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# A Trace of the Original Whitney Museum Reappears

By **DAVID W. DUNLAP** JULY 31, 2015

The downtown Whitney opened itself to public inspection this week. There are only two more days to fully appreciate it, however.

Not the one at 99 Gansevoort Street, over the High Line; the one at 8 West Eighth Street, in Greenwich Village, the birthplace of the Whitney Museum in 1931 and now the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture.

After a sidewalk shed came down from the school on Monday at the conclusion of a \$450,000 restoration project, passers-by had their first glimpse in more than six decades of the salmon-pink stucco facade looking almost exactly as it did when the museum was opened by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney.

“It just glows,” Elisa Jensen, the chairwoman of the board of governors of the school, said.

Making the tableau especially evocative are Roman-style letters, chiseled in marble, that proclaimed this to be the “Whitney Museum of American Art.” That inscription, topped by Karl Free’s cast-aluminum eagle (symbolizing

America), sits above two tapering, fluted white marble columns framing the red Numidian marble main entranceway.

Of course, the school is mindful of its identity, so it plans to reinstall its own sign over the Whitney inscription next week.

“We pondered the idea of putting signs on the side of the doorway,” Jonathan Raible, the architect for the renovation, said. “But the decision of the board was to put back the New York Studio School sign in place, as it was since 1967.”

Anticipating that history-loving New Yorkers may want to photograph the Whitney inscription, the school will welcome visitors at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., Saturday and Sunday, to come inside and be escorted by students into the sculpture studio where Mrs. Whitney herself worked.

Across town, officials of the modern-day Whitney expressed delight at the archaeological discovery on West Eighth Street.

“What a timely coincidence,” Donna De Salvo, a deputy director and a senior curator at the museum, said. “It’s a rich visual reminder of the museum’s downtown roots, to which it has now returned, and of the layers of history that make up this remarkable city.”

Probably the last time the Whitney inscription was visible was in 1954, when the museum moved to 22 West 54th Street, before continuing its journey uptown to 945 Madison Avenue in 1966. It reopened on Gansevoort Street this year.

The studio school, like the museum before it, occupies a complex of four abutting brownstones on Eighth Street and four corresponding carriage houses along Macdougall Alley. The chief purpose of the renovation was to repair cracks in the stucco facade, which runs 75 feet along the fronts of three of the brownstones.

As part of the project, workers took down the school sign last year. Under it, they found a sign for the “National Recreation Association,” which moved into the complex after the Whitney left. Under that sign was the original Whitney inscription.

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