



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
361 Central Park West
March 3, 2020**

LANDMARK WEST! is a not-for-profit community organization committed to the preservation of the architectural heritage of the Upper West Side.

The Certificate of Appropriateness Committee wishes to comment on 361 Central Park West, a Beaux Arts Classical style church designed by Carrere & Hastings and built in 1899-1903. The application is to construct additions, replace stained glass and other special windows, alter entrances and replace doors, install signage and excavate at the cellar.

The LANDMARK WEST! Certificate of Appropriateness Committee looked forward to this hearing since The Real Deal announced on January 2, 2018 that the Children's Museum of Manhattan (CMOM) had become the third owner of this individual landmark since its designation. Two years later, much has changed from our initial discussions in regards to the organization's wants and needs. An institution, which has come of age in an historic district carve-out, in a religious building built for different purpose, with a lengthy signature ramp entrance, and windows blinded, blocking all natural daylight covered in advertisements, now owns an individual landmark. They seek to scrub religious associations, eliminate ramps, and have become fixated on daylight as the born-again horsepower to their mission. The heart can be fickle.

While we remain hopeful for a return to those original visions and promises of stewardship, we are also hopeful that this team of experts can solve this problem with a design that both serves the Museum and the Landmark alike.

There are some inventive parts of the proposed design, but our concerns still outweigh them. The Committee's apprehensions are serious not only because of the stature of this landmark but the precedent it may set for other sun setting religious facilities along our historic Central Park West corridor.

Iconography aside, wholesale removal of the art glass under the argument that "these medallions contain religious leaves" is disingenuous and would set a new level of liberal interpretation, if the LPC were to approve. Unfortunately in 2020 we are left discussing a challenged 1974 designation report listing John La Farge once more. In the months and years following the 2014 hearing much research transpired regarding the glass; experts were engaged, and attempts were made to discuss findings with the LPC, yet the public was repeatedly rebuffed. Although documentation was provided, Commissioners today are asked by the applicant to rely upon a report by Femenella & Associates, however this report contradicts Femenella's own record at the BSA in December of 2015. With a flawed 2-page designation report, and without the LPC's research expertise, which Femenella findings should be considered?

As for the windows, cost isn't a concern: the applicant is willing to negotiate, document, clean, secure, remove, art pack, ship, deliver and install for a new recipient at no charge, as well as commission, fabricate and install clear-glazed bronze replacements. Why toss them out like three-day old refrigerator art?

The proposal, for a cultural institution to shirk its stewardship of the collective cultural heritage is unfortunately less shocking as cultural guideposts like the New York Public Library, and MoMA have recently set the standard, and Lincoln Center, the Frick and others are closely following suit. One has to wonder how site-specific elements, created and envisioned as part of a specific setting and context, serve a similarly equivalent or even legible purpose in warehouse crates, or half way across the country, or across the globe—all current one-way itineraries for the UWS's artistic heritage.

The First Church of Christ, Scientist served upwards of two thousand faithful at a time with an innovative building that worked naturally. The Children's Museum can surely serve hundreds upon hundreds expected with their projected doubled attendance thanks to the lighting services of Tillotson.

The LANDMARK WEST! Certificate of Appropriateness Committee supports the Children's Museum of Manhattan in their efforts to return this individual landmark to public use but feels the proposed alterations to the glazing are not only unnecessary, but too numerous and significant, deleteriously impacting the many fine architectural details which give this building its great distinction. We urge the Full Board to disapprove of the removal of the historic art glass.