

# Main Line Times

## “Barnes Foundation unveils concept plans of new museum on Parkway”

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by Cheryl Allison

Nearly five years after a judge gave it permission to move its prized art collection, the Barnes Foundation was to provide the first glimpses of the new museum that will house it in Philadelphia yesterday.

The foundation was scheduled to present concept plans for a museum building on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway to the city’s Art Commission at the morning meeting.

“This is not the total release,” Barnes spokesman Andrew Stewart said in an interview Monday. “These are not the full architectural plans.”

However, renderings and site plans that became available for public view earlier this week give the first sense of the type of building the foundation’s architects, Tod Williams and Billie Tsien, have conceived, and how it will accommodate the art that has been housed for 80 years, as its collector, Dr. Albert C. Barnes, wished it to be viewed, in the gallery he built for it in Merion.

The foundation has said since the court ruling that the galleries, with their unique “compositions” mingling Impressionist and Post-Impressionist masterpieces, Pennsylvania Dutch furniture, pieces of metalwork and African sculptures, would be recreated in their new setting.

The foundation has argued that it cannot survive financially in Merion, where visitation has been limited by Lower Merion Township’s zoning.

Although the township has acted to make expanded visitation possible, an argument for moving the collection has been that the art would be more accessible to the public in the city.

Published images of the plans reveal that the Barnes collection would be housed in a long, rectangular gallery building evocative of the Merion building, facing the Parkway.

An L-shaped building wrapping around a courtyard would provide new spaces unavailable to the foundation in Merion to offer special exhibit areas, a café and art-education programs. A glass canopy is shown, rising above the courtyard and extending the length of the gallery.

The plans also indicate the extensive landscaping and plantings that will surround the new building on its 4.5-acre site. Including a fountain area and various gardens, they are intended to recall the arboretum setting of the Merion gallery.

Stewart said the plans to be presented this week are intended to present the “massing and volumes” of the new building, the “way it sits on the Parkway,” concepts for “how people will move in and out” of the building and site, and the landscaping plan.

Members of the group known as the Friends of the Barnes Foundation, including a number of local residents, have continued to fight relocation of the art. Others in the art world, nationally and internationally, have spoken out against removing it from its setting.

Only this week the Friends group released a letter it had received from renowned architect and Philadelphia native Robert Venturi deploring the planned move.

“The current building in Merion was designed specifically for the Barnes collection by Paul Cret in collaboration with Dr. Barnes as owner/curator. The building and site design are an integral part of the collection and vice versa. Separating them vastly diminishes the value and purpose of both,” Venturi writes.

Having seen the published images, Friends member Aram Jerrehian asked, “If they’re going to replicate something, what’s the point? The wheel’s already been invented.”

“There can be no justification for this senseless, willful destruction of a cherished site of cultural heritage that belongs to the American people,” said Friends member Evelyn Yaari, adding, “Allocating scarce financial resources for a vanity project at a time of widespread financial distress indicates callow disregard for the people of Pennsylvania, on top of everything else. What can people be thinking?”