

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, main floor interior consisting of the entrance vestibule, the Great Hall, the passageway connecting the Great Hall with the Grand Staircase, the corridors which flank the Grand Staircase at the north and south; the Grand Staircase leading from the main floor to the second floor; second floor interior consisting of the halls and balconies encircling the Great Hall and the Grand Staircase, and all vaults and domes above these halls and balconies and above the Great Hall; Fifth Avenue at 82nd Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1895-1902; architects Richard Morris Hunt and Richard Howland Hunt, consulting architect George B. Post.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1111, Lot 1 in part consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On September 20, 1977, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, main floor interior consisting of the entrance vestibule, the Great Hall, the passageway connecting the Great Hall with the Grand Staircase, the corridors which flank the Grand Staircase at the north and south; the Grand Staircase leading from the main floor to the second floor; second floor interior consisting of the halls and balconies encircling the Great Hall and the Grand Staircase, and all vaults and domes above these halls and balconies and above the Great Hall; and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 6). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has expressed its approval of this designation. The Commission has also received a number of communications expressing support for the designation.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the most renowned institution of its kind in the United States and one of the finest art museums in the world, occupies an imposing complex of buildings --a designated New York City Landmark-- on Fifth Avenue at 82nd Street. The grandeur of the structure and its magnificent interior spaces--in particular, the Great Hall and the Grand Staircase--are a fitting complement to the greatness of the institution.

The Metropolitan Museum had its beginnings in 1866 when John Jay, an eminent New York lawyer and a grandson of the first chief Justice, addressing a group of Americans celebrating Independence Day in Paris suggested that it was "time for the American people to lay the foundations of a National Institution and Gallery of Art." A group of New Yorkers who were present determined to work through the Union League Club towards such a goal. On November 23, 1869, the Metropolitan Museum of Art was founded at a meeting at the Union League Club with William Cullen Bryant presiding. It was incorporated on April 13, 1870, by an act of the State Legislature. Among the founding members were a number of men notable in the literary and artistic affairs of the city--William Cullen Bryant, Frederic E. Church, Richard Morris Hunt, Eastman Johnson, John F. Kensett, Frederick Law Olmsted, George P. Putnam, Russell Sturgis, and John Quincy Adams Ward.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art was first opened to the public on February 17, 1872, in temporary quarters in the Dodsworth Building at 681 Fifth Avenue. In 1873 the museum moved to larger accommodations in the Douglas Mansion, 128 West 14th Street. Meanwhile the present site of the museum in Central Park had been chosen in 1872, largely at the urging of Andrew Haswell Green, president of the Central Park Commission and a founder of the Metropolitan Museum. Ground for the new museum building was broken in 1874, but construction did not begin until 1877. This first building was designed by Calvert Vaux and Jacob Wrey Mould, the architects of the bridges and other structures within Central Park, working with the building committee of the museum--which consisted of Richard Morris Hunt, James Renwick, and Russell Sturgis. Vaux and Mould also devised a master plan for the future expansion of the museum. Because the museum did not have

sufficient funds to construct a new building, an arrangement was made with the City of New York to pay for it with public monies, the City retaining legal ownership of the museum building while the trustees of the museum retained ownership and control of the collections. This became the pattern which was followed by most of the major art museums in America. The new building in the park was formally opened on March 30, 1880, with President Rutherford B. Hayes presiding.

As the collections of the museum increased and the institution expanded its activities, two new wings were added to the original building. The south wing, designed by architect Theodore Weston, was built in 1884-88, while the north wing, designed by Weston in collaboration with architect Arthur L. Tuckerman, was built in 1889-94. Again the City of New York paid for the new structures.

No sooner had the north wing been completed in 1894, than the museum trustees began to plan for a further extension of the building. The State Legislature passed an act on April 16, 1895, authorizing the City of New York to expend one million dollars for a new building. Richard Morris Hunt, chairman of the museum building committee, was given the commission to plan this new structure, as well as to produce a new master plan for the future expansion of the museum.

Richard Morris Hunt (1828-1895), the foremost American architect of the second half of the 19th century, was also among the most influential. He was the first American to study at the famed Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, completing his work there in 1853. After working for a year under Hector Martin Lefuel as an inspector of construction on additions to the Louvre, he returned to the United States. He set up his own practice in New York in 1857. At the urging of a number of his younger friends Hunt established an atelier in 1858 to train them in the Beaux-Arts principles of architecture. Among Hunt's students were George B. Post, Charles D. Gambrill, Henry Van Brunt, William R. Ware, and Frank Furness. These men were, in turn, to become influential leaders in the American architectural profession. Also following Hunt's example, many Americans went to Paris to study architecture at the Ecole in the second half of the 19th century.

In the first twenty years of his career Hunt achieved success in the design of institutional and commercial structures, one of which was the Tribune Building (1873), an early elevator office building. His Stuyvesant Apartments of 1869 was the first apartment house of note in the city. Hunt is most often remembered, however, as the architect of a series of handsome mansions for wealthy and prominent members of New York society. His first such commission, the William K. Vanderbilt House (1878-79) at 660 Fifth Avenue introduced the François I style of the French Renaissance to the United States. He continued to design residences in New York and Newport for such clients as Ogden Goelet, O.H.P. Belmont, Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt, Elbridge T. Gerry, and John Jacob Astor until his death. "Biltmore" (1890) at Asheville, North Carolina, was designed for George W. Vanderbilt. One of Hunt's last and most important designs was the central Administration Building at the World's Columbian Exhibition of 1893 in Chicago. Among his important public structures are the base of the Statue of Liberty, a designated New York City Landmark, the Lenox Library in New York (demolished), the Fogg Museum at Harvard University, and the National Observatory in Washington, D.C., as well as the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Hunt was one of the founders of the American Institute of Architects, its first secretary (1857-60), and its third president (1888-91). Through the A.I.A. he did much to promote architecture as a profession in this country. Not only was Hunt a founder of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but he also served as a trustee until his death. He took a special interest in building up the museum's collection of architectural casts. In tribute to Hunt's services to the profession of architecture and to the arts, a monument was placed on Fifth Avenue facing the Lenox Library in 1898. It was designed by architect Bruce Price with sculpture by Daniel Chester French.

In his plan for the Metropolitan Museum, Hunt designed a grand structure based on Classical Roman prototypes. It was to be built east of the three structures already standing, orienting the museum towards Fifth Avenue rather than the park. Hunt's death on July 31, 1895, delayed the course of construction.

The trustees, apparently with some reluctance, according to Hunt's widow Catherine Clinton Howland Hunt, eventually determined that Hunt's design for the new building would be carried out by Richard Howland Hunt, Richard M. Hunt's son. George B. Post was appointed consulting architect.

Richard Howland Hunt (1862-1931) became associated with his father's architectural firm following his studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. One of the major commissions of his career was the completion of his father's design for the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He also continued the family association with the Vanderbilt family as the architect of "Idlehour," W.K. Vanderbilt's estate in Oakdale, Long Island; a residence for George W. Vanderbilt at 647 Fifth Avenue, now a designated New York City Landmark, done in association with his brother Joseph Howland Hunt; and Kissam Hall at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee. He also designed Quintard and Hoffman Halls at Sewanee University, Sewanee, Tennessee, and residences for such prominent New Yorkers as Howard Gould, and Mrs. O.H.P. Belmont. Richard joined with Joseph to form the architectural firm of Hunt & Hunt in 1901. Richard was active in the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the Architectural League of New York, and the Beaux-Arts Society of Architects.

George B. Post (1837-1913), a civil engineering graduate of New York University, received his architectural training in the atelier of Richard Morris Hunt. His first architectural firm with Charles D. Gambrill was dissolved because of his service in the Civil War. An early commission, the Williamsburgh Savings Bank, Brooklyn (1870-75), a designated New York City Landmark, was one of the first banks in the country to be built in the neo-Renaissance style. Post, however, achieved his greatest success in the design of business buildings, among them the New York Produce Exchange (1881-84); the New York Cotton Exchange (1883-86); the New York Times Building on Park Row (1889); the St. Paul Building (1897-99), the highest structure in the city when built; and the New York Stock Exchange (1903-04). He also won acclaim for the design of the Long Island Historical Society (1878-80), the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Buildings at the Chicago World's Columbian Exhibition (1893), the plan and early buildings of the campus of the City College of New York (1902-11), and the design of the Wisconsin State Capitol (begun 1904). Like the Hunts, he had an association with the Vanderbilts, designing the Cornelius Vanderbilt residence at 57th Street and Fifth Avenue (1879-82, 1891-94). It is likely that Post was appointed consulting architect on the Metropolitan Museum project because of his previous association with Hunt and because of his engineering expertise. Post was active in the affairs of the New York Architectural League and the American Institute of Architects, serving as president from 1896 to 1899.

Excavation work for the foundations of the new Fifth Avenue wing for the museum was begun in 1897, and above grade construction began in 1898. Although structural work was completed by the end of 1901, the building was not opened to the public until December 22, 1902, because display cases had to be built and exhibits installed. Following the opening the New York Evening Post (December 23, 1902) called the museum "the most noteworthy building of its kind in the city, one of the finest in the world, and the only public building of recent years which approaches in dignity and grandeur the museums of the old world."

Even before the new structure was opened, the New York Times (October 24, 1899) commented on the interior. The reporter wrote: "To say that this interior is of a surprising degree of architectural beauty and magnificence is to state the case very mildly. . . .the great staircase and large hall are unlike anything else in the city, but are as large, finely proportioned, and elaborate in decoration as the great court of the Louvre and the staircase of the National Gallery in London."

One enters the museum at the main floor after ascending the steps leading from Fifth Avenue and passing through the central one of three great arches. The entrance vestibule is given particular distinction by the curved walls at the north and south ends with large blind openings set in the curves of the walls. Each opening has an eared enframement surmounted by a cornice set on console brackets. A large tablet commemorating J.P. Morgan, third president of the museum, is placed at the north end. The ceiling is adorned by a dentiled cornice.

From the entrance vestibule one passes through a colonnade into the Great Hall, a vast and imposing interior space. The use of warm-toned Indiana limestone and the carefully-designed ornamental detail give the room distinction and character. The Great Hall rises two stories beneath three saucer domes with circular skylights. A gallery in the form of a balcony at the second floor enhances the sense of spaciousness as do the colonnades at each side of the room at the main floor. Each colonnade is composed of four fluted columns with Ionic capitals. The columns support an entablature which continues around the room at the level of the gallery. Ornamental panels with acorns and sunflowers adorn the frieze of the entablature and a dentiled cornice surmounts it. This in turn supports a limestone balcony railing with pierced stone panels which encircles the room at the second floor. Among the distinctive features at the main floor are four ornamental niches set in the bases of the piers in the east and west walls, originally designed for statues. Each arched niche has a keystone incorporating scallop and conch shell motifs. The arch is flanked by large brackets adorned with swags and resting on acorns. The brackets support a pediment containing a cartouche set above ornamental fruit motifs.

The Great Hall is subdivided into three bays by piers carrying arches which support the three saucer domes. The arches, which rise above dentiled cornices acting as pier capitals, are outlined by bead-and-reel and leaf-and-tongue moldings. The pendentives of each dome are paneled, while leaf-and-tongue moldings and a series of closely spaced brackets with egg-and-dart moldings above and between them encircle the base of each dome. The original brackets were larger, more elaborate, and linked by swags, but during alteration work in the 1930s the brackets were changed to their present form. The skylights in the domes are encircled by wreath moldings and Greek fret motifs.

Two transverse passageways open up at the north and south ends of the Great Hall behind the screens of columns. The stone and plaster walls are adorned by handsome dentiled cornices at the ceiling.

The transverse passageway which connects the Great Hall with the Grand Staircase behind the western colonnade has limestone walls and a dentiled ceiling cornice. Very deep round arches with panels in the reveals are set in the side walls. Two openings lead to the corridors which flank the Grand Staircase at the north and south. The enframements of these openings have deep paneled reveals, and they are surmounted by cornices carried on console brackets.

In the north and south corridors there is one arch in each which opens onto the hallway of the Grand Staircase, and a series of arches, most of which are now blind, lines the walls. Both corridors are adorned by dentiled ceiling cornices.

The Grand Staircase, contained within a long narrow hallway, rises in a broad sweep from the main floor to the second floor with a landing at mid point. The walls lining the stairs are rusticated. At main floor level they are punctuated by two arched openings leading to the north and south corridors which parallel the stair hallway. The rustication keyed to the arches enhances these openings. At the second floor an arcade opens out above the staircase onto side galleries with five arches on each side. Each arch enframement is adorned with flower motifs as are the bracketed keystones. The outer arches are flanked by paired engaged columns and have handsome spandrel panels with carved figures of angels blowing trumpets. This sculpture was executed by Karl Bitter, the artist who so often collaborated with Hunt. The spandrels of the inner arches have wreaths and laurel branches. These arches are flanked by engaged fluted columns with stylized Corinthian capitals which support a continuous entablature with modillioned cornice, above which rises a barrel-vaulted ceiling. A large arch at the east end of the stair hallway has an enframement which extends down to the level of the second floor. Its keystone consists of a carved female head. At the landing and in the transverse corridor at the top of the stairs a series of arches rising from piers defines the spaces and provides access to the side galleries which open on the stairs. Above the landing the coved ceiling has a central panel once containing a skylight, which is outlined by a laurel wreath. The two side galleries at the north and south, and set behind the open arcade, lead back to the balconied main gallery which encircles the Great Hall at the second floor level.

Access to these side galleries from the main gallery is through two openings flanking the large arch at the east end of the stair hallway. The enframing of each arch is surmounted by an arched pediment set on a rectangular panel flanked by brackets with floral motifs.

The ceiling above the main gallery at the second floor is vaulted with arches rising from the same piers which carry the saucer domes above the Great Hall. Large blind arches adorn the walls. The limestone arch enframements are outlined with egg-and-dart and leaf-and-tongue moldings. On the east wall large tripartite window openings with rectilinear grillwork are set in the arches. Handsome bands of marble define the patterns of the floors at both the main floor and the second floor.

These interior spaces at the main floor and the second floor are vital parts of the Metropolitan Museum of Art complex. Virtually all visitors to the museum pass through these spaces en route to the various exhibition galleries. Their grandeur enriches the visitor's experience, and they are a fitting introduction to the works of art in the galleries beyond.

Following the completion of this section, the museum continued to expand. As the collections grew in quantity and quality, additional space to house them continued to be a necessity. Adapting Hunt's master plan to a new one of their own, the architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White was responsible for many of the new museum additions. These include four units on Fifth Avenue adjacent to Hunt's entrance wing, built in 1906-11, 1910-13, 1914-17, and 1914-26. The firm also designed the first library wing, built 1901-10--replaced in 1962-65 by the present library designed by Brown, Lawford & Forbes--and the Morgan Wing (1908-10). Also of interest is the American Wing (1922-24), designed by Grosvenor Atterbury, which incorporates in a courtyard the facade of the Old Assay Office Building.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art was designated a New York City Landmark on June 9, 1967. In that same year as the museum approached its one hundredth anniversary the trustees commissioned a Master Architectural Plan from the firm of Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo & Associates. As part of this plan the Fifth Avenue entrance and steps were redone and the Great Hall refurbished in 1969-70. New wings to house important new collections were planned on the park side of the building. The Lehman Pavilion was opened in 1975, while the wing to house the Temple of Dendur and the expanded American Wing are still under construction. New wings are also planned to house 20th century art and primitive art.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, one of the country's most prestigious cultural institutions, continues to play a vital role in the artistic life of New York City. Its grand interiors are a tribute to the talents of Richard Morris Hunt, one of this country's most important architects, and are symbolic of the greatness of the museum.

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Metropolitan Museum of Art, main floor interior consisting of the entrance vestibule, the Great Hall, the passageway connecting the Great Hall with the Grand Staircase, the corridors which flank the Grand Staircase at the north and south; the Grand Staircase leading from the main floor to the second floor; second floor interior consisting of the halls and balconies encircling the Great Hall and the Grand Staircase, and all vaults and domes above these halls and balconies and above the Great Hall, have a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the interior spaces of the Metropolitan Museum of Art at the main floor and second floor linked by the great stairway are vital parts of the Museum complex; that the grandeur of the Museum structure and its magnificent interior spaces are a fitting complement to the greatness of the institution; that these grand interiors are a tribute to the talent of Richard Morris Hunt, one of the leading architects of this country; that the Museum occupies an imposing and architecturally distinctive complex of buildings in a prominent location on Fifth Avenue; that the Museum is the most renowned institution of its kind in the United States and one of the finest art museums in the world; and that the Museum is a vital part of the artistic life of New York City.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as an Interior Landmark the Metropolitan Museum of Art, main floor interior consisting of the entrance vestibule, the Great Hall, the passageway connecting the Great Hall with the Grand Staircase, the corridors which flank the Grand Staircase at the north and south; the Grand Staircase leading from the main floor to the second floor; second floor interior consisting of the halls and balconies encircling the Great Hall and the Grand Staircase, and all vaults and domes above these hall and balconies and above the Great Hall; Fifth Avenue at 82nd Street, and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1111, Lot 1 which contains the land on which the described building is situated.