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April 16, 2019

Buffalo Preservation Board  
901 City Hall  
Buffalo, NY 14202

Dear Members of the Buffalo Preservation Board:

Docomomo, the international advocate for the documentation and conservation of buildings of the Modern Movement, with its thousands of members that span 70 countries, remains acutely concerned with plans to dramatically alter the historic 1962 addition to the Albright Knox Art Gallery designed by Gordon Bunshaft for Skidmore, Owings and Merrill.

The Albright Knox addition is one of Gordon Bunshaft's most important and iconic works that has inspired generations of Buffalonians to seek careers in architecture, contemporary art and design. As you are no doubt aware, Gordon Bunshaft was born and raised within a mile of the Albright Knox Museum and his addition to the museum is his only work in Buffalo.

Docomomo US feels strongly the "preservation" proposal in front of you, much like the proposal from 2017, continues to be in conflict with the Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties as it relates to the Bunshaft addition. The addition of a conjectural roof sculpture over the courtyard gives a false sense of the historic development and is not in keeping with the Standards.

We are also concerned that while an art installation typically is portrayed as temporary, this type of installation has to be viewed in the framework as a permanent addition to the building. It will impose structural loads on the existing building that will require significant modifications. Atop these structural changes will be the aesthetic alteration of the historically significant space.

While we appreciate and applaud the museum's desire to engage the community in the Bunshaft design, we are deeply troubled with the current proposal and the radical change it would have on the visual relationship between the original 1905 building and the 1962 building. The open-air courtyard balances the volume of the 1962 building while acting as a noncompeting visual bridge to the overall composition.

Modernists often used the courtyard to separate yet connect (outside and inside are one design) when designing stylistically contrasting additions. In its modesty and scale, this early addition respects the original Beaux Arts style building and allows for a designed element (the courtyard) to become the light touch that connects the old and the new. The negative space is what allows the two contradictory volumes to exist as a whole and filling this void not only changes the visual harmony but would likely impact the physical structure. This installation will impart a permanent alteration that may be very difficult, if not impossible, to undo.

We urge you to reject this proposal and recommend the applicant to submit a design that conforms to the Secretary Standards and support the historic nature of the 1962 addition. This does not mean a dynamic installation cannot be held within the courtyard that would enhance the existing spatial relationships created by these significant buildings, it is just not this proposal.

On behalf of Docomomo US, we thank you for your time and ongoing efforts to designate and protect Buffalo's significant midcentury resources.

Sincerely,



Liz Waytkus  
Executive Director



Todd Grover  
National Advocacy Committee Chair