

# New Life and New Mission For a 1964 World's Fair Relic

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Philip Johnson's steel and concrete fantasia in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, designed as the New York State Pavilion for the 1964-65 World's Fair, has been crumbling for decades. Now it is finally getting some attention.

Adrian Benepe, New York City's parks commissioner, said his department had begun soliciting ideas from groups interested in revovating the pavilion. If there are enough expressions of interest, he said, the department will issue a formal request for proposals.

At the same time, the Queens Theater in the Park — which produces performances geared to the borough's immigrant communities — is planning to build an 8,000-square-foot addition to its space, a small section of the pavilion that was called the Theaterama during the World's Fair. That section has been maintained while the rest of the pavilion, including the huge "Tent of Tomorrow" and cluster of round observation

towers, continues to fall apart.

The addition will consist of a 75-seat cabaret and a new entry hall with an inverted-dome ceiling, a shape that one of its architects, Sara Caples of Caples Jefferson, said would recall the "va-voom architecture" of Johnson's pavilion. The city has allocated \$5.2 million for the addition and hopes to break ground this fall, the cultural affairs commissioner, Kate D. Levin, said. The opening is planned for late next year.

When completed, Ms. Caples said, the new entry hall will join the original Theaterama, the observation towers, and the tent to be "a fourth geometric figure in this wonderful composition of Philip Johnson's."

But the shiny new addition will also call attention to the blighted condition of the tent, which appears to be on the verge of collapse. Sixteen 100-foot-high concrete towers once supported a multicolored canopy above a football field-size map of New York State. The canopy is gone, and the map is now a forest

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The remains of the New York State Pavilion for the 1964-65 World's Fair, in Queens.

Stephanie Keith for The New York Times

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of weeds that have cracked the state's 62 counties.

As recently as 2001, the city's parks commissioner at the time, Henry J. Stern, said he thought the tent structure was useless and should be torn down.

But Mr. Benepe said the pavilion as a whole was worth preserving because it is a remnant of the fair and was designed by "an important architect."

Mr. Johnson, who turned 98 last week, was not available for comment and has not seen the plans for the theater addition, said his design partner, Alan Ritchie. But Mr. Johnson once said that he cringed every time he passed the crumbling pavilion on the way to the airport.

One group, Mr. Benepe said, has proposed

## Philip Johnson says he cringes when he passes his crumbling design.

creating a New York City sports hall of fame at the pavilion. Another, which includes the Manhattan architect Frankie Campione, has proposed turning it into an aerospace museum. Mr. Campione said he was concerned that the theater addition would detract from Mr. Johnson's composition. Worse, he said, construction could damage the existing building, which, because it was not intended to be permanent, was constructed on wooden pilings.

But Ms. Caples said that her team, which includes Lee/Timchula Architects of Manhattan and the structural engineer Stanley Goldstein, was aware of the wooden pilings and had performed what she called "obsessive" engineering studies to make sure the pavilion did not topple as a result of the construction.

The proposed theater addition is only one of several significant building projects in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. A radical alteration to the Queens Museum, by the Los Angeles architect Eric Owen Moss, is in the planning stages. And a 55,000-square-foot addition to the Hall of Science, by Polshek Partnership Architects of Manhattan, is nearing completion.

Ms. Caples said she believed that she and her partner, Everardo Jefferson, were respecting the Johnson building by adding to it. "Repurposing cultural buildings and bringing them into our time," she said, "is a stronger way of keeping these beloved institutions part of the life of the city than letting them fall into disuse."



Top, Stephanie Keith for The New York Times; above, Cicada D

Above, the planned new shape of the Queens Theater in the Park, foreground; a r entry pavilion will be under the towers. Top, the once-grand "Tent of Tomorrow