

The Museum of Modern Art

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THRESHOLDS/O.M.A. AT MoMA: REM KOOLHAAS AND THE PLACE OF PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE

November 3, 1994 - January 31, 1995

An exhibition of the work of Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas (b. 1944), on view at The Museum of Modern Art from November 3, 1994, to January 31, 1995, is the third in the Museum's **THRESHOLDS** series devoted to thematic explorations of contemporary issues in architecture and design. Organized by Terence Riley, Chief Curator, Department of Architecture and Design, **THRESHOLDS/O.M.A. AT MoMA: REM KOOLHAAS AND THE PLACE OF PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE** presents five architectural and three urban projects that explore the relationships among architecture, urbanism, and the idea of public space.

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The exhibition, designed in cooperation with O.M.A., is comprised of models of both unbuilt competition entries and realized projects. Featured is a model of Euralille, a major commercial, residential, and transportation complex underway in Lille, France (Phase I, 1989-94; project to be completed in 2004). Also presented are models of urban proposals for Melun-Sénart, France (1987, proposal), and Yokohama, Japan (1991, competition entry).

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The five architectural projects presented specifically address issues relative to the place of public architecture: the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris (1989, competition entry); the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe, Germany (1989, competition winner); the Kunsthal, Rotterdam (completed 1992); the Jussieu Library for the University of Paris (1993, competition winner); and Congrexpo, a large multi-use exhibition and convention center at Euralille (to be completed fall 1994). Gallery walls are wallpapered with project drawings.

In a series of outdoor installations, the exhibition also addresses the new urban issues raised by Koolhaas in his forthcoming book *S-M-L-XL* (Monacelli Press, early 1995). Installations combining urban images with essays or excerpts of essays by Koolhaas are installed in the subway station under 666 Fifth Avenue and at several locations on West 53 Street (see list of outdoor installations).

The Office for Metropolitan Architecture (O.M.A.), founded by Rem Koolhaas with Elia and Zoe Zenghelis and Madelon Vriesendorp, has for two decades pursued a revolutionary vision of the dynamic between architecture and the contemporary city; O.M.A.'s mission is its advocacy of the city as a legitimate and positive expression of contemporary culture. In the brochure accompanying the exhibition, Mr. Riley writes "Few contemporary architects or urbanists have been willing to embrace the residual graces of the metropolis, the most evident of which is the city's unrelenting artificiality. At a time when the natural, the *unbuilt*, is vested with unquestionable moral value, the urban visions of Koolhaas and O.M.A. unabashedly celebrate the constructed environment, even at its most extreme."

For O.M.A./Koolhaas, the scale of the city's presence is a source of exhilaration. In his 1978 publication, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, Koolhaas writes, "Through the simultaneous explosion of human density and an invasion of new technologies, Manhattan became, from 1850, a mythical laboratory for the invention and testing of a revolutionary lifestyle: the Culture of Congestion." O.M.A.'s urban projects demonstrate this vision. Inspired by the paradigm of New York City, Euralille, for example, serves as a new model for urbanism, facilitating future business, residential, and transportation needs at the center of the Paris-London-Brussels triangle. With a mesh of rails and highway sweeping through a grid of vertical structures, Euralille connects numerous buildings by various architects.

The architectural programs of the five projects featured in the exhibition represent the high values of Western urban culture: museums, libraries, and exhibition halls -- yet they reject the traditional forms of the historical city. For example, Koolhaas describes the unbuilt National Library of France as "a solid block of information, a repository of all forms of memory -- books, laser discs, microfiche, computers, databases," out of which the major public spaces are carved as voids, or "absences of building." The Rotterdam Kunsthal confounds expectations with its twisting internal geometries and the screen-like character of its facades. The exterior of a winning 1992 competition entry, the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie is dominated by a ten story "media-wall" displaying changing video images -- challenging the traditional concept of the facade.

Rem Koolhaas, like many of his generation, was widely influenced by the critical milieu that surrounded the Architectural Association, London, and the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, New York. In 1974 Koolhaas opened O.M.A. in London. Following the publication of *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* in 1978, O.M.A. gained international recognition and, in 1980, relocated to Rotterdam. *Delirious New York* will be reprinted by the Monacelli Press at the time of the exhibition; Koolhaas' new book, *S, M, L, XL*, is to be published later this winter.

As a supplement to the exhibition, three residential models and a video of Villa Dall' Ava, a residence in Paris (completed 1991), are on view in the Museum's Edward John Noble Education Center.

After its showing in New York, the exhibition travels to the Canadian Center for Architecture, Montreal (February 21 - April 21, 1995), and the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (May 6 - August 13, 1995).

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BROCHURE ***Thresholds/O.M.A. at MoMA: Rem Koolhaas and the Place of Public Architecture.*** By Terence Riley. A newsprint guide to the exhibition with an essay by Terence Riley and individual project descriptions by Rem Koolhaas. Available at the entrance to the exhibition.

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For further information or photographic materials, contact the Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750.