

The Museum of Modern Art

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WILL INSLEY: CEREMONIAL SPACE AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Present challenge of art
can no longer be realized
full scale
within our building space
man looks to horizon
and beyond
wishing to move
within his extended dream
layers of this information
pressed between earth and sky
peeled away
each in turn
notation of journey
remembered from the future

-- Will Insley, 1970

"Most architects are too busy coping with clients, inflation, ecology and the Crisis of the Cities to have any time for purely theoretical studies. If they do, they are more likely to concern themselves with the housing problem than with architecture as an instrument of metaphysical speculation.

"Will Insley is an exception. A painter and sculptor trained as an architect, he has designed projects whose function eludes definition."

-- Arthur Drexler, Will Insley: Ceremonial Space.

Will Insley's seven foot square model for PASSAGE SPIRAL SPACE, a roofless, ceremonial enclosure of concentric concrete walls and wedges and inaccessible sunken rooms, will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art through May 3. Selected and installed by Arthur Drexler, Director of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design, the model base contains enlarged details of the structure visible through eye level peep holes. Visitors mount a special stairway to view the model from above. The exhibition is augmented by Insley's geometric preliminary drawings and enlarged montages which show the structure in its intended environment.

"Insley's architectural compositions," Drexler explains, "are settings for an imaginary civilization whose preoccupations correspond to his own. It is a civilization not indifferent to material well-being, but its highly developed sense of time and place evidently requires an environment organized horizontally, like landscape, rather than vertically, like sky scrapers or other artifacts.

(more)

(2)

Two zones of space under the ground - in Insley's vision - would accommodate services and information; two levels on and above ground would accommodate the public and private renewal, in contact with the earth, which can be called 'living'.

"Through underground tubes one would journey to places set aside for contemplation, or perhaps a kind of religious observance, more intensely private than might be possible within the community. These places are imagined as vast roofless enclosures isolated on prairies or deserts. The structure shown in this exhibition belongs to this category. Although it is an independent element, it is related to an imagined larger complex much as a village church might be related to Chartres Cathedral. Its straight and narrow paths lead between, through and along the tops of high walls, past sunk rooms to which there is no access, taking the philosophical visitor into expanding or diminishing volumes of space open to the sky. No experience is possible other than that determined by the architect. The only indeterminate would be an encounter with another living being.

"Insley's central preoccupation is with time.

(more)

Passage space

square spiral slip ratio

slight rise in the land

twelve feet high

double a man

space five hundred

and thirty one

feet square

Diagramed area

removing man from exterior reference

containing man

in fragment space of mental travel

grey

silent

rim

sky

-- Will Insley, 1971

(3)

His studies for the larger, more elaborate ceremonial space describe the present as a corridor flanked by a "wall of information", or knowledge, which is accessible but impenetrable, and by a wall beyond which is "the other side of the present" - death. One reaches the other side of the present by passing through a library, indicating a position in the mind from which one sets forth on a journey into the future. If the path leading into time is unbroken, it eventually returns the traveller to the present through an arc Insley describes as the shadow of death.

"Removed from many of the concerns of theology, Insley's use of space and architectural form is nevertheless rooted in "the last things": for him architecture is eschatology, and its function is to help us act out what creation has ordained."

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