

COMMITTEE FOR POST-WAR ARCHITECTURE

PRESERVATION APPRECIATION and ADVOCACY FOR MODERN DESIGN IN NEW YORK CITY

April 7, 1997

(HANDOUT PREPARED FOR CITY COUNCIL)

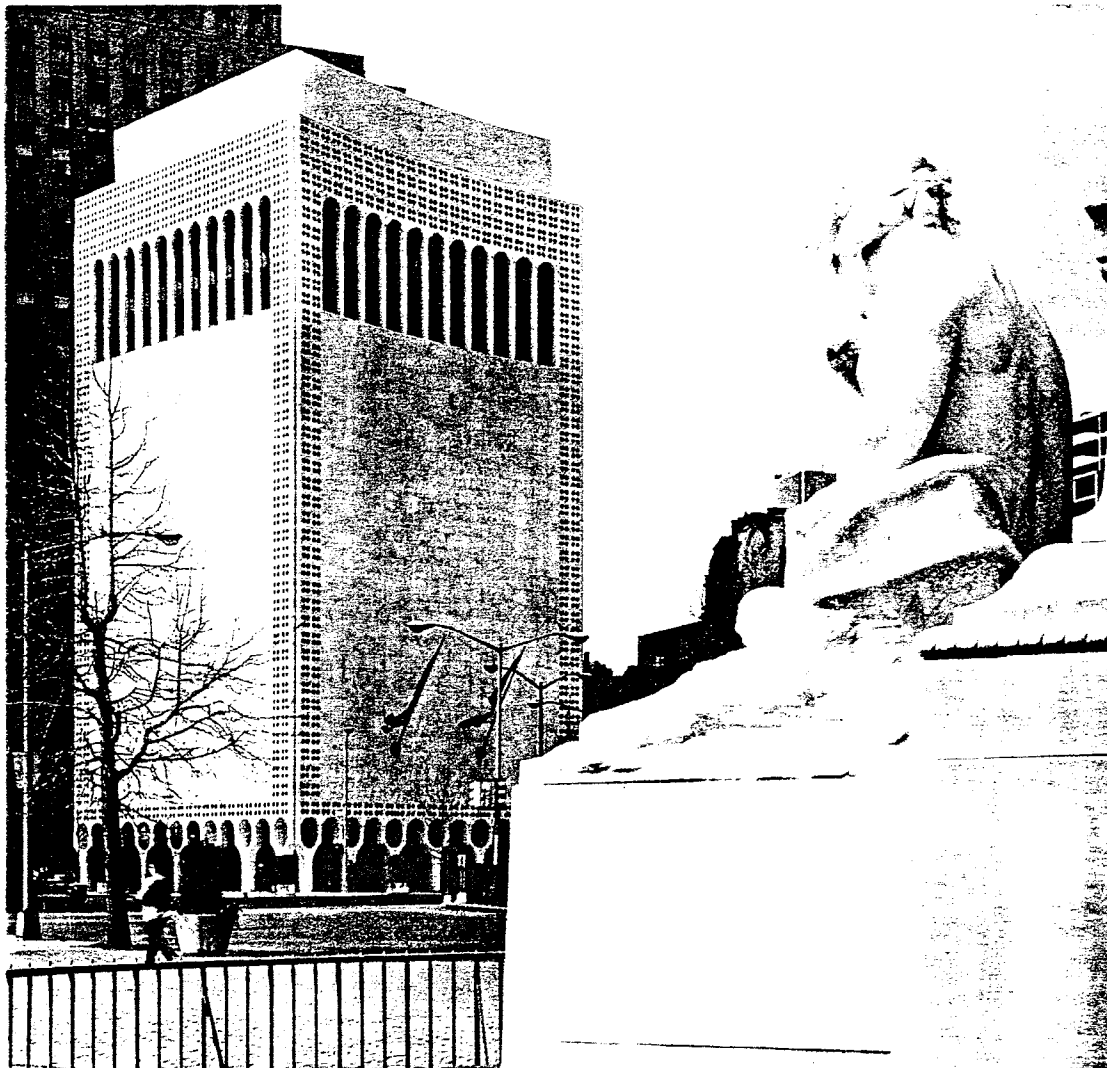
Dear Colleague:

One of New York's most distinctive modern landmarks is threatened: the former Gallery of Modern Art at Two Columbus Circle. This little building is a characteristic and important work by a leader of post-war American Architecture, Edward Durell Stone. We believe that this landmark-worthy building is an integral part of New York City's heritage of modern architecture. Architect Robert A.M. Stern has stated that the Gallery of Modern Art is one of the most significant modern buildings in New York City, and that its preservation through landmark status is imperative.

The Gallery of Modern Art was commissioned by Huntington Hartford to house his eclectic art collection. The building was designed in 1957, at the height of Edward Durell Stone's career, when he was working on his most important commissions including the American Pavilion for the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels and the American Embassy in New Delhi, India. In a major retrospective on his architecture, published at that time, Architectural Record emphasized Stone's broad appeal to laymen as well as professionals, calling his work "an architecture of grace and space," of "great dignity and warmth." Stone's newest buildings, the Record commented, "seem to be a happy meeting ground of a number of polarities: the conservative and the experimental; the classic and the romantic; the austere and the highly decorated." The Record also noted Stone's twenty-year exploration of "the principle of patterned sunlight in walls and striated, filtered light in ceilings and roofs" and his life-long search for an architecture that was warmer, more subjective and more textured than the "geometric, pared-down, objective ideals of the day." The Gallery Of Modern Art well exemplifies these themes, and it was widely published in architectural journals. Interiors reported that Stone had "solved the 'insurmountable' Gallery requirements on the cramped site with masterful grace" and found that the exterior disarmed criticism: "For these miniature red granite-lined colonnades, these rows of portholes like borders of eyelets hand-embroidered on a marble christening robe are too winsome for heavyweight architectural criticism. Only a Bauhaus ogre with hardened arteries could fail to smile at them."

The building has long been occupied by the city's Department of Cultural Affairs. The City, however, has recently transferred ownership to the Economic Development Corporation and has solicited bids for its sale as part of the redevelopment of Columbus Circle. One of the requirements of the City's design guidelines for the site is that new construction must correspond to the curve of the Circle, something that the former Gallery of Modern Art already does admirably. Because the entire bidding process has been wrapped in secrecy, we cannot say what the fate of the building will be. But we do know that many of the proposals call for its demolition or disfigurement. However, at least one bidder, the Dahesh Museum, has proposed to restore and reuse the building for its original purpose. The Dahesh Museum is a young and energetic cultural institution which collects and exhibits art of the nineteenth-century academic tradition - a tradition sympathetic in many ways to Huntington Hartford's own tastes.

[over, please]



We understand that the fate of the Gallery of Modern Art may be decided very soon. A letter from you to the Mayor could help save this important modern building and advance the cause of preserving New York City's post-war landmarks. **Please drop a note to Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani at City Hall, and ask him to help revitalize the new Columbus Circle by saving the Gallery of Modern Art and awarding the building to a cultural institution.** Saving this building is part of our obligation to the future, and fighting for its preservation is an important step in gaining recognition for post-war architecture more generally.

It is important to copy and send your letter to the following key players responsible for the redevelopment of this site:

Hon. Rudolph W. Giuliani, Mayor
City Hall, New York, NY 10007

Fran Reiter, Deputy Mayor for Planning & Development
City Hall, New York, NY 10007

Commissioner Jennifer Raab
Landmarks Preservation Commission
100 Old Slip, New York, NY 10005

President Charles Millard
Economic Development Corporation of NYC
110 William Street, New York, NY 10038

Kindly fax a copy of your letter to the Committee for Post-War Architecture at 212-875-0209.