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## Big 'Da Vinci Code' Billboard Removed at Columbus Circle

By DAVID W. DUNLAP

It was too big. It was too high. It was illegally installed in an area where it was prohibited anyway. And yesterday, it was gone.

Facing four violations from the Department of Buildings, the Museum of Arts and Design removed an enormous billboard for the movie version of "The Da Vinci Code" from its future home at 2 Columbus Circle. The sign was installed on the construction scaffolding a week ago.

"The Museum of Arts and Design wishes to apologize to those individuals who were offended by the ad," the museum's director, Holly Hotchner, said yesterday.

She added, "Our goal in making this space available was to generate income that goes directly to supporting public programs." As a result of the rapid dismantling, she said, the museum will not receive any income.

This was by no means the only illegal sign on scaffolding in New York. But it dominated Columbus Circle and covered a building that has known only controversy in its lifetime, beginning in 1964 as Huntington Hartford's Gallery of Modern Art.

The museum, now at 40 West 53rd Street, is reconstructing the 10-story gallery building over the next two years to serve as its new home.

Private preservationists who had fought to save the existing structure -- long after the Landmarks Preservation Commission declined to pursue landmark designation -- were quick to criticize the billboard. Building inspectors soon followed.

Four violation notices were issued on Wednesday, said Ilyse Fink, a spokeswoman for the buildings agency. The sign was cited for having been installed without a permit, for being in a zoning district where it would not be allowed in any case, for having a surface area greater than 200 square feet and for rising higher than 25 feet above the curb.

If offending conditions are removed or legalized within 35 days after a violation is received, Ms. Fink said, a hearing is not held and fines are not imposed. The museum took only two days to remove the sign.

"It was not intended to cause a big problem," Ms. Hotchner said. "And I'm sorry that it did. Truly sorry."

