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Louise Mirreux, President
New-York Historical Society
170 Central Park West
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Dear Louise Mirreux,

I have had an exchange of letters with Linda Ferber regarding the Society's announced plans; however, since you chaired the public meeting on January 31, at which the Society's architect described some of what you plan to do, I think that I should address my questions and comments arising from that meeting to you.

My chief question is: in light of your need for additional exhibition space, a need underscored in Linda's letter to me and again at the meeting, how does the described plan address that need? By putting a restaurant in the northeast corner of the building's first floor, you will radically reduce the space that traditionally has been available for temporary exhibitions. By restructuring the central part of the first floor into an orientation gallery, into which the entrance from Central Park West will open directly, you reduce the galleries used for temporary exhibitions even more substantially. If I understand and remember correctly the plan shown us, space for temporary exhibitions will be confined to the south flank of the building in perhaps half the amount of space devoted to the slavery exhibition now on view. Will other space be found? If so, where?

I also have a question about what can be exhibited appropriately in an orientation gallery that will also serve as an entrance hall, opening directly onto the street. Because it will have to serve various practical functions, as well as simply be a place where visitors will be coming and going, and so on, I can not imagine that it will be a sympathetic place for contemplating works of art, or paying serious attention to the content of more historically focussed exhibitions. If I am right in thinking that such a multi-purpose entrance hall/gallery will not provide a suitable environment for showing major paintings and other works of art from your very distinguished collections, I think it right to ask whether additional gallery space will be made available elsewhere to allow more of the permanent collection to be on view.

My chief comment is that the apparent proposed reduction of space for your exhibition program is surely something that the Society does not really intend to happen. I expect that the lost space will be compensated for by space made available by new construction, something not discussed in Wednesday's meeting. As I wrote to Linda, I think that most people would not be opposed to your making use of the former garden for an extension to house needed gallery space, if such an extension were appropriate to the site and the neighbourhood, but everyone fears that something much more is in the works.

My second comment is that an institution your size does not need two entrances. Many larger museums, with much higher attendance, make do with one. Each entrance requires a certain amount of space for corridors and for ancillary activities such as information desk, ticket sales, and so on. Currently, after entering by the Central Park West entrance, I am repeatedly struck by how under-utilized the grander interior behind the entrance on 77th Street seems to be, and by the amount of manpower required by the need to staff two entrances. Until fairly recently, for most of the many years I have been visiting the Society,