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## “Barnes stages symbolic groundbreaking on Parkway”

by Inga Saffron

After years of talking about its move to Philadelphia, the Barnes Foundation did something visible yesterday, when it took formal possession of its future home on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and marked the territory with a colorful screen that winds through the mature London plane trees.

The symbolic groundbreaking, attended by the city's cultural and political elite, was conceived as a splashy coming-out party for the Merion-based art institution, after years fighting lawsuits aimed at blocking the transfer of its valuable collection of impressionist art.

Yesterday, politicians spoke, fireworks exploded, and a wrecking machine took a symbolic jab at the former Youth Study Center, which is to be torn down this winter for what is being called the "Barnes on the Parkway."

And opponents of the move protested. About a dozen people marched outside the property with placards and loudly taunted the Barnes' supporters about the "greatest theft of art since World War II."

Their bullhorn chants could be heard during the speeches. Although they vowed to continue fighting the move, foundation officials say the protesters have exhausted the last avenues of legal opposition.

"I think it's been 14 or 15 years since [art patron] Ray Perelman first came to me with this idea to move the Barnes," Gov. Rendell noted during his remarks. He announced yesterday that the state was raising its contribution to the project from \$25 million to \$30 million.

No final budget for the project has been given, but construction costs are expected to fall between \$100 million and \$150 million. The Barnes is paying \$1 a year to lease the site from the city, which moved the juvenile jail earlier this month to a temporary location in East Falls. A permanent facility is planned for West Philadelphia.

Barnes officials said the current turmoil in the credit markets would have no impact on their plans. They are building the project with donations and do not plan to borrow.

The last big news about the project came almost a year ago, when Barnes officials announced they had selected New York architects Tod Williams and Billie Tsien to design its new home. Though they are still tinkering with the design, Barnes officials said the new Parkway building would start construction next fall.

Under the terms of a 2004 legal judgment, the Barnes is obliged to replicate the exact configuration of its Merion galleries. But the foundation plans to add space for classrooms, offices, special exhibits, a cafe and an auditorium. The structure that surrounds the enlarged foundation will be modern, not a copy of the original Barnes by Paul Philippe Cret.

Just recently, the Barnes asked Philadelphia landscape architect Laurie C. Olin to join the effort. Because the landscaped arboretum at the Merion Barnes is integral to understanding the art collection, foundation officials are hoping that Olin will recreate a semblance of that experience on the Parkway.

Since Olin is now preparing a new landscape design for the neighboring Rodin Museum, Barnes officials want him to create a unified environment for the two art institutions.

Olin has already lobbied to save the three rows of towering trees that front the Youth Study Center. A survey determined that most of the trees are healthy enough to survive well beyond the Barnes' expected completion in 2011.

"That means the new Barnes will be sitting among the trees, just as the Merion Barnes," said architect Williams.

Otherwise, he and Tsien gave away few details about their design. It will probably be sited closer to the Parkway than the Youth Study Center now is. And it will be clad in stone, said Tsien, although she quickly added, "there will be a lightness to it."

"What we want," Williams said, "is that your shoulders should drop as you approach. You'll feel calm. There will be something personal and domestic about the design."

In the meantime, the city will have to content itself with the selections from the Barnes collection now displayed on a curving scrim along the Parkway. Designed by the Philadelphia graphic-design firm Cloud Gehshan Associates, it includes a Cezanne, a Renoir, and a digital recreation of one Barnes gallery wall.

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