

**Country** USA  
**Site Name** 2 Columbus Circle  
**City** New York

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Note: WMF either scanned or retyped this RFA.

## 1. REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE SUMMARY

- 1.1 After completing the RFA form, summarize the site's significance, threats to the site, actions needed to address threats, and the specific project for which assistance is being requested. (300 word limit)

The former Gallery of Modern Art at 2 Columbus Circle has been loved, loathed and hotly debated since its opening in 1964. Although it has no official designation or protection, its prominent location and iconic presence at the base of one of New York City's pre-eminent urban spaces, where Midtown Manhattan meets the Upper West Side, make it universally recognizable as a "landmark." Edward Durell Stone designed 2 Columbus Circle to house the art collection of A&P supermarket heir and philanthropist Huntington Hartford. Stone (1902-1978) is acknowledged as "one of the earliest American exponents of the International Style." Yet, with 2 Columbus Circle, Stone overtly questioned the European-style modernism favored by corporate America in the mid-20th century, referencing historical and classical architectural themes. The building is a prime example of how Stone helped "transform the International Style modernism of the 1950s into the Post-Modernism of the 1960s and 1970s by substituting formalism for functionalism." Architect and historian Robert A.M. Stern has called 2 Columbus Circle one of Stone's masterworks, a world-class building by a world-class architect. 2 Columbus Circle is threatened by wholesale renovations that would obliterate Stone's original design. The prospective owner, the Museum of Arts and Design, has announced plans to gut the interior and replace the building's white-marble facade (including its signature "lollipop" arcade, porthole windows, and upper loggia) with new materials configured to render the structure more transparent and "ephemeral." These threats occur just as an increasing number of organizations and individuals in the architecture, history and design fields are calling for official recognition of 2 Columbus Circle as an important work of an internationally acclaimed architect. Radically altering 2 Columbus Circle would create a gaping void in the record of design and urbanism in the city, state, nation, and world. At the very least, 2 Columbus Circle deserves a public hearing before the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission to determine its merits for official, protected Landmark status. Furthermore, despite claims (arguably overstated) that the facade is irretrievably deteriorated, the prospective owners could adopt a design approach that would lessen the impact on the exterior of the building by renovating in a way that would not jeopardize the facade's signature features. The technology and design expertise exist but, to date, the will is lacking.

## 2. GENERAL SITE INFORMATION

2.1 Name of Site: 2 Columbus Circle

2.2 Location of site (Country, City/Municipality, State): USA, New York, New York

Latitude/Longitude: N/A

2.3 Describe the site's construction history including its first date of construction and the most important changes and modifications to the site over time, with their dates:

2 Columbus Circle was built in 1964 as the Gallery of Modern Art to house the Huntington Hartford collection. The building's white-marble exterior is largely unaltered from the time of construction. The interior has been adapted to accommodate various uses subsequent to the Hartford museum, including the New York Cultural Center (1969-1975) and the offices of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and Tourist Bureau (1980-1998). The City evicted the agency in 1998, leaving the building vacant and all but abandoned.

2.4 Type of site (check the **one** that best applies):

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeological          | <input type="checkbox"/> Dwelling         | <input type="checkbox"/> Military           |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Civic        | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Art / Space |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial              | <input type="checkbox"/> Garden / Park    | <input type="checkbox"/> Religious          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural Landscape      | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial       | <input type="checkbox"/> Townscape          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please describe) |   |   |

2.5 What was the original use of the site? Museum/art gallery

2.6 What is the current use of the site? Vacant

2.7 Is the site on the UNESCO World Heritage List?  yes  no

(if no, proceed to question 2.8)

Listed individually?  yes  no

Included in Designated Area?  yes  no

World Heritage in Danger?  yes  no

Official Site Name:

Date of Inscription:

Inscription Number:

2.8 List national, state and local landmark designations or inscription on other lists that distinguish this site.

The site has no official national, state or local landmark designation, although the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (the State Historic Preservation Office, SHPO) have

received numerous requests for evaluation. The LPC has declined to hold a public hearing, and the SHPO has stated that would proceed with a formal determination of eligibility should there be state or federal involvement (copy of letter enclosed). The National Trust for Historic Preservation included 2 Columbus Circle on its 2004 list of America's "11 Most Endangered Places," and the Preservation League of New York State listed the building among its 2003 "Seven to Save" properties.

### 3. SITE SIGNIFICANCE

- 3.1 Describe the site's significance, including its historic, architectural, cultural, artistic, social or associative values. Specify if the site is unique or is representative of a type of site and, if applicable, what other sites could easily be compared to it. (250 word limit)

2 Columbus Circle represents a critical hinge in the career and thinking of its architect, Edward Durell Stone, one of the very few American architects to have enjoyed an international practice. While it is a unique expression of Modernist style, it has also been compared to the TWA Terminal and Lincoln Center as a prime example of late Modernism. Even people who dislike the building are realizing that it represents a significant moment in the history of Modernism and the styles that followed. Stone was renowned as one of America's earliest and deftest interpreters of the International Style (the A. Conger Goodyear House on Long Island and the Museum of Modern Art, both completed in 1939), but he ultimately revolted and developed a signature style – evident in such work as the US Embassy in New Delhi (1954), the US Pavilion of the Brussels World's Fair Exposition (1958), and 2 Columbus Circle (1964) – that quickly proliferated through his work in Europe, India, Pakistan, the Middle East, and North and South America. Robert A.M. Stern cites 2 Columbus Circle, with its clear classical references, as a forerunner of Post-Modernism, while the Wall Street Journal called it "one of New York's few tangible reminders of America's response to the Cold War." Built as Huntington Hartford's Gallery of Modern Art, the building also embodies a pivotal episode in the history of modern art. It remained a highly regarded focal point of New York's art scene as the New York Cultural Center (1970-1975).

### 4. THREATS TO THE SITE

- 4.1 List the **five (5)** principal threats to the site in order of urgency, beginning with the most urgent. Lists of natural and man-made threats are provided below for your consideration and use.

Threat 1: (Most Urgent) Development Pressures - inappropriate renovation/gross alteration

Threat 2: Lack of Due Process - no Landmarks Commission hearing or determination of eligibility for National or State Register of Historic Places

Threat 3: Inadequate Planning - City's lack of foresight in abandoning the building, was it accepted as a gift in 1980, and failure to perceive its value to future generations

Threat 4: Continued lack of Public Awareness about value of postwar Modernism

## Threat 5: (Less Urgent) Neglect and Inadequate Maintenance

- 4.2 Describe the threats and physical condition of the site. How have the threats negatively impacted the physical condition of the site and its most significant elements, including loss of significant elements that characterize the site? Describe the extent and rate of deterioration. (250 word limit)

2 Columbus Circle is imminently threatened by renovations that would utterly destroy Edward Durell Stone's original design. In 1996, the NYC Economic Development Corporation rejected a proposal by the Dahesh Museum of Art to restore and reuse the building as a museum. In 2002, Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced the Museum of Arts and Design as the designated recipient of the site. The Museum plans to radically alter the building by gutting the interior and replacing the building's white-marble facade (including its signature "lollipop" arcade, porthole windows, and upper loggia) with new materials configured to allow the facade to appear more transparent and "ephemeral." The Museum has been unwilling to consider restoring the building, despite efforts in public and one-on-one meetings to convince them of the building's historic and architectural significance. While they have claimed that the building is seriously deteriorated, they have offered no conclusive proof. In fact, Wiss, Janney, Elstner, structural engineers nationally known for their work on marble-clad facades, provided an affidavit stating that 2 Columbus Circle could be restored without replacing the entire facade. Clearly, the quest to establish a new identity is driving the Museum's decision to destroy 2 Columbus Circle. Despite long vacancy and neglect in the hands of the City of New York, the building's signature features remain intact. The public has only recently begun to embrace the architecture of the recent past. Because 2 Columbus Circle deviates from early, more orthodox Modernism, establishing its significance has been even more challenging. The NYC Landmarks Commission refuses to hold even a public hearing to consider the building's merits for landmark protection.

- 4.3 Describe actions the government, community, and/or other groups have taken to combat the threats listed and described above? What measures are being implemented to protect the site in the immediate and long-term future? Explain the obstacles to implementing effective site protection. (250 word limit)

2 Columbus Circle has been the focus of major advocacy by preservationists and others at the local, state, regional, and national levels. The NYC Landmarks Commission and the NY SHPO have received repeated requests for evaluation of 2 Columbus Circle. Neither agency has taken any formal actions to review the building's significance. Steps to combat threats include volumes of press, rallies, panel discussions, a website, an on-line forum, a postcard campaign, petition-signing, an auction of Stone-related objects that drew tremendous response, meetings with City and Museum officials, participation in hearings regarding the sale of the property, listing on the Preservation League of New York State's "Seven to Save" list and the National Trust for Historic Preservation's "11 Most Endangered" list, and a lawsuit contesting the City's approval of the sale on the basis of inadequate assessment of historic resources. In the late 1990s, the Dahesh Museum of Art proposed to restore and adaptively reuse the building, but their offer was

rejected by the City. Since then, preservationists have met with other cultural institutions that have quietly expressed interest in occupying the building, especially given its renewed prominence in the media. Yet, these institutions, out of courtesy to their colleagues at the Museum of Arts and Design, demur from advertising their interest. The City's ownership of the site and intention to transfer it to an unsympathetic user constitutes the major impediment to protecting the site.

## 5. ACTIONS NEEDED TO ADDRESS THREATS

- 5.1 Has a formal conservation management plan been prepared for the site?  yes  no  
If no, is one currently being prepared?  yes  no  
What is the anticipated date of completion of the plan? (month / year)

If yes, please provide the completion date of the plan. (month / year)

Outline the main points of the plan below. (150 word limit)

- 5.2 Will the current use of the site change?  yes  no  
If yes, summarize the proposed new use? (100 word limit) The building is now vacant.  
The new use will be a museum.

- 5.3 Describe all actions necessary to address the threats to the site and conserve it. (150 word limit)

Preserving 2 Columbus Circle requires a dramatic shift in the design approach for adaptive reuse. To date, the NYC Landmarks Commission has endorsed radical alteration over sensitive alteration by refusing to schedule a public hearing to even consider landmarking the building, the logical first step towards alleviating the threats to the site. Advocacy is also needed to urge the SHPO to make an official determination of National Register eligibility. The Museum must be encouraged to commit to a sympathetic design approach. Alternatively, if the Museum withdraws, a preservation-minded user must be found to restore and revitalize the building. Ideally, this could be accomplished in a face-saving way, with all participants (the City, the new owner, preservation organizations) emerging as preservation heroes.

- 5.4 From the description in 5.3, provide a global budget assigning costs to the immediate and long-term actions needed to address the threats to the site and conserve it. If possible, organize budget information according to phase. All costs should be listed in U.S. dollars.  
N/A

- 5.5 Describe the benefits that will result from the conservation of the site. (150 word limit)

Justifying the benefits of preserving 2 Columbus Circle, Robert A.M. Stern wrote, "New York is where orthodoxies are challenged by new ideas. Two Columbus Circle was just such a challenge, and it clearly challenges us to this day. Its provocations are as important now as ever. It was and is a pot of paint flung in the face of the high Modernist

establishment. For this reason, if no other, Two Columbus Circle must be preserved intact for future generations to enjoy, consider, debate, and learn from.” Preservation through designation and/or a modified design would meet Stern’s challenge. At the very least, a public hearing before the Landmarks Commission would ensure that due process is served. The broader outcome would be a preservation success story that spotlights a post-1950 landmark, leads to greater appreciation of Modern movement architecture and provides a model for future efforts to save buildings that are difficult sells in the current preservation climate.

## **6. REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE**

- 6.1 From the list of actions provided in 5.3, describe the specific project for which support from the World Monuments Fund is being requested? (150 word limit)

Neighborhood, citywide, statewide, regional and national organizations are aligned to preserve 2 Columbus Circle. WMF leadership would take this unified support to the next logical level. Building on its track record of success with “Watch List” properties, especially the A. Conger Goodyear house, WMF could publicly endorse preserving 2 Columbus Circle through letters and press. Because its work transcends local politics, WMF could help find a face-saving way for the City and the Museum to change their path and develop a sensitive reuse proposal. Alternatively, if MAD were to withdraw from the project, WMF could help encourage other cultural institutions to step forward with sympathetic design proposals and assist them in obtaining funding, positive media response, architecture and preservation awards, and national and international acclaim.

- 6.2 Provide a detailed budget, in U.S. dollars, for the requested project described in 6.1.  
N/A

- 6.3 Exact amount of financial support requested in U.S. dollars \$ N/A

## **7. SOURCES OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

- 7.1 List sources of financial assistance received within the last two years. Provide the amount of financial assistance in US dollars and the month and year the financial assistance was received.

*Funding Source, Amount in U.S. dollars, Date Received (month/year)*

N/A

- 7.2 Describe current and potential future efforts to secure financial assistance for conserving the site, including other sources that are currently being approached for financial support. (150 word limit) N/A

- 7.3 Describe how the long-term maintenance for the site is foreseen once the threats are addressed. (150 word limit) N/A

## 8. OWNERSHIP, ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITY AND JURISDICTION OF THE SITE

### 8.1 Ownership of Site

The owner is the governmental agency, public or private organization or private individual(s) who legally retain rights to the site. The owner's approval is desirable but not required to list a site on the World Monuments Watch. The owner's name and address should be included whether or not the organization or individual endorse the RFA.

Is the owner of the property aware of the request for assistance to the World Monuments Fund?  yes  no

Does the owner of the property endorse the request for assistance to the World Monuments Fund?  yes  no

Mr.  Mrs.  Ms.  Dr.

First Name

Robert

Last Name

Kulikowski

Institution/Organization

Office of the Mayor of the City of New York

Institution/Organization's website

www.nyc.gov

Address

100 Gold Street

City, State, Postal Code, Country

New York, NY 10038

Telephone Number

212-788-2937

Fax Number

212-788-2941

E-mail

unavailable

### 8.2 Administrative Responsibility for Site

The governmental agency, public or private organization, or private individual(s) who is responsible for making decisions about the site and administering the actions to protect the site.

Mr.  Mrs.  Ms.  Dr.

First Name

Robert

Last Name

Kulikowski

Institution/Organization

Office of the Mayor of the City of New York

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## 10. RELEASE OF IMAGES

**RFA forms without the release of images will not be considered.**

Images submitted must be clear of copyright restriction. All reproduction rights, releases and/or permissions are the responsibility of the applicant. Images will only be used to promote the site and World Monuments Fund. Images submitted become property of World Monuments Fund and will not be returned.

Credit will read: "WMF/[photographer and/or institution / organization]." If no photographer or institution/ organization is provided in image documentation, credit will read: "WMF."

I, the undersigned, understand the above and give World Monuments Fund permission to reproduce submitted images in its publications (including website) and make images available to the press and educators.

Applicant's Name: Kate Wood, Landmark West!

Applicant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_