

Craft Museum to move to Columbus Circle

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The American Craft Museum in New York will soon have a new home. The museum beat out two main competitors in a bid to redevelop the city-owned building at Two Columbus Circle, situated on a prime spot just off Central Park South. Designed by Edward Durrell Stone, the white marble-clad building has sat unused since 1998 while New York's Economic Development Corporation weighed possible reuse options, including demolition, as part of its plan to revitalize Columbus Circle. In July, Mayor Michael C. Bloomberg announced that the Craft Museum had been selected to redevelop the distinctive structure. A purchase price is being negotiated.

A late entrant in the redevelopment bid, the museum—which plans to sell its current facility on 53rd St.—won out over the Dahesh Museum of Art, whose bid called for the preservation of the structure intact, and Donald Trump, who wanted to build a new hotel on the site. Before the Craft Museum submitted its proposal, preservationists and community activists had been rallying behind the Dahesh. Some objected to the razing of a notable building; others were opposed to the construction of another Trump property in the area and wanted a nonprofit to move in (Trump International Hotel and Tower is also on the circle).

Stone's nine-story structure was commissioned by Huntington Hartford, A&P heir and art patron, for his Gallery of Modern Art, which opened in 1964. Showing then-- obscure 19th-century figurative art as well as out-of-favor 20th-century realist painters, Hartford had a mission which was quite the opposite of what his museum's name would suggest. Stone's building, with its marble cladding, graceful street-level arcade and almost windowless facade bordered by perforated ornamentation, made oblique reference to Venetian prototypes, and was seen at the time as an affront to accepted modernist practice; the structure was itself part of Hartford's unorthodox program. The building represents Stone's late style, when he had softened the austere modernism characteristic of his early career (he was one of the architects of the original Museum of Modern Art).

Hartford relinquished control of the museum in 1969, but under different management it continued to produce lively exhibitions until 1976. It was then purchased by the Gulf and Western Foundation, located across Columbus Circle, and given to the city to house the New York Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Department of Cultural Affairs.

The Craft Museum expects to undertake extensive renovations, costing at least \$30 million, to transform the aging structure into a state-- of-the-art facility. The Columbus Circle building contains 54,000 square feet of space, about three times more than the museum currently has. The move will allow the museum to display more of its growing permanent collection, expand its educational programming and add artists' studios. A restaurant and members' lounge will be located on the building's top floor, offering

impressive views of Central Park. And for the first time ever, the museum will have an auditorium, which is already in place in the basement.

Museum director **Holly Hotchner** said that the building's imposing facade will be altered, opening up some of the walls to integrate the building with its environs and the park, a change, she says, that the city was seeking. She anticipates resistance from preservation groups, even though the building has been denied landmark status under three different administrations. In fact, according to a spokesperson for the EDC, the city informed the Craft Museum that officials would look favorably on plans to make the building's facade more transparent. Hotchner said that an architect should be selected sometime this month and that younger architects are being considered to reflect the museum's mission as a forward-thinking contemporary institution. Though the final design is "not really a community decision," she says, the museum is seeking a "creative yet nondestructive" solution that pays homage to Stone's original concept; she nevertheless aims for a design that will please both preservationists and those who favor more innovative architecture in the city. Once an architect is selected, the proposed plan must go through a public land-use review before work can begin. Construction should start in a year and is expected to take two years to complete.

[Photograph]

Art on the Go

Waiting for the bus in Ventura, Calif., just got a bit more interesting. A new \$2.2-million bus transfer center, designed by Dennis Oppenheim, opened in June. Called Bus-Home, it features an arching steel bus shelter [right] that suggests a city bus morphing into a house, playfully evoking the commuter's ultimate destination. Curving forms and the bus motif are repeated throughout the complex, which includes rest rooms, seating, bike racks, an information kiosk and public telephones. Working in conjunction with a local architect, structural and civil engineers, a landscape architect and transit operators, Oppenheim served as lead designer for the entire project.

-Stephanie Cash