

Columbus Circle Culture Center Is Offered for Sale at \$6-Million

By GRACE GLUECK

The New York Cultural Center, the white marble building on Columbus Circle that once represented Huntington Hartford's dream gallery, is for sale at \$6-million. An advertisement in tomorrow's Real Estate section of The New York Times offers the structure, built at a cost of \$7.4-million in 1964, as a "unique property, ideal for use as a gallery, museum or headquarters for other cultural or governmental entities."

"It's a good buy—it would probably cost \$10-million to duplicate," says John R. White, president of Landauer Associates, the real estate concern that is handling the sale. "We are trying to find a buyer who'd make similar use of the building—it doesn't really lay out for commercial purposes."

A proposal to take over the center by a citizen's group interested in continuing its activities under the directorship of Mario Amaya has been turned down by the center's board of trustees, according to Allen Russell, board president, because the price the group offered was "far below market value."

Yesterday C. Henry Buhl 3d, chairman of the group, which calls itself the Committee for the Continuance of the New York Cultural Center, said that the board's decision was "a great surprise to us, since for the past two months we have had several meetings with Mr. Russell and were led to believe we had structured a proposal that would be acceptable to the board."

The gallery's financial plight became known last October. At that time, Fairleigh Dickinson University, which had taken over the center's operation in 1969 from Mr. Hartford, the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company heir, announced that it was phasing out its relationship because of rising costs and an "inadequate base of public support."

Subsequently Mr. Russell said that the trustees were actively seeking a buyer and that the deadline for disposal of the building had been set for June 30.

Last month the citizens' committee wrote to Fairleigh Dickinson, the former New Jersey state senator and prime supporter of the gallery as well as

of the university, suggesting that he meet with it to search for an "accommodation." But no reply has been received, Mr. Buhl said.

Speaking for Mr. Russell, who is out of the country, Mr. White said yesterday that the committee's bid had been turned down on the advice of Landauer Associates because of the terms, which specified a 20-year payment period with "no guarantees," were unacceptable. "Not that we may not possibly make a deal with them," he said. "But we want to make a more extensive marketing effort in behalf of our client."

Mr. Buhl said that the citizens' committee, which would have to raise \$700,000 a year to pay operating expenses, could "not possibly propose" to meet the \$6-million asking price. "What's a fair market value for a museum building?" he asked. "In view of our present economy, it's quite unlikely that a new museum would start up there. I'd hate to see it become, say the Saudi Arabian Embassy."

Meanwhile, Mr. Amaya said that the trustees had offered to renew his contract to March 31, 1976, but, since the museum was scheduled to close June 30, he was uncertain over what his function would be. Efforts to reach board members for clarification had so far been unsuccessful, he said.