

Metropolitan Museum to Get Costly New Facade

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is about to begin a major face-lifting of its 66-year-old, 1,200-foot Fifth Avenue front.

The remodeling, which will cost \$1.6-million, will include the removal of the doghouse that has been a temporary draft deterrent at the front door since the building opened in 1902, the use of an air curtain instead of entrance doors, and the installation of broad, new approach steps of plaza-like dimensions. These will be part of the complete redesign of the area fronting the museum along Fifth Avenue from 80th to 85th Street.

The steps, terraced in wide, flat stages to the sidewalk and street, will replace the existing carriage drive. They will be flanked to the north and south by fountains, each 100 feet long and 15 feet high. A new entrance, matching the present auditorium and Costume Institute entrance will be added to the south, near 81st Street.

New Signs Are Planned

There will be all new street furniture — lighting standards and signs — as well as new night lighting for the facade.

The remodeling is meant not only to deal with problems of entrance circulation, which have been increasing with rising attendance, but also to integrate the solution with an environmental, open space design for a five-block stretch of Fifth Avenue. The entrance becomes a public plaza.

The museum's plans were announced yesterday by Thomas P. F. Hoving, director, at a trustees' meeting. Architects for the facade and street changes are Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates, designers of the Ford Foundation headquarters on East 42d Street. They were commissioned in October, 1967, to start a continuing study of the

\$1.6-Million Project Planned For Fifth Avenue Front —City Will Share Cost

museum's collections and expansion plans.

The new front is a project that has been undertaken unsuccessfully by three other architects previously. The Roche Dinkeloo firm will also house the Temple of Dendur on the site of the north, rear parking lot.

City Will Share Cost

The \$1.6-million cost of the exterior work will be divided between the city and the museum.

The city's share will be \$470,000, of which \$430,000 was appropriated for facade changes in the 1963-64 capital budget. That figure has been raised \$40,000 for increases in construction costs since then.

One million has been given to the museum by an anonymous donor, especially for this purpose.

"We have tried to deal with this as a complete problem, not as a stopgap solution," Mr. Hoving says. "We accept full responsibility for the museum's relationship to its environment. It's taken us a hundred years, but this is the act that completes the facade."

Stylistically, the changes are planned to be in harmony with the classically colonnaded, Beaux Arts design of the central Fifth Avenue section of the museum, built by Richard Morris Hunt in 1902 and extended by McKim, Mead and White from 1910 to 1917. This formal, heroic manner was popularized by the World's Columbian Exposition of Chicago in 1893.

Mr. Roche, of the architectural firm, describes the museum as "World's Fair style,"

rather than true academic classicism. Although the Roche Dinkeloo firm work is completely contemporary and marked by some of the country's most highly praised modern designs, the remodeling is to be done with a simple, almost Versailles-like grandeur and symmetrical monumentality, in response to the existing architecture.

The plan has been approved by the Parks Department, which has submitted it to the Art Commission. It has also been accepted by the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Approvals must now be obtained from the Budget Director's and Controller's offices, the Corporation Counsel and any city departments involved in the construction. The museum hopes to have the work completed for its centennial celebration in 1970.