

Cocktail Danse Macabre Marks the Demise of Cultural Center

By GRACE GLUECK

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Nearly 500 mourners attended a wake for the New York Cultural Center last evening, marking the end of its 11-year life. The occasion was billed as a "museum cooling," though the free-flowing liquor and loud rock provided by a live combo gave it a desperately festive air.

"You can't be sad about this. You have just as much fun as you can with the corpse," said Mario Amaya, the center's director for three years, who conceived the idea of the "cooling" and got two center patrons, James Akston and Katerina Meyer, to pay for it.

As Mr. Amaya stood by the floor entrance, accepting condolences, Richard Oldenburg, director of the Museum of Modern Art, came up and shook his hand. "I'm sorry," he said. "I wish it were an opening."

The center, founded by Huntington Hartford in 1964 but for the last six years run by Fairleigh Dickinson University, was closed this month by vote of its trustees, who decided that its operation was no longer financially viable. The 10-story

white marble building on Columbus Circle is for sale, with today the closing day for sealed bids to James D. Landauer Associates, a real-estate consulting firm.

Hartford in Raincoat

Mr. Hartford, who as host of the gala opening party in 1964 had been resplendent in evening clothes, appeared last night looking gaunt and much grayer of hair in a raincoat and business suit. Looking at the bare walls that had once held his collection of representational art, he said, "I feel optimistic. I don't think this will be the end of the gallery. Something good will happen. I have enough confidence in the huge public for art in America to believe that it won't be torn down."

The A.&P. heir, who sold most of his collection at auction not long after the Center opened, doctored the "power" of art critics in New York. "What bothers me is that I got together one of the greatest collections of paintings ever seen here," he said. "I sold them because I thought they

were ignored, and I made money on them. But there was no recognition. My God, you get discouraged."

Meanwhile, among the guests, there was speculation as to the center's future. "I think it's found its metier—as a discothèque," said Gregory Battock, a writer on art, as he took in the ear-splitting rock. The artist Marisol thought it might make "a good department store." Alice Neel, the painter, suggested it as a site for "another A.&P." And another guest thought it would make "a snazzy funeral parlor."

As guests circulated through the center's four lower floors, they saw few indications that it had once functioned as an exhibition gallery. On the third-floor landing a left-over cardboard sign proclaimed, "exhibition continued below." But most of the rooms were closed off, with signs reading "Keep Out."

As the festivities wound down, at Mr. Amaya's behest the composer Philip Glass sat down at the giant organ installed by Mr. Hartford, and pumped out a lively requiem

he had written. "Actually, I've been to so many openings that I kind of like the idea of a closing," Mr. Glass said, before he sat down to play.

"I have nothing against the museum—there were some nice things here—but it's great to put one under, so to speak. Maybe when they tear it down I can get the organ."

As he watched the audience

seated on the floor around the organ Tom Norton, a vice president of Sotheby Parke Bernet, Inc., said: "This has got to be one of the most bizarre occasions. Eleven years ago the art scene was booming, everyone buying paintings. And now this. It's like a metaphor of what's happened to New York."

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