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2 Columbus Circle Makes Group's List of Threatened Sites

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Edward Durell Stone's porthole-studded building at 2 Columbus Circle, Mexico

City's historic center and every "cultural heritage" site in Iraq have been added to the World Monuments Fund watch list of most endangered sites, to be released today.

Preservationists have been protesting plans to reclud and recreate 2 Columbus Circle as the new home of the Museum of Arts and Design, arguing that the 1964 building represents a turning point in Modernist design.

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2 Columbus Circle, on the World Monuments Fund watch list. [More Photos >](#)

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In an era of growing calls for the preservation of Modernist architecture, the 2006 watch list includes nine 20th-century sites. "There are enough people out there calling attention to the fact that we're losing these buildings that there is a

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kind of groundswell," said Bonnie Burnham, the fund's president.

Beyond 2 Columbus Circle, the Modern group includes the Cyclorama Center in Gettysburg, Pa., built from 1958 to 1961 to house a panoramic painting that depicts the final battle there; Konstantin Melnikov's House Studio in Moscow (1927-1929), a cylindrical building that the avant-garde architect designed for his family; and the historic city center of Asmara, a series of strikingly Modernist buildings in Eritrea built by Italian occupiers from 1936 to 1941.

Since Eritrea gained independence from Ethiopia in 1993 after several years of fighting, efforts to restore and preserve neglected or war-ravaged cultural sites have gained momentum. Two other sites in that country made the list: the late-14th-century Kidane-Mehret Church, representative of indigenous craftsmanship (it was built in the monkey-head style, where the rounded ends of timber beams stick out of striated stone walls, resembling monkey heads); and the historic town of Massawa, a port city successively ruled by the Ottoman Turks, Egypt and Italy that retains architectural features of each culture.

The Iraqi monuments are listed as a single entry on the roster of 100 sites, which is drawn up every two years with input from preservation groups, archaeologists and government agencies.

Ms. Burnham said it was the first time that essentially an entire country had been listed.

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"Everything that is cultural in Iraq is threatened at the moment," she said. "We really couldn't see any other way to address it."

Mexico City's historic center, which includes the main public square and colonial-era buildings, was included on the list to draw attention to environmental problems there, particularly the threat of sinking caused by rising water tables, Ms. Burnham said.

The selections are made by a rotating panel of experts who evaluate the sites' significance, the urgency of their condition and the viability of the nominator's proposal to protect them. Several sites are relisted. Among those that were on the 2004 watch list are Little Hagia Sophia, the oldest preserved Byzantine church in Istanbul, which was converted to a mosque in 1504 but is closed because of structural damage; Frank Lloyd Wright's 1924 Ennis-Brown House in Los Angeles, one of four textile-block houses that the architect built from local materials; and the Panama Canal area, which the fund says is threatened by development pressures and a lack of regulation.

"Some of these sites are so much on the tourist circuit that people don't really think about the conservation issues," Ms. Burnham said, citing, for example, the formerly listed Taj Mahal and Pompeii.

Sites can also be unglamorous, like a fish processing site in British Columbia that once made the list, or hazy in origin, like the Pulemelei Mound in Samoa, a mysterious earth and stone monument built between 1100 and 1500 that made this year's list.

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On watch in the United States are the bluegrass cultural landscape of Kentucky, whose horse farms and training stables are threatened by urban sprawl; Hanging Flume in Montrose Country, Colo., a 13-mile-long track that was used for hydraulic gold mining in the late 19th century; and the Ellis Island baggage and dormitory building in New York, where immigrants waited to be processed for arrival or deported.

This year's list has sites from 55 countries on all 7 continents, including Antarctica, the fund said. There is Tell Balatah from the Palestinian territories, thought by some scholars to be the biblical city of Shechem; the Roman aqueduct in Segovia, Spain, whose rough-hewn granite blocks are being eroded by pollutants; the International Fairground, built between 1963 and 1975 in Tripoli, Lebanon, which faces possible conversion into an amusement park; and the Teatro Capitolio in Lisbon, a 1930's theater that has been closed since the 1980's and is slated for demolition.

There are six sites in China, two of which - the Cockcrow Post Town in Huailai and the Tianshui Traditional Houses in Gansu Province - have been relisted. As development gains speed there, Ms. Burnham said, "towns are rapidly disappearing."

Among the other sites included for the first time this year are Afghanistan's oldest mosque, the Haji Piyada in the northern province of Balkh, whose mud-brick and stucco decorations date from the ninth century; the Tarrafal concentration camp (1933) on Santiago Island in Cape Verde, which housed political opponents

of Salazar's fascists and, later, African nationalists rebelling against colonial rule; and Hemingway's house in Cuba (1886), where the author wrote works including "For Whom the Bell Tolls," "The Old Man and the Sea" and "A Moveable Feast."

The fund is one of several organizations that have watch lists. (Unesco maintains the World Heritage List, for example.) It is privately financed and funnels aid to preservationist efforts. Since 1996, it has distributed about \$35 million.

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