

The Museum of Modern Art

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Architecture of Museums will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from September 25 through November 11. Directed by Ludwig Glaeser, Curator of Architecture and Design, the exhibition consists of models, photographic murals, and color transparencies of seventy-one museums. While most of the examples were built during the '50s and '60s, several designs still under construction are shown as well as a few important historical prototypes and unrealized 20th-century projects.

Selected at a time when museum building has reached unprecedented proportions, the exhibition is relevant to the current debate on the function of museums in our society. "The educational role which the age of enlightenment intended for the museum has not only been revived but increased to an unforeseeable extent," Mr. Glaeser points out in the exhibition catalogue.* "Yet despite these new tasks, the museum can never deny its original function of housing art. Even the most rebellious contemporary work, if it survives the judgment of time, will become a treasure. Architecture that acknowledges this fundamental nature of the museum can arrive at solutions unattainable by accommodations based exclusively on temporary and often undefinable functions. This is why some of the most successful new museums have been established in renovated European castles and palaces."

Underground museums, open air museums, variations on the blank-walled solid cubic form, and museums recently remodelled in old buildings have been selected for the exhibition from twenty-two countries.

Museums devoted entirely to 20th-century art, a Pavilion for Antique Toys, a National Museum of Anthropology, a Gallo-Roman Lapidary in Belgium, the Peace

*Architecture of Museums, by Ludwig Glaeser. 20-page booklet, wrapped in its own poster; 20 illustrations. \$1.50. Published by The Museum of Modern Art.

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Memorial Museum in Hiroshima, a Spanish Museum of Architecture, a Nature and Science Museum, and a Cabinet of Prints and Drawings in the Uffizi in Florence are among the buildings that illustrate such practical aspects of museum design as lighting and installations in solutions which contribute to the broader concept of the museum. "In addition to their architectural excellence," Mr. Glaeser says, "the examples chosen suggest an ambiance congenial to the immanent values of the collection and to the contemplative moments of the viewer."

Among those architects whose work contributed to new techniques, none has applied his concepts more consistently to exhibition design than Mies van der Rohe. Paintings as well as sculptures are used as if they were walls and columns defining an open space. This concept requires the large, uninterrupted space that appears first in his 1942 project, the Museum for a Small City, then in Cullinan Hall built in Houston, Texas, and finally the recently completed New National Gallery in Berlin. This is shown in a large mural, plans, and a model.

Le Corbusier, a painter as well as architect, projected museums throughout his life. In addition to his concern for studio-like lighting, a recurrent theme in his designs is the spiral plan. Not only does it permit unlimited additions but it also reflects his notion of exhibitions as didactic, expository sequences which predetermine the viewer's movement. Among the seven examples of Corbusier's work in the exhibition are his first square spiral scheme, the World Museum project of 1929, the Cultural Center designed in 1954 for Ahmedabad in India, and his 1959 National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo.

Frank Lloyd Wright amplified both Le Corbusier's and Mies van der Rohe's ideas in the Guggenheim Museum in New York by enclosing a large domed hall in a continuous spiral ramp. The 1945 model for the Museum is shown along with a photo mural of the interior.

Most contemporary projects are variations that elaborate one or another aspect of the masters' exemplary solutions, according to Mr. Glaeser. Le Corbusier's "magic box" is perhaps the most appropriate term for all those museums which

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exploit, like their classical antecedents, the solid cubic form. This is because the primary requirement of most museums is blank wall space. Sky lights are preferable to windows which often cause glare, and artificial light allows both to be eliminated if so desired. In most examples, galleries are organized around a central interior space, often an atrium or a lightwell, reminiscent of Palladian schemes.

Variations on the "magic box" which have sought more complicated geometric configurations include the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse designed by I.M. Pei and Associates, in which four two-story high units connected by bridges surround a large, independently roofed sculpture court, and the hollow cylinders Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill has designed for the Joseph W. Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C. In the extension for the Newark Museum designed by Michael Graves, a box-like frame absorbs existing buildings into a unified complex.

A logical extension of the blank walled scheme is the invisible or underground museum. One of the largest shown is the Oakland Museum designed by Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo and Associates, now under construction in California. On a seven acre site occupying four city blocks the architects have created a "non-building," a series of terraces, stairs, and plazas planted generously with shrubbery and trees. "Oakland is not only an exceptional museum scheme but also unique as an architectural solution," Mr. Glaeser says. "Rather than striving to design a monument to culture, the architects have buried the building under its own landscape. The building thus acknowledges its urban function by being in effect a park, but also acknowledges its expanded function as a museum by providing a congregating place." Among the other underground museums in the exhibition are the Shrine of the Book designed by Frederick Kiesler and Armand Bartos for Jerusalem, the experimental Underground Art Gallery designed by Philip Johnson for his own art collection in New Canaan, Conn., the Museum of the Treasury in the San Lorenzo Cathedral in Genoa, Italy, designed by Franco Albini in 1956, and a Gallo-Roman Lapidary by Constantin L.- Brodzki in Belgium.

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A section of the exhibition deals with open-air museums or sculpture courts which are incorporated into most museums built today. "Few museums can provide adequate space for sculpture, and the traditional outdoor architectural setting remains the most suitable exhibition environment. The Renaissance again provides the prototypical examples," Mr. Glaeser says, citing the sculpture-filled garden of Bramante's Belvedere Pavilion in the Vatican.

Today's architectural settings include terraced gardens, like the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden of The Museum of Modern Art, walled courts, or open-ended pavilions, like Aldo van Eyck's composition in Sonsbeek Park. In some instances the entire setting has been roofed and regarded a building, as in the Lehmbruck Museum designed by the sculptor's son Manfred.

The adaptation of an existing structure to better suit museum purposes was the first stage in museum architecture, Mr. Glaeser points out, and is still one of the most successful solutions.

"Italian architects are renowned for their renovation of buildings and reorganization of collections. Their success has depended upon the cooperation of museum directors willing to surrender some of their prerogatives to architects." The extent of the renovation, shown in the exhibition, varies from Carlo Scarpa's adapted original interior in the Museo Correr in Venice to the introduction of completely new interiors in the Pinacoteca at Bologna.

Catalogues, photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. 245-3200