



SEVEN TO SAVE

Endangered Properties Program - 2003

Preservation League of New York State
44 Central Avenue, Albany, NY 12206
TEL: 518-462-5658, FAX: 518-462-5684
info@preservenys.org, www.preservenys.org

Goals

- Increase the visibility of the preservation movement and key current issues across New York State
- Educate the public about the tangible and intangible contributions historic preservation makes to communities
- Heighten awareness of the range of threatened historic resources in the state
- Generate enthusiasm and opportunities for preserving these resources by highlighting those threatened
- Mitigate threats and find creative solutions to protect historic resources

Support

- Statewide Publicity: the League will create press releases and other materials and devote part of its newsletter to promote the Seven to Save
- Local Publicity: the League and the nominating organizations will hold publicity events in the locales of the threatened properties
- Technical/Legal: the League will suggest solutions and work with property owners, Preservation Colleagues and other interested parties to alleviate threats
- Financial: listed properties will be given priority for League funding programs

Criteria

- Property must be located in New York State
- Property must be historically and/or architecturally significant (but need not be designated)
- The continued existence and integrity of the property must be seriously threatened
- League involvement in listing the threatened property must be judged to significantly aid in alleviating the threat
- Properties may be illustrative of regional, state and national preservation issues
- Selected properties will reflect diversity of geography, building type, etc.

Program Priorities The League is especially interested in designating endangered properties that may serve as case studies or models of the following issues:

- Historic transportation routes and supporting buildings and structures (bridges, train stations, etc.)
- Historic landscapes, view corridors, open space
- Historic neighborhood schools
- "Main Street" issues such as inappropriate new development and threats to economic vitality
- Downtown disinvestment by government agencies (local, state or federal levels)
- Rural resources including roads, farmsteads, barns, agricultural buildings
- Historic religious properties



SEVEN TO SAVE Endangered Properties Program

Nomination Form – 2003

Preservation League of New York State
44 Central Avenue, Albany, NY 12206-3002
518-462-5658 518-462-5684 (fax)

Postmark Deadline: August 8, 2003

Date: _____

Nominating Organization/Agency: LANDMARK WEST!

Contact Person: Kate Wood, Executive Director

Address: 45 West 67th Street, New York, NY 10023

Telephone: 212-496-8110 (Day) 212-496-8110 (Eve.)

E-mail: katewood@landmarkwest.org

Property Owner: City of New York Contact Name: Robert Kulikowski, Asst. to the Mayor

Address: 100 Gold Street, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10038

Telephone: 212-788-2937 (Day) 212-788-2937 (Eve.)

Property Name: Two Columbus Circle

Address: Two Columbus Circle, New York, NY 10019

County: New York

Property is located in: NYS Senate District Number 26 Senator Liz Krueger

NYS Assembly District Number 75 Assemblyman/woman Richard Gottfried

Physical Condition: Construction Date(s): 1964

Excellent Good X Fair Poor Is this information based on a professional assessment? X Yes No

Explain: A copy of the engineer's report is available on request.

Historic Designation (Check all that apply and please send one copy of the nomination form):

- National Historic Landmark National Register State Register
 Local Designation National Register Eligible (As determined by NYS OPRHP)
 Other (please explain) _____

Nominations should be sent to the League address above and must be postmarked by August 8, 2003.

Contact Lorraine Weiss, Program Manager, with questions: 518-462-5658, ext.12; lweiss@preservenys.org.

- ___ Please provide 10 copies of this form (back-to-back copies are preferred). Do not exceed a total of four, single-sided pages for the original nomination form.
- ___ A nomination **must** be accompanied by no more than five photographs and ten color slides which clearly show the property, its setting, and condition. Include a brief description or script for the slides which will be used during the committee review process.
- ___ Also enclose one copy only of other available documentation that would help provide a complete representation of the site and the challenges to its preservation (feasibility studies, conditions report, newspaper stories, landmark nomination forms, etc.).
- Photographs and slides will be used to publicize a property chosen for the final list. They should be of high quality, identified with the proper credits. By submitting the images, you give the League permission to use the image for any publicity and publication regarding the *Seven to Save* program.
- We regret that we will not be able to return any photos, slides or documentation materials.

1. Briefly state the property's historic and/or architectural significance.

The former Gallery of Modern Art at Two Columbus Circle has been loved, loathed and hotly debated since its opening in 1964. Still controversial after nearly 40 years, it is an undeniably significant part of New York's architectural heritage. Its prominent location at the base of Columbus Circle reinforces its iconic visual quality; although it has no official designation, it is recognized by many New Yorkers and visitors to the city as a "landmark" at this bustling crossroads where Midtown meets the Upper West Side.

Its original purpose was to house A&P heir Huntington Hartford's collection of 19th- and 20th-century representational art, itself an important milestone in the history of art theory because it challenged the prevailing preference for abstract art.

The Gallery of Modern Art was designed by Edward Durell Stone, an internationally acclaimed architect, at a time when he was questioning the Miesian, European-style Modernism favored by corporate America at mid-century. Because of its overt references to historical and classical styles, architect and historian Robert A.M. Stern has called Two Columbus Circle a forerunner of post-Modernism and one of Stone's "masterworks" (a full copy of Stern's February 12, 2003, statement is enclosed). Author and critic Tom Wolfe has called Two Columbus Circle "one of the most important buildings in the history of 20th-century architecture" (a copy of Wolfe's October 2003 *New York Times* editorial is enclosed).

Two Columbus Circle is an innovative, irreplaceable example of mid-century Modernism, the loss of which would create a significant hole in the record of architecture and urbanism in the city, state, nation and, arguably, world.

2. Explain the importance of the property to the community (use, cultural significance, location).

Due to its past use as a cultural center, its (some say) quirky design, and its location at the base of Columbus Circle, Two Columbus Circle is a visual icon in the community. Many New Yorkers loved the building from the outset and fondly remember visiting the building in its former life as a gallery space (see enclosed Timeline – the building has been closed to the public since 1997, when the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs moved out). Some people adamantly dislike the building, although many of them even concede that the building may have historic value or at least urbanistic value, particularly in its relatively low-scale, its softly curved facade that contours to the shape of the circle and its transparent base. Today, it has a growing number of admirers within the architecture, preservation and design communities, as well as among members of the public at large - the growth of this constituency is due, in part, to increasing interest in mid-20th-century design and culture. A genius of the New York City Landmarks Law is that it establishes a 30-year "waiting period" for buildings to be considered for landmark designation, recognizing that some time must pass in order for us to gain perspective on whether a site contributes significantly to our heritage. Two Columbus Circle, along with Edward Durell Stone's later work in general, is just now beginning to gain the appreciation it deserves. Accordingly, over the past nearly 10 years since the building's 30th birthday, numerous groups and individuals have nominated it for landmark status, in keeping with normal Landmarks Preservation Commission procedures.

3. How is this property threatened? (i.e., abandonment, inappropriate development, demolition, loss of visual and architectural integrity, etc.) How would you define a "save?" (Please be specific)

Two Columbus Circle is threatened by massive renovations that would utterly destroy E. D. Stone's original design. The building was given as a gift to the City of New York in 1980 for use as its primary cultural center. In 1996 and 1999, the Economic Development Corporation issued Requests for Proposals in order to sell the property and encourage its redevelopment by a private developer. Among the many respondents to the RFP were the American Craft Museum (now the Museum of Arts and Design) and the Dahesh Museum (an institution devoted to 19th- and 20th-century European academic art), which proposed to rehabilitate the building working with architect Hugh Hardy of Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer. In June 2002, Mayor Michael

Bloomberg announced the Museum of Arts and Design as the designated recipient of the site. In April 2003, the Museum announced 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 be more transparent and "ephemeral". The Museum launched a \$50 million capital campaign to cover the property purchase price and the new building program. According to the Museum, it has raised \$22 million from two major board donors (see 5b). The City has indicated that payment for the property will be deferred for several years to allow the Museum to focus its fundraising on the new building program.

The Museum has demonstrated no willingness to consider preservation and restoration of the building as part of their adaptive reuse plans, despite efforts in public and one-on-one meetings to convince them of the building's historic significance. The City, moreover, approved an Environmental Assessment Statement and Negative Declaration that failed to adequately evaluate Two Columbus Circle as a historic resource that would be impacted by the sale of the property to the Museum (please see enclosed Submission to the City Planning Commission).

No one objects to the idea of a museum occupying and revitalizing Two Columbus Circle. However, a **"save" would require the Museum to totally change its approach and adopt a rehabilitation plan that would have far fewer visible impacts on the exterior of the building and respect its historic integrity.** This shift would perhaps be possible if enough public pressure were brought to bear on the Museum's board, staff and donors to persuade them of the greater sensibility of preservation from a fundraising and public-relations perspective.

Alternatively, a **"save" could involve a disapproval by the Manhattan Borough Board (the last stage in the City's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure) of the sale of the building to the Museum or to any other entity that plans to destroy it.** Achieving such a disapproval would require vigorous lobbying of the Manhattan Borough President, Councilmembers and Community Board representatives who serve on the Borough Board. A disapproval would essentially overturn previous votes by Manhattan Community Board 5, the Manhattan Borough President and the City Planning Commission sanctioning the disposition. The Borough Board hearing could happen as soon as December 2003. If the disposition were disapproved, either the Museum or another user would have to come forward with a revised ULURP application.

Finally, a **"save" would be the designation of Two Columbus Circle as a New York City landmark and listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.** While many advocates have called for a public designation hearing before the Landmarks Preservation Commission to give Two Columbus Circle its "day in court," many organizations and individuals have also recommended its designation. A hearing and subsequent designation would demonstrate the kind of attitude shift, or climate change, that must take place within the government administration and any future institution that seeks to occupy the building in order for Two Columbus Circle to be treated with the respect and sensitivity it deserves.

4. How can the threat be eliminated?

The threat to Two Columbus Circle can be eliminated through advocacy and education that raises awareness, generates publicity, shows the City's decision-makers that the issue will not "just go away," and ultimately brings about the attitude shift described above. In addition, LANDMARK WEST!, together with other organizations and individuals, is committed to taking necessary legal action to challenge improper aspects of the process by which Two Columbus Circle is being disposed of by the City and compelling those aspects to be revised.

5. a. Who are the stakeholders and community members who are willing to help in the property's preservation?

Leading preservation advocacy organizations, including the Preservation League of New York State, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, DOCOMOMO (US and New York Tri-State Chapters), the Municipal Art Society, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Historic Districts Council, and

LANDMARK WEST!, have urged the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission to calendar a public hearing to consider whether Two Columbus Circle merits designation as a New York City landmark. We consider these groups, along with the many individuals who have written letters and attended public forums about Two Columbus Circle, partners in this preservation effort since each one has expressed concern, in so many words, about the lack of "due process" in the City's treatment of this vital resource. (A full list of organizations and individuals who support the preservation and/or further study of the building's historic merits is enclosed.) People have been writing to Landmarks Preservation Commission since at least 1996 (shortly after the building turned 30 years old and became eligible for landmark designation), when the Commission says its internal Designation Committee met and reviewed Two Columbus Circle's potential for landmark status and declined to recommend it for a public hearing before the full Commission.

- b. Is there an identifiable organization, municipal office or business interest opposed to the property's preservation?

Based on information and belief, the parties that would be opposed to "saving" Two Columbus Circle would include the Museum of Arts and Design and the Economic Development Corporation. The two Museum board members who gave sizable gifts towards the new building program are Jerome A. Chazen, Chairman of the Museum's Capital Campaign (\$12 million) and Nanette Laitman, President of the Board (\$10 million). In addition, several groups and individuals have written letters and/or testified against preserving the building, including Aaron Betsky, Director of the Netherlands Architecture Institute; Frederic Papert, President of the 42nd Street Development Corporation; Donald Oresman, former counsel to Gulf & Western Industries (the Gulf & Western Foundation gave Two Columbus Circle to the City in 1980); Monica Blum, President of the Lincoln Square Business Improvement District; and several architects (copies of available letters enclosed). In the on-line forum sponsored by LANDMARK WEST! (transcript enclosed), Museum of Modern Art Curator Terence Riley also spoke out against saving Two Columbus Circle at the expense of a potentially great new design. Other parties, such as Mayor Bloomberg, the City Planning Commission and Community Board 5, have exhibited support of the Museum's proposal. However, we do not know that they would actively oppose preservation of Two Columbus Circle.

6. What role have you or your group played thus far in eliminating the threat?

LANDMARK WEST! has spearheaded efforts to preserve Two Columbus Circle for the past several years. We helped organize a rally in front of the building in 2000; we testified at a March 2001 oversight hearing before the New York City Council's Economic Development Committee, as well as at more-recent ULURP hearings; we have written letters to the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Mayor Michael Bloomberg, and Deputy Mayor Daniel Doctoroff, among others (copies enclosed); we have galvanized community support and participation through frequent e-mail alerts and an extensive postcard campaign in December 2002; we co-sponsored a February 2003 panel discussion that assembled a group of well-respected architects, preservationists and critics to discuss the future of Two Columbus Circle (press release enclosed); we organized an innovative on-line forum moderated by architecture critic Paul Goldberger in June 2003 (press release enclosed); we have met with elected officials as well as representatives from the Museum; and we have retained legal counsel to scrutinize the disposition process.

7. List the actions you think the League could take to help alleviate the threat. (Please be specific)

The Preservation League of New York State could help alleviate the threats to Two Columbus Circle by stepping up its advocacy to impart public visibility and legitimacy to the issue and the building. The listing of Two Columbus Circle on the League's Seven to Save list would build on the solid expression of support for a public designation hearing expressed in its May 28, 2003, letter to the Landmarks Preservation Commission and reinforce the widely held belief that the building is a resource worthy of preservation.

On the flip side of its public involvement, the League could also help by quietly working behind the scenes to lobby the decision-makers who now hold the future of this building in their hands, including elected officials and the representatives of the Museum itself. This preservation effort would greatly benefit from

the League's strategic input and ability to generate broad publicity through events, such as rallies, and publications.

By establishing an even closer partnership with the League on this issue, we hope to strengthen the reality and outward impression of a unified force committed to doing whatever it takes to save this important modern landmark.