

# Metropolitan Museum to Expand In Park and Revamp Collections

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is about to embark on a major new construction program and the most comprehensive plan for its growth and expansion in its 97-year history. The construction will be in Central Park, within boundaries previously allotted by the city.

The new program, to be announced in the museum's annual report on Oct. 16, will be based on an exhaustive study and reorganization of the Metropolitan's vast collections. The master plan that will result is intended to guide the museum's policy and development for the rest of the century.

The entire project, from study to construction, has been given to the architectural firm of Kevin Roche and John G. Dinkeloo, successors to the office of the late Eero Saarinen. It

According to Thomas P. F. Hoving, director of the Metropolitan, two building projects have been given immediate priority. The first is the installation of the Temple of Dendur, the architectural refugee from the Aswan Dam construction in the United Arab Republic, a prize awarded to the Metropolitan by a Presidential commission after keen competition among leading United States institutions. The second is the expansion of the American wing, where only a sampling of the

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# Metropolitan Museum Will Expand Into Park and Revamp Its Collections

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American collections of paintings, sculpture, furnishings and decorative arts are now on view.

The Temple of Dendur will be housed over the north parking lot, connecting directly with the Egyptian sculpture court. The site for the expanded American wing is still undecided, as is all future construction. Architectural plans will grow out of the evolving program.

Only two factors are certain now. One is the area in which any expansion can take place, a section of Central Park designated by an agreement between the Department of Parks and the Metropolitan Museum under state enabling legislation in 1876. The other is the nature of the new construction, which will be totally unlike the museum's massive, 1901 Beaux Arts monument by Richard Morris Hunt.

## A Delicate Procedure

The land specified for museum use in the original agreement extends from 79th to 86th Street, and from Fifth Avenue to Central Park's east drive. It has never been completely built on.

Mr. Hoving points out that the museum's huge classical building now turns its back on the park and is surrounded by a mix of unattractive and poorly organized park uses that include service roads, standard playgrounds and inadequate landscaping.

He conceded in an interview yesterday that the question of expansion in the park is a delicate one. Through his past experience as the city's Parks Commissioner, Mr. Hoving is particularly aware of battles over "encroachment."

"We have to be of the utmost sensitivity," he said. "Anything we build will be, in some manner, a sympathetic extension of the park. We would be very lacking in sensitivity not to solve the problem that way."

## An 'Architectural Landscape'

Mr. Hoving and Mr. Roche both stressed that the new plans would be a blend of landscape and building. Work in progress in other parts of the country by the Roche-Dinkeloo firm shows an unconventional synthesis of these elements, a factor that was influential in its selection by the museum.

Mr. Roche's design for the Oakland Museum, for example, now approaching completion, is being watched as a potential breakthrough in museum design. It is a series of connecting courts, often depressed below ground level, enclosed by galleries and arcades softened and united by planting. A kind of "architectural landscape" is created, which also provides changing spaces and environments for the exhibitions.

"You have a choice of movement," Mr. Roche explained,



Kevin Roche, left, and John G. Dinkeloo, the architects

"with spaces that are terminal points and with courts and trees between rooms. You have a sense of urgency to rush through a series of identical spaces. The traditional gallery is continuous movement, like a race course."

"All those doors," Mr. Hoving interjected.

"You can organize collections so they become more meaningful," Mr. Roche continued. "There are certain turning points in the history of man that are like tremendous anchors, around which works of art revolve. We want to approach the collections in that sense."

The initial study and programming is expected to take about a year. The master plan will require two or three years after that.

## Funds Are Voted

No time schedule or cost estimates for the whole project have been made. An initial \$25,000 has been voted by the museum's board of trustees to start the job and retain the architects. A rough estimate for

the first, or programming phase, is about \$250,000.

The museum's land and buildings belong to the city because the Metropolitan is considered a quasi-public institution. According to the museum's charter, the city pays for construction. Traditionally, the city's contribution varies.

In the last capital budget, the museum received \$125,000 for study and designs for new construction, which included provisions for the Temple of Dendur. This was matched by museum funds. The construction cost of just under \$2.5-million of the recent Thomas J. Watson Library wing was shared equally by the museum and the city. Substantial construction funds are usually provided by the museum's board of trustees.

"This is a matter for nego-

tiation with the city," Mr. Hoving said.

Part of the program will be to return some of the dimmed glories of the Hunt building to their original state of grandeur.

"The building is a work of art," Mr. Hoving declared. "Archivists are doing research on the main hall now. It will be cleaned, restored, and lighted as architecture. We can't replace the 32 bronze urns that were melted down for the war effort, but the doghouse at the entrance will go."

At present, only about 50 percent of the museum's total holdings are on view.

"This plan is for our future," Mr. Hoving said. "We will be going through a massive reappraisal for changing times, needs and objectives."