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The New York Sun

November 18, 2005 Friday

SECTION: ARTS & LETTERS; Pg. 17**LENGTH:** 505 words**HEADLINE:** ABROAD IN NEW YORK**BYLINE:** By FRANCIS MORRONE**BODY:**

I have been speaking out about 2 Columbus Circle for years. Now that its defacement is a done deal, please allow me to write about 2 Columbus for what will likely be my last time.

To use a cliché, there's something rotten at the core of the Big Apple. And while that "something" goes well beyond the chairman of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, Robert Tierney, he certainly exemplifies it. His stern refusal to hold a hearing for 2 Columbus - a hearing that had professional support unprecedented in the history of landmarks preservation in New York - was a profound dereliction of his responsibility to the people of this city. He acted as though the public were a nuisance.

I'd have liked to see 2 Columbus landmarked. But, as has often been noted, that wasn't the issue: The issue was whether it would get a hearing. Mr.

Tierney's naked intransigence in the matter leaves me slack-jawed. I've not witnessed anything like it before.

The building met every criterion for a hearing. It was a stylistic exemplar by one of the most famous architects of his time, Edward Durrell Stone, and it was a place making building that spoke of a significant moment in the history of New York culture. To top it off, there was no shortage of institutions with the desire and the means to preserve the building.

None of that is to say the building deserved to be landmarked. But when a building that so manifestly fulfills the requirements for a hearing is denied one, it calls into question the whole apparatus by which New York seeks to preserve worthy old buildings. I see this as the culmination of a decade in which the whole notion of "historic preservation" was trashed by elite opinion, as though people had simply grown bored of the business. Critics from the so-called "right" believe a city is nothing more than a machine for making money, and preserving old buildings can get in the way of that. Critics from the left, like the former New York Times architecture critic Herbert Muschamp, believe the culture of historic preservation stifles creativity in new New York architecture. Indeed, it was the commission's desire to satisfy "avantgarde" opinion (which is a bit of a contradiction in terms for a landmarks commission) that led it to green-light the new front on the Brooklyn Museum. Between that and the 2 Columbus debacle, who needs a landmarks commission, anyway?

Huntington Hartford's Gallery of Modern Art opened in 2 Columbus Circle on March 20, 1964, with an exhibition of paintings by Pavel Tchelitchew. Tchelitchew was the man who had introduced Lincoln Kirstein to George Balanchine - a signal moment in the cultural history of New York. Another such signal moment was the creation of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, one year after 2 Columbus Circle opened, and 40 years ago this year. The groups seeking a hearing for 2 Columbus may have failed in their effort. But so long as there are groups like Landmark West! there is hope for New York, a hope we had once entrusted to the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

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