On Campus

Architecture Dean Designs Athens Acropolis Museum

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A major new museum that will stand just 800 feet from the Acropolis in Athens was designed by Bernard Tschumi, dean of Columbia's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation, who submitted the winning design in an international competition sponsored by the Greek government. The site of the new Acropolis Museum, which is expected to receive about 10,000 visitors a day, is the closest that a significant modern building has come to the ceremonial hill on which still stand ancient remains of the Parthenon, Erechtheum, and Propylaea.

The museum will cost $45 million, and the Greek government hopes to finish construction in time to open the museum for the 2004 Olympic Summer Games in Athens.

Tschumi says he was stunned when he won the contest, since his focus on a solid design resulted in what he thought were technical and bureaucratic constraints that would discourage the selection of his concept. "We asked, 'How can we provide a building which is as representative to our contemporary sensibility and technology as the Parthenon was at its time?'" says Tschumi. "Architecture is not about form, but about defining a goal or concept. There is no sentimentality in it. You cannot be intimidated."

Tschumi's design revolves around three concepts: light, movement, and a tectonic and programmatic element, which together "turn the constraints of the site into an architectural opportunity, offering a simple and precise museum" with the mathematical and conceptual clarity of ancient Greek buildings. Tschumi's plan places a prominent glass-enclosed gallery on the upper level to accommodate the Parthenon Marbles—a series of seventeen marble sculptures and a 525-foot-long frieze depicting the gods and heroes of classical Athens—which were removed from the Acropolis two centuries ago and are now on display in the British Museum. The

Greeks hope the erection of the Acropolis Museum will help win back the artifacts.

This summer Tschumi announced that he will step down from his post as dean on June 30, 2003, in order to devote more time to his practice—and to projects like the Acropolis Museum. “Fifteen years is an architectural generation,” said Tschumi, who became dean in 1988. “It is time for a new person to take over, and for the school to enter a new phase in its evolution.”



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