

## **HISTORICISM HAPPENED. IF YOU CAN HANDLE THAT, KEEP READING.**

2 Columbus Circle, designed by Edward Durell Stone in 1964 as the Gallery of Modern Art, is a few votes and several signatures away from erasure by the Museum of Arts and Design's recladding and channeling scheme (see *NYT*, 4/1/03). The Uniform Land Use Review Procedure is underway and the current proposal will be pushed through quickly unless questions are asked and vigorous, coherent objections are raised.

Difficult as it may be for many to accept, there are certain cultural artifacts worth recognizing not because they are archetypes, but because they are not types at all. Edward Durell Stone was an internationally known architect. 2CC is a signature E. D. Stone building encapsulating the architect's late-career theories. 2CC is of its time, categorically representing the small subset of the Modern movement where Historicism and Formalism colluded.

If you find value in such anomalies keep reading and make a statement via letters to the officials at right or by attending the CB5 meeting vote. Voices outside of NYC are needed too.

### **• In NYC, museums are icons.**

2CC is important to the history of museums in NYC and beyond. In building his Gallery of Modern Art, Huntington Hartford was boldly and personally challenging the Modern art establishment not only with his collection but with the building he commissioned. Likewise, Stone's historicism was deliberate. It was a statement against Breuer's Whitney, Wright's Guggenheim--even MoMA's original building, which he designed with Philip Goodwin in 1939. Hartford's collection centered on Impressionists, Pre-Raphaelites, Surrealists and other schools of representational painting. Hartford was pushing Dalí and Vuillard when the art establishment was on to Pollock and de Kooning. Stone's design, astutely pegged by Herbert Muschamp as a "fairly legible abstraction of Venetian Gothic," was a step away from the undecorated poetic new of mainstream Modern architecture in the 1950 and 1960s. (see *NYT*, 4/2/00) The boldness of these architectural intentions and the building that resulted make the Gallery of Modern Art an icon of NYC museum history, even without its original collection.

### **• Getting beyond "quirky."**

The design for 2CC did not result from some unpredictable, erratic notion. It blends Stone's trademark screening, Hartford's personal aesthetic intentions, an odd-shaped but highly visible site, a museum program and a generous budget and happened at a time when International Style modernists were getting restless and Pop Art was hitting stride. The result certainly isn't

the preferred Miesian Modern. But it's hardly unpredictable. Forget quirky. Look at how that slightly concave façade hugs the circle; how that elegantly plain marble facade creates momentary calm and a fine backdrop for the Columbus monument (envision the facade cleaned up and taking a hit

of sunshine--or lit from the roof of AOL/Time Warner at night). Consider the uniqueness of a screen-grill device on a tall building; the rarity of round windows (3,000+ in one place); the building's pleasing scale--another rarity.

### **• Don't like its looks?**

Aesthetics is a factor--a very fickle time-bound factor--in determining cultural relevance. That plenty of people don't like the look of 2CC is a style and taste issue that shouldn't derail discussion on broader terms. Significance goes beyond style.

### **• E.D. Stone: understudied.**

Relatively little academic work has been published on E.D. Stone. There are legitimate explanations for this. Insignificant career and unworthy work are not among them. By the early 1970s Stone's work had fallen from favor, like that of Harrison, Rudolph, Saarinen, Abramovitz, Yamasaki, Johansen and other once highly

(OVER)



GALLERY OF MODERN ART BUILDING AT 2 COLUMBUS CIRCLE AS IT APPEARED FALL 2002

*The Museum of Arts and Design is a fine candidate for new owner of 2CC. We can all support its future home at Columbus Circle if the transfer of the building--taxpayer property--is made with the condition that the façade remain substantially unchanged in design. Please write the individuals below and tell them so.*

*One letter is better than no letter! Send/email/fax your letter addressed to the Mayor to DOCOMOMO NY/Tri-State. We will collect and distribute to the other officials.*

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