



September 21, 2005

Board of Directors
Museum of Arts & Design
40 West 53rd Street
New York, New York 10019

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As the founder and the curator of American Decorative Art 1900, an organization that endeavors to advance appreciation of early modern American design, we are writing concerning your plans for Two Columbus Circle. We have supported and advised over twenty museums, and our collection of works from the American Arts & Crafts Movement – widely considered the most important of its kind – will over time be distributed to these and other institutions. We are also avid collectors of contemporary fine art and residents of the Upper West Side.

We believe that the *avowed* mission of the Museum of Arts & Design (MAD) is to preserve design objects and advance appreciation for design as an art form. The Edward Durrell Stone building – which Holly Hotchner flippantly calls “ugly,” an “eyesore” and “the world’s greatest urinal” – has been named by the World Monuments Fund, National Trust for Historic Preservation and Preservation League of New York State, as well as many leading architects and architectural historians, as an important work worthy of urgent preservation. The planned destruction of this building would be a desecration of your own mission.

How have you gone so wrong? We are suspicious of your leadership. In our view, the enclosed feature article in the *New York Times* on Holly Hotchner portrays her as reckless and self-promoting. We would urge you to inquire with individuals in the museum field as to whether Ms. Hotchner has a reputation for browbeating subordinates and bullying everyone else. Your board may not have been made aware of the true costs of your current course.

In pursuit of the site, MAD cynically allied itself with preservationist coalitions by promising to save the building, but once granted the property, the deceit became obvious: MAD has had no interest in preserving Stone’s work. To lead your new building program, you hired the former chairwoman of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, who, it has been reported, received underhanded favoritism from current commissioner Robert Tierney. With their help, MAD has shortsightedly continued to resist a landmarks hearing, which, if the building were found unworthy of landmark status, would at least offer MAD the possibility of escaping infamy.

The pursuit of this site, at the expense of the Stone building, betrays unworthy motives and a lack of confidence in your mission. Tellingly, when we discussed the new building with one of your board members, his focus was on the potential of luring visitors into a ground floor shop on Columbus Circle and upstairs for a view of Central Park. (We can hear, ringing in Ms. Hotchner’s ears, “you gotta get a gimmick, if you want to get ahead!”) Why don’t you have more confidence in the quality of your collection and programming?

At every turn, your leaders are undermining your own institution’s future. MAD has already become the subject of widespread criticism in the art and architecture communities. If the destruction proceeds, the Museum of Arts & Design will be ostracized by museums, cultural institutions and the public for having destroyed an important work of architecture and design – a work of art. This legacy will inevitably undermine your ability to attract the financial support and donations of important objects that are essential to the institution’s future.

On the other hand, the Museum of Arts & Design would receive an enduring surge of support if it creatively re-uses the Stone building while restoring its inimitable façade. (The American Folk Art Museum’s building makes brilliant use of a small footprint with limited natural light). If such an approach is beyond your means or imagination, rather than betray your mission, seek a home elsewhere.

Sincerely,

Bruce Barnes, Ph.D.
Founder

Joseph Cunningham, Ph.D.
Curator