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2 Columbus Circle Will Be a Museum Again

By DAVID W. DUNLAP

The long-abandoned marble-clad confection of a building at 2 Columbus Circle that New Yorkers loved to hate — but hated to let go — will be reborn as what it was intended to be: a museum.

Ending seven years of uncertainty about the structure, originally Huntington Hartford's Gallery of Modern Art in 1964 but more recently a city office building, the Bloomberg administration said yesterday that it would sell 2 Columbus Circle to the American Craft Museum, now at 40 West 53rd Street. The price was not disclosed.

The museum plans to spend at least \$30 million to renovate the building as its new home, said its director, Holly Hotchner. Galleries will be used again for art, the underground auditorium for performances and the penthouse restaurant for dining. (It was once the Gauguin Room, specializing in Polynesian cuisine.)

Ms. Hotchner said she hoped for 600,000 visitors a year. "There's a tremendous amount that we'll bring to the mix at Columbus Circle," she said. "We will return it to the full glory of being a museum. We think that's important to everyone in the neighborhood."

Andrew M. Alper, president of the New York City Economic Development Corporation, said the museum would complement the array around Columbus Circle: the AOL Time Warner Center, now under construction; the Central Park gateway; and the Trump International Hotel and Tower.

(Donald J. Trump's bid for the 2 Columbus Circle site was turned down by the city, as was a bid from the Dahesh Museum of Art.)

The sale will be subject to the city's uniform land-use review procedure, which requires public hearings, Mr. Alper said. "This is an important project and we think it's worthwhile getting public comment," he said.

The new craft museum will have more than three times the space of the current one, which also specializes in decorative arts, architecture and interior design.

It is too early to tell whether the almost windowless facade of 2 Columbus Circle will end up still recognizable as a "die-cut Venetian palazzo on lollipops," as Ada Louise Huxtable, the architecture critic of The New York Times, described it in 1964.

Though the museum has not yet chosen architects for the renovation, Ms. Hotchner said the facade would almost certainly be changed. "We'd like the museum to add to the architectural landscape of New York," she said.

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