

turning a well-meant gift horse into a white elephant. In addition, a proper visitors center has long been projected as a need and a revitalizer for the heart of the theatrical district to which tourists are normally attracted.

If the Department of Cultural Affairs is to be combined with a visitors center, the marriage might better have been consummated in the Times Square area, where it would reinforce the theater district, as well. More help is needed than one brave private group that has rescued a West 42d Street theater block and is now eyeing some of the once-splendid defectors to smut. Culture is as culture does.

There is little question about the civic spirit of Gulf & Western's fine gesture. But this seems like one more maverick solution for the albatross of Columbus Circle, rather than a constructive planning effort.

Cultural Center

There is good news for the little seraglio on Columbus Circle that started life as the abortive Gallery of Modern Art and has been empty and abandoned for over a year. Its near-neighbor, Gulf & Western Industries, is rescuing it from a fate worse than demolition by buying it for the city to use for the new Department of Cultural Affairs and an exhibition and tourist center.

The building has always been a maverick. In its second incarnation it was an offbeat exhibition center for Fairleigh Dickinson University, but the maintenance costs proved prohibitively high. Located on a small and constricted site, it has always been a better traffic island than museum.

Its third incarnation also raises doubts. There are discrepancies between past operating costs and projections for the future that could perform the zoological feat of

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