paradise Island, Hartford entertained The Beatles, Jackie Onassis, Richard Nixon and Winston Churchill at his Caribbean playground before selling up in 1979.

"If the mayor would only take a little interest, we might be able to do something. It's incredible that the Museum of Arts and Design seems to be protected from any sort of platform of citizens feelings," Diane Hartford told FWD. Protestors are seeking to force the museum, which is planning a new terra cotta and glass front for Two Columbus Circle, to face a hearing before New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Among the most energetic campaigners is Diane and Huntington's daughter Juliet, a painter once trenchantly chronicled by Vogue's Andre Leon Talley as, "A girl born to a silver cradle, who still moves among the glamorous, idle rich."

"I've got Carolina Herrera and Brooke Astor to write letters to the city," explained Juliet, who presented FWD with a packet of letters written in defense of her father's building by Brooke Astor, J. Carter Brown, Francis J. Kellogg and Crown Prince Pavlos of Greece.

Adding muscle to the protest, arguably the city's most influential architectural critic, Hubert Muschamp of the New York Times, argued in Monday's edition: "A campaign is under way to have the building declared a city landmark before it undergoes a major renovation. I would regret the loss of the building. Whether the campaign succeeds, I hope that New Yorkers will take the opportunity to renew the independent spirit the building embodies."

The fight itself is worth fighting for. Only a decade after Hartford's museum opened, New York architecture began to be overtaken by a tyranny of politeness, a fear of breaking ranks that has yet to loosen its grip. The battle cry for architectural consensus that followed the attacks on Sept. 11 shows how deeply entrenched is the city's resistance to facing the unknown," Muschamp added.

Counter-intuitively, Hartford filled the 10-story paean to modernism mostly with 19th Century art - Moreau, Millais and Sargent. The A&P heir, you see, who once hosted style icons the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, hated abstract art. But not Salvador Dali, who could boast two huge paintings at the opening of the museum.

"This museum is magnificent... The museum is the vindication of the Dalian prophecy of art," Dali told the Herald Tribune at its opening. So there.

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