

THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

ESTABLISHED BY CONGRESS 17 MAY 1910

NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM
441 F STREET, N.W., SUITE 312
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20001-2728

202-504-2200

March 17, 1999

Ms. Martha Catlin
Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
Old Post Office Building
1100 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, #809
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Ms. Catlin:

I read with considerable distress that Richard Neutra's Cyclorama Building at Gettysburg is threatened. As a trustee for twenty-three years of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and appointed and re-appointed by the last six presidents in my present capacity as chairman of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, I believe that building to represent one of the high-water marks of the federal government's involvement with architecture. It has become a landmark of tremendous value, not only architecturally, but to the whole question of how we interpret our historic sites.

I well recognize there are practical problems, but it is a question of will, and of understanding the significance of a period in American architecture that is at an awkward distance from us, but is as fully worthy of preservation as the more traditionally espoused earlier styles.

As chairman for the last twenty-one years of the Pritzker Prize in Architecture, now considered the Nobel Prize in that field, I can assure you that Neutra would be a prime candidate if we were not limited to living architects. I was invited to speak at a symposium jointly held by the University of California at Los Angeles and the Getty Institute for the Humanities celebrating the 100th anniversary of Richard Neutra's birth. As a winner of the AIA's Gold Medal, its highest award for lifetime achievement, Neutra stands as a towering figure in the history of American and world architecture. He was one of the first Europeans fully to appreciate the leadership of the United States in this field, voting with his feet to emigrate for that reason, and become a U. S. citizen, long before the wave who came here as refugees. His passion for American history, and his appreciation of the significance of Gettysburg and Lincoln's address there in a world context embody everything of which this nation of immigrants—voluntary and not—can be justly proud.

The theme-park concept of falsely recreating a landscape that can never be put back to 1863 is an unconscionable intellectual travesty. Let us hope that clearer thinking prevails in the months ahead. Every conceivable effort should be made to protect and restore this exceptional building.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Carter Brown". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

J. Carter Brown
Chairman
Director *emeritus*,
National Gallery of Art

cc: The Secretary of the Interior, The Hon. Bruce Babbitt
Robert Stanton, Director, National Park Service