

Washington's National Gallery Engages Pei for New Building

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

The National Gallery of Art announced plans yesterday to construct a large building adjacent to its classical landmark on Constitution Avenue, on one of Washington's most important sites, the junction of Pennsylvania Avenue and the Mall.

The architect will be Ieoh Ming Pei, a leading modernist who is currently working on the John F. Kennedy Library in Cambridge, Mass. The present National Gallery, a marble monument by John Russell Pope, helped set Washington's Graeco-Roman style of the nineteen-twenties and thirties.

Authorization for the new construction was signed by the President on July 5. Paul Mellon and Mrs. Mellon Bruce have given \$20-million for the project.

The National Gallery addition will rise on a 4.9-acre plot on the Capitol side of the existing building. The program calls for a completely 20th-century museum in form and function — less a repository of great art than a place for new ideas to generate.

The addition will emphasize changing exhibitions, extension services and education. There will be an extensive library and a Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts.

"This will be the working part of the museum," Mr. Pei said. "It will be completely different in purpose and appearance from the present building."

A primary objective stated by the National Gallery is a sympathetic relationship between the old and new structures. The architect will also consult with the Pennsylvania Avenue Commission, responsible for the planning of the Avenue from the White House to the Capitol.

"We are counting on Mr. Pei's sensitivity to the strength of the existing building and the quality of its detailing, as well as his general awareness of environment," said J. Carter Brown, the gallery's acting director. Asked whether the National Gallery's classicism would be a stylistic restraint, Mr. Pei replied, "We look at history as a continuous flow."

Mr. Pei was born in China in 1917 and educated at Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is a member of the National Council on the Humanities and of New York City's Urban Design Council. He has built two other museums, the Everson Museum in Syracuse and an addition to the Des Moines Art Center. He has designed two apartment groups in New York, Kips Bay and University Plaza south of Washington Square.

Programing for the National Gallery addition will begin immediately, with design to follow. Completion is set tentatively for 1973.