

GREATER NEW YORK

GREATER NEW YORK WATCH

Museum Prepares for a Makeover

By CHARLES PASSY

The Hispanic Society Museum & Library has long been considered one of New York City's overlooked treasures.

It has an art collection that rivals those of many major institutions, replete with works by such Spanish masters as El Greco, Goya and Velázquez. It has a library with hundreds of thousands of books and manuscripts devoted to all aspects of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American history and culture.

But the Hispanic Society, founded in 1904 in Manhattan's Washington Heights, has faced significant challenges, not the least of which is that it sits outside the Upper East Side's Museum Mile and other New York City cultural hubs that draw tourists and locals alike.

Its main building and terrace, designed in the same beaux-arts style as the Metropolitan Museum of Art's main location, has been in need of an overhaul. In fact, the Hispanic Society closed its doors to the public in 2017, save for library appointments, while it began replacing the main building's ornamental copper roof.

Now, the society is embarking on an ambitious and potentially costly mission to reinvent and reposition itself.

The goal is to fully revitalize the main 110,000-square-foot building—actually, multiple buildings joined together—and 33,000-square-foot terrace.

But the idea is to also make the society a vital presence through programs and by welcoming touring exhibitions. The terrace could also serve as a neighborhood gathering spot.

"Our priority is to become a much more active center for Hispanic art and culture," said Philippe de Montebello, chairman of the society's board.

Mr. de Montebello served as director of the Metropolitan Museum from 1977 to 2008 and is widely considered one of the most respected admin-



The Hispanic Society Museum & Library has a collection that rivals those of many major institutions. It showcases works by such Spanish masters as Velázquez, whose paintings are seen below.



istrators in the museum world.

The society has selected a team of three architectural firms—Selldorf Architects, Beyer Blinder Belle and Reed Hilderbrand—to develop a plan for the renovation.

Meanwhile, the museum will reopen one of its main attractions, a gallery featuring paintings by Joaquín Sorolla, in September. Admission to the gallery will be by appointment.

It is too early to discuss how much the renovation will cost, society officials said, though Mr. de Montebello expects it would run below \$100 million. He said he would like to see the work completed over

roughly the next five years.

At the same time, Annabelle Selldorf, principal of Selldorf Architects, said the task is significant, noting that the society's main building lacks many of the standard amenities common to most modern-day museums such as a restaurant or gift shop. "It lacks everything," she said.

This isn't the first time the society has considered an overhaul. Plans have been discussed during the past two decades, officials say.

Moreover, the society already has put \$20 million into improvements and renovations during the last few years, including the roof replacement.

The real question, say arts-world professionals, is whether the society can raise whatever sum it takes to do the major work ahead. That is especially important because the museum, which has an annual budget of \$4.4 million and an endowment of \$67 million, sits in upper Manhattan, outside New York's deep-pocketed community of cultural philanthropists.

The society is likely to draw attention from donors because of its significant collection, says Barbara Prey, a visual artist who serves on the advisory board of the National Council on the Arts. "They have the raw material," she said.

CONNECTICUT

Victim Called 911 Twice Before Death

Shortly before Perrie Mason vanished earlier this month, two 911 calls were made from her phone. Dispatchers didn't hear anyone on the line and called her back, but still no response, according to her sister.

Four days later, on Aug. 21, the body of the 31-year-old Connecticut mother of two, who recently moved from Hawaii, was found, and her ex-boyfriend was arraigned in court on domestic violence charges in connection with a previous attack against her, authorities said. The ex-boyfriend, James Watson, has denied harming Ms. Mason.

It isn't clear what happened in the moments after the 911 calls to Meriden's emergency communications center. City police officials have declined to release the 911 recordings, as well as any information about their response to the calls, citing the continuing criminal investigation into Ms. Mason's death.

Relatives, friends and anti-domestic violence advocates say they wonder whether more could have been done after the calls and whether Ms. Mason's death could have been prevented.

—Associated Press

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

New Rules Proposed On Time in Solitary

New York state officials have proposed a three-year timeline to phase in new rules to curtail the amount of time prisoners

can stay in solitary confinement.

The proposed rule changes show that officials plan to cap solitary confinement time to 30 days by 2022. New York's prisons agency says the changes will come with a \$69 million cost in fiscal year 2020.

Leading Democrats announced a plan in June to restrict use of solitary confinement. That plan included the 30-day cap and prohibitions on putting pregnant women and adolescents into isolation.

The agreement came after lawmakers failed to pass legislation that would have banned putting a prisoner in isolation for more than 15 consecutive days.

The proposed rules have raised objections from inmate advocates.

—Associated Press

NEW JERSEY

Carjacker Moved Sleeping Woman

A possible carjacker apparently removed a sleeping 80-year-old woman from her parked car before stealing the vehicle and leaving her in the driveway, said police in Hamilton, N.J.

The woman told police she had fallen asleep in her car in a driveway around 9 p.m. on Wednesday and woke to find the vehicle missing at about 4 a.m. on Thursday. The woman didn't remember what happened and had a bruise and abrasion on her face, police said.

Authorities found the empty vehicle Thursday afternoon in Trenton. No arrest had been made as of midday Thursday.

—Associated Press



KICKOFF: Dancers stepped out in Times Square on Thursday to promote this weekend's New York International Salsa Congress.