

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

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PRESS PREVIEW

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Architecture and Imagery--Four New Buildings is the title of an exhibition of scale models, enlarged photographs and original drawings on view at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from February 11 through April 19. The buildings are the TWA Terminal at Idlewild Airport by Eero Saarinen Associates, an Australian Opera House by the Danish architect Jørn Utson, a church in Connecticut by Harrison & Abramovitz and a church in France by Guillaume Gillet.

The exhibition was installed by Wilder Green, Assistant Director of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design. Arthur Drexler, Director of the Department, wrote the explanatory text.

According to the text, the exhibition illustrates such developments in modern architecture as a movement away from the uniformity of standardized rectilinear forms, which have tended to make buildings look more and more alike even though they were put up for quite different purposes; and a renewed interest in more sculptural curvilinear shapes. These forms help the architect to make each building a more individual design. The four buildings in the show are the product of these influences, Mr. Drexler says, but they also go beyond them in one particularly interesting respect: they evoke images of natural or man-made objects.

"To evoke such images was not necessarily the architect's intention, and indeed most architects would disclaim any deliberate intention to do this at all," the text reads. "The forms of their buildings derive first of all from considerations of the particular structure to be used and the functional problems to be solved....Abandoning the repetitive rectilinear grid systems of more conventional buildings,...the architects of these four buildings have sought monumental scale and a variety of memorable shapes. Allusions to non-architectural images--ranging from the merest hint to an explicit statement--are used to express emphatically some distinguishing aspect of the building's function or location."

The First Presbyterian Church in Stamford, Connecticut by Harrison & Abramovitz and the Church of Notre Dame de Royan in France by Gillet are completed. Construction drawings are in preparation for the Opera House in Sydney, Australia, by Utson, awarded a first prize in an international competition, and for the Trans-World Airlines Terminal Building at Idlewild by Saarinen & Associates.

The TWA project, according to the architect, was planned to be distinctive and memorable while related to the numerous surrounding buildings and as a structure in

which the architecture itself would express the excitement of travel and movement. It consists of four interacting vaults of slightly different shapes, supported on four Y-shaped columns to enclose a space 50 feet high and 315 feet long. Embarking passengers enter this space under a marquee extended like a visor from one of the vaults and proceed from the check-in and ticketing area into the main waiting room where tiered seats are arranged in an amphitheater. Elevated areas housing services, restaurants and stores are at each side, connected by a bridge overlooking the main room. The bridge, steps, services, seats and all other details are "part of the same form world" as the cantilevered vaults and their monumental supporting piers.

Commenting on this building, the Museum says: "This unity of forms gives to the building an evocative character independent of abstract architectural composition. The flowing contours and merging shapes not only suggest motion but suggest a moving object, although the architect firmly maintains that 'any resemblance to anything other than a piece of architecture is purely in the eye of the beholder, or in the editorializing of the "trend-maker."' The east and west vaults in particular evoke the image of poised wings--an effect appropriate enough to the building's location and purpose."

The National Opera House in Sydney, Australia by Jørn Utson is to occupy a promontory in the harbor, clearly visible from land and water, which the architect has converted into a gigantic masonry plateau ascending in broad terraces and flights of steps. On these terraces and straddling the steps are clusters of interlocking concrete shell vaults housing two separate auditoriums and a restaurant. Auditorium seats are concentric semicircles of steps scooped out of the podium. Ceiling and wall panels under the concrete vaults forms can frame views of the harbor. Workshops, rehearsal rooms and other services are contained within the masonry podium, along with an entrance for automobiles.

"By treating the entire surface of the podium as a stepped circulation area," Mr. Drexler states, "the architect has eliminated altogether the need for separate emergency exits and has produced a kind of abstract landscape. The shell vaults, apart from their justification as masks for awkward service elements, such as stage houses, provide an extraordinary festive, even lyric, image. In the words of the awarding jury 'The white sail-like forms of the shell vaults relate as naturally to the harbour as the sails of its yachts....The dynamic form of this vaulted shape contrasts with the buildings which form its background, and give a special significance to the project in the total landscape of the harbour.'"

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Wallace Harrison, architect of the church in Stamford, says that he set out "to build a sanctuary for a Presbyterian church today which might be the same light structure of stone and glass achieved so marvelously in the middle ages." At the same time he wished to develop still further the medieval use of stained glass by carrying it up to the roof of the building. To accomplish this he used a structural system of pre-cast concrete frames filled with chunks of multi-colored glass.

The entrance to the building is at one side through a low and dimly lighted narthex. The nave and narthex itself rise from both sides of this entrance, and together with the canted planes and splayed shape of the nave give the church the appearance of a huge fish--a Christian symbol equally apparent in the floor plan.

Guillaume Gillet's Church of Notre Dame de Royan includes a parish center, a presbytery, and a gymnasium and playing field. A spacious court accommodates open-air masses and is adjoined by class-rooms and the sacristy.

The nearly oval plan of the church is derived from two intersecting parabolas, the roof being a doubly curved concrete "saddle". Walls are made of individual V-shaped piers, the narrow spaces between them filled with glass. Each pier is tapered at its base, resting on a single point, and is buttressed by the roof of the ambulatory. Galleries circling the building above provide additional stabilization for the piers.

"The buttressed piers of Gothic architecture, which much of this building suggests," Mr. Drexler says, "were joined at their summits in great ribbed vaults evoking the image of trees in a forest. But unlike its Gothic predecessors, the piers in Gillet's church carry an unrelated roof form. Instead its saddle shape both unifies the entire nave and cuts the piers at graduated lengths, like the pipes of an organ. This effect is perhaps at its strongest when the interior is seen from the top of the flight of steps linking the main entrance to the nave floor some 12 feet below."