

The Museum of Modern Art

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DESIGNS FOR A NEW PARIS MUSEUM ON VIEW AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Designs for a new museum for modern art in Paris with demountable exterior and interior walls and outside tubes housing elevators and escalators, are shown in drawings and photographs in an exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art from December 31, 1971 to February 20, 1972, arranged by Arthur Drexler, Director of the Department of Architecture and Design.

Le Centre Beaubourg is the result of a government-sponsored competition won by the architects Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers. This is the first public showing of the project outside Paris as the winning design was schematic and indicated only a general concept suitable to the site, formerly occupied by Les Halles. The plans on view at the Museum were approved by President Pompidou this month and construction is expected to start in 1972.

The new museum is to house exhibition galleries replacing the present National Museum of Modern Art; new departments for industrial design; theatres; cinemas and experimental galleries; a center for acoustical research; and an art library transferred from the Bibliotheque Nationale, as well as a restaurant and information center.

What Piano and Rogers proposed was a transparent box whose walls would incorporate moving images, so that the building would serve as a gigantic TV screen relaying art information, news of the world, and "the latest disasters." Columns were concentrated along the perimeter walls, leaving interior space uninterrupted. Vertical transportation by elevator and escalator was located on the building's exterior.

"In several respects the concept of this building has much to do with the theatre," Mr. Drexler notes in the wall label. "If it can be made to function on those terms it would offer an interesting alternative to the museum conceived as a treasure house: in this version it would be a stage or a bulletin board. (Conventional works of art might perhaps be housed in another, less active, building.) Given the opportunity, the architects have not unreasonably invented a program to suit forms they like. In drawings and models the result looks vigorous,

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fresh and persuasive."

The structural frame achieves its giant spans with trusses deep enough to accommodate works of art so that alternate floors can function as storage areas. Columns and trusses constitute the first of three distinct form systems; the second is the network of exterior vertical and diagonal tubes housing elevators and escalators. The third is the system of transparent plastic wall and roof panels which, it is hoped, can be made so readily demountable that it would be easy to rearrange not just interior partitions but the external walls as well. To emphasize the difference between the fixed structural frame, the mechanical transportation systems, and the flexible exterior skin, the designers have sought forms symbolic of each function. The structure suggests a bridge or some other work from the world of engineering; the elevator and escalator tubes recall the massive pipes clinging to industrial installations; and the transparent gallery walls suggest the "soft" forms of product design.

"Although the original concept has been altered to meet practical requirements, certain aspects have emerged clarified and strengthened," Mr. Drexler says. "Some modifications, on the other hand, have weakened or contradicted the original concept. The alternating truss floors provide more storage space than is needed, so they now also include exhibition areas for which they are less appropriate. In addition to the external transportation system, some galleries now have their own internal stairs emphasized by double height rooms. These spatial developments, characteristic of the classically modern architecture of Le Corbusier, are composed architectural spaces forestalling much of the flexibility of the independent wall system. The notion of using the facade for changing, electronically operated images has not been abandoned, but technical problems have yet to be solved. There is also the problem of collaborating with news sources for information not already available on radio and TV."

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