

LANDMARK WEST!

From: "LANDMARK WEST!" <landmarkwest@landmarkwest.org>
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Subject: 2 Columbus Circle: And Still the Fight Goes On

Court Denies City's Attempt to Rush Judgment on 2 Columbus Circle

Late last week, the Appellate Division of the New York Supreme Court preliminarily rejected efforts by the City to rush the legal process that could decide the future of 2 Columbus Circle. Under court rules, Landmark West! and colleagues, who filed suit last November contesting the building's sale because an inadequate environmental review neglected to identify it as a significant historic resource, have until early 2005 to file our appeal. As of now, that schedule still holds. And we fully intend to file.

The City's Friday morning sneak attack is the merely the latest in a series of maneuvers to derail the swelling campaign to preserve Edward Durell Stone's famous 1964 design. Last week, the Economic Development Corporation notified the Manhattan Borough President's office that it would seek an August 19 hearing before the Borough Board, a last step in transferring ownership of the site to the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD). Mid-August hearings are a classic political gambit to squeeze through decisions that would otherwise engender huge public debate. An attorney representing MAD told a state judge that the Museum had been stymied in its efforts to raise funds due to the possibility of LW's obtaining a reversal in its suit. She said that two pledges in excess of \$1 million had already been withdrawn.

Meanwhile, support for ensuring that 2 Columbus Circle receives the public Landmarks hearing it deserves is stronger than ever. The **National Trust for Historic Preservation**, the **Preservation League of New York State**, the **Historic Districts Council**, **DOCOMOMO**, the **Municipal Art Society**, the **New York Landmarks Conservancy**, **Robert A.M. Stern**, **Tom Wolfe**, **Senator Tom Duane**, **Chuck Close**, **Frank Stella**, **Jonathan Adler**, **Barry Bergdoll**, **Jeffrey Bilhuber**, **Michael Bruno**, **Andrew Cogan**, **Frank De Biasi**, **Joan K. Davidson**, **Todd Eberle**, **Michael Formica**, **Françoise Gilot-Salk**, **Milton Glaser**, **Bob Hiemstra**, **Mary Anne Hunting**, **Barbara Jakobson**, **Reed & Delphine Krakoff**, **Gene Meyer**, the **Very Rev. James Parks Morton**, **Carlos Mota**, **Liz O'Brien**, **James Zemaitis**, **Alan Rosenberg**, **Jill Rudnick**, **Michael Sorkin**, **Ken Smith**, **Alan Wanzenberg**, **Hicks Stone** and **Edward Durell Stone, Jr.** The list goes on. Way on.

MAD and the City would like for this whole issue to just go away, but it won't. The eyes of the nation are on them.

And if you've read this far, you might as well keep reading. Don't miss this week's issue of the *West Side Spirit* and Christopher Moore's front page coverage of the continuing battle for the future of 2 Columbus Circle.

And Still the Fight Goes On: Should city rule on Columbus Circle?

By Christopher Moore

In 1964, when Two Columbus Circle was completed, Upper West Siders were fighting over the building.

They still are.

Preservationists, insisting that a silent majority is becoming increasingly vocal in defense of the building, say they want the city's Landmarks Commission to hold a hearing on the fate of the building. On the other side of the debate, some New Yorkers contend that worthy plans to bring a museum to Columbus Circle are being unwisely stalled by preservation efforts.

"That building has always gotten people talking," said Peg Breen, president of the New York Landmarks Conservancy. "It is an iconic building in its own right."

The structure at the center of the storm was created by architect Edward Durell Stone, who also designed the

Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. Advocates for 2 Columbus Circle describe it as an icon of architecture's Modernist movement. As part of a two-part op-ed on the subject last October in the New York Times, novelist Tom Wolfe called the location "one of the most important buildings in the history of 20th-century architecture."

Sitting at the southwest corner of Central Park, the building was first used as Huntington Hartford's Gallery of Modern Art. It may be returning to something like its original use if the Museum of Arts & Design, currently headquartered on West 53rd Street, is able to complete its plan to take it over. The museum wants to buy the building from the city, alter it under a design plan by Brad Cloepfil, and move in.

The museum won a key victory in April when the State Supreme Court dismissed a challenge to the museum's project. Petitioners had argued the city's review of the potential economic impact of the building's sale had been inadequate.

Landmark West, a key preservation group headquartered on the Upper West Side, was the key plaintiff in the legal proceeding. The group, according to Kate Wood, its executive director, is optimistic in the long run about saving the structure.

"All we're asking for is a public hearing," she said.

In May, the National Trust for Historic Preservation weighed in, listing Two Columbus Circle on its annual list of endangered historic places. The trust urged the city to "develop a restoration plan for the building that respects its integrity as a Modernist masterpiece and celebrates its unique form and design."

In its spring 2004 newsletter, Landmark West appealed directly to the mayor, asking on the front page: "Mayor Bloomberg, what more will it take to save 2 Columbus Circle?" Wood explained why targeting the mayor is so important to those concerned with the building.

"It's just not something that he has taken up as one of his priorities," she said.

Wood pointed to a June 29 fundraising event at the Liz O'Brien Gallery on Fifth Avenue, where \$50,000 was raised to continue the struggle. Increasingly, Wood said, artists and designers, natural defenders of Two Columbus Circle, are joining the campaign for a public hearing.

"The Landmarks Commission is the agency that has the power to make the difference here," she said. "They could schedule a meeting tomorrow if they wanted to."

They don't want to.

Diane Jackier, director of communications and government affairs at the Landmarks Preservation Commission, said the commission reviewed the building in 1996 and decided against holding a hearing.

"We stand by that decision," Jackier said.

Upper West Side Councilwoman Gale Brewer said she's heard that argument from the commission's chairman, Robert Tierney.

"It would be very helpful to all of us if there would be a hearing," Brewer said. But she positioned herself between preservationists and the museum, saying she was pleased with the design team behind plans for the site.

"In the best of all possible worlds, I would like to keep it as it is, but it appears that the museum has needs for the light and air," she said, gently approving of plans to alter the structure.

Some community leaders go further, such as Monica Blum, president of the Lincoln Square Improvement District. She likes the museum's plan and said, "It's too bad that it's not moving forward."

From a business perspective, Blum said, she likes the idea of a museum at Columbus Circle. The museum would

be an interesting artistic enterprise, joining relatively few artistic endeavors, such as the American Bible Society and the folk art annex, in the neighborhood, Blum said.

"Our view is that this is good for business and will be an asset to the community," Blum said.

At the Landmarks Conservancy, Breen said her own organization's board is divided on the issue of the building's future, but has one area of agreement.

"My board has always been split on this, but everyone has agreed that the building should have its day in court," she said.

Personally, she added, she hopes that museum plans printed in a recent New York Times column do not come to pass.

One reason Breen favors a commission hearing: to bring finality to a long-simmering debate.

"I think that would kind of help settle things once and for all," she said. "Any building that has generated this much debate about architecture deserves the full process."