109

2/17/20



# THE ART WORLD

## *Modern vs. Postmodern*

THE main event of this somewhat lacklustre art season has been the furor over the proposed expansion of the Whitney Museum. Since last May, when the Whitney went public with plans, by the architect Michael Graves, to build a new structure alongside and on top of its present one, on Madison Avenue at Seventy-fifth Street, it has been next to impossible to get through an evening's talk without some kind of argument on the subject. A great deal of discussion has centered on whether or not the Graves design would destroy Marcel Breuer's 1966 Whitney building, which has come to be regarded not only as a modernist icon but also (to the great surprise of the Whitney's trustees) as a beloved Manhattan landmark. The situation abounds with ironies. Breuer's dark, granite blockhouse —a highly aggressive form that stands out like a mailed fist from the urbane gentility of Madison Avenue—was praised by architecture critics but greatly disliked and disparaged by the public in its early years. Although it has become a familiar part of the uptown East Side landscape, the current surge of affection for it is something new. The spectacle of architects attacking a prominent member of their own profession is also novel. The profession has always been fiercely competitive—the first law of architecture, it has been said, is "Get the job"—but the degree of public vituperation in this case has been extraordinary. By contrast, Gwathmey Siegel & Associates' proposed addition to the Guggenheim Museum—an eleven-story tower faced with pale-green tile—has elicited little comment of any kind from the profession, even though it seems evident that the tower would seriously compromise the integrity of Frank Lloyd Wright's only Manhattan building, the crowning work of his career, and, by general agreement (something that could hardly be said for Breuer's Whitney), one of the supreme architectural achievements of the twentieth century.

There was no immediate outcry when the Graves drawings and models were presented last spring. His overall plan called for a large, five-story structure equal in height to Breuer's building, extending the museum southward all the way to Seventy-fourth Street (the Whitney owns the row of undistinguished brownstones that would be demolished to make way for the expansion); the two buildings would then serve as the base of a five-story setback penthouse, which would rise to a height of a hundred and eighty-eight feet—the equivalent, in all, of a seventeen-story residential building. The *Times*' architecture critic, Paul Goldberger, gave the plan a rave review in his initial article on the expansion, in May. He called the Graves design "daring and sensitive," and he went on to say that Graves' style—"a richly colored, ornamented assemblage of pure geometries and variations on classical elements such as colonnades and pergolas"—seemed "right for the eclectic mix that Madison Avenue is." The opposition's opening salvo came a month later, at the annual meeting of the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Abraham W. Geller, a seventy-three-year-old architect, who was receiving the chapter's 1985 Medal of Honor, used the occasion to attack Graves' design. He charged that Breuer's building was being "literally crushed. . . . subjugated to an assemblage of many diverse and unrelated blocks."

Subsequent developments have included an anti-Graves article in the *Times* by Hamilton Smith, who was Breuer's partner on the Whitney commission ("The plan reduces the Breuer building to one of several components of an assemblage wrought by seemingly piling toy blocks on each other"); a letter to the president of the

Whitney from Constance Breuer, the architect's widow, stating that she would prefer to see the Whitney torn down rather than subjected to the indignity of the Graves addition (and adding that she was sure her late husband would have felt the same way); and—most distressing to Graves—a petition with more than six hundred signatures, including those of such well-known architects as Edward Larrabee Barnes, I. M. Pei, Romaldo Giurgola, and John Johansen, stating that the expansion "would totally destroy the architectural integrity of the original building." The Ad Hoc Committee to Save the Whitney, which circulated the petition, has been cooperating with neighborhood groups such as the 75th Street Block Association and the Friends of the Upper East Side Historic District. Since the Whitney falls within the recently designated Upper East Side Historic District, its expansion plan must be approved by the Landmarks Preservation Commission; it must also pass review by the City Planning Commission, the Board of Estimate, and Community Board 8. The opposition forces have been raising funds to fight the plan at every stage, and they have retained the services of Berle, Kass & Case, the law firm that was instrumental in stopping Westway.

Some equally prominent architects have rallied to Graves' defense. Philip Johnson and Ulrich Franzen spoke favorably of his design at a curiously restrained public meeting sponsored by the New York Chapter of the A.I.A. in July. The architectural historians Vincent Scully and Martin Filler have defended it. Paul Goldberger, meanwhile, has had second thoughts. He now feels that the five-story top section is "fussy, pretentious and overblown," and he has suggested that "a smaller, less ambitious Whitney could be a better one."

Johnson and others tend to regard the dispute as a generational conflict, pitting modernist diehards against their postmodernist challengers. While this is too narrow an interpretation—the neighborhood groups simply don't want to see a huge building go up on the block, and the head of the Ad Hoc Committee to Save the Whitney, Murray Levi, is a twenty-nine-year-old architect just out of Cooper Union—there is obviously some truth to it. The emergence during the last decade of what has been called postmodernist architecture, with its borrowings from historical styles, its bold use of color and ornamentation, and its playful (or frivolous, depending on your point of view) mixing of forms, represents an almost total break with the austere, "less is more" aesthetic of Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, and the other giants of architectural modernism. (It also represents an economic threat to architectural firms that have based their practice on steel-and-glass office towers, which many clients no longer seem to want.) Marcel Breuer was one of the modernist founders; he taught at the Bauhaus, he was Gropius's partner after they both moved to this country, in the nineteen-thirties, and he was beloved by several generations of American architecture students. The prospect of seeing his most important New York building swallowed up by a postmodernist extravaganza turned an aesthetic issue into an emotional one.

MICHAEL GRAVES, as it happened, was an ideal target for pent-up modernist wrath. Comparatively young (fifty-one), he was known mainly as a teacher (at Princeton) and a designer of innovative private houses until, in 1982, he burst upon the larger architectural scene with the Portland Building, in Oregon, his first large-scale commission. He has since become one of the busiest architects in the country. His recent work has received a great deal of publicity, both favorable and unfavorable. Pietro Belluschi, the former dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, called his Portland Building an "oversize, beribboned Christmas package" that belonged "perhaps in Atlantic City or in Las Vegas, but not in Portland." (Belluschi later recanted, saying he was getting used to the building and was sorry he had made any adverse comment on it.) At the 1983 A.I.A. Convention, in New Orleans, where Graves received an award for the Portland Building, he was confronted by fellow-architects wearing lapel buttons that showed the Portland Building with a red slash through it, and others wearing buttons that read "We Don't Dig Graves." In spite of these slings and arrows, Graves was unprepared for the attacks on his Whitney design. The fact that I. M. Pei and other architects had signed the petition against him was particularly galling; a year or so earlier, Graves had refused to speak out against Pei's glass-pyramid entrance to the Louvre, saying, "Architects don't do that sort of thing." He knows better now.

The uproar also came as a nasty shock to the trustees and staff of the Whitney Museum. Thomas Armstrong, the director, and Flora Miller Biddle, who was then the president of the board (she has since relinquished that post to become chairman), had felt that in choosing Graves they were doing just what an earlier Whitney board had done when it selected Breuer—entrusting the museum's future to the cutting edge of architectural excellence. In retrospect, some of the trustees agree that it was a great mistake to present the Graves design to the public mainly in the form of elevation drawings. The public didn't understand elevations—didn't realize that the building wouldn't look that way when seen from the street. The penthouse floors, with their setbacks, would barely be visible from street level, and when the museum was viewed from the north, down Madison, the original Breuer building would hardly be obliterated. Graves fully believes he was being respectful to the Breuer building. He kept Breuer's flying bridge as the main entrance to the museum, and he echoed the Breuer façade in subtle ways in his adjoining building. Since the main purpose of the expansion was to provide more space for the museum's permanent collection, both Graves and the Whitney's building committee had rejected the idea of housing the addition in a tower. "We need horizontal space," Armstrong explained. "We don't want a tower where you go to the seventeenth floor for Minimalism." That being the case, the only alternative was to build alongside and on top of Breuer. When Graves accepted the job, he had called it "an incredible challenge" and "the most important commission of the decade." He had gone to great pains to design a building that would read as "one museum" but would also be more hospitable than the Breuer building to what he called the "smaller scale and more elaborated façades of the remainder of Madison Avenue." (Breuer had told a *Newsweek* reporter in 1966 that he had not tried to accommodate his building to its neighbors, "because the neighboring buildings aren't any good.") It may well be that adding to Breuer's abstract, sculptural mass and being respectful to it at the same time is impossible. But then why weren't the architects who opposed Graves' design jumping up and down with

111

rage at Gwathmey Siegel's plan for the Guggenheim? Was some of their anger directed at the Whitney itself, rather than just at Graves?

A painful thought, that. For much of its history, the Whitney has been looked upon with great affection—if not always with great esteem—by the New York art community and by the public. Established in 1930 by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, a professional sculptor who also happened to be one of the richest women in America, it retained for many years the guiding ideals of the Whitney Studio Club, which had preceded it; the Whitney existed primarily to help living American artists, and several generations of American artists looked to it as their invaluable resource, showroom, and spiritual home. Its loyalty to the artists who had grown up with it eventually became a drawback. The Whitney was lamentably late in recognizing Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and others of the first generation of American artists to achieve international renown, and until 1968 or so it took relatively little notice of Pop Art, Minimalism, and other contemporary developments. Tom Armstrong, the abundantly genial but by no means easygoing man who took over as director in 1974, saw his job primarily in terms of professionalizing the place. "When I first came here, some trustees still talked about giving So-and-So a show because he was getting older, or he needed the attention, or he had taught so many years at the Art Students League," Armstrong told me some time ago. "It was a private museum until 1961—no trustees outside the Whitney family and their advisers. My main point has been to turn it into an institution whose primary responsibility is to the public. That means making critical judgments and decisions about quality. It means setting standards. I want this to be the best place in the world to see what American artists have done in this century."

Some critics (and some artists) believe that Armstrong's Whitney has failed dismally in this endeavor. The museum's biennial exhibitions of painting and sculpture—our closest approximation of a national salon—have been accused of "trendiness," and its curatorial standards, despite some outstanding exhibitions, are said to be erratic. Hilton Kramer, formerly the chief art critic of the *Times* and since 1982 the editor of *The New Criterion*, has repeatedly attacked Armstrong's stewardship, and the diatribe reached its peak (presumably) in the September, 1985, issue of *The New Criterion*. The public announcement of Michael Graves' design for the Whitney expansion had finally made clear, according to Kramer, the "sinister and menacing character" of that museum's over-all policies and programs. The "moment of truth" had dawned, "even for those who had tried so arduously to make allowances for so many egregious misadventures in the past." The Whitney now stood revealed as one of those art institutions (apparently there are many) which "constitute a real threat to the life of art and its place in our society." Armstrong and his staff have learned to take Kramer's opinions in stride—the implication that they spent most of their time thinking up new ways to damage American art struck them and others as laughable. But it is clear that the climate of affection in which the Whitney once basked has chilled considerably, and one of Armstrong's big problems is that the museum has not yet gained enough professional respect to give it real power as an institu-

tion. The Whitney's board of trustees wields relatively little clout in New York's social or political life. William S. Woodside, the new president of the Whitney's board, may change that; he is the chairman and chief executive officer of the American Can Company, and it is anticipated that he will try hard to bring more corporate throw weight into the museum's future. At the moment, though, almost anyone with money and social ambitions would still rather serve on the board of the Museum of Modern Art or the Metropolitan Museum—two institutions that have carried out vast recent expansions with little public opposition.

Armstrong and his board feel that they also erred in not "selling" the need for their museum's expansion before they revealed the architectural plan. They are trying to do so now, at every possible opportunity. The present space, they point out, allows them to show only seventy-two works of art out of a permanent collection of ten thousand. There is no auditorium for lectures or public-education programs, and no space to show the Whitney's collection of more than five thousand drawings; office and support facilities are wholly inadequate; the library can accommodate only four users at a time (thin ones). The Graves plan would add about thirty-five thousand square feet of exhibition space—more than doubling the present total. It would also provide a two-hundred-and-fifty-seat theatre, an orientation gallery, an expanded library and study center, additional office space, a rooftop restaurant, and a host of lesser amenities. Critics of the expansion have asked whether the Whitney really needs all these things if the price includes doing in the Breuer building. One Whitney trustee resigned last spring because he was opposed to the expansion, and two others recently told a *Times* reporter that they had doubts about the expansion. The rest of the thirty-three-member Whitney board is behind the plan, however, even though several have asked rather plaintively for verbal ammunition to use at cocktail and dinner parties, where they are frequently asked to explain why anyone want to spoil the Whitney. (Armstrong's staff obliged them with a two-page, single-spaced summary of useful facts and arguments.) Twenty-five board members have pledged financial support for the building fund, which has been set at fifty-two and a half million dollars—thirty-seven and a half million for expansion itself and fifteen million for an endowment to maintain it. According to the museum, about a third of the money has been pledged; but some trustees doubt the firmness of some pledges, and most agree that public opposition will make it tougher to raise the full amount.

THE next step is for the Graves plan to go before the Landmarks Preservation Commission. The Whitney withdrew its application for a hearing last spring, having decided that it needed more time to assemble the required data—and no doubt hoping that tempers might cool a bit. The museum has brought in reinforcements: Arthur Lindenbaum, who is considered one of the top real-estate lawyers in the city, and the public-relations company of Howard J. Rubenstein Associates. The Landmarks Commission hearing will probably take place sometime this spring, and it is presumed that the Graves design will be presented there in a somewhat scaled-down form. A major battle is expected, in any event, and the outcome is very much in doubt. As one experienced urban administrator said to me, the lost momentum, a determined and well-organized opposition, a bad press, and a highly complex series of public hearings and official reviews add up to a real possibility that the project will be stopped. What then?

Armstrong has indicated that if the building expansion and the development plans that go with it are shelved he will resign. The Whitney's trustees would then be obliged to sit down and rethink a number of issues. This could turn out to be an interesting process. There has been very little hard thinking lately about the nature and the purpose of art museums. Should they really try to be all things to all people, as so many museums feel they must these days—community centers as well as research institutions, places of entertainment as well as temples of high culture? Must they forever grow larger and more "comprehensive" in their appeal? Is public education in the visual arts really part of the museum's job? The Whitney has already expanded its activities by establishing three branch museums—two in Manhattan and one in Stamford, Connecticut—and this week it will open a fourth branch, in the Equitable Life Assurance Society's new building, on Seventh Avenue between Fifty-first and Fifty-second Streets. Could this be an alternative to enlarging the Breuer space—Whitney branches exfoliating across the country, spreading the good word about American art? In the nineteen-twenties, a number of educators and museum people addressed themselves to such questions. Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., the co-founder of the fine-arts department at Princeton, argued that American museums were growing too large, and so defeating their purpose. He urged the Metropolitan and other big museums to decentralize—to establish branch museums specializing in one or another category of art objects, which, he said, would lead to greater interest and pleasure for the public and more efficient administration. John Cotton Dana, the brilliantly innovative director of the Newark Museum, contended that "no other public institutions give so little in return for the money spent on them as museums." Dana wanted museums to help viewers respond to aesthetic pleasure in their everyday life, and he argued that they were doing nothing of the kind. This sort of spirited iconoclasm is in short supply today, when American civic pride seems to require the automatic proliferation of more and bigger art museums.

The questions will probably not be asked, though—at least, not in this case. My guess is that the Whitney will agree to some cutbacks and alterations in the Graves design, and that the expansion will eventually be approved. Graves is not averse to putting his building "on a diet," as he phrases it. His original design simply reflects what Armstrong and the Whitney trustees asked for in terms of space; if they opt for less, Graves can oblige them. At any rate, New York has always been more hospitable to change than to architecture. "It's an old issue, isn't it?" Philip Johnson said the other day. "We all ruin other people's buildings. I 'ruined' the Museum of Modern Art—not once but twice!—and now Cesar Pelli has 'ruined' my garden there. Breuer tried to ruin Grand Central Terminal. The fight to stop him from building that fifty-five-story tower over Grand Central was really what put teeth into the Landmarks Commission." Johnson himself, who as early as the nineteen-fifties was telling Yale students that "you cannot not know history," has managed the transition from modernism to postmodernism with the ease of a master technician. At the age of seventy-nine, he knows that in this city it is the architects who last, not the buildings.

—CALVIN TOMKINS

3/11/87

# The Whitney Unveils Smaller Expansion Plan

By DOUGLAS C. McGILL

The Whitney Museum of American Art, responding to protests by neighborhood and civic groups over a plan to expand its building at Madison Avenue and 75th Street, announced a revised plan yesterday that calls for reducing the proposed addition by nearly a quarter.

The original expansion plan, announced in May 1985, consisted of a 10-story addition to the south of and directly over the current Whitney building, a distinctive minimalist structure designed by the architect Marcel Breuer in 1966. The expansion was designed by the architect Michael Graves, who also designed the revision.

Within days after the plan was announced, however, objections were raised by many people who believed the size of the addition would overwhelm nearby shops and buildings, block the view of nearby apartment owners and destroy the architectural integrity of the Breuer building by making it merely one component of the Graves design.

"The building has a new life, a new sense about itself," Mr. Graves said yesterday at a news conference at the museum, where the new plan was unveiled. "It is a bit tauter, yet without sacrificing any of the life and spirit of the earlier design. From the viewpoint of anyone who thought the building was too big, it will be improved."

The revised plan is essentially the same form as the first, only smaller. It consists of three parts: a building to the south of the Breuer building, a cylindrical structure between the Breuer building and the new building and a rectangular structure atop the cylinder and the Breuer and Graves buildings.

In the new plan, the top structure is the one most dramatically reduced in size. It is less than half the size — 40 percent — of the first design, is 47 feet lower and is substantially plainer, lacking several distinctive architectural elements of the first design, such as an "eyebrow window" that spanned nearly its entire length. It has also been set back 20 feet on the corners of the rear facade, whose previous tall, sheer face was a source of especially strong protest from local groups.

The design of the revision, however, remains in Mr. Graves's characteristic style, a post-modern amalgam of abstract forms that recalls architecture ranging from pyramids and palazzos to New York brownstones.

Thomas N. Armstrong, the director of the Whitney Museum, said yesterday that despite the overall reduction in the size of the museum, the total amount of exhibition space increased slightly — to 54,700 square feet from 51,820 square feet. The museum now has 23,100 square feet.

That result was achieved, Mr. Armstrong said, by scaling down most other aspects of the expansion, such as office space, the museum store, restaurant, theater, library and drawing study center. Each of those areas will still expand, but not so much as before. At least one major improvement was the removal of a floor for mechanical equipment that would have interrupted the flow of visitors from floor to floor.

"This design is much more a whole in terms of the museum experience," Mr. Armstrong said. "The difficulty was to maintain the integrity of the museum program and of the expansion design and at the same time to respond to the community problems. All of us genuinely feel we have done that."

A prime objective of the expansion, Mr. Armstrong said, has been to display more works from the museum's permanent collection of some 3,000 paintings and sculptures. At present, only 72 works from that collection are on view; the expansion will increase that number to 350.

The cost of the expansion, estimated in 1985 at $37.5 million, will remain the same, Mr. Armstrong said. With the revised expansion plan now complete, he said the museum will begin a $52.5 million fund-raising campaign, of which $15 million will go toward the museum's endowment and the remainder to build the expansion. He said he hoped the expansion would be complete sometime "in the 90's."

Among other changes in t
vised plan, the restaurant, whi
to have been on the top floor ov
ing Central Park, was moved
basement. In addition, the cyli
element flared out in steps at t
tom, overlapping the granite
of the Breuer building, but is
perfect cylinder.

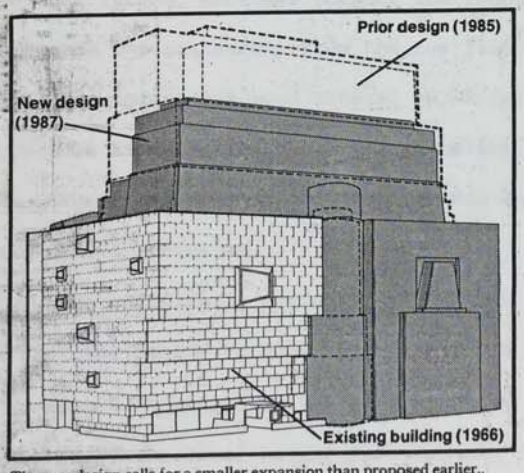
Samuel Lindenbaum, a law
the Whitney, said yesterday t
museum would soon ask for a h
before the New York City Land
Preservation Commission, wh
proval is required, and would a
mission to demolish five brow
it owns on the expansion site. T
seum must present its prop
several public hearings and a
the approval of Community B
the City Planning Commissi
the Board of Estimate, whic
take a year.

In telephone interviews yes
several neighborhood reside
civic leaders said that museu
cials met with them several t
the last year as the revision
veloped and that they were
aged by the new plan.

"It's heartening to know th
was a response to concerns ra
the community," said Edith
the chairman of a committee
munity Board 8. She added, h
that she had only heard the
described and was reservin
ment until she saw the new mo

The New York Times/Chester H

Michael Graves, left, architect, and Thomas N. Armstrong, direc
Whitney Museum of American Art, with model of proposed additi




The new design calls for a smaller expansion than proposed earlier..

**Whitney Museum of American Art**

Madison Avenue at 75th Street New York, New York 10021 (212) 570-3633

**For Release**

#935

March 10, 1987

REVISED EXPANSION PLANS ANNOUNCED

BY WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

The Whitney Museum of American Art today made public revised plans for its proposed expansion by architect Michael Graves. The addition has been reduced by 47 feet in height and more than 30,000 square feet in gross area--a decrease of 24% from the prior design.

The cylindrical hinge between the existing building and the proposed addition has been scaled down so that it no longer overlaps the existing granite facade. The new design also eliminates the previously planned 74th Street entrance, adds setbacks on the east facade, encloses more of the loading dock to shield it from view, and relocates the restaurant from the top floor.

*The height has been reduced by 47 feet, from 204 feet to 157 feet. The new structure is approximately the same height as nearby apartment houses.

*The gross area of the addition has been reduced from 128,270 to 97,920 square feet (a 24% reduction).

*The addition is not only reduced but also set back 20 feet at the seventh floor on the east facade to allow more light and air into the block.

*A 60% reduction in the area spanning the addition and the Breuer structure is achieved by the lower height and setbacks on all sides.

While the overall size of the proposed addition has been substantially reduced, the total amount of exhibition area for works of art has been slightly increased. This will provide space for approximately 350 masterworks by such renowned American artists as Alexander Calder, Stuart Davis, Willem de Kooning, Edward Hopper, Jasper Johns,

(more)

Ellsworth Kelly, Louise Nevelson, Georgia O'Keeffe, Ad Reinhardt, James Rosenquist, George Segal, David Smith, and Frank Stella, among others. At present the Whitney Museum can display only 72 works from its unrivaled Permanent Collection.

Mechanical space on the roof of the existing building has been converted to galleries so that exhibition space will now be vertically contiguous on five floors.

"We are particularly pleased with the new design which both responds to many community concerns and admirably fulfills the Museum's most pressing need for more exhibition space to show additional masterpieces from our Permanent Collection," said William S. Woodside, President of the Museum. "As the leading international museum devoted to American art, we have a special responsibility to both the public and scholars to make these works available, as well as to provide space for research and educational activities. We are delighted that Mr. Graves' sensitive, intelligent, and creative new design meets these requirements in a structure that complements the powerful Marcel Breuer building and is appropriate to the neighborhood," he said.

Museum Director Tom Armstrong said, "The staff and Trustees are extremely pleased with the revised plans. Although we have sacrificed space for some aspects of the program, we have not lost any exhibition space from the preliminary design and have maintained sufficient space for education and research programs. Such programs represent an integral part of the Museum's purpose. Many scholars requesting use of the Library--the definitive resource on 20th-century American art--are turned away for lack of space. The study of works on paper is now virtually impossible. We are perhaps the only major museum with no auditorium on the premises for lectures, symposia, and performances--essential to fulfilling the institution's public mission. The expansion will help the Whitney Museum sustain its role as the pre-eminent center for the enjoyment and study of the visual arts of our country," he said.

(more)

"The new addition places greater emphasis on its street-level elements and reduces and simplifies the design of the upper portion of the building," said Michael Graves. "Its composition relates sympathetically to the existing museum, and the articulation of the lower facade reflects the scale and coloration of the nearby brownstones. I feel very positive about the design of this addition and its relationship to both the Breuer building and the context of Madison Avenue."

The major components of the expanded museum include 37,700 square feet of exhibition space for the Permanent Collection, an orientation gallery, a 250-seat theater to accommodate the Museum's active public education programs, and an expanded library--the latter two occupying less space than in the previous design. Commercial space along Madison Avenue, also reduced from the prior design by 4,000 square feet, maintains the retail character of the district consistent with zoning requirements. Office space will be slightly reduced, and the restaurant, which will remain in its present location in the Lower Gallery, will occupy slightly less space than in the preliminary plans. Twenty-one thousand square feet for art storage for the Permanent Collection will remain off site.

The expansion will allow the Museum to present the most comprehensive view of 20th-century American art in the world adjacent to the existing temporary exhibition galleries, thus providing a historical context in which to view the changing exhibitions. The new galleries will be devoted to a chronological installation of the development of American art since 1900, as well as surveys of the work of major figures who are represented in depth in the Permanent Collection.

The Museum is located in the Upper East Side Historic District, and the proposed expansion will require approval of the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Certain zoning modifications will also be needed which require Community Board review and City Planning Commission and Board of Estimate approval.

(more)

Mr. Armstrong expressed his appreciation to members of the Community Board and neighborhood groups who have been meeting with Museum staff in the course of the revision process.

It is estimated that the proposed building program, including construction of the addition and renovation of the present building, will cost approximately $37.5 million.

A summary table depicting the space allocated by various functions is attached.

Press information: (212)570-3633

# WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

COMPARISON OF SPACE ALLOCATIONS BY FUNCTION (in net square feet)

| FUNCTION | EXISTING | PRIOR DESIGN* | NEW DESIGN* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Permanent Collection Exhibition | 8,100 | 28,840 | 37,700 |
| Temporary Exhibition | 15,000 | 22,980 | 17,000 |
| Total Exhibition | 23,100 | 51,820 | 54,700 |
| Film/Video | 1,480 | 1,550 | 2,645 |
| Works on Paper Study/Storage | 1,510 | 5,370 | 2,300 |
| Library | 1,700 | 6,750 | 5,085 |
| Museum Store | 1,400 | 2,670 | 2,465 |
| Restaurant | 3,310 | 5,110 | 4,480 |
| Theater and Support Space | - | 11,840 | 9,780 |
| Exhibition preparation | 5,700 | 5,580 | 5,545 |
| Building Operations and Security | 1,985 | 9,120 | 5,650 |
| Office (includes off-site) | 10,860 | 13,250 | 12,880 |
| Loading Dock | 620 | 990 | 1,005 |
| Commercial | - | 9,660 | 5,040 |
| Art Storage | | (21,000 square feet off-site) | |

*Includes existing building and proposed addition

March 1987

# Guggenheim Museum Proposing Scaled-Down Design for Addition

By PAUL GOLDBERGER

Officials of the Guggenheim Museum, conceding that an earlier plan to add a cantilevered tower to the museum's celebrated Frank Lloyd Wright-designed building on Fifth Avenue had won little support while incurring the resentment of community groups and preservationists, presented a new, scaled-down design yesterday. The new Guggenheim tower, 10 stories high, would be one floor lower than the first plan. In its overall design, however, it differs more dramatically, and is now a discreet backdrop to the museum rather than a competing element.

The new proposal, which, like the previous one, was designed by the architectural firm of Gwathmey Siegel & Associates, represents a major retreat for the museum. For not only would the building be significantly smaller, it would also contain only additional exhibition space and museum offices. The earlier project would have had room for the museum's library, art-conservation department and art storage, all of which are now to be housed away from the main premises.

"The first project was very satisfactory to us, but it did inspire expressions of dissatisfaction from certain parts of the community, and we are not insensitive to such expressions," the director of the museum, Thomas M. Messer, said at a news conference held in the museum to announce the new design. "We felt we had no choice but to accept the reduced size of this new design."

The earlier project, announced in October 1985, was withdrawn last fall, shortly before New York City's Board of Standards and Appeals was to vote on it, when officials of the Guggenheim calculated that they did not have the votes to win approval. The board will also have to give its approval to the new project, since the shape and bulk of the proposed building require several variances from the city's zoning laws. The Landmarks Preservation Commission, which normally passes on additions to significant works of architecture in the city, has no jurisdiction here since the Guggenheim is neither an individual landmark — completed in 1959, it is too new to meet the requirement that landmarks be a minimum of 30 years old — nor is it within a historic district.

> The new plan offers a discreet backdrop to Wright's building.

The new design was described by Charles Gwathmey, one of the architects, as following "a strategy of mediation with the Frank Lloyd Wright building rather than one of making a counterpoint."

"We abandoned the first scheme and went to a totally different one that we believe responded to the concerns of critics and people in the neighborhood," Mr. Gwathmey said.

The tower, which would cost about $9 million, would be 133 feet high as compared with the 162-foot height of the earlier design. It would be sheathed in limestone rather than colored tile, and it would have a simple rectangular shape rather than the complex, projecting shape of the first project. It would be 35 feet wide as compared with the earlier design, which at the widest point of its cantilever over the Frank Lloyd Wright building would have had a width of nearly 50 feet.

**Facade Would Be Grooved**

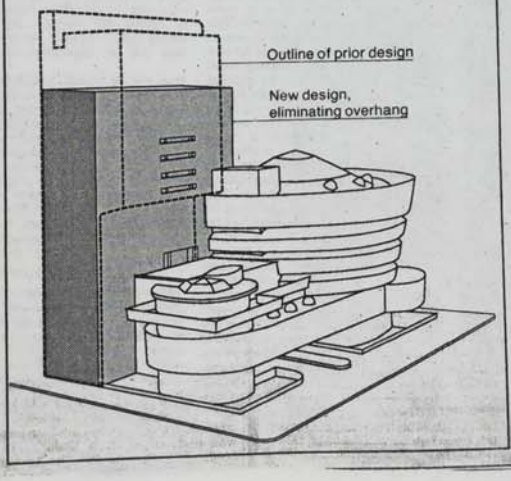
The building would not be a stark box, however. Its facade would be articulated with a grid of deep grooves cut into the limestone in the form of a grid of roughly eight-foot squares, intended both to enliven the facade and to allude to a design that Frank Lloyd Wright himself made for this narrow site just behind the Guggenheim's main building. The Wright project, which never went beyond the stage of initial sketches, would have been a 25-foot-wide slab containing artists' studios, with a gridded glass and masonry facade that, like the Gwathmey Siegel design, was intended as a discreet backdrop for the more active, rounded forms of the museum itself.

The new design would also contain four horizontal rows of narrow, deeply set windows, which together form a square. These would provide natural light for the offices within and give the tower facade an element to balance visually the mass of Frank Lloyd Wright's great rotunda. On the 89th Street side, the essential themes of the building would continue, but there would be more glass and the vertical grooves would fall away to make the grid a series of horizontal lines instead.

Inside, the first seven floors would contain exhibition space to display a larger portion of the museum's permanent collection, 97 percent of which, according to museum officials, is now in storage. The new galleries would expand the amount of the collection on view only from 3 percent to 7 percent, Mr. Mr. Messer said, "but that figure is highly misleading, since it is not a question of numbers of works but of masterpieces."

"Less than half of the things in our

**Guggenheim Addition: A New Proposal**



The New York Times/Edward Hausner

Charles Gwathmey, left, and Robert Siegel, architects, at news conference at the Guggenheim Museum. They displayed renderings of new design for a proposed 10-story tower.

collection that we would consider masterpieces are now on view," he said, "and there is no museum in the world that has that quality of work permanently invisible." He later estimated that roughly 200 works of "masterpiece" quality could go on permanent exhibition in the new wing.

The exhibition floors in the new wing would connect at each level with the spiral ramp of the Frank Lloyd Wright building, which would continue to be used for temporary exhibitions. Some sections of some floors in the new wing would be cut out to yield double-height spaces and balconies, and there would be a large outdoor sculpture terrace off the fifth floor, on the roof of the "little rotunda," the smaller section of the Wright building on the north end.

**Views of Park From the Terrace**

From the standpoint of the organization of space within the museum, the new design represents a degree of improvement over the earlier project — circulation will flow more easily through the galleries, and the sculpture terrace would be a special bonus, with spectacular views of Central Park as well as the chance to view the exterior of the main rotunda with an unusual intimacy.

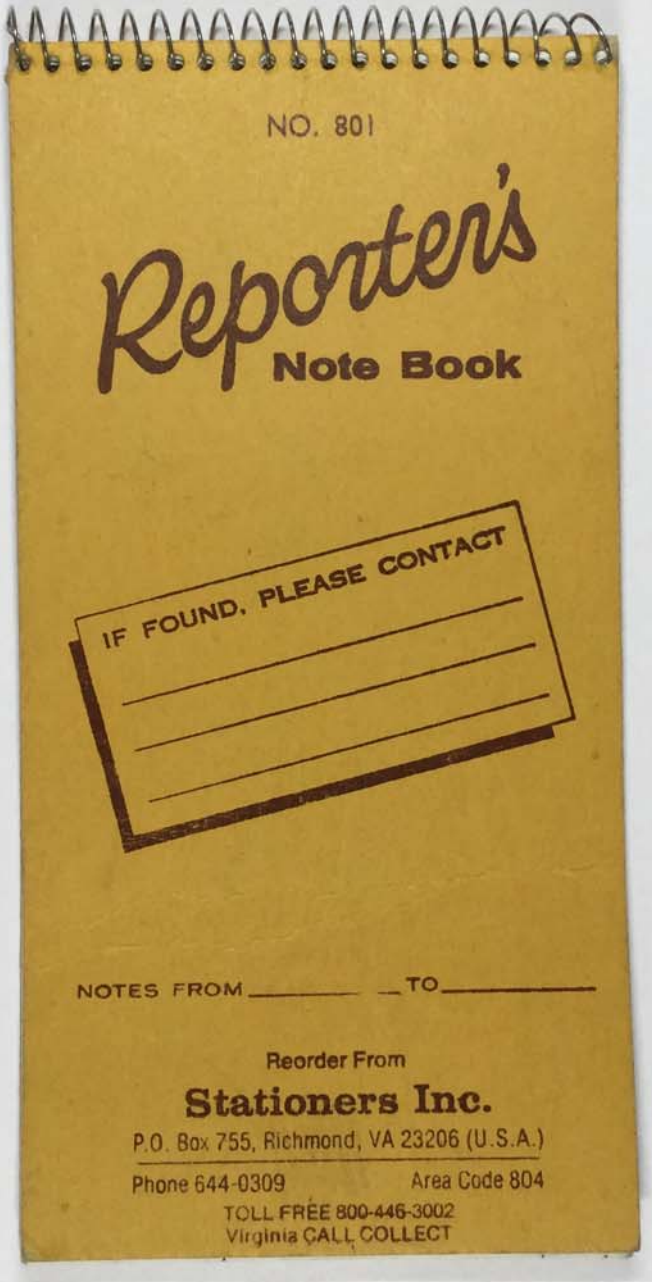
The inside was never the real question as regarded the earlier project, however; the controversy it engendered was over the effect it would have on a markedly eccentric, difficult building that is correctly viewed as one of the great works of architecture of the 20th century. The Guggenheim Museum has always been problematic as a display space, but it is triumphant as a work of architectural imagination. As a thing in itself it is as precious, surely, as any work of art it contains.

There is a point of view that holds that such a masterwork should never be touched, and it is hard to disagree entirely with that: this building, for all its power, has a particular fragility, and cannot be tampered with easily. But that does not mean it cannot be added to at all, when an addition pays proper respect to the nature of the Wright original.

The earlier design by Mr. Gwathmey and his partner, Robert Siegel, did not do that. It attempted something more ambitious, in its way — to speak back to Wright in a different language — and it was ultimately an act of hubris that deserved the abandonment it has now received. The new design is the product of a chastened sensibility, of the recognition that there are moments in architecture when strength consists of a willingness to stand back. Given the various factors at play here — the Guggenheim's institutional needs, the fact that Wright himself had designed a structure vaguely similar to the present proposal and the fundamentally deferential nature of this new design to Wright's original — there is a strong case to be made for the viability of this proposal.

## Stanley Kunitz Wins Bollingen Poetry Prize

Stanley Kunitz has won the Bollingen Prize in Poetry of the Yale University Library. The $5,000 prize, announced yesterday, is given every two years to one or more living American poets for the best collection published in that period, or for a body of poetry written over several years. Mr. Kunitz, who is 81 years old, and whose "Selected Poems" (1958) won the Pulitzer Prize, was cited for the "growth and vigor" of his own work, his support as a "nurturing spirit for scores of younger poets," and his influence on such poets as Theodore Roethke and Robert Lowell who, the judges said, probably became "better poets than they would have been without his friendship."



Clips

Graves named to design "a single-use bldg. with the possibility of commercial space at ground level." G. says job of adding to Brenner "a struggle and an incredible challenge." (NYT, 10/18/81)

"It's the most important commission of the decade" - Graves. (Metropolitan Home, Des Moines, Ia., Jan. '82)

Graves' first major comm. in NYC. Has done private houses, offices, housing for elderly, Water museum in Union, NJ, Portland Pub. Off. Bldg, Targe-Moss Head Cultural Center. "The challenge will be to make a companion piece to Brenner's that will maintain a certain nostalgia for the old bldg and yet have a personality of its own..." (Cent News, Feb '82)

When he won the Amer. Acad + Inst. of Arts + Letters annual architec. award in 1980, Gordon Bunshaft said, "We used to give prizes for doing bldgs. Now we give prizes for drawing pictures." Pietro Belluschi, former dean of arch. at MIT, called his Portland bldg. an "oversize, bewhbowed Christmas package" that belonged "perhaps in Atlantic City or in Las Vegas, but not in Portland." (People, 2/8/82

For info on Friends of Upper East Side Historic District, call ~~Gotham Bldrs~~ East Berwick at Municipal Art Soc. - 935-3960

Guggenheim addition - NYT 10/10/85

Petition signed by more than 600 architects + artists urges Whitney board to abandon Graves design. →

"The expansion would totally destroy the architectural integrity of the orig. bldg..." Signers include Dore Ashton, Peter Blake, Ed Barnes, Pei, Ronaldo Giurgola, John Johansen, Noguchi, Motherwell, Julian Schnabel, Saul Steinberg.

Goldberger rave on 5/22/85 called design "both daring + sensitive." Graves' style, "a richly colored, ornamented assemblage of pure geometries and variations on classical ~~forms~~ elements such as ~~colon~~ colonnades and pergolas... feels right for the eclectic mix that Madison Avenue is."

Abraham W. Geller, in accepting A.I.A. 1985 Medal of Honor, attacked Graves. "... the Breuer bldg is being literally crushed." (NYT, 6/4/85)

All out attack by Michael Sorkin in VV, June 25, 1985.

Hamilton Smith, Brener's partner, wrote art. in NYT July 28, 1985:
"... the plan reduces the Brener bldg. to one of several components of an assemblage ~~to~~ wrought by seemingly piling toy blocks on ~~each~~ ~~other~~."

~~Chad~~
Geller had copies of his speech ready for the press. Small "Save the Whitney" signs were distributed at the C.I.A. meeting. (Charlotte Curtis in NYT, 7/2/85) - play?

Oddly restrained pub. meeting at Donnell Library in July. Most speakers supported Cranes (Philip J., Hanzen, V. Scully). Tom A. said "We need horizontal

space. We don't want a tower where you go to the 17th floor for Miesmiesken." (NYT, 7/26/85)

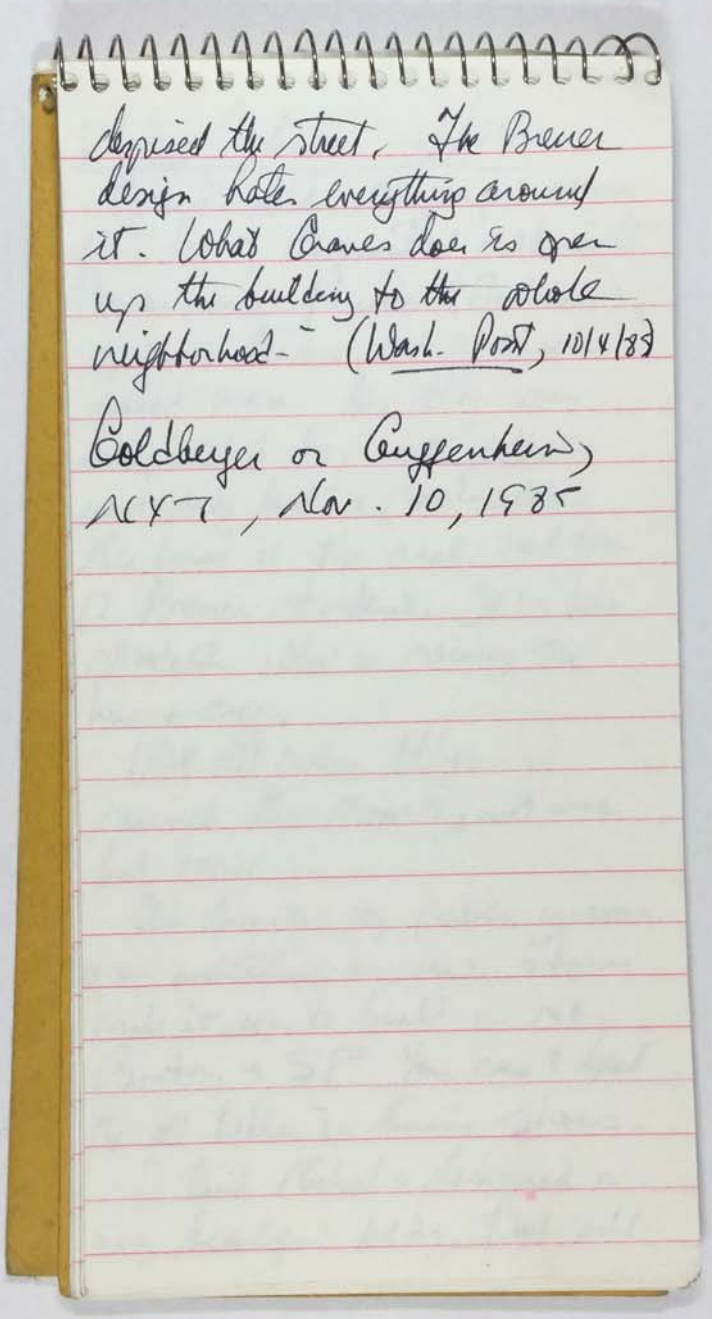
Martin Filler, in Aug. '85 House & Garden, heartily approved, "... will add much to the cultural richness of a city that has always seemed oddly short of architectural masterpieces. Its boldness is tempered by a real attempt at beauty ... This imaginative design promises to raise the Whitney from its unquestioned national stature to a new international eminence."

Tom Hoving in Connoisseur: "... a somnolent, squat, ponderous structure dipped in déjà vu."
(Aug. 85)

Deyan Sudjic in Sunday Times (London), 9/01/85: "Does the Whitney really need a huge new restaurant, a 250-seat theatre, a study centre, more offices, and an orientation gallery if the price is the integrity of the Breuer building?"

Colin Amery in The Financial Times (London), 9/30/85: "Graves wants to enrich the language of architecture and ornament; he is bursting with ideas, but too many of them have gathered here in one place." (re Humana Bldg).

Scully: "Fundamentally, the issue is the city. In a sense the modernists never valued the ~~modern~~ traditional city. Like so many of the Bauhaus architects, Breuer



depressed the street. The Breuer design hates everything around it. What Graves does is open up the building to the whole neighborhood." (Wash. Post, 10/4/85

Goldberger on Guggenheim)
NYT, Nov. 10, 1985

Philip Johnson — 1/14

Breuer bldg. the perfect issue for a lot of disgruntled modernists. Breuer was a founder (Bauhaus), a great teacher, and a much loved man. His bldg was being added to, not with a mod. bldg. but a postmodern. No fuss if the arch. had been a Breuer student. It's his students who're raising the hue + cry.

We all ruin bldgs. I ruined the MoMA, not once but twice...

This business of public uproar over architecture is new. Hayes made it imp. to build in NY, Boston, + S.F. You can't beat the old ladies in tennis shoes.

I think Michael's designed a very beautiful bldg. That will

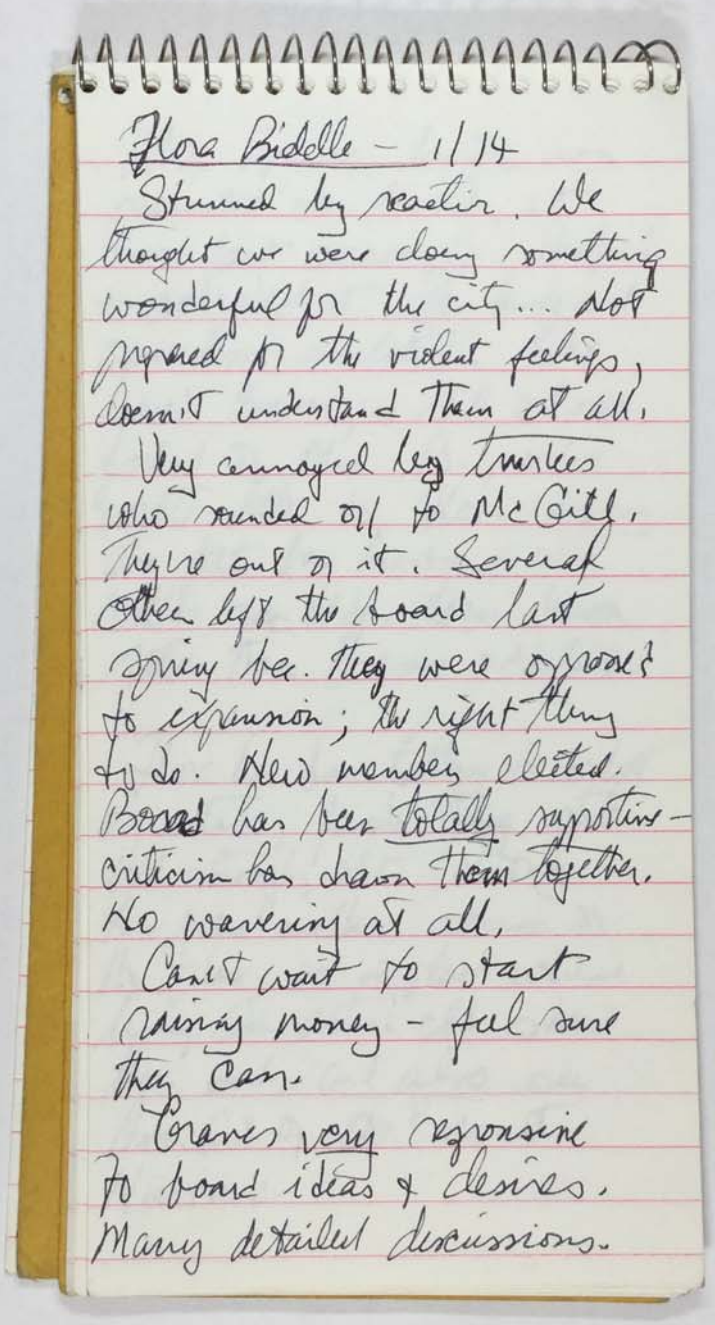
be good for the block + for the city. (Brener didn't care about either).

Doesn't think Graves is pleasant as arrogant or condescending. Where did you get that?

Philip never signed anything ag. Brener's add. to Grand Central. "I simply refused to take part in the competition." Doesn't think anything sh'd be built over G.C.

Will they get the money? Leonard Lauder did write a check for the whole amt.

A reduced version is what seems in the cards.



Flora Biddle – 1/14

Stunned by reaction. We thought we were doing something wonderful for the city... Not prepared for the violent feelings, doesn't understand them at all.

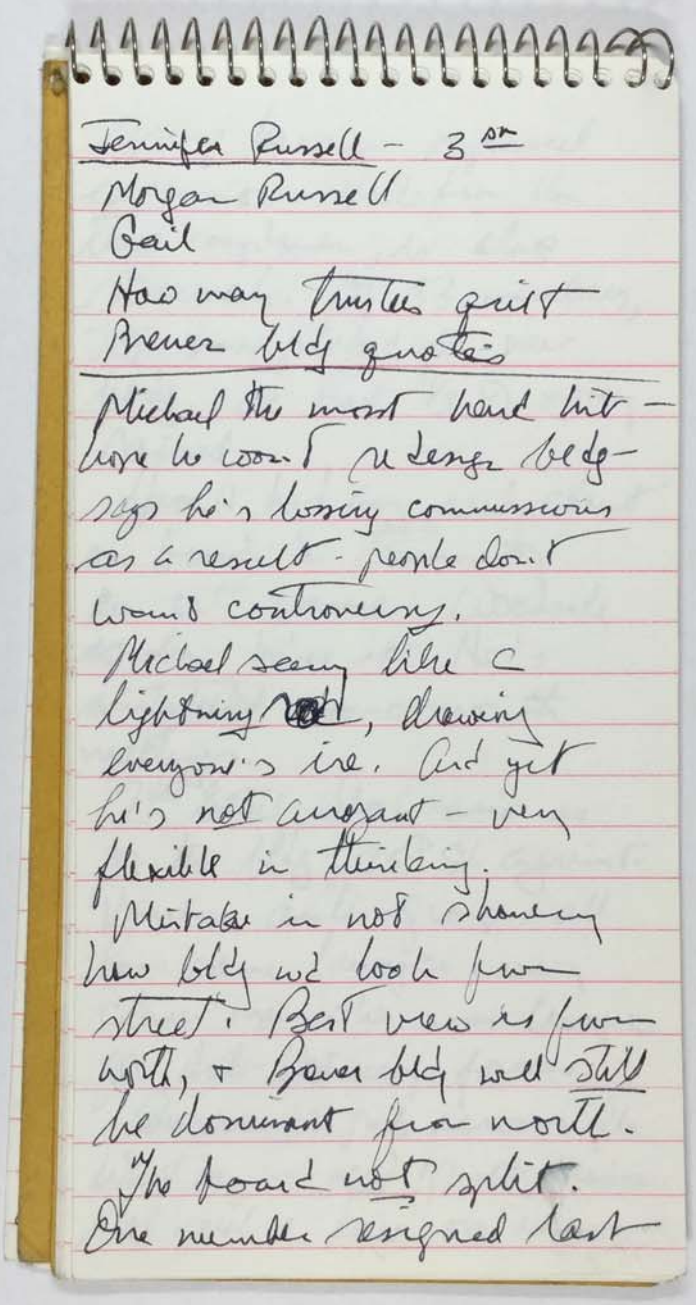
Very encouraged by trustees who rounded off to McGill. They're out of it. Several others left the board last spring too. They were opposed to expansion; the right thing to do. New members elected. Board has been totally supportive – criticism has drawn them together. No wavering at all.

Can't wait to start raising money – feel sure they can.

Cranes very responsive to board ideas & desires. Many detailed discussions.

When Breuer design was presented to board, it was fait accompli. Gulped + accepted it. Her husband was asso. architect. She loved Breuer, is still close friend of Mrs. B., who wrote letter to Flora saying she felt her husband w'd rather see bldg. torn down rather than Graves addition.

Flora has been talking to a lot of artists, finds they still feel strongly abt Columbus in her grandmother's sense of the place, as a place where living Am. artists cld show their work, and also see Am. Art of 20th cent. Nature.



Jennifer Russell – 3rd
Morgan Russell
Gail
Had many trustees quit
Brewer bldg quotas

Michael the most hard hit –
have to count on large bldg –
says he's losing commissions
as a result – people don't
want controversy.
Michael seems like a
lightning rod, drawing
everyone's ire. And yet
he's not arrogant – very
flexible in thinking.
Mistake in not showing
how bldg will look from
street. Best view is from
north, & Brewer bldg will still
be dominant from north.
The board not split.
One member resigned last

Spring became opposed expansion. Aside from the three complainers, W. else staunch. Of 33 members, 25 have pledged for new bldg; at least 1/3 of money raised.

Haven't had any real clout on board, in terms of the city game. Woodside does have it. He's ~~sustained~~ a month meetings.

74th Street block anti is for the bldg; 75th St. against. Various anti-groups all have same lawyer, very clever man who was lawyer for anti-West way forces.

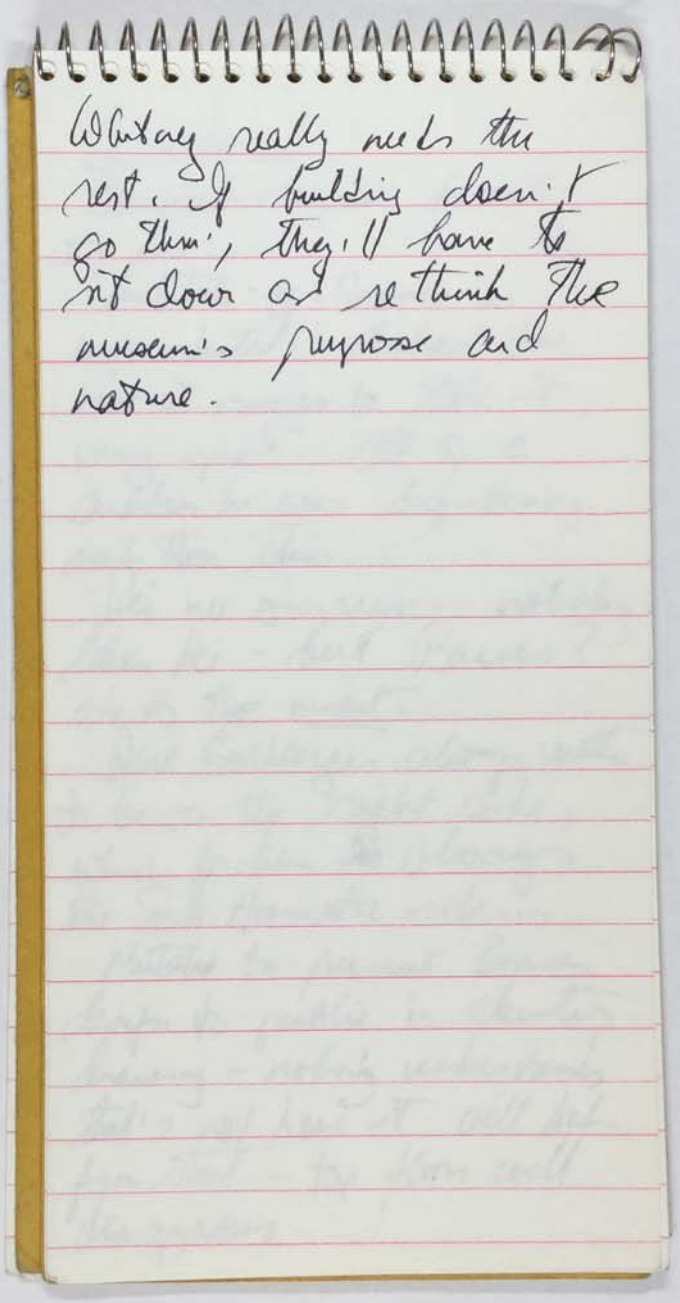
Anxious to get across the West way is key for expansion. Not such a huge one anyway -

will still be a small museum. (see next page)

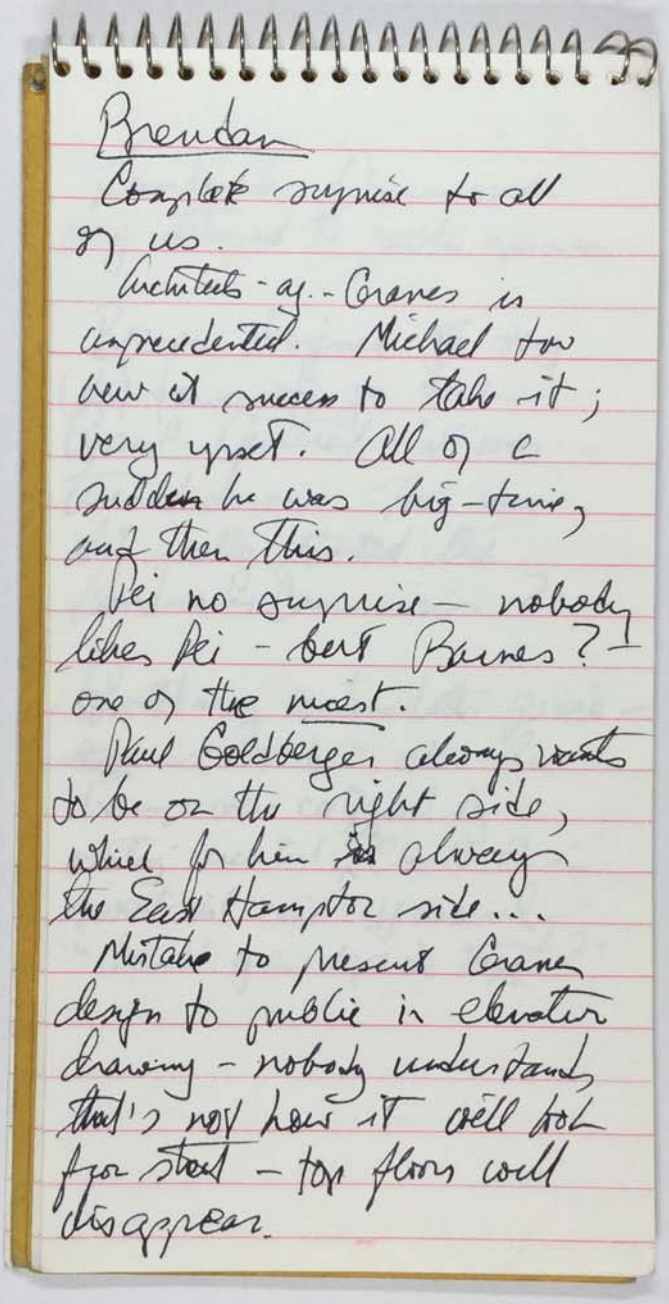
Morgan Russell - owner was friend of Gail Levin - not a conditional gift (can't accept such without board approval). We are going to do a show. But material mostly documentary & historical, not v. interesting.

Levin spent 8 yrs. @ Cat. Raisonné of Hopper - was 2 yr. behind - asked permission to write book on Hopper for commercial pub - was told no, in writing, by Palmer. Well did so anyway, fired as result. She's convinced Kramer [illegible] fired her because he anti Semitic.

Whitney's storage is all in warehouse in West 20's, & will remain there even after new bldg done – inconvenient but necessary. Restaurant is imp. part of income, not so much for ordinary visitors use as for corporate dinners. Auditorium takes up most space because of raked floor (two floors needed). No place at all now to show drawings. Library usable only by someone totally focused or deaf (as Arthur Rosenblatt said in his report on need for expansion – now he's one of leaders of the opposition). If there's a setback, the rest will be one of things cut. Bard



Whitney really needs the rest. If building doesn't go thru, they'll have to sit down & rethink the museum's purpose and nature.



Brendan

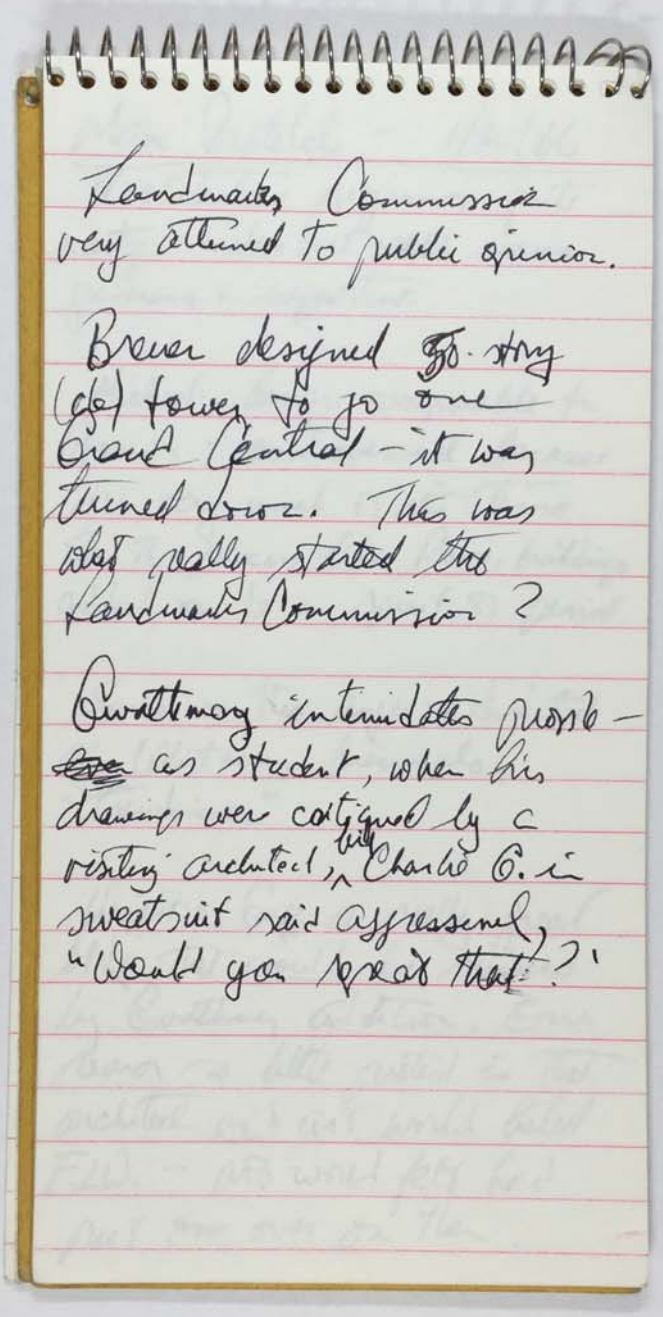
Complete surprise to all of us.

Architects - eg. - Cranes is unprecedented. Michael saw new it success to take it; very upset. All of a sudden he was big-time, and then this.

Pei no surprise — nobody likes Pei - but Barnes? — one of the worst.

Paul Goldberger always wants to be on the right side, which for him is always the East Hampton side...

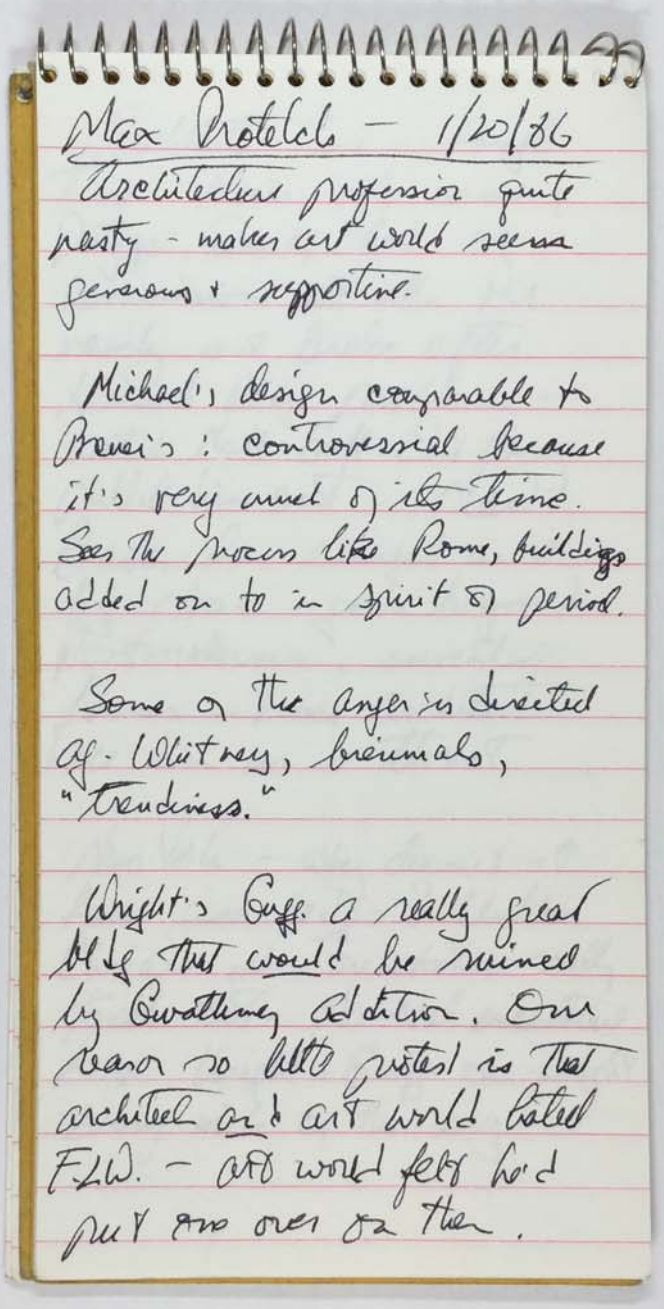
Mistake to present Crane design to public in elevation drawing - nobody understands that's not how it will look from street - top floors will disappear.



Landmarks Commission very attuned to public opinion.

Breuer designed 50-story (de) tower to go over Grand Central – it was turned down. This was what really started the Landmarks Commission?

Swarthmore intimidates people – as student, when his drawings were critiqued by a visiting architect, Charles G. in sweatsuit said aggressively, "Would you speak that?!"



Max Protech – 1/20/86

Architecture profession quite nasty – makes art world seem generous + supportive.

Michael's design comparable to Brewer's: controversial because it's very much of its time. Sees the process like Rome, buildings added on to in spirit of period.

Some of the anger is directed at Whitney, biennials, "trendiness."

Wright's Guff a really great bldg that would be ruined by overbearing addition. One reason so little protest is that architect and art world hated F.L.W. – art world felt he'd put one over on them.

Architects have a tough time. Meier, after winning Pritzger Award, had no commissions at all. Pei nearly went broke after Hancock Bldg. problems - until Nat. Gall. East Wing pulled him out. Now Graves has emerged as a big star - gone beyond Postmodernism, inventing forms - hence architects see him as a threat.

New York - why doesn't it have good bldgs? Unlike Chicago where architecture really took root. No real incentive here. Wright's, Bugg. was fought every inch of the way.

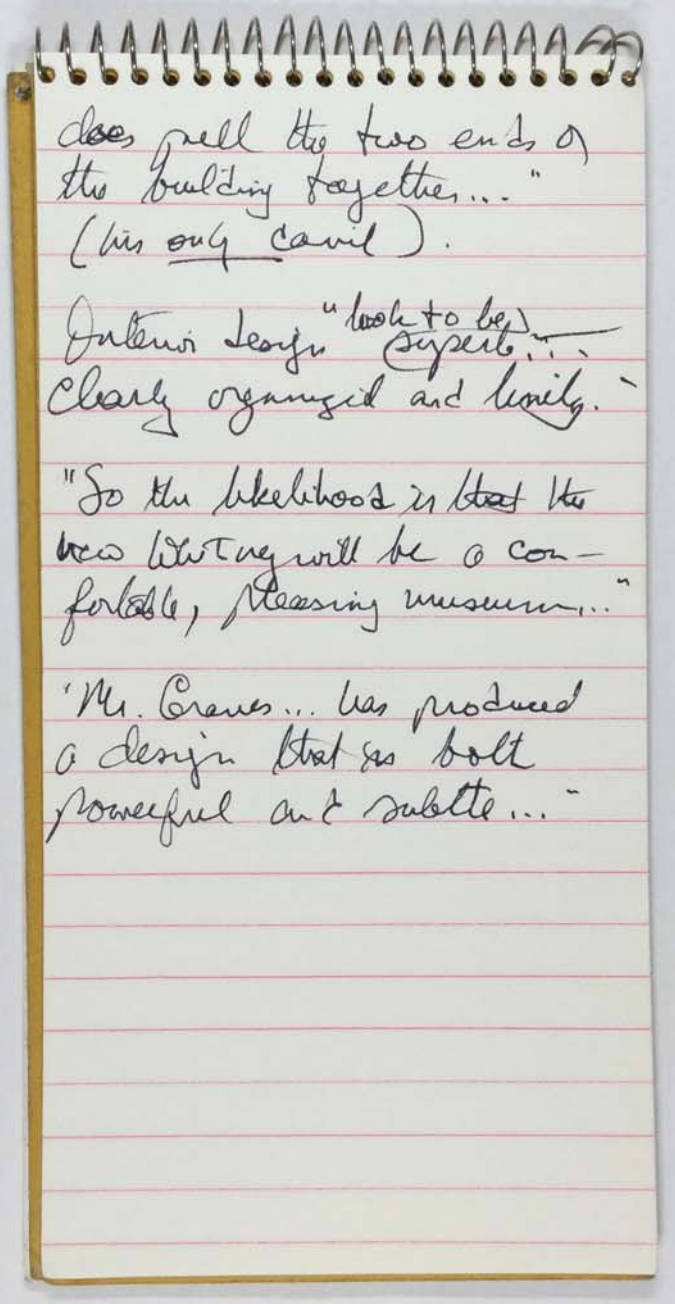
5/22/85 Goldberger

"And then, most dramatic of all, there is to be a few-story, setback penthouse structure, like a vast, colonnaded temple, slung across the top of both buildings...

"The whole composition is colorful and boldly decorated...

..." The compositional moves are consistently intelligent...

"There are a few awkward notes — the overall mass is heavy, though it carries its weight more easily than the Brewer building does. The 'eyebrow' window is probably the most ill-suited element to this facade, even though it →



does pull the two ends of the building together..."
(his only cavil).

Industrial Design "looks to be superb... Clearly organized and lovely."

"So the likelihood is that the new Whitney will be a comfortable, pleasing museum..."

"Mr. Graves... has produced a design that is bold powerful and subtle..."

ARCHITECTURE VIEW

PAUL GOLDBERGER

# The Case for Keeping Wright's Vision of the Guggenheim

The most puzzling thing about the proposal to add to the Guggenheim Museum, which was announced last winter and then revealed in its final form last month, is the relative silence with which it has been received. It has neither been celebrated as an architectural triumph nor reviled as the desecration of a landmark. A few architects have come forward to support the plan, and the Carnegie Hill Neighbors, a community group in the portion of the Upper East Side in which the museum is located, has made known its displeasure. But the response has been nothing compared to the outcry that greeted the announcement by the Whitney Museum, the Guggenheim's neighbor 15 blocks to the southeast, that it wished to make a substantial addition to its building.

The Whitney's plan, designed by Michael Graves, has been the architecture world's favored subject of debate, or gossip, or both, since last May, when it was made public with no small amount of fanfare. By midsummer it seemed as if no one was talking about anything except whether the Graves design would be the ruination or the savior of Marcel Breuer's original Whitney building.

Yet when the Guggenheim commissioned the firm of Gwathmey Siegel & Associates to add to its building — the major Frank Lloyd Wright building in New York and one of the great works of 20th-century architecture in the world — there seem to have been whimpers, not shrieks. Why? The difference between the two reactions is instructive, and tells us much not only about the two original buildings and the institutions they house, but also about the state of architecture at this moment in our culture.

• • •

The similarities between the situations first. In both cases we are dealing with modern buildings that in a relatively short time — the Guggenheim opened in 1959, the Whitney in 1966 — have reached the status of cultural icons. Both are works of our time, visited every day of the year by people who can clearly recall the moment they opened. These buildings are both, quite justifiably, considered landmarks, and they are among the relatively few modern structures in this city that are viewed with respect, even love, of the sort more often reserved for buildings of much earlier generations.

Another similarity is that both museums, as institutions, perceive their landmark buildings as too small for present needs. But there, I think, the Whitney and the Guggenheim part company. The Whitney is seeking to more than double its size, adding all kinds of new facilities as well as a vast increase in gallery space. The Guggenheim wants merely to add modestly to its gallery space and consolidate its "backstage," or support facilities. Its desires, as an institution, are far more restrained.

In this sense, surely, the more muted reaction to the Guggenheim proposal is perfectly reasonable. There is a kind of hubris to the Whitney scheme that is disturbing, even if you feel, as I do, that the Graves scheme is not without its respect for the Breuer building, different as the architectural language it speaks is. The Whitney design, in short, calls for a cubic mass to rise beside the present Whitney building by Breuer (and virtually as large as it) and then imposes a vast, colonnaded top that would sit heavily astride both sections, weighing them down and, indeed, visually engulfing the original building. The base is itself a remarkably deft composition, an agile post-modern response to an unusually difficult and isolating modern building. The top, unfortunately, is fussy, pretentious and overblown.

The architect's model of the proposed addition to the Guggenheim.

Louis Checkman

The top cannot, of course, be sliced off this design willy-nilly, even if the Whitney's administration were to conceive of the museum's future in more modest terms, for the projected layout of space inside the expanded building would have to be reorganized. But given the high quality of Mr. Graves's base section and the intriguing dialogue it initiates with the previously silent and brooding Breuer building, and given the fact that hauling in the sails would not be a bad idea for the over-ambitious Whitney, it would seem as if there must be some way in which a more reasonable program for expansion could be paired with the better half of Mr. Graves's design.

There is no such easy solution in sight for the Guggenheim's problem. Its requirements, more reasonable to start with, are also more difficult to edit down. The Guggenheim desperately needs gallery space to display its distinguished permanent collection (so, to be fair, does the Whitney, but it would get plenty of it even in a smaller Graves building). There is no land next door to the Guggenheim that the museum can purchase for expansion, as the Whitney has done. The Guggenheim's officials feel they have little choice but to build over the small and mediocre annex to the building that was erected many years ago by Taliesin Fellowship, the inheritors of Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural practice, and they point frequently to sketches Wright himself left for a tall building to rise in precisely the site of that annex, serving as a backdrop for the main museum building.

If Gwathmey Siegel were proposing a building like that in the Wright sketch, there would be no problem: Wright's plan was for a wafer-thin structure to house artists' studios, and it would have been more a concrete and glass curtain than a real building. But such a structure is far too narrow to contain the galleries, conservation areas and offices that the museum now wishes to add.

To make room for these functions, the architect Charles Gwathmey has proposed a wider wing, cantilevered forward from a taller rear section that would in itself be somewhat like Wright's backdrop building. But the forward section, which would be covered in pale green tile, would project out so far that it would reach the midpoint of the main rotunda. It would thus fill, at least in part, the void over the north half of the Guggenheim that is absolutely critical to the integrity of this great building.

That void, that empty space, is in many ways as important as any filled space in the Guggenheim. It is often so in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright — think, for example, of how important the void in the center of the main rotunda is to the architectural ideas at play here. If that space were to be filled, even in part, it would lose its impact and its meaning. And so, too, with the space outside. For the main rotunda was not intended to have anything compete with it — it was meant to stand alone, its great circular form swirling free in space.

It is a way of making architecture that is, of course, at odds with the normal and proper way of doing things in New York, where we generally respect the close connections between buildings. But the strength of rules lies in part in knowing where they can be broken, and in the hands of genius such as Wright's, breaking the rules — and thus giving us this great rotunda standing alone in space, disconnected from the street or from any other structure — is exactly how it should be.

• • •

I say all of this with the utmost respect for the internal arrangements Mr. Gwathmey has designed here: from the standpoint of interior organization, there is no question that the Guggenheim would be a better museum if this addition were built. Most important, the so-called "little rotunda," the round section at the northwest corner of the building that is now used for offices, would be opened up to the public as additional gallery space. Further, there is much to be praised for the way in which the Gwathmey Siegel design serves the urbanistic needs of East 89th Street, its side elevation working well as a mediation between the main Guggenheim building and the townhouse scale of this East Side block.

Moreover, the continual refinement of this scheme in the months that the architects have been developing it has improved it noticeably, and reduced the degree of intrusion into what we might call the Guggenheim's visual field. Last week, in a fairly substantial redesign that involved lifting the projecting section higher, the scheme underwent another improvement: it surely does not appear to loom over the original building as much as it did in the version made public a few weeks ago.

But these things alone are not enough to justify what is still a major incursion into one of the greatest buildings of the 20th century. It is an odd accident that the Guggenheim is not protected by official landmark designation — it is too new to be an individual New York City landmark, and it does not fall within any of the city's historic districts — but it is inconceivable that this building should be considered as anything other than a *de facto* landmark. And as such, it is difficult to see this addition, for all the respect contained in its intentions, as a justifiable one.

But why are substantial changes defensible at the Whitney when they are not at the Guggenheim? Granting that I am uncomfortable about the overwhelming degree of change Mr. Graves has proposed for the Whitney Museum, I admit to feeling no qualms about a scaled-down version of his scheme. It all comes down, I think, to the fact that Marcel Breuer was not Frank Lloyd Wright, and the Whitney is not the Guggenheim. In the case of Wright, we have a building that is one of the triumphant achievements of genius. In the case of Breuer, we have a building of strength and integrity, but far short of genius. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the Wright building must be treated with even more restraint than the Breuer building — and that it is possible that even the most conscientious and intelligent design does not do that, only because the Guggenheim, for all its incredible power, is ultimately the more fragile and delicate thing. ■

PAUL G

# For the Whitney, Adding

Maybe the only real solution to the problem of adding to the Whitney Museum of American Art on Madison Avenue is not to put a modern building, as some have suggested, or a post-modern one, such as Michael Graves has designed, beside Marcel Breuer's present structure. Perhaps the real answer would be to put up a limestone Beaux-Arts building, preferably one that looked as if it had been there for a long time and once spanned the entire blockfront. With any luck, in a few years people would begin to talk about what a shame it was that the Breuer building had intruded upon a lovely stretch of Madison Avenue and caused the demolition of the northern half of one of the city's finest classical compositions.

The perpetrators of the present addition would appear blameless. And if they were really lucky, in a few more years the hybrid blockfront that they brought about would be hailed as an ideal mix of old and new.

It would be a tempting way out of the fix the Whitney Museum has gotten itself into. For the design the Whitney has commissioned by Mr. Graves has caused the biggest architectural brouhaha since the controversy over the A. T. & T. building that started in 1978. This will forever be remembered as the summer of debate over whether the Whitney will be enhanced or destroyed by permitting it to be more than doubled in size by an architect who admits freely to holding an altogether different philosophy from that of the building's original designer.

But the problem is not merely the philosophical differences between Marcel Breuer, who died in 1981, and Michael Graves. It is also that it is hard to imagine a comfortable fit between Breuer's building and anything else at all. For while the 19-year-old Whitney Museum is one of the great modern buildings of New York, it is also utterly inhospitable to addition or expansion of any kind.

• • •

The battle over the Graves proposal is nowhere near finished. It has already provoked an impassioned denunciation from Abraham Geller, this year's recipient of the Medal of Honor of the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. That denunciation was delivered as Mr. Geller stepped to the platform to receive his medal, a point at which he would have been expected merely to say thank you. The press has jumped in, sometimes to attack the proposed new Whitney, sometimes to defend it. Then came a public A.I.A. symposium late last month held specifically to give everyone a chance to let off steam. The event brought forth a number of passionate defenses of Mr. Graves's design, delivered in the presence of the building's most vocal opponents, most of whom that evening surprisingly chose to remain silent.

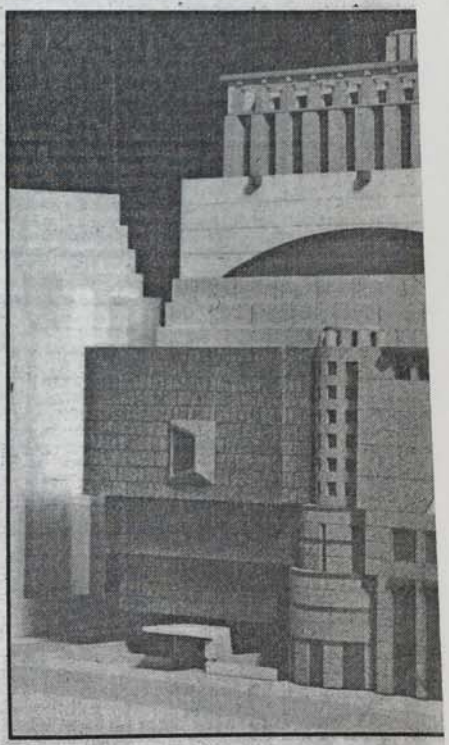
Behind the scenes, however, the fighting goes on, with both sides aware that the Landmarks Preservation Commission is expected to hold a hearing on the design next month. Mr. Breuer's widow has written a letter to the president of the Whitney's board opposing the design. An official of another New York City museum has been acting as a kind of behind-the-scenes press agent for opponents to the design. And virtually every architect in town whose name is worth printing on a letterhead has been sought as an ally by one side or the other.

What could arouse such intensity of feeling? Put simply, the Whitney proposal brings into focus all the emotions that have surrounded modern architecture in the last generation. The Breuer building that has housed the Whitney since 1966 epitomizes both the strengths and weaknesses of a certain type of sculptural, neo-Brutalist modern monumentality. It is a severe, hard-edged building of dark gray granite, its facade a kind of reverse stair, with each floor cantilevered out in a vast overhang over the one below. It is not a particularly likable building, but it has an undeniable seriousness and strength. It has what one might call a kind of nasty integrity, and that obviously has a certain appeal in an age when much of the architecture produced gives the impression of being concerned more with superficial effects than with underlying truths.

That integrity, such as it is, will inevitably be compromised when the building is expanded. It cannot be otherwise, given the fact that the Breuer building was designed to stand alone like a piece of abstract sculpture. Since the building does so earnestly "want" to stand aloof, it is not likely that adding to it, even in the same architectural style, would yield a very good result. A Breuer building doubled in size would not be twice as good, or even half as good; it would lack the strong and tough contrast with the more richly detailed streetscape that is an essential component of the present building's strength.

So some of the opposition to the expansion plan is what might be called preservationist, the desire to keep this modern monument intact. Though we are unaccustomed to thinking of buildings less than two decades old in terms of historic preservation, a case can be made for wanting to leave the Breuer building untouched. But much more of the opposition, it would appear, is in reaction to Mr. Graves's design itself. And this is where the great misunderstanding comes. For while there could be no architect more distant philosophically from Marcel Breuer than Michael Graves, Mr. Graves has not failed to respect the Breuer design. He has enveloped it, but in doing so he has made it part of a larger composition that — as far as we can judge from models and drawings — allows it to retain many of its essential qualities, and forces the Breuer building to enter into a dialogue with other kinds of architecture that, up to now, it has spurned.

Mr. Graves's work is highly personal and frankly decorative; he has evolved a style that one might call a



A model of the Whitney Museum with Michael G

TURE VIEW

OLDBERGER 8/11/85

# Less May Result in More

collage of abstracted versions of classical elements, richly colored and detailed. Here, he has tried to employ this style in a not unsubtle, and sometimes daring, effort at a kind of point-counterpoint in which he has created a highly complex composition of forms that respond to themes set by the Breuer building.

His design calls for a large, blocky mass on the corner of 74th Street and Madison Avenue, south of the Breuer building and roughly balancing it, though without the large overhangs of the Breuer building. Between the Graves wing and the Breuer wing, obliterating the staircase and concrete wall that now mark the south end of the present Whitney, would be a semicircular section mediating between the two counterbalanced, boxy masses. Most dramatic of all, there would be a five-story, setback penthouse structure, like a vast, colonnaded temple, slung across the top of both buildings.

It is a remarkable scheme. It has its problems, especially at the top, where the penthouse section puts far too much visual weight atop the original building. But the scheme comes unusually close to doing the impossible, which is to add compatibly and respectfully to the Breuer building. The Breuer building is no longer alone on the street, the great modernist presence amid a smaller and more diverse streetscape, but it is clearly the anchorpiece of Mr. Graves's composition — the starting point from which all of his compositional moves have been made.

The cubic mass proposed for the southern half of the Madison Avenue blockfront, which would be sheathed in a reddish granite to play off the gray granite of the Breuer building, is the strongest aspect of the design. At the base of this mass would be a colonnade that would both provide handsome retail space and balance Breuer's canopied entrance. The colonnade loosely resembles the ground-floor arcade of Mr. Graves's just-completed Humana Building in Louisville, a skyscraper base that ties in splendidly with the older and smaller-scaled buildings down the street. Its success bodes extremely well for the compatibility of this base with the eclectic Madison Avenue streetscape.

The cylindrical central section, intended to mediate between the Breuer wing and the Graves wing — Mr. Graves calls it "the hinge" — would unfortunately obliterate the view of the staircase of the Breuer building from the street. But it would not eliminate the staircase, which may well be the most endearing aspect of the Breuer building; it would merely cover its windows. In exchange the plan would offer new interior balcony views from that staircase.

• • •

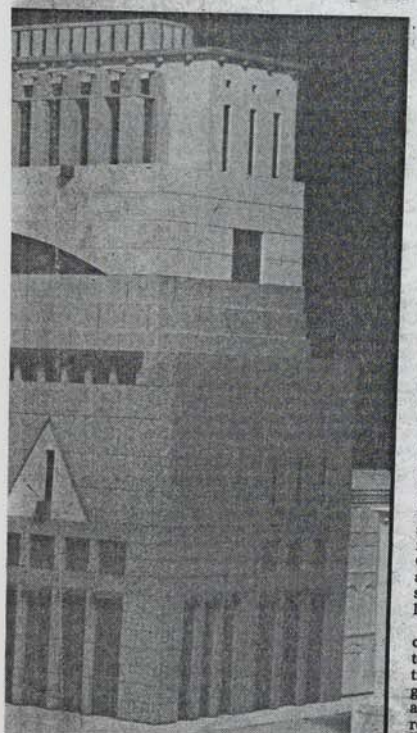
But there is no equally strong justification for the massive top section, which despite its setback bears down on the entire structure. The "eyebrow" window that leaps across the facade in a single, low arch to tie together the Breuer and Graves wings is a simplistic gesture, more a schematic sketch than an appropriate part of this composition. Mr. Graves attempts to justify this bridging by comparing the facade to a Renaissance diptych, in which an enclosing or enveloping frame pulls together the two halves of the composition. But this analogy is fallacious, for we will hardly see this facade straight on, as we see a painting. The upper sections would be visible only from the street below, and thus would be seen at distorted angles. They would not pull the two halves of this facade together so much as weigh both of them down.

Why the top is so big brings us to another question, perhaps the most urgent one of all. Has the architect been given the right assignment in the first place? The present Whitney Museum contains roughly 80,000 square feet of space. The Graves design calls for much more than this; it will more than double the size of the museum. Some of this extra space goes for new galleries, including a large permanent exhibition area. But much of it will be used to house new functions, such as archives, a rare-book room, a major auditorium and a large new restaurant.

Is this sweeping building program really necessary? The gallery space surely is, for the Whitney now has no real space in which to display its distinguished permanent collection. But must the Whitney, like so many other museums, also be a research center, an archive, a library and a public meeting and eating place? There is a real question as to whether the museum must be all things to all people, or even all things to all people interested in American art.

It is not impossible that a smaller, less ambitious Whitney could be a better one. It would certainly be a more stable museum financially, for right now the Whitney is nowhere near having in hand $37.5 million — the bare minimum that this new building will cost. More to the point, a smaller Whitney would absolutely be more successful architecturally: that overbearing top could be reduced or even eliminated altogether. The bottom of Mr. Graves's design is unquestionably better than the top, and, Mr. Graves's strained diptych analogies notwithstanding, the bottom could do without the top quite happily.

None of this will satisfy this design's most extreme critics, who want only to see the Breuer building left untouched, or their unlikely allies, a handful of more traditional preservationists who would like to see the undistinguished brownstones that are now on the building site left alone. But a topless Whitney, so to speak, may be the most reasonable course. If the Whitney's trustees were not so determined to pursue a building program that is rather daunting in its size, they might find that quite a few of their architectural problems would take care of themselves. ■



Paschall/Taylor

Graves's proposed addition

RCHITECTURE VIEW

PAUL GOLDBERGER

12/29/85

# The Prospect Of Bigger Towers Cast A Shadow

It has been a year in architecture filled less with the pleasure of built buildings than with the debate over unbuilt ones. If 1985 will be remembered for anything, it will be as the year in which a remarkable number of plans to alter the shape of New York were announced, almost all of which sparked considerable controversy. The most dramatic, surely, was the developer Donald Trump's plan to build a 150-story tower by the architect Helmut Jahn on the site of the Pennsylvania Railroad yards on the Upper West Side, part of a project called Television City that would also include six 76-story apartment towers, an office tower and television production facilities.

The 150-story tower Mr. Jahn worked up for this site was similar to one he had unveiled earlier in the year for another Manhattan site, that presently occupied by the New York Coliseum at Columbus Circle. That one, too, was designed at Mr. Trump's behest, and it was an entry in what must have been 1985's most bizarre architectural sweepstakes, the competition held by the city and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to find a building to replace the Coliseum, which will be demolished when the new convention center opens next year.

The winner for the Coliseum site was not Mr. Jahn's super-high tower but a lower, bulkier tower by Moshe Safdie, sponsored by Boston Properties. While the Safdie tower does have a handsome, rounded arcade at its base, it is otherwise a distressingly heavy mass. Like virtually all of the projects proposed for the Coliseum site it is a much bigger building than this piece of land at the corner of Central Park should by any rational measure be expected to carry. The overall process of finding a new building for the Coliseum site was one of 1985's more discouraging events, for the city and the M.T.A. in effect auctioned off the land to the highest bidder, meaning that money, and not design quality, was to be the prime factor in determining which building was chosen.

The Jahn and Safdie projects suggest a fixation on a kind of gigantism that is not at all a happy prospect for New York as it moves through the middle of a decade that has already seen an extraordinary volume of large-scale construction. But two other

**These projects suggest a fixation on a kind of gigantism.**

rojects that were also announced in the past year prooked reactions that were perhaps even more impasioned than the response to these massive ones, even hough they are, comparatively speaking, quite small: he proposal by the Whitney Museum to mount a huge ddition by Michael Graves atop and beside its 19-year-ld building by Marcel Breuer, and the plan by the Guggenheim Museum to append a structure by Gwathmey iegel to its great Frank Lloyd Wright building.

Right now these additions are both far from certain to e built, and the controversy that has surrounded them, nd particularly the Whitney, is deep and bitter. Each of hese building projects would permanently alter one of lew York's most celebrated, and in some ways most beoved, public buildings. The Whitney project has sharply livided the architectural profession, many of whose nembers admit openly to their dislike of Mr. Graves's ornamental, "post-modern" style and feel that any Graves-lesigned addition would compromise the integrity of the Breuer building, which has begun to take on the status of a kind of modernist icon.

The stylistic argument is an unfortunate one, and not a little ironic given how gracelessly the Breuer building relates to the architectural context of which it is a part. It is a building of clear integrity, but of almost unrelenting harshness, and it arrogantly sets itself apart from the city around it. The Graves building actually shows promise of mediating between the difficult Breuer building and the larger cityscape; its problem is that it is disturbingly large, and it has a top section which is particularly overbearing.

The Guggenheim's plan is more modest, which might, at first glance, make this project more appealing. Unfortunately the opposite is true, even though the architects Charles Gwathmey and Robert Siegel have been conscientious in their attempt to respect the great Frank Lloyd Wright museum which they are altering. The problem is that the Wright building truly is a great modernist icon, far greater than the Breuer building, and it must really be handled more delicately. A large mass cantilevered into the void beside Wright's great central rotunda, no matter how carefully wrought, disturbs an essential

*Continued on Page 34*

ARCHITECTURE VIEW

# Bigger Towers

*Continued From Page 31*

part of Wright's vision.

We will not know until 1986 what the outcome will be on these two fronts — the Whitney plan must be considered by the Landmarks Preservation Commission since that museum is within the Upper East Side Historic District, while the Guggenheim project has been delayed for an environmental impact statement at the request of the City Planning Commission. The coming year will also bring public hearings on the Coliseum project and on the Trump proposal for the rail yards on the Upper West Side; the first part of the year will also bring a decision on yet another major project, the proposal to erect a huge skyscraper atop or beside the Staten Island Ferry terminal at the southern tip of Manhattan.

Here, as at the Coliseum, the city has decided to turn over some public property for private development. While there are somewhat stricter guidelines in this instance than at the Coliseum, this project would still mean a radical change in the lower Manhattan skyline, cutting off light and views from the edge of Battery Park and putting much of the park into shadow.

In all the intense rush to redevelop Manhattan island at greater and greater density, there was one major project annnounced this year that is cause for celebration: the proposal for a combination office, apartment and cinema complex for the square block between Eighth and Ninth Avenues and 49th and 50th Streets that was once occupied by Madison Square Garden.

Designed by David Childs of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and Frank Williams for a consortium of developers, including the Zeckendorf Company and World-Wide Realty, the project consists mainly of two masonry-clad towers, both of which are somewhat classical in nature. The office tower, which is the more handsome, will become the headquarters of Ogilvy & Mather. In spirit this entire project picks up on the best conventions of architecture and urban planning in Manhattan; like Rockefeller Center it seems to evolve naturally from the nature of New York, and not to be a wild, science-fiction fantasy dropped in from another planet.

If there were any lingering doubts about the desirability of Buck Rogers futurism in mid-Manhattan, the opening of the Marriott Marquis Hotel at Times Square last autumn should surely have put them to rest. The hotel, designed by John Portman, advertises itself as having the world's tallest atrium — 48 stories — but it is a cold, grim place, despite the attempts to enliven it with sculpture and plants. Like so much of Mr. Portman's architecture, the hotel is turned almost completely inward; the architect seems interested in urban activity only insofar as it can be canned and packaged within his walls. To the rest of New York, this building turns a harsh concrete wall.

It should not be said, however, that 1985 was nothing but a year in which more and bigger towers seemed to inflict themselves upon us — this was also the year of Arata Isozaki's spectacular Palladium, the nightclub set within an old movie theater that is the first New York design by the man who is perhaps Japan's most gifted architect, and it was the year in which the Museum of Modern Art brought the significant work of a pair of too-little-known architects, Ricardo Bofill and Leon Krier, to wide public view through a major exhibition.

Yet the struggle to build more and bigger towers still seemed to be the theme of 1985. The efforts of St. Bartholomew's Church on Park Avenue to erect a tall office tower beside its splendid Bertram Goodhue edifice continued, in the form of an effort to convince the Landmarks Commission to reconsider the agency's original rejection of the scheme, this time on the grounds of economic hardship.

But as St. Bartholomew's was pressing its attempt to add another tower to the overcrowded skyline, another church was embarking on what was surely the most pleasing glimmer of hope on the architectural front in the past year. It was the announcement by the Universalist Church at 76th Street and Central Park West that it would reject all offers from real-estate developers to add an apartment tower to its property and would instead seek funds from neighbors and preservation advocates to restore the fine English Gothic church.

There could not be a more positive sign for the future of New York than the decision by those in charge of this church — a congregation much less well-off financially than St. Bartholomew's — to save and restore its building for the benefit of its community, rather than tear it down or compromise its integrity by adding a tall apartment tower to it. The Universalist Church has positioned itself as the answer to St. Bartholomew's, as the institution willing to stake a claim for the belief that we do not make a better city by seeing every landmark merely as a piece of developable real estate, that we do not improve the quality of life by giving in to the pressures for gigantism on every front. ■

Graves – by phone

(1) Lots of reasons, not one – Pei, "he's touching Breuer – I'm not touching the Louvre." Idea that architecture stands alone – struck me as no end of it, so curious a statement to make in 1986, I was dumbfounded; but I think that issue is a strong one... All museums in N.Y. have been changed, enlarged, modified... Detractors see building as monument, like sculpture – not part of city & contextual sense

Another part is backlash by modernist people... practices enormously threatened by postmodernism. What's happened to architecture is astonishing – changed overnight, it seems. See colleagues knuckling under, new clients say don't want another steel & glass box – must be devastating.

Third part is simply backlash toward me – last few years I've gotten a lot of press. People react very strongly. R. Meier gets almost as much publicity, but he's still a modernist, one of them, own being blessed. I've produced a lot in last few years.

(2) I'm very sensitive to tone of community — I would guess that if I went to Landmarks tomorrow I wd be turned down. I don't want to be turned down ... Neg. crit. has been so much that I don't see how laymen could [be immune to it]. It's not "Graves's Whitney." The program.

It gives one pause — makes me have to believe in self in stronger way than I ever that I'd have to —

Have to put Mfg. on a list — & notify sure we won't build buildings as designed. Pressures of money, press, critics — people on Landmarks Comm. have to be hearing all this.

~~Chermayeff - 744-3970~~

Graves (609) 924-6409

1. Why so much antagonism from architects? Portland? 1
2. Would you alter design?
3. What bldg means to you — most imp. commission?
4. Speech or won't comment abt design deciding the profession on generational grounds, W. over 50 against it...
5. What mistakes made in presenting it

From "The Critical Edge" (re Portland Bldg)
Competition committee had Philip Johnson as professional consultant. Other finalists were Arthur Erickson and Mitchell-Giurgola. Graves' design was only one within $22.4 m. budget. Graves' first large-scale project.

Vehement early criticism, much of it centering on Graves. Local architect John Storrs called it "a dog bldg, a turkey." Belluschi later changed his mind, say he was sorry he'd made an adverse comment. Local critics tended to come round to liking it. But at A.I.A. Convention in New Orleans, Graves, who received AIA Honor Award for Portland Bldg, was confronted by architects wearing lapel buttons showing Portland Bldg with red slash thru it, others saying "We Don't Dig Graves."

out.

Could easily be stopped now. Need to listen to critics, allow for some discussion & views...

"The antecedents that Graves likes to draw upon include Roman, Renaissance and Baroque architecture and the work of Claude-Nicolas Ledoux (1736-1806), Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944), Gunnar Asplund (1885-1940), and Le Corbusier as well as elements of Art Deco. To this heterogeneous list should be added Synthetic Cubism, Purism, and landscape gardening, particularly the 18th century topiary + Indian Quarrying (Charles Jencks, Architecture Today, p. 138).

Richard Kahan (don't quote him)

MoMA has accumulated so much enmity over years, has made so much vicious criticism of other architects - -

Battleground for modernists vs post m's.

No momentum - negative public reception - neg. reporting by quarter (Goldberger) - law firm that stopped Midtown - complicated city process, landmarks etc. - add all that up & you have ingredients for stopping a project.

Museum has burden of proof, to prove it's essential to expand. That message never got out. Bd, staff, committee of others (even museum people) get that out.

Could easily be stopped now. Need to listen to critics, allow lot of time for discussion & visions - -

Gatje 867-7373

Eh said wd. reply a Jan, dk. it; we're just waiting
Will marshal our forces when time comes + do what necessary

Ad Hoc Com. + Jane Whitney
→ Murray Levi, young architect, with Stein
partnership (675-0500)

We're not opp. to Michel Graves being
arch. ~~but~~ opposed to expansion per se, just
feel it's too big, not "respectful."

No Breuer drawings for expansion.

Graves said in pub. speech on ever
could this wd. divide museum on
generational grounds. U. over 50 wd be
opposed... Simply not the
case Murray Levi only 35 or (29)
Nor do I see it as div. ~~over~~
stylistic lines. It's really an
issue of whether you love old
bldg; & if you have ~~an~~ Architectural
~~Art~~ masterpiece, there are things
you should do it.

Tom

Goldberger – attacked our program
Times has taken a line – unfortunate
Speech to Coss Club next week – will
make pt. That explains or architectural controversy
has obscured real needs of the museum.

Kent Barwick - Municipal Art Society 935-3960

Says main active opposition is led by the continuers of Breuer's form, Gatje Papachristou Smith. Talk to Robert Gatje: 807-7373

Municipal Art Sociery has taken no position so far. They were getting ready to do so last fall, when the Whitney withdrew its application to the Landmarks Commission, indicating that there might be some changes in the design. AIA New York chapter hasn't taken position either, probably for same reason.

Barwick has heard story about Breuer, when he was trying to get clearance from AIA to build the tower on top of Grand Central. Someone there said to him, "How would you feel someday if somebody suggested building a tower on top of the Whitney Museum?" Breuer said, "That would never happen."

Tremendous loyalty to Breuer, in his day and since, among architects. During the dispute over Grand Central, most architects refused to side against him, even if they opposed the idea themselves.

against no

Victor Ganz - lunch 1/9/86

Richard Kahan has volunteered his help to the Whitney, and been put on the bldg committee. He's already had some good ideas, such as -- on hearing that they'd retained the top lawyer in for NY real estate, and the top PR man for ditto, Kahan said they were indeed tops, could get Koch or Cuomo on the 'phone any time, but maybe what the Whitney needed right now were some biggies in NY cultural affairs, such as Paley or Blanchette Rockefeller, to put in a good word. No real PR campaign in progress yet, but Victor is trying to get something going along those lines. Feels they've been much too passive.

The board is not badly split, or anything like that. There's a conservative wing, composed of Lipman, Solinger, and Leonard Lauder, who are not so sure the museum should expand at all, but the middle majority is not questioning that decision. They just want some guidance for use when they're attacked at dinner parties. There was never any opposition to the basic concept of the Graves design. A lot of minor aspects were debated in the building committee, such as entrances and exits, but everyone approved the overall concept, and nobody now is suggesting that they rethink it.

Michael Graves himself is very depressed. The vitriolic attacks by members of his own profession stunned him (although he is well known for speaking unkindly of other architects). It would be a terrible blow to him professionally if the building did not get built.

Look up material in Whitney files about Breuer bldg - what was said about it. The word "contextual," now so in vogue among architects, could never have been applied to that design.

The Whitney really does need the space. Mainly to show permanent collection - it should and must become a place where a visitor can spend two hours and get a true picture of American art in this century. But other needs almost as pressing as that. No place to look at the thousands of drawings. No auditorium. etc.

Irony of Pei's position. His own highly controversial addition to the Louvre. The fact that he is the architect of a 28-story building going up at corner of Madison and 80th. And Goldberger's saying that when Pei designed the last expandion of the Cleveland Museum, he completely obliterated the previous expansion -- which was by Breuer.

Whitney is delaying its application to the Landmarks Commission. Doesn't want a decision made while the controversy is so hot, fearing the Commission might make a decision it then would be stuck with. Application is made at least a month in advance, and they're not making it for a while. The other hearings will follow that one.

The money is <u>not</u> in hand, no matter what Tom says. Victor doubts whether the solid pledges by board members would add up to more than $8 million (out of $52 million required). Lots of soft pledges, but will they come through? Tom has his reasons for wanting to suggest money is no problem.

Guggenheim addition not so controversial, because there already is a tower next to it. Not so with Whitney. (But what about Carlyle, only a couple of blocks north?)

Woodside, the new pres. of the board, is head of Continental Can, has been on board for a number of years. Feeling was obviously that they needed someone like

against vo

him to go after the really big bucks -- and Flora had had enough anyway. The board has been spoiled for years, never being asked to give really big sums because the family supported the museum. There is virtually no endowment now. Al Taubman has clearly lost interest -- he's after more glitter, would leave in a minute if he could get on board of Met (museum or opera).

Victor agreed to come on the board when it was made clear to him that the museum under Tom was going to become big time, go all out for to be the number one place in the world for American art of this century. He'd always felt it was a boring place, which had missed out on the really important American art from 1945-1970.

Now, of course, it remains to be seen whether the place can make it into the big time. With all the controversy surrounding the new building, it will be even harder to raise the dough. Corporations will be very hesitant to get involved. And the Whitney board just doesn't have the social clout of the Met or the MOMA.

Cams

Armstrong 570-3635

Flora Biddle 570-3663 home 988-1964

Graves (609) 924-6409

~~Curators: Haskell, Sims~~

~~Lauder~~ Jennifer Russell

Philip Johnson 751-7440

~~I.M. Pei~~

~~David Solinger~~

Richard Kahan 303-1476

Linda Gordon (file on Mdg) 570-3633

Brendan

Bob Gatje - 807-7373

Murray Levi - 675-0500

Signed petition:

Ed Barnes, I.M. Pei, Ronaldo Guiriola
Noguchi, Schnabel, Motherwell

Jim

against

Murray Levi (Stein Partnership) 675-0500

What sort of actions planned?
Unusual for architects to do this sort of thing?
– when Breuer designed tower for Grand Central...

When I was proposed ex. in NYT I became a little concerned – loved Breuer bldg – tried to find out more abt it, found Whitney not forthcoming.

29 – recent grad. of Cooper Union

Boils down to fact a really beautiful bldg. going to be vandalized. (Our opinion, not yours).

Recent symposium re museum expansion – Gwathmey, Raphael Nuñez, Graves.
Annunciation by Fra Angelico, real unb. of Whitney. Club. Doesn't see how any change in design would be acceptable.
Museums so unresponsive —

Group of abt 8 people active re GC
Not group – by no means a dispute a generational lines.

Thinks a lot of architects would petition against Breuer's bldg over Grand Central (?).

Whitney Museum of American Art

Madison Avenue at 75th Street New York, New York 10021 (212) 570-3633

For Release

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, A BRIEF HISTORY

FOUNDING

The Whitney Museum of American Art evolved out of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's activities on behalf of American artists. A sculptor herself, Mrs. Whitney recognized the obstacles facing American artists at the turn of the century, when it was almost impossible for artists concerned with new ideas to exhibit or sell their work. The leading patron of American art from 1907 until her death in 1942, she supported these artists by purchasing and showing their work.

In 1914 Mrs. Whitney established the Whitney Studio in Greenwich Village where she organized regular exhibitions by living American artists who had been spurned by the traditional academies. By 1929 she had assembled a collection of more than 500 works, which she offered with an endowment to The Metropolitan Museum of Art. When the offer was immediately refused, she decided to set up her own museum, one with a new and radically different mandate--one devoted exclusively to the art of this country--and the Whitney Museum of American was founded in 1930.

SPACE

The Whitney Museum of American Art opened in 1931 at 10 West 8th Street in three brownstones remodeled by the architectural firm Noel & Miller. Eight years later four new galleries were added, almost doubling the exhibition space. In 1949 land for a larger Museum was acquired on West 54th Street, donated by the trustees of The Museum of Modern Art, and the new Whitney Museum, designed by August L. Noel, opened in 1954. Again outgrowing its space, the present site on Madison Avenue at 75th Street was acquired in 1963. This building, designed by Marcel Breuer and Hamilton Smith, with Michael Irving as consulting architect, opened in 1966. In 1981 Michael Graves was selected to design an addition proposed for land acquired to the south of the present building.

The first branch of the Whitney Museum opened at 55 Water Street in 1973. The only cultural facility of its kind to serve the Lower Manhattan community, the Downtown Branch has since moved, and will open in a permanent new home at 2 Federal Reserve Plaza, 33 Maiden Lane, in 1986, with funding from Park Tower Realty Corp. In 1981 the Whitney Museum of American Art, Fairfield County, opened in the new headquarters building of Champion International Corporation in Stamford, Connecticut. The third branch operation of the Museum opened in 1983 in the headquarters of Philip Morris Incorporated on Park Avenue and 42nd Street. A fourth branch will open in the fall of 1985 in the headquarters of the Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States on Seventh Avenue between 51st and 52nd Streets.

(more)

PERMANENT COLLECTION

Mrs. Whitney's collection, totaling some 600 works when the Museum opened in 1931, served as the nucleus of the founding collection. It included paintings by Thomas Hart Benton, George Bellows, Stuart Davis, Edward Hopper, Maurice Prendergast, and John Sloan. Mrs. Whitney continued to augment the collection, but it was not until 1948 that the Museum began to accept gifts for the first time.

In 1970 the Museum received the entire artistic estate of Edward Hopper. Bequeathed by his widow, it is the largest gift in the history of the Museum, consisting of about 2,000 oils, watercolors, drawings, and prints and dating from Hopper's student days to his later years. The Lawrence H. Bloedel Bequest, including works by Milton Avery, Charles Demuth, Georgia O'Keeffe, Larry Rivers, and Charles Sheeler, was received in 1976. A gift of Morgan Russell's works and papers, including paintings, drawings, notebooks, and correspondence, was presented to the Museum in 1979 by Mr. and Mrs. Henry M. Reed. Reginald Marsh's widow bequeathed more than 850 paintings, oil studies, drawings, and sketches the same year, making the Museum the owner of the most significant collection of work by Marsh. As part of the Museum's 50th Anniversary Celebration in 1980 approximately 90 important works specially sought by the staff were donated to commemorate the occasion. Among them are works by Calder, Gorky, Hartley, Hopper, Lachaise, Nevelson, O'Keeffe, Prendergast, Rauschenberg, Reinhardt, and Sloan. Also in 1980 the much-celebrated Three Flags by Jasper Johns was acquired. Alexander Calder's Circus, which had been placed on deposit at the Museum by the artist in 1970, was purchased for the collection from the artist's estate in 1982 for $1.25 million following an intensive fund-raising campaign that was successfully completed in just two weeks through a generous gift of one-half of the total amount from the Robert Wood Johnson Jr. Charitable Trust.

Although the Permanent Collection was constantly growing, it was not until 1978 that a policy decision was made to have part of the collection on public view at all times. In 1981, for the first time in the Museum's history, a permanent installation of selected works from the collection was opened, supported by grants from the Alcoa Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

A Drawing Committee, chaired by Trustees, was formed in 1976 to advise and support the Museum on its acquisitions and exhibitions of drawings, and in 1982 a Print Committee was formed to assist with acquisitions that would complement works already in the Permanent Collection.

From the approximately 600 works comprising the Permanent Collection at the opening of the Museum in 1931, the holdings of the Museum grew to about 1,300 by 1954 when the second Museum building opened. In 1966, with the opening of the present building, the collection numbered approximately 2,000. Today it has increased to more than 10,000.

EXHIBITIONS

As the most important international institution devoted to the art of our country, the Whitney Museum of American Art presents the full range of American art, from Colonial times to the present, with its focus on the

(more)

20th century and especially work by living artists. Exhibitions range from historical surveys and in-depth retrospectives of major 20th-century artists to group shows introducing young or relatively unknown artists to a larger public. The popular Biennial Exhibition, an invitational survey of work produced in America in the previous two years, was introduced by Mrs. Whitney in 1932 and is the only continuous series of exhibitions in the country to offer such a broad, in-depth view of recent developments in American art.

Although the Whitney Museum originally did not present one-person exhibitions of work by living artists, that policy was abandoned in 1948, and shortly thereafter such artists as Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Max Weber, and Edward Hopper were honored with retrospectives.

The New American Filmmmakers Series was begun in 1970 to support the work of independent, non-commercial American filmmakers, and the following year the first major exhibition of videotapes at a New York museum was presented. Now showing video and installations employing both media, the Film and Video Department has played a major role in the emergence of these media as contemporary art forms.

Exhibitions now average 15 annually as opposed to 10 a year on 54th Street and 6 on West 8th Street. Today the Museum also presents an average of 10 film and video programs yearly, as well as an additional 20 exhibitions at the branch museums, and circulates internationally another 10 exhibitions every year.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

The Education Department was established in 1966 to explore new approaches to the concept of Museum education and programs in studio art and art history. The following year the Independent Study Program was begun. The Independent Study Program is an off-campus program that gives advanced students the opportunity to study in New York with artists, critics, dealers, and the Museum staff and to organize exhibitions. Funds from the Helena Rubinstein Foundation, first received in 1968, continue to support the art history/museum studies aspect of this program. Major support for the studio program has recently been received from the Bohen Foundation.

Seminars with Artists was begun in 1976. This ongoing series of ten seminars per semester gives students of art and art history a rare chance to meet informally with well-known artists and critics.

Artreach began in 1977 to introduce New York City elementary school children to American art through a visiting lecture program with funding from Mrs. Laurance S. Rockefeller. The program was expanded to junior and senior high school students in 1983 with additional grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Billy Rose Foundation, and it now reaches more than 10,000 pupils in 150 schools in all the boroughs.

The Whitney Symposium on American Art was initiated in 1978 to introduce original research by graduate students and scholars beginning their careers in American art and is now made possible by funds from Joel and Anne Ehrenkranz.

Also in 1978, a grant from the Helena Rubinstein Foundation began to provide for free admission for college students. The following year Manufacturers Hanover Trust began funding free admission for children under 12 and daily showings of the Calder Circus film in the lobby of the Museum.

(more)

A docent program was organized in 1982 with a group of organized volunteers to give tours of the Permanent Collection installation and temporary exhibitions.

The Whitney Museum of American Art Distinguished Lectures on American Art and Culture were initiated in 1982. The lectures on 20th-century American art and its relationship to social, political, and cultural history of the period are supported by a grant from the Anne Burnett and Charles Tandy Foundation, Fort Worth.

Free weekend gallery talks were begun in 1983 and are now funded by The Joe and Emily Lowe Foundation.

A grant from the Samuel and May Rudin Foundation, Inc., received in 1983, which enables New York City public school groups to visit the Museum with docents during non-public hours, was organized in cooperation with the New York City Board of Education Cultural Arts Unit.

The latter organization also assisted the Museum with a program of Teachers Workshops in 1984. Sponsored by the Penzance Foundation, these are designed to familiarize teachers with 20th-century American art and to encourage them to introduce American art into the curriculum and to bring students to the Museum.

CONSTITUENCY

Originally a family institution, with an audience primarily from the art community, the Whitney Museum now enjoys an international reputation.

The first membership body, the Friends of the Whitney, was established in 1956. It was comprised of 19 collectors and art patrons devoted to furthering contemporary American art; today it totals some 1,000 individuals. In 1978 a new, broadly based membership program was instituted. Offering a number of categories of membership, there are now approximately 4,000 individual and corporate members.

The Board of Trustees, once composed entirely of Whitney family members, was expanded in 1961 by the election of Trustees from outside the family.

The National Committee, established in 1980, consists of 46 patrons and collectors of American art from various parts of the country, who help to bring the achievements of 20th-century American artists to national attention by sponsoring exhibitions and related programs that many institutions in the United States otherwise might not be able to afford.

Annual attendance on West 8th Street averaged about 70,000. That figure grew to 260,000 when the Museum was located on West 54th Street. Today Museum attendance totals approximately 500,000 per year.

MUSEUM DIRECTORS

Upon the founding of the Museum, Juliana Force, a close associate of Mrs. Whitney, was named Director. (Her curatorial staff was composed of three artists: Edmund Archer, Karl Free, and Hermon More.) After Mrs. Force's death in 1948, Hermon More was appointed Director and served until his retirement in 1958, when Lloyd Goodrich assumed responsibilities. John I.H. Baur was appointed to the position in 1968 when Mr. Goodrich retired, and, upon the former's retirement in 1974, Tom Armstrong became Director.

**Whitney Museum of American Art**

Madison Avenue at 75th Street New York, New York 10021 (212) 570-3633

**For Release**

#799

May 21, 1985

EXPANSION PLANS ANNOUNCED

BY WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Flora Miller Biddle, President of the Whitney Museum of American Art, today made public the proposed plans for the expanded Whitney Museum. The proposal calls for the Museum to be extended south to 74th Street, fronting on Madison Avenue, with an expansion designed by architect Michael Graves.

The proposed plans unify the new section and old by means of a connecting structure spanning the two. The building would be 188 feet high and would have ten floors above grade with approximately 134,000 square feet of additional space. The total development would contain substantially less area than currently allowed.

The major components of the proposed Graves addition include 40,000 square feet of exhibition space for a continuing installation of the Permanent Collection, emphasizing its unequaled strengths; a 250-seat theater for presenting comprehensive public education programs; an orientation gallery; an expanded Library and Study Center to encourage and respond to the need for scholarship in American art; and additional office and support space for operations.

The proposal incorporates commercial retail space on the ground floor, basement, and mezzanine levels along Madison Avenue, with exhibition space beginning at the second-floor level. The present Madison Avenue entrance would remain the primary public access to the Museum. A new entrance on 74th Street would be used for special purposes including events taking place in the theater during hours when the Museum galleries were not open to the public.

(more)

The Museum is located in the Upper East Side Historic District, and the proposed expansion will require approval of the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Certain zoning modifications will also be needed, and the plan for the expansion must be approved by the City Planning Commission and the Board of Estimate.

It is estimated that the proposed building program, including construction of the addition and renovations of the present building, will cost approximately $37.5 million.

Museum Director Tom Armstrong said, "The Whitney Museum of American Art is prepared to continue a program of temporary exhibitions and to fulfill its public obligation to present the Permanent Collection and provide optimum conditions for research and study of American art. However, we must expand to accomplish this. Although the Whitney Museum is the leading international institution devoted to American art, throughout its first 50 years it functioned as a temporary exhibition center with no works from the collection on continuous display. In 1981 the Museum opened an ongoing exhibition of highlights of the collection, yet this installation offers less than one percent of the Museum's holdings. We are constantly strengthening the Permanent Collection, and it will continue to grow.

"The expansion would allow the Museum to present to the public the most comprehensive view of the accomplishments of American artists in the 20th century through exhibition of a substantially increased percentage of the Permanent Collection. For example, there would be major concentrations of work by such artists as Alexander Calder, Edward Hopper, Louise Nevelson, David Smith, and Frank Stella. This installation would also provide visitors with a historical context in which to view the ongoing program of temporary exhibitions.

"In addition, the Museum at present has virtually no space to permit scholarly research and study," continued Mr. Armstrong, "and must continually turn away scholars from its library. The study of works on paper is virtually impossible and access to our vast archives is extremely limited. Rooms where

(more)

groups can meet are lacking, and performances, lectures, and symposia have to be held outside the building or in make-shift locations where sight lines are bad, outside noises are disruptive, and slides are projected in daylight. These and other serious limitations affect the Museum's overall ability to fulfill its mandate to present the full scope of American art and to collect, exhibit, research, and interpret the best of 20th-century American art."

Michael Graves explained some of the challenges posed by the building program: "The Whitney Museum of American Art is located in the Upper East Side Historic District, and we feel it is crucial that our scheme enhance the urban characteristics of the existing neighborhood. It is a particular challenge for an architect to combine a modern monument such as Marcel Breuer's original Whitney with the more elaborated facades of the prevailing context. We have attempted to use to our advantage the apparent contradiction of modernity versus a more figurative architecture. We believe our work reflects a particularly American spirit, one which combines architecture derived from traditional sources with the modern architecture of the recent past."

Mr. Graves continued: "In designing the expanded Whitney Museum, we were first concerned with providing appropriate rooms and spaces for the public to view the chronological presentation of the Permanent Collection. In order to provide a context for this collection and to establish the desired relationships with temporary exhibitions, it was essential to bind together our proposed addition with the half completed by Breuer in 1966."

Since moving into the present building on Madison Avenue, designed by Marcel Breuer and opened in 1966, the Museum has dramatically increased programs. The Education Department and the Independent Study Program were established, the Film and Video Department was formed, three branch museums were opened, a fourth branch museum has been announced, and an ongoing international traveling exhibition program was created. Attendance at the Museum has doubled since 1966, the

(more)

the Permanent Collection has grown 500 percent, and membership has increased more than ten fold.

In 1974 the Trustees appointed a Planning Committee to study the future of the Museum, and in 1978 approved the Committee's report which stated that the primary goal of the Museum should be to increase public awareness of the significance of American art and culture of the 20th century. To achieve this goal the Museum must establish as its first priority the research, interpretation, and exhibition of the Permanent Collection, and improve its facilities in order to serve as a major center for scholarship and research on American art.

In October 1981, following six months of interviews with more than 12 architects, Michael Graves was hired to produce schematic designs for an addition. Shortly thereafter, the Museum staff began drawing up a building program, setting forth specific space needs. Intensive interviews were conducted with staff, Trustees, and consultants, and more than a year was spent analyzing the program and visiting other museum facilities. Further months were devoted to financial studies and studies of the adjoining site and zoning regulations. In January 1984 Graves presented his initial schematic design to the Building Committee. Over the past year he has revised and refined his designs, working closely with the Museum staff.

Press information: Linda Gordon (212)570-3633

**Whitney Museum of American Art**

Madison Avenue at 75th Street New York, New York 10021 (212) 570-3633

**For Release**

EXPANSION FACT SHEET

OBJECTIVES: To create exhibition space for an ongoing installation of the Permanent Collection presenting to the public the most comprehensive chronological overview of 20th-century American art with emphasis on the in-depth concentrations of works by particular artists

To enlarge and improve research facilities, enabling the Museum to fulfill its role as a major center for scholarship in American art

To provide a theater to allow the Museum to serve its audience more effectively through a regular program of educational activities

To expand the presently inadequate space for offices and operations

ARCHITECT: Michael Graves Architect, Princeton, N.J.

(more)

SITE: East side of Madison Avenue south of existing Whitney Museum to 74th Street (100'8" along Madison Avenue and 91'8" along 74th Street); connecting to existing Museum designed by Marcel Breuer and Hamilton Smith with Michael Irving, Consulting Architect

| | |
|---|---|
| Present site | 12,958 sq. feet |
| New site | 9,228 sq. feet |
| Combined sites | 22,186 sq. feet |

MAJOR COMPONENTS: Approximately 40,000* square feet of new exhibition space, primarily devoted to the Permanent Collection

250-seat theater below grade

Expanded Library, Archives, study facilities

Works on paper study center

Orientation Gallery

New Restaurant space on top floor

Approximately 13,600 square feet of commercial retail space on ground floor, basement, and mezzanine levels along Madison Avenue

New vertical circulation to be provided by high-speed elevators in Lobby of addition

Approximately 15,000 square feet of new office space

*All figures represent gross square footage

(more)

SIZE:

New space: 134,000 sq. feet (approximate)

Existing: 83,500 sq. feet

Total Expanded Museum: 217,500 sq. feet

HEIGHT: Approximately 188' (Existing building is 97 feet)

ZONING: Upper East Side Historic District; Special Madison Avenue Preservation District

District C5-1

Use group 3, Community facility

Allowable F.A.R. of combined sites: 10

Proposed F.A.R. of combined sites: 6.65

MATERIAL: Granite

ESTIMATED COST: $37.5 million

BUILDING COMMITTEE: Elizabeth M. Petrie, Chairman

Tom Armstrong

Flora Miller Biddle

Victor W. Ganz

Brendan Gill

C. Lawson Reed

A. Alfred Taubman

**Whitney Museum of American Art**

Madison Avenue at 75th Street New York, New York 10021 (212) 570-3633

**For Release**

#808

WILLIAM S. WOODSIDE NAMED PRESIDENT OF BOARD

OF WHITNEY MUSEUM

William S. Woodside, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of American Can Company, was named President of the Board of Trustees of the Whitney Museum of American Art at a special meeting of the Board on June 26, 1985. Mr. Woodside is succeeding Flora Miller Biddle, who was elected Chairman on the retirement of Howard Lipman. Mr. Lipman will remain an active Trustee.

Three new Trustees have also been elected to the Board: Joanne L. Cassullo, Beth Rudin De Woody, and Benjamin D. Holloway.

William Woodside, as President, is the chief executive officer who provides leadership to the Trustees and ensures that policies they establish are implemented by the staff through the Director. A Museum Trustee since 1979, he serves as Co-Chairman of the Corporate Committee as well as a member of the Development Committee. His personal interest in the work of contemporary American artists is reflected in the American Can Company collection and support through the American Can Company Foundation of important exhibitions of work by living American artists presented at the Whitney Museum -- "New Image Painting" (1978), the "1981 Biennial Exhibition," and "Jonathan Borofsky" (1984). The company has been a corporate member of the Museum since 1978.

Mr. Woodside is also a director of Mellon Bank Corporation, James River Corporation, and Empire Blue Cross and Blue Shield. He is chairman of the Regional Plan Association, a trustee of the Committee for Economic Development, and a director of the New York City Partnership and the Business Committee for

(more)

the Arts. He is a trustee of Barnard College and a member of the Board of Visitors of The Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York. Mr. Woodside also serves on the Advisory Council of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy and is a member of the Business Roundtable and Council on Foreign Relations.

Flora Biddle has served as a Trustee since 1958 and was Vice President of the Board from 1960 until 1977, when she became President. In this respect, she has carried forward the legacy of her grandmother, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, who founded the Museum in 1930, and her mother, Flora Whitney Miller, who succeeded Mrs. Whitney as President from 1942 to 1966 and was Chairman until 1974. Mrs. Biddle, who has served on numerous Trustee Committees and has guided the Museum on the path to its recently announced expansion, will continue her active involvement in all Museum activities. In addition, she collaborated with B.H. Friedman on the biography Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1978).

On the retirement of Howard Lipman, the Board passed a Resolution of Thanks

> ...for his leadership of the Museum at a time when it experienced the greatest growth in its history;...for his wisdom in establishing the Long Range Planning Committee in 1974 and his guidance in implementing the Committee's recommendations and setting the Museum on its present course; for the extraordinary generosity which he and his wife, Jean, have shown in helping the Museum to build the most significant collection of twentieth-century American sculpture in the world and for the role they have played as the most important patrons of the Whitney Museum other than the founder, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney; and for his steadfast support of American artists and his dedication to furthering the Museum's goals of recognizing, preserving, and presenting to the public the finest examples of American art of our time.

Benjamin Holloway, newly elected to the Board, is Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Equitable Real Estate Group and Executive Vice President of Equitable Life Assurance Society. He also serves as trustee and president of the Building Fund of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine and as a trustee of Duke

(more)

University and the Archives of American Art. Equitable, which has recently become a Corporate Member of the Museum, sponsored the exhibition "Print Acquisitions 1974-1984" last year and will be host for the fourth branch of the Whitney Museum, which will be located in the new Equitable Center on Seventh Avenue between 51st and 52nd Streets.

Beth De Woody is Assistant Vice President of Rudin Management Co., Inc., and a director of the Samuel and May Rudin Foundation, Inc. She also serves on the Board of Phoenix House, on the Exhibitions Committee of the International Center of Photography, on the Producers' Council of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and as vice president of the Board of Eye and Ear Theater, Inc. She is a member of both the Print Committee and the Public Education Committee of the Whitney Museum.

Joanne L. Cassullo, a Library Fellow of the Whitney Museum, is an alumna and a supporter of the Museum's Independent Study Program and a member of the Lobby Gallery Associates of the Whitney Museum. She is a gallery assistant at the Washburn Gallery and serves as vice president and director of The Leonhardt Foundation, Inc.; trustee of Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia, and Friends Academy in Locust Valley, New York; on the Board of Phoenix House, and Eye and Ear Theater, Inc.; and a member of the special events committee of Artists Space.

Other officers elected at the June 26 meeting are: Vice Chairman, Leonard A. Lauder; Vice Presidents, Joel S. Ehrenkranz, Victor W. Ganz, and Stephen E. O'Neil; and Treasurer, Charles Simon.

Press Information: Linda Gordon (212)570-3633

June 1985

**Whitney Museum of American Art**

Madison Avenue at 75th Street New York, New York 10021 (212) 570-3633

**For Release**

MICHAEL GRAVES

Michael Graves, who was born in Indianapolis in 1934, received his architectural training at the University of Cincinnati and Harvard University. In 1960 he won the Prix de Rome and studied at the American Academy in Rome of which he is now Trustee. Graves, a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, is Schirmer Professor of Architecture at Princeton University, where he has taught since 1962.

Graves' recent projects include The Portland Building in Oregon; the Humana corporate headquarters building in Louisville, Kentucky; the Environmental Education Center, Liberty State Park, New Jersey; the San Juan Capistrano Library in California; and Riverbend, the Cincinnati Symphony summer pavilion. He is currently the architect for the Whitney Museum of American Art expansion in New York City; the Emory University Museum of Art and Archaeology, Atlanta; The Newark Museum in New Jersey, and Clos Pegase Winery, Napa Valley, California.

Graves has been the winner of thirteen Progressive Architecture design awards, five National A.I.A. awards, and the Arnold W. Brunner Memorial Prize in Architecture from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. His work has been exhibited in numerous exhibitions here and abroad and has appeared in many periodicals and books, among them Five Architects; Michael Graves, published in 1979 by Academy Editions and Rizzoli; and Michael Graves, Buildings and Projects 1966-1981, published in 1983 by Rizzoli.

May 1985

December 11, 1985

prepared for Trustees

FACT SHEET

The Expanded Whitney Museum of American Art
designed by Michael Graves

**The Whitney Museum of American Art needs to expand because:**

-- We have a Permanent Collection of 10,000 works of art. We have space to display only 72 of them, since the 2nd and 4th floors are devoted to the ongoing temporary exhibition program.

-- We have the single most impressive and comprehensive collection of 20th-century American drawings--more than 5,000 works. The collection is all in storage.

-- We have the most historically important library collection relating to American art in the world. However, our library is so small that only four scholars can squeeze in at a time; we are forced to turn away as many as we accommodate.

-- We have a dynamic public education program; half the year we have no place to run it; the balance of the time it is run out of space that can only accommodate half the numbers who would, and should, be able to attend.

-- Operating space is intolerably cramped. Xerox machines are in corridors, light bulbs are stored in the hallway, there is no space for female guards to change, a large closet serves as an office for two, and the Drawings Department itself is a former closet now graced with a phone.

-- Even after the addition is complete, sculpture and paintings will continue to be stored in an off-site warehouse.

**The expansion program provides for:**

-- A fourfold increase in Permanent Collection exhibition space while maintaining the temporary exhibition space. Galleries will be laid out to present a rational, chronological view of 20th-century American art, greatly enhancing the museum experience.

-- An auditorium to allow the Museum to offer a wide range of educational programs for students, scholars, and the general public. The Whitney is the only major museum in the country lacking an auditorium.

-- Greater library space and facilities for scholars to utilize the books, archives, and artists files.

-- Works on paper study-storage facilities to make accessible to scholars and others the significant collections.

-- More efficient, though increased only modestly in size, space for offices, security, operations and the restaurant.

**The design is controversial, but respects the integrity of the Breuer building:**

-- Such distinguished architectural voices as Philip Johnson and John Burgee, Ulrich Franzen, Vincent Scully and Sir James Stirling all solidly support the design by Michael Graves which they describe as a brilliantly innovative solution that preserves Breuer in a unifying new composition. Breuer, as instructed by the Trustees who purchased adjacent land contemplating future expansion, designed the Museum to accommodate that expansion by providing knock-out panels at all levels.

-- The Whitney is at the cutting edge of the future. So is the Graves design; when built so was the Breuer.

-- The structure fits the neighborhood context, is smaller than zoning allows, and meets the requirements of the special Madison Avenue district.

**Why doesn't the Museum expand by creating more branches?**

-- The Permanent Collection installation in the expanded Museum will provide an historic context for temporary exhibitions. For example, visitors to the current Ralston Crawford show would then be able to see how his work relates to other developments in 20th-century American art in the adjacent Permanent Collection areas. Separate the two and you diminish both. Also, branch museums depend on the support and direction of a thriving central institution. Freeze the nucleus and the satellites will not survive.

**What about the "historic" brownstones?**

-- The brownstones are old--built in 1876. But, they are neither historic nor distinguished and have been totally altered below the third floor. Scores of much better "neo-grec" brownstones exist throughout the area--there are even better examples in better condition in three locations by this "architect"/developer, Silas M. Styles.

MICHAEL GRAVES
ARCHITECT

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
NEW YORK, NEW YORK
MAY 21, 1985

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at the corner of Madison Avenue and East 75th Street in New York and occupies a building designed in 1966 by Marcel Breuer. The Museum owns the Madison Avenue block front south of this building to East 74th Street and is planning a significant expansion on this site. The site is located within the Upper East Side Historic District and the Madison Avenue Special Preservation District and is therefore subject to special zoning requirements and design guidelines. New construction is meant to enhance the urban characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood. The original Breuer building, a modern monument finished in dark gray unpolished granite, is in distinct contrast to the smaller scale and more elaborated facades of the remainder of Madison Avenue. The particular design challenge of this project is therefore to use to our advantage the apparent contradictions of modernity versus a more figurative and traditional architecture. Further, in order to make the old and new sections legible as one museum, it is necessary to bind together the two halves of the building, both in plan and in the treatment of the exterior.

The proposed program for the expansion will add approximately 134,000 square feet of new construction to the 83,500 square feet of the existing building. The major components of the new building program include: 40,000 square feet of exhibition space for installation of the Permanent Collection; a theater for presenting the Museum's public education programs; an orientation gallery; an expanded Library and Study Center to promote scholarship in American Art; and additional office and support space for operations. In keeping with the guidelines of the Madison Avenue Special Preservation District, the expanded Museum will also include commercial retail space on the ground floor, mezzanine, and basement levels along Madison Avenue.

The present Madison Avenue entrance to the Breuer building will remain the primary public access to the Museum. A new entrance on 74th Street will be used for special purposes such as events taking place in the theater during the evening and other times when the Museum galleries are not open to the public. As with all major public spaces in the Breuer building, the existing lobby will retain its original character. An expanded Museum Shop and coatroom will be provided. A new elevator and stair lobby will be established in the Graves addition, accessible directly from the Breuer lobby and on axis with the new entrance from East 74th Street. The

341 NASSAU STREET
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY 08540
TELEPHONE 609 924 6409

location of this connection takes advantage of an existing access panel to the east of the existing Breuer stair; this stair remains, as it is considered a special element within the existing building. The north-south axis of movement occurs on all floors of the expanded building as a way of orienting the visitor and binding together the two structures.

A cylindrical "hinge" located opposite the public elevators and at the joint between the original building and its addition, helps to mediate the difference in setback from the street. (The Breuer entrance is set back approximately 30 feet from the sidewalk, whereas the Graves addition, following present zoning guidelines, is established at the edge of the sidewalk.) Throughout the building, this cylindrical hinge will be used for functions that are particular to the Whitney Museum. On the first floor, it will house the Lobby Gallery and its continuing program of small and often provocative temporary exhibitions. On the lower level, it becomes the theater lobby, and on the upper levels, it contains the Orientation Gallery, Calder's Circus, and a major viewing room of the Study Center.

The theater, located at a lower level of the addition, will seat approximately 250 people. The theater is intended to serve the Museum's educational programs and is therefore equipped with full projection and sound facilities for films and slides. The stage itself is also large enough for the types of performing arts programs which the Whitney now stages in its galleries.

Exhibition space, as at present, will begin on the second floor. The floor levels of the new section of the building will be continuous with those of the existing Museum. Exhibition of the Permanent Collection will be arranged chronologically as a survey, interspersed with more extensive displays of special "concentrations" within the collection. In order to introduce the history of American Art since 1900, which is the subject of the Museum's holdings, and to establish the Permanent Collection as a reference for the temporary exhibition program, it was decided that the entire second floor be devoted to a survey of American Art up to World War II. The Orientation Gallery is also located on this level.

On the third and fourth floors, the existing galleries in the Breuer building will continue to be used for temporary exhibitions. The third floor of the Graves addition will continue the chronological presentation of the Permanent Collection, and the fourth floor, because of the great height of the existing ceilings, will be used for the display of sculpture from the Permanent Collection, including works by Calder, Nevelson, and Smith, among others. A large alabaster window facing Madison Avenue will allow a soft, diffuse light to enter these galleries, and a small window in the center will allow visitors to become re-oriented to Madison Avenue.

The existing fifth floor, originally designed for administrative offices, has ceilings too low for exhibition space, so the library, archives, and works on paper study center are located on this floor. The plans are organized to take advantage of the availability of natural light for certain reading rooms.

Above the fifth floor, the new building spans across both the Breuer building and the Graves addition and sets back from Madison Avenue, and from East 75th and 74th Streets. This strategy has been attempted both to establish sufficient floor area on each level for Museum exhibitions and to keep the overall profile of the building as low as possible within the surrounding context. The sixth floor, the first level spanning both halves, completes the chronological presentation of the Permanent Collection with galleries for art since 1970 and recent acquisitions. The seventh floor contains the film and video galleries and a large temporary exhibition space which has the possibility of controlled natural light from the side and top. A dramatic public stair connects the sixth and seventh floors along the Madison Avenue face, where a large curving window, seen on the exterior as a "bridge" between the two halves, offers the visitor views of Madison Avenue.

Further set back from Madison Avenue, the eighth and ninth floors are designated for staff offices and conference rooms. A roof terrace is accessible from the lower level of offices. A restaurant with a public terrace, crowns the building and offers spectacular views toward Central Park.

The overall composition of the addition attempts to establish a reciprocity with the original Breuer museum. The design of the lower portion of the Graves addition maintains the overall height and mass of the Breuer building. The cylindrical hinge between the old and new portions attempts to focus the mass on the center as a series of rooms rather than see the center as a divisive wall. Since the program for the addition is considerably larger in area than the original building, there appear to be only two reasonable alternatives to absorb the additional square footage above the setback at Breuer's existing cornice line: building a tower solely above the new addition, or building the same square footage in a horizontal mass, bridging the two bases. The second alternative was chosen as it provides greater areas for individual museum floors and thereby better establishes the continuity of the museum experience. Above the base, the upper floors are set back in a series of steps which correspond to specific aspects of the program.

For the exterior walls, we have chosen a gray pink granite to approximate the color value of Breuer's gray granite, as it was thought that continuing the same dark gray that Breuer used would present an overly somber facade for the entirety of the Madison Avenue block. Therefore, we have used a combination of grays, reds, and pinks to infuse the addition with a somewhat more lively expression and yet to be compatible with Breuer's coloration. Lighter vlues of similar materials are used at the top of the building, again in an effort to diminish the apparent mass that the building presents to the street.

# The Whitney's new Graves

*by Hilton Kramer*

In the life of certain art institutions there sometimes comes a moment—call it the moment of truth—when, as the result of a particularly fateful and disastrous decision about their future course, they stand revealed as the unmistakable enemy of all the standards and traditions and achievements they have claimed to represent. Policies and programs which, prior to this revelatory moment, might be regarded as merely misguided or inadvertent or simply ignorant, suddenly acquire a more sinister and menacing character when their full implication is made so baldly apparent to us. It is only then that we come to understand that these institutions may now constitute a real threat to the life of art and its place in our society.

For many people concerned with the life of art in this country, the program of the Whitney Museum of American Art has now come to constitute a portent of this kind. Much has lately been happening to the Whitney to raise grave doubts about the museum's ability to perform its designated functions. It was a bad sign, for example, when Gail Levin left the Whitney's curatorial staff last year, for Miss Levin was one of the very few bona fide scholars in the field of early twentieth-century American art on the museum staff, and as far as we know, she has never been replaced by a scholar of comparable credentials. Then, too, there was the matter of the museum's unseemly actions—and inactions—on the Morgan Russell donation (about which we shall have more to say in due course). Above all, this year's Biennial exhibition was deeply shocking even to the many museumgoers who, through grim experience, had come to expect the worst from this particular enterprise. Certainly the 1985 Biennial exceeded, in its gleeful surrender to everything that is most vulgar, superficial, and meretricious on the contemporary art scene, anything that had heretofore been seen at the Whitney—and that is really saying something when one considers the recent history of the Biennials.

Yet, distressing as these and certain other developments at the Whitney have been, it was not until May 21, when the museum announced its plans to repackage the Marcel Breuer building it has occupied since 1966 as part of a new and larger museum designed by Michael Graves, that the moment of truth finally dawned even for those who had tried so arduously to make allowances for so many egregious misadventures in the past. With this announcement, the crowded record of foolish decisions could no longer be regarded as a succession of miscellaneous delinquencies. Clearly a new policy was in place, and there was now every indication that we would henceforth be dealing with an institution which cannot be trusted to serve the interests of either art or its public.

While it would not be inaccurate to claim that the new Michael Graves building, which combines an appalling poverty of architectural thought with a maximum of ornamental ostentation, is the perfect symbol of what

the Whitney now aspires to be, that of course is precisely what makes this whole episode so oppressively significant. Mr. Graves has been nothing if not entirely faithful to the spirit of his client's wishes—a spirit governed by an invincible preference for glitz and specious glamour at the expense of art itself. It is for this reason that the Graves building, though in itself an object lesson in how *not* to design an art museum, cannot be separated from the Whitney program it is intended to serve.

What, then, does this program entail? Alas, there are no mysteries to be decoded in this matter. By its actions, no less than by its pronouncements, the Whitney has made its present and future goals altogether plain. In this respect, its ill-conceived branch-museum program reads like a blueprint for future operations. There are now two of these so-called branch museums already functioning —one in the Philip Morris building at Park Avenue and Forty-second Street in Manhattan, and another in the Champion International building in downtown Stamford, Connecticut. Two more are planned for Manhattan—one in the Equitable tower at Seventh Avenue and Fifty-third Street, scheduled to open this fall, and another at Federal Reserve Plaza, now set for early 1986. No doubt there are still others under discussion.

From the branches already in operation the nature of the Whitney's interest in these misnamed "museum" projects can be easily discerned, and it is not primarily an artistic or museological interest. To a serious experience or understanding of art these branch operations make no contribution whatever. In fact, they aren't in any true sense of the word museums at all and shouldn't be called by that name, but are more akin to boutiques or advertising displays in which token art objects are put on show for the purpose of conferring a spurious "cultural" image on the host companies. The real function of these branch operations is neither to educate nor to delight, but simply to provide both the Whitney and the sponsoring corporations with a mutually beneficial public relations program. The Whitney looks as if it were performing a service for the public, and the sponsoring corporations look as if they were performing a service for art, whereas in truth both are cynically using art *and* the public as a means of promoting their own respective interests.

It is in this historic shift to public relations as a priority interest, to the use of art for the purposes of institutional self-promotion and self-aggrandizement, that the branch-museum program of the Whitney affords a key to its current outlook. Given the goals implicit in that outlook, the building which Michael Graves has designed for the new Whitney is abysmally appropriate, of course. For what the Whitney program calls for isn't so much a new art museum as a new corporate headquarters, and this, more or less, is what Mr. Graves has given it. Unfortunately, for those of us who are still more interested in art than in this transformation of the museum into an arm of the public-relations business, the Graves design is hideously *in*appropriate to the function to which, for the moment anyway, the Whitney still gives lip service: exhibiting works of art. With its sherbert-colored cladding and its cookie-cutter windows, its ornamental cornices and penthouse colonnade, all topped off with one of those preposterous pergolas which serve no other function than to announce to all the world that the whole lugubrious conception is unmistakably Michael Graves's, this design belongs in one of those ballyhoo exhibitions of which the current directorship of the Whitney is so inordinately proud. It was therefore entirely apt that the Graves design should be unveiled to the public while the latest Whitney Biennial was in progress, for it is a design that inflicts on the existing Marcel Breuer building the same kind of degrading transformation which the museum invited one of its favored graffiti artists, Kenny Scharf, to carry out in the building's second-floor washrooms and telephone booths as part of his contribution to this year's Biennial.

The Whitney's blithe disregard for the building which it commissioned from Mar-

cel Breuer scarcely twenty years ago is in itself a scandal of considerable significance. Among much else, it instantly throws into doubt the Whitney's role—which is, be it remembered, the primary role it claims for itself—in making what its director, Tom Armstrong, calls "initial judgments about the merit of current work." Why should we place any trust in the judgment of a museum that shows itself so eager to repeal the most important architectural decision it ever made and so blind—or is it merely cynical—about the implications of this eagerness?

It is true that the Breuer building has never been an easy building to live with. It makes rather too much of its own authority, and it isn't always as subtle or as commodious in accommodating itself to its functions as it might be. But it was the Whitney, after all, which gave us this high-powered, difficult building in the first place. It was the Whitney which boasted of its merits and made large claims for its excellence. And there is this to be said for the Breuer building: it unequivocably focuses attention on the seriousness of the museological enterprise, it speaks in every detail for the gravity and high purposes of art, and it does not easily lend itself to frivolity or foolishness. Which is why, I suppose, it had to be outrageously defaced to accommodate the spirit of this year's Biennial, and why the current director, with his unerring penchant for the showy and the superficial, is so eager to see it absorbed into Michael Graves's gaudy labyrinth.

We know now what we can expect from the new Whitney. In his remarks to the American Institute of Architects on July 25, Mr. Armstrong announced that in its new building the Whitney would exhibit its art in a new way. What he characterized as the "anonymous spaces" of Sixties museum architecture—meaning, of course, the Breuer building—would no longer do, he said. Which, translated from the public-relations argot used on such occasions, simply means that the Michael Graves design can be counted on to provide the same kind of non-anonymous spaces for the museum's permanent collection that Kenny Scharf and others gave us a glimpse of in this year's Biennial. Which means, in turn, that works of art will henceforth be at the mercy of the art of display at the Whitney, and that the museum will naturally favor the kind of art —of which there is no shortage on today's art scene—which is itself a form of display. No one can say that we weren't warned.

Cognizant that, despite this emphasis on fun and games, the museum must also have at least the appearance of a more serious side, the Whitney has made the claim that its new building will "[enable] the Museum to fulfill its role as a major center for scholarship in American art." For anyone familiar with the museum's record in this matter, the notion of the Whitney serving as "a major center for scholarship in American art" borders on the comical. In this regard, the case of the Morgan Russell donation tells us everything we need to know. Russell was, of course, one of the pioneer figures in the early history of abstract painting. He also happened to enjoy the patronage of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, the founder of the museum. Seven years ago Henry M. Reed, who has devoted much time, effort, and expense to assembling an invaluable collection of Russell's manuscripts, studies, and works of art, donated the collection to the Whitney on the understanding that the museum would organize an exhibition of this material and publish a scholarly catalogue. But of course nothing has ever been done with it, and Mr. Reed has now been obliged to go to court in the hope of getting the collection transferred to an institution more receptive to scholarly pursuits. It is farcical for the present administration of the Whitney to claim to have any interest in or understanding of scholarship.

But farce—of one kind or another—seems to be the name of the game that is now being played at the Whitney, which looks and acts more and more like an institution that has severed whatever connections it had with the standards and achievements of high art in order to set itself up as another kind of enterprise.

The NY Times
5/2/85

**Critic's Notebook**

# Harmonizing Old and New Buildings

By PAUL GOLDBERGER

IF there is any major price we pay for the current rise of revivalism, or historicism, or whatever the repetition of historical architectural form in new buildings may be called, it is not what is most often feared, a lack of originality. It is possible to be as creative in assembling Corinthian columns and pediments as in the making of a modern building. The real problem is more subtle — it is in the belief, rarely stated explicitly but coming to be more and more of an assumption, that the only way to relate properly to an older building is by reproducing or imitating its architectural forms.

To break with the past, after all, was considered modern; nothing seems to sum up modern architecture's failings more aptly than the glass tower shoved unsympathetically beside, say, a Georgian bank. Our age, desperate to put as much distance as possible between itself and the age of heroic modernism, sees its symbolism differently — we would rush to be Georgian ourselves, putting some kind of red-brick Georgian tower next to that Georgian bank.

This is not necessarily wrong; it is just that it is a very glib and simple-minded way to be right. There are other ways to be sympathetic to older buildings without being particularly literal — indeed, without being literal at all.

This is perhaps the most pleasing aspect of all to the distinguished new Museum of Decorative Arts, in Frankfurt, West Germany, by the New York architect Richard Meier, which opened last week. Mr. Meier's building, like all his museums, is a pristine, white structure, in a style best called romantic modernism; it is active both inside and out, and indicates little interest on the part of the architect in the philosophy of the museum as a neutral container for art. It is, by and large, strongly sympathetic to the furniture and objects it is designed to house, despite its assertive qualities.

But what are at least as important in terms of the lessons this building offers for architecture at this moment are its implications for the relationship of new to old. The Museum of Decorative Arts was originally housed in a classical villa that was scheduled to remain as part of a much larger new museum complex. The first problem faced by the architect, then, was creating a new building that would relate comfortably to the old one.

It is a situation in which direct imitation might have been an easy choice, though admittedly not for Mr. Meier, whose commitment to the modernist vocabulary has been constant throughout his career. But what makes Mr. Meier's modernism different from so much other modern architecture is the remarkable spiritual sympathy it displays for other kinds of buildings.

That is particularly evident here. The classical villa, by a stroke of luck, was shaped like a cube, and Mr. Meier took its dimensions as the starting point for his own building. The cube is reproduced three times in abstract form to make up the main gallery spaces of the new building; these cubes, covered in white porcelain-enameled steel, are joined together by glass and steel wings to form a great "L" around the original villa.

The scale, the proportion, and all of the axes, or lines of circulation through the complex, respect the themes set by the villa. What breaks from the motifs of the villa is only style itself — the villa is neo-classical, the new museum modern — for in every other way the two sections are kin. Indeed, if anything, there is something almost gentler about Mr. Meier's building. The villa is a bit stodgy, whereas the new building, unlike most modernist works in our time, is a light, lilting composition; it dances around the old villa, which sets it moving but in no way defines its limits.

The New York Times/Karin Rid

A ramp inside the Museum of Decorative Arts, in Frankfurt, West Germany.

So the relationship of this new building to the villa is a dynamic one — the villa gives the Meier building a constant, and constantly recharging, counterpoint. The integrity of both old and new remains, while together they make a composition richer than either section could be on its own. The circumstance in which old and new buildings engage in a dialogue across time is an ideal rarely realized, but it is what is achieved here. The dialogue is as graceful a one as the architecture of this decade has yet produced — and a vital reminder that respect in architecture takes many forms.

•

In all the uproar about Richard Serra's sculpture, "Tilted Arc," that now sits on Federal Plaza at Foley Square in lower Manhattan — which a recent General Services Administration panel has now recommended be removed in response to the widespread public objections to it — there has been little talk about the architectural issues raised by both the controversy and the piece itself.

The opponents of the Serra piece have tended to talk of how the long, sweeping arc of steel cuts the open space in front of the 26 Federal Plaza office tower in two, thus diminishing the plaza's usefulness. True, the arc is a wall. But did anyone really make much use of Federal Plaza before this piece of "public art" was installed? The fact is that, in a city of bad plazas in front of bad skyscrapers, this is one of the worst. Federal Plaza is a dreary stretch of concrete, punctuated by a poorly placed and poorly designed fountain; it was no urban oasis by a long shot.

The Serra piece is harsh and difficult. But Richard Serra did understand the nature of urban space and Foley Square, in a way that the architects Kahn & Jacobs, who designed 26 Federal Plaza, did not. The arc, in its long, gentle sweep, reaches out to embrace the two great classical courthouse buildings across the square, pulling the civic buildings around Foley Square together, where the Federal Plaza building itself tries to stand apart.

Given all of this, was the piece worth keeping? Ideally, yes. Public art rarely achieves a total consensus of opinion, and should not; it is intended to challenge as much as to comfort. But the sad thing about the Serra piece is that it seemed, to many, only to challenge, and not to comfort at all. The result is that, ironically, this piece did inspire the near unanimity of opinion that most public art cannot — there was a consensus this time, and it was against the piece.

While the Government should not bow to incidental pressure so far as public art is concerned, near-total opposition is another matter. When a work of public art fails to communicate to those who see it daily as completely as this one seems to have done, the sad question that must be asked is what benefit its continued presence has.

•

There is, on Lexington Avenue at about 44th Street, an extraordinary site: a view of the entire height, length and width of the north side of the Chrysler Building. It is something that has never been seen before, since for the 55 years that building has been the greatest exclamation point on the Manhattan skyline, other buildings have filled the east blockfront of Lexington Avenue between 43d and 44th Streets.

Now, most of those buildings are demolished; only one, which contains some residential tenants and is subject to a city moratorium on the demolition of single-room occupancy facilities, remains. That is causing a long delay in Olympia & York's plans to construct a tower by the Chicago architect Helmut Jahn on the site, a design that tries, regrettably, to beat the Chrysler Building at flashiness.

But for now, the delay is to everyone's benefit — to see the full sweep of the Chrysler Building's height, from its solid base to its setbacks marked by great eagle gargoyles to its exuberant crown, is to see something that would be special in any age. But today, when overbuilding has made us so accustomed to seeing skyscrapers in tiny bits and pieces, it is magical.

Artforum, Nov. 185

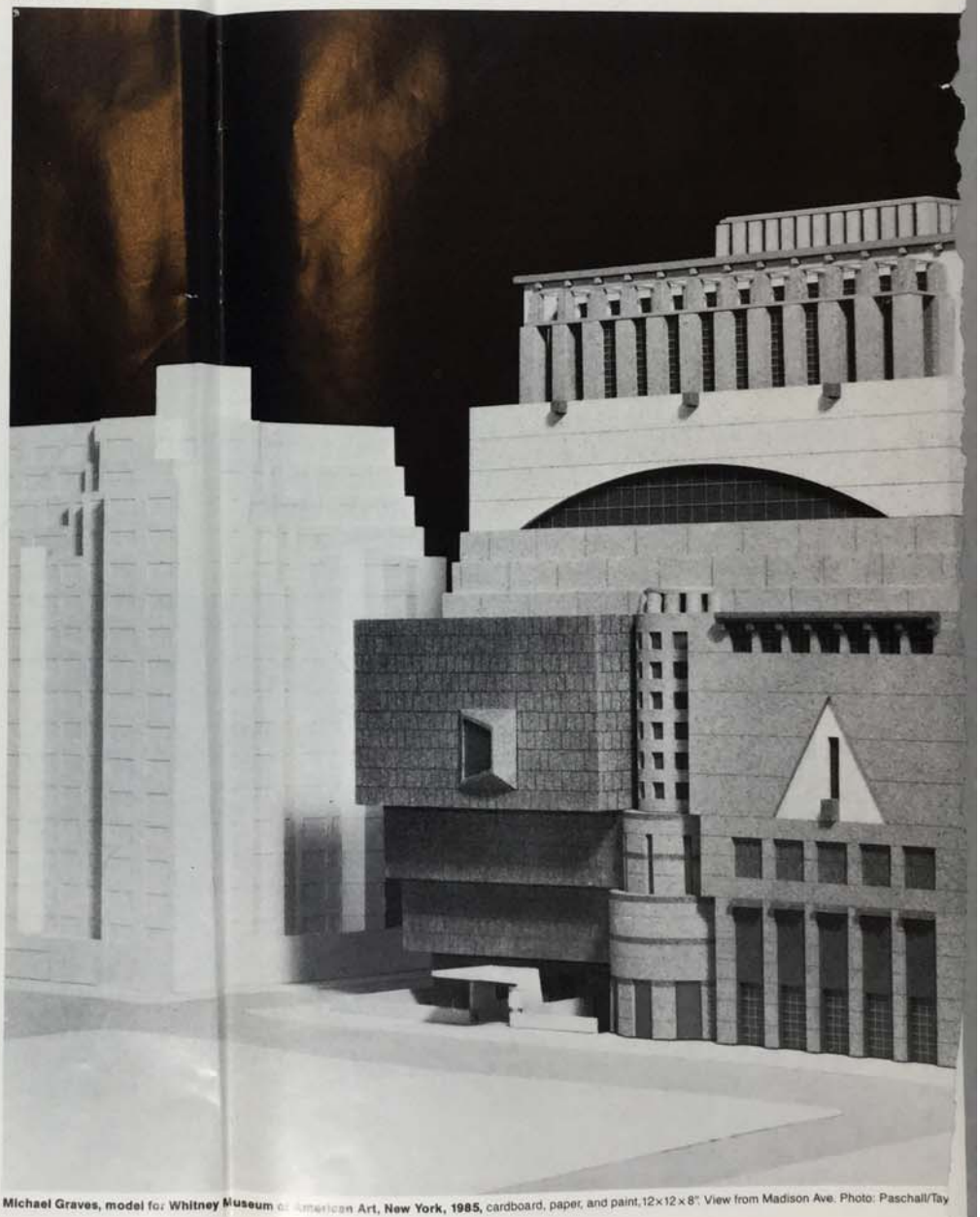
# A GRAVE SITUATION FOR MARCEL BREUER'S WHITNEY

JOSEPH GIOVANNINI

**Christo, *Whitney Museum of American Art Packed*, 1971,** lithograph with collage, 27⅞ × 21⅞". Edition of 100. Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

When the Whitney Museum of American Art made its proposal for expanding the museum public last May, the design immediately provoked strong reactions among many people, especially architects. The feelings were expressed informally, between colleagues and friends, over lunch and at weekend gatherings, but they had no form or focus. This fall, however, the discussions become public as the expansion proposal embarks on a series of hearings, and they promise to be vocal—matching the intensity of the feelings surrounding last spring's hearings over the removal of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* from Foley Square. In addition to being reviewed by the New York Landmarks Preservation Commission, the proposal must pass before the city's Planning Commission, its Board of Estimate, and Community Board 8.

More than another polite discussion about architectural Modernism versus Postmodernism, and about the architectural appropriateness of siting a Postmodern tour de force next to a Modern classic, the problem is that the addition, as designed by the Princeton architect Michael Graves, cannot be built without seriously compromising Marcel Breuer's Whitney, completed in 1966. Though the Graves addition hardly touches the facades of the Breuer, its engulfing ten-story structure wraps around the ear-



**Michael Graves, model for Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1985,** cardboard, paper, and paint, 12×12×8". View from Madison Ave. Photo: Paschall/Tay

lier building's side and top, locking the Breuer in a framework that clearly alters its character. The monumentalized addition greatly reduces the Breuer in scale and presence, and imposes on it in a way that transforms the mysterious structure into a mannered cornerstone. The deformation of a major work of art is now an imminent threat.

The problematic proposal also raises the issue of the responsibility of the Whitney as a museum to understand and protect the building it occupies. By advocating the Graves proposal, the Whitney seems to appreciate neither the art of the building nor its historical significance. The Museum is not conserving or preserving its architecture as it would one of its own paintings; a masterpiece of Modernism and a summary building for an entire architectural movement, the Breuer is perhaps the most obvious piece in the Whitney's collection of 20th-century art.

In 1981, the Whitney commissioned Graves to produce a design that would add approximately 134,000 square feet to the existing 83,500-square-foot building, an addition that would include 40,000 square feet of new gallery space. The Museum wanted large gallery floors to better establish "the continuity of the museum experience." The Whitney owns a site on Madison Avenue adjacent to it, property now occupied by a row of unremarkable brownstones, which would be demolished to incorporate the block-long Museum complex.

The scheme Graves proposes—to cost approximately $37.5 million—matches the Breuer building with another of equal mass and height on the brownstone site, and couples the two parts with a vertical, cylindrical volume placed at the center. Together, the Breuer Whitney and the Graves section would act as a base for a massive, templelike structure on top, making the total height of the building 188 feet, or ten stories. The obvious solution for the expansion, a tower built only on the brownstone site, was not developed because, says Tom Armstrong, director of the Whitney, "We need horizontal space. We don't want a tower where you go to the 17th floor for Minimalism." Graves also maintains he wants the whole building to read as a single entity—"one Whitney," he says, apparently believing, despite the precedent of the Museum of Modern Art, that a tall building could not be integrated with the Breuer so that the old and new parts would read as one institution. At an extraordinary convocation of architects this summer, held by the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) for its members, Graves presented the design, quoting art history with slides, like passages from the Bible. Attended by many figures of the New York architectural establishment, the meeting was the proposal's first step into a semipublic realm of discussion, and proved an especially awkward forum: the addition puts the architectural community in the uncomfortable position of having to weigh the work of an eminent colleague against the interests of a building done by a dead master. For a profession with a generally genteel pulse, it was an intense moment. Philip Johnson voiced his support; Paul Rudolph sat inconspicuously, remained silent, and left before the session ended. Yale's Vincent Scully, professor of architectural history, who favored the scheme, launched into what sounded like one of his lectures, but a heckler deflated what seemed party rhetoric before the professor gained momentum. Among the opponents, one young architect—French, and later identified in the press only by his black suspenders—passionately attacked the Graves scheme for its attack on Breuer's building.

In his presentation Graves likened the base of the new "one Whitney" to diptychal Renaissance annunciation scenes in which the message from the archangel in one frame leaps to the Virgin in the second. In the same way, Graves implied, the Breuer Whitney and his addition converse with each other.

A polemic indeed runs between the two parts, with a Postmodern argument of symmetry and static forms playing against a Modernist one of asymmetrical, dynamic ones. The diptych analogy might even hold if the temple on top did not strongly evoke a different reference to art history—the image of the seated ruler, often depicted in paintings and sculptures, the royal foot resting on the body of a subjugated enemy. Like the vanquished captive, Breuer's Whitney is completely dominated by the temple on top, and its architectural power overcome. This is Samson after the haircut.

Breuer designed his five-story building as a hovering structure, resting mysteriously on its own deep shadow at the base. The shadow is deepened by the moat of air around it; a glass wall across the front, at the street and basement levels, visually emphasizes the building's apparent lack of support. Clad in heavy granite, the Museum rises in three stepped cantilevers which extend the hover out toward Madison.

What is most destructive about the Graves temple is that it places the floating structure in compression, making the Breuer Whitney into a cornerstone on which the temple would rest. Graves' architecture emphasizes gravity, and the way lines of weight accumulate from the top of a building down to the earth; in its nature it opposes the antigravitational quality of the Breuer building. And Graves' central

cylinder, with its ledges that seem to hold up Breuer's cantilevered floors, would further violate the original by giving clear visual support to floors purposely designed to have the look of no support at all.

The conventional wisdom about the Breuer Whitney is that it is the kind of freestanding Modernist building that resists architectural company—that it is difficult to add on to. But as Armstrong stated at the AIA meeting, Breuer designed the Whitney knowing that it would eventually be expanded, and the architect clearly indicated the location of a future addition. Where he situated the elevator and stairs, on the south side of the building, he also placed a punch-out wall, according to Armstrong, which could connect the 1966 building to a new one. He in fact designed the entire south wall as a plain old New York party wall—undesigned, unfaced, to be covered over, the datum beyond which any future structure would be built. With the stairway, the elevator, and a connecting corridor clustered together at what would be the center of a new, combined building, Breuer even made an expansion efficient. He kept these elements back from the facade to give breathing room between the old and future buildings in the form of a shadow joint, or "reveal," as architects call this type of recess.

The south wall is a line of demarcation, and whether or not the addition is a tower, it should not cross that party wall. The primary reason Graves has said he did not place the whole addition on the brownstone site indicated by Breuer is that gallery spaces need the largest continuous "floor plate" possible. With its two floors of galleries, the temple supposedly makes available these large floor plates. The plans, however, which were displayed before and after the AIA meeting, and later at the Municipal Arts Society, actually show that the proposed solution disserves these gallery requirements.

The Breuer Whitney and the matching piece of the Graves Whitney to its side are each five stories tall. The planned sixth floor (the bottom floor of the temple that will span their roofs) is a full floor of ducts and mechanical systems; above it are small seventh- and eighth-floor galleries, each about 5,000 square feet. (The mechanical level is not numbered on the plans, so these gallery floors appear there as the sixth and seventh floors.) On all but the mechanical floor and the fifth floor of the combined Breuer and Graves pieces, Graves has joined the buildings to make continuous gallery spaces. The fifth floor has been allocated for offices and nongallery use, since the Breuer ceiling is too low (8 feet 9 inches) to be used as a gallery.

The use of this fifth floor suggests a remarkably simple key to liberating the Breuer building from the temple—perhaps one of other possible alternatives. Because the entire fifth floor is devoted to functions that could easily be put in a tower,[1] all Graves has to do is switch floors, putting the 5,000-square-foot seventh- and eighth-floor galleries on the fifth floor, which is planned to offer about 14,850 square feet net. The seventh- and eighth-floor galleries would not simply fit easily into the fifth floor, the Museum would also potentially gain nearly 5,000 square feet of gallery. The price to pay is simply the price of elevating the roof of Breuer's fifth floor several feet to a height acceptable for galleries. The mechanical systems now on the Breuer roof would also have to be redesigned, which is not a serious obstacle, given the scale of the overall project.

The switch would not only give the museum about 10 percent more gallery space—and on five rather than six floors—but would consolidate the galleries within the first five floors of the building. In the current plan a gallery visitor has to ride from the fourth floor, past a fifth floor of staff and research rooms, past the mechanical floor, to get to the seventh and then the eighth floor. This is a discontinuous museum experience the Museum has understandably said it does not want. Most importantly, by concentrating the galleries in the first five floors, the nongallery functions, which do not require large floor plates, can occupy a tower. The tower automatically eliminates the need for the temple and frees the roof of the Breuer building.

Ironically, the so-called tower scheme would, according to Graves' own calculations, be only 32 feet taller, or 3 stories more, than the proposed Graves scheme. The term "tower" is unnecessarily intimidating—although it would have to be approved, there is nothing inherently less appropriate about a 13-story building in New York, on Madison Avenue, than about a 10-story building like that proposed. The distinguished, much higher Carlyle Hotel is just a block up the Avenue.

Like the temple, the cylinder has very little programmatic justification, serving primarily as a formal facade maneuver with few compelling functions inside. The circular form, apparently justified by the proposal to house the Calder Circus on one floor of the cylinder, has been assigned a variety of other uses that hardly require circular geometry: storage, reception, lobby gallery, orientation gallery with projector, sculpture gallery, works-on-paper study room.

It is not that Graves is the wrong architect for the addition—a good building of his could be brilliant in this place. Graves is a painterly designer, adept at composition, and he is an accomplished colorist. Museums require large amounts of wall space and little transparency, and, perhaps more than any other major architect now practicing in the United States, Graves is a "wall" architect, with a highly evolved repertory of wall forms and a complex decorative system for their surfaces. It will be interesting to see how the paintings of artists who work in open, light-filled lofts settle in the architect's highly controlled, deliberately sequenced suites, since the paintings themselves are often permeated with the special character of these studios. (Graves' buildings tend to be saturated in colors and forms, and he will have to thin out his interiors so that the art will not seem superfluous—a lush Willem de Kooning would be too much for an already lush wall.) At a time of increasing interest in figurative and representational art, Graves' highly figured, representational architecture is as contemporary as Breuer's more reductive style was twenty years ago. His interiors, designed as contained rooms rather than open spaces, are also highly concentrational—they hold the eye within the space—and should prove conducive to viewing art. Graves uses such architectural elements as doorways and windows to center forms and spaces; using specific pieces of art in rooms created expressly for them, he should be able to build spaces around the works, with the art as a focus.

The architect is also a provocative choice for more theoretical reasons. The spaces and forms of his buildings are finite; clearly bounded with fixed walls, they are also centered along axes or focal points. They embody a concept of space profoundly different from that of, for example, Jackson Pollock's paintings, which are fields of great visual depth with no center or boundary. The difference in space between a Graves building and a Pollock painting is itself a polemic, and there is interesting comment, and conversation, in the juxtaposition. Graves' is a Euclidean architecture for paintings done in Albert Einstein's century.

Provocative though a Postmodern building is in the context of the Whitney, it is Graves' own stance vis-à-vis the Breuer that risks limiting the proposal to simply a historic-preservation issue, obscuring what is Graves' most challenging contribution to the Whitney and to museum design—his exploration of how to deneutralize museum interiors. In his recently completed Michael C. Carlos Hall, at Emory University, in Atlanta, for example, he created museum interiors with rich materials, and art-specific spaces to feature certain displayed objects. The floor plans for the Whitney expansion promise to have many comparable, specifically designed spaces, and are perhaps for better or worse the most strongly configured interior plans for a museum since the ramp at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. This is a radical move, and will serve as a precedent for alternatives to the neutral white open space architects and curators have boxed themselves into. What Graves has done on the exterior is perhaps appropriate as a poetic idea—he has created a palimpsest, one building over another, which implies the natural architectural accretion of an institution as it has grown older and larger. Unfortunately, it is a poetic idea that does not scan because of the severe damage it does to the Breuer.

Among the many strong reactions to the design is a troubling comment from Constance Breuer, widow of the architect. She has said she would prefer to see his building demolished rather than integrated in the expanded Whitney as proposed, and she firmly believes this would be the opinion of Breuer too. Sadly, Graves' design for the "one Whitney" promises to divide the institution itself.□

Joseph Giovannini is an architect and architectural writer based in New York.

1. As listed in a drawing, they are "slide library, microfilm, kitchenette, conference, staff lounge, periodicals, copy, catalogue, librarian, rare books and archives, reading room, library gallery, lobby, works on paper exhibitions, works on paper storage," and two terraces, two study rooms, and seven offices.

THE NEW YORK TIMES
11/26/85

# Expansion at Whitney: The Debate Broadens

By DOUGLAS C. McGILL

Since last spring, when the Whitney Museum of American Art announced its intention to raise $37.5 million to expand its building at Madison Avenue at 75th Street, the museum has been the focus of an intense public controversy.

Leading architects, including I. M. Pei and Edward Larrabee Barnes, have opposed the design for the expansion, by Michael Graves, saying it would destroy the integrity of the Whitney building, designed by Marcel Breuer in 1966.

Neighbors of the Whitney and historical preservation groups have also opposed the expansion, saying that it is too large and will overpower the narrow stretch of Madison Avenue around 74th and 75th Streets. These groups have vowed to fight the museum's attempts to win approval for the expansion from the city's Planning Commission and the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

The controversy has been passionate and intense — far more so than disputes that have surrounded expansion projects at the Metropolitan Museum, the Guggenheim Museum and the Museum of Modern Art. The fervor arises partly from the fact that the Whitney is the only building in Manhattan designed by Breuer, a leading exponent of modernist design, and is considered a landmark by many.

**Old Complaints About Museum**

The debate has also provided a forum for the expression of other longstanding complaints about the Whitney, both from within and without the institution. Those complaints include:

§The Whitney's branch museums in the lobbies of corporate skyscrapers around Manhattan have caused the museum to be called "the McDonald's of the art world."

§Several art critics have said that the Whitney's best-known exhibition, a biennial show of contemporary art, emphasizes "trendy" art as opposed to serious art, and at least one critic has said that this emphasis is evident in the Whitney's artistic policies in recent years;

§Some of the museum's trustees say it has incurred serious budget deficits in recent years, and they question whether an institution in such financial shape should undertake an ambitious expansion that calls for a total fund-raising goal of $52.5 million, of which $37.5 million is for construction.

A major question being considered by the trustees is the size of the expansion. The extension would rise to the south of and directly over the Breuer structure at Madison Avenue and 75th Street. It would be a block long and 188 feet high (about 19 residential stories), and the Breuer building would be incorporated only as one of the expanded museum's components. Its style would be Post-Modern — a collage of colorful shapes recalling architecture from Italian palazzos to brownstones.

**Double Exhibition Space**

The expansion would increase the museum's exhibition space from 25,400 square feet to 53,200 square feet (as compared with the Museum of Modern Art's 71,200 square feet and the Guggenheim's 38,500 square feet), and its total space (including offices, a restaurant, an auditorium, storage space, elevators and so on) from 80,000 square feet to 224,000 square feet.

"When you pare it all away," said Leonard A. Lauder, the board's vice chairman, "the greatest area of discussion is that everyone agrees an expansion is necessary, but does it have to be that large?"

Many trustees, including Thomas N. Armstrong 3d, the museum's director; Flora Miller Biddle, the chairman of the board, and Victor Ganz, a member of the building committee, say that growth at the Whitney in recent years has made the expansion, as now designed, necessary.

The museum, for example, has a permanent collection of 3,000 paintings and sculptures. Yet its present space allows the display of only 72 pieces from that collection.

The expansion, by contrast, would allow 250 of these works to go on display (as compared with ratios of nearly 2,800 owned to 125 displayed at the Guggenheim, and 3,900 owned to 470 displayed at the Museum of Modern Art), in a succession of rooms that would provide a walking tour of the history of American art.

The museum's facilities for the study of American art have also outgrown the present building, according to Mr. Armstrong.

**Library Space Too Limited**

The library, for example, now contains 25,000 books, magazines and "artists' files." Yet the museum says limited space allows only two visitors at a time. And the museum's entire collection of 8,000 American drawings — one of the best in the world — is in storage.

For some trustees, the large amount of money that must be raised for the expansion — $52.5 million — is also a problem: Of that amount, $37.5 million would be spent on construction, and $15 for an endowment.

At least two trustees, both of them former presidents and chairmen of the board, said the museum had operated at a deficit in recent years — averaging around a half million dollars a year over the past five years. They questioned whether the amount can, or should, be raised.

"My greatest fear about this building," said one of those two trustees, David M. Solinger, "is that we get enough to build it, and we build it, and future generations have the problem of maintaining a plant that's twice as large as the one at present, that we can't even maintain now."

Howard Lipman, the other trustee, who has been a major contributor of art to the Whitney, expressed a similar concern.

"Instead of running a tight museum," Mr. Lipman said, "and putting on the most interesting shows you can put on, you're trying to raise money for an expansion. This will go on for years, and you can't do that without hurting somewhat the creative energy that you have for the museum's activities."

**Budget Deficits Common**

Yet Mr. Armstrong, and many other trustees, said it was common for nonprofit institutions to have a yearly budget deficit. The deficits have always been covered by other funds from the museum's budget, they said, and were thus not a serious problem.

A biennial exhibit of contemporary art at the Whitney Museum has also drawn much criticism, from such critics as Robert Hughes of Time magazine and Peter Plagens of Art in America, who argue that this year's show contained mostly trendy painting and sculpture, and few serious works. At least one critic, Hilton Kramer, the editor of The New Criterion, the neo-conservative culture journal, wrote in a recent article that the museum has a "spirit governed by an invincible preference for glitz and specious glamour at the expense of art itself."

**Branch Museums Criticized**

The Whitney branch museums — the display rooms bearing the Whitney name in various corporate lobbies around Manhattan and in Connecticut — are also cited by some as evidence that the museum is more interested in getting publicity than showing serious art.

Mr. Armstrong, a tall man with a quick smile, a long stride and a liking for large striped bow ties, answers such criticism with his own arguments and statistics, and at times with a philosophical shrug.

Criticism of the Whitney is inevitable, he said, given the controversial nature of contemporary art — especially art of the past two years, as is shown in the biennial, and which is by its nature untested by time.

Still, he allows that such criticism can impair his effectiveness by dampening the enthusiasm of some trustees, especially those who are relatively new to the Whitney board. Of the board's 34 members, 13 have joined in the last five years, replacing 10 who have left.

"We've had trustees leave us," Mr. Armstrong said, "because they couldn't handle a museum that was making tough decisions and becoming more and more controversial. Being a trustee of the Met is not controversial. But putting a 100-foot-long Serra sculpture that's made of cardboard on the fourth floor is something you'll have to defend to your peer group.

"Trustees are faced with continuous questions about creativity and the artistic contributions of our time," he added. "Can you imagine going to 15 cocktail parties a week and being told, 'Why the hell are you on that board?' The encouragement to carve in is out there."

Thomas N. Armstrong 3d, director of the Whitney Museum, with a model of the planned addition.

In their specific complaints about the museum, Mr. Armstrong adds, the Whitney's critics often overlook important facts.

For example, he noted that the branch museums are fully financed by the corporations that house them, and thus pose no financial strain on the museum. At the same time, he said, they "take our programs to a public that normally does not come to the Whitney."

Critics who say that the Whitney has become trendy, Mr. Armstrong said, also overlook the fact that the Whitney operates a number of educational programs, and that the museum frequently mounts scholarly exhibitions of such important American artists as Marsden Hartley, Milton Avery and Ralston Crawford.

"This isn't someone's madcap scheme," Mr. Armstrong said. "This is based on a lot of concentrated thinking, and 10 years of work.

"The art world is an incredibly political and competitive place," he added. "You just have to dismiss all that and do what you think is right."

The Washington Post

*Cityscape*

# *Graves' Uncivil Liberties*

## Reflections From Afar On the Whitney Plan

By Benjamin Forgey
Washington Post Staff Writer

TOKYO—One would think that objections to the proposed, and justifiably controversial, addition to the Whitney Museum in New York would vanish when reflected upon from the perspective of this oriental city, so far from the fray.

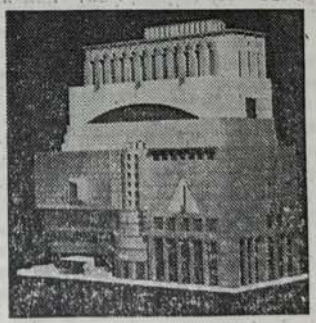
What architect Michael Graves plans to do, with the full support of the museum's director, trustees and curatorial staff, is more or less what goes on every day in Tokyo. The idea is to place the addition, in the form of an inverted "L," on top and to the side of the existing museum structure, designed by Marcel Breuer and completed in 1966.

Such strategies are business as usual here, where buildings go down and go up in less time than it takes a ginkgo leaf to yellow in autumn, and are reconceived, refaced, rebuilt and added to with what seems a peremptory disregard for stylistic consistency or historical integrity. Landmark structures are few, and even the most distinguished pedigrees (Frank Lloyd Wright's Imperial Hotel, for instance, dismantled in 1968) are not often sufficient to save them.

But even from Tokyo, the Graves design continues to strike a false chord, and not simply because Manhattan's East Side is not Ginza. Ironically, distance from the argument only increases awareness that in the name of architectural and urban civility, Graves is committing an extremely uncivil act.

The rationale is unexceptionable, even admirable—who can argue with the museum's desire to better serve its public and better treat its collection of 20th-century American art, or with the architect's intention to "enhance the urban characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood"? At the same time, it is hard not to see an underlying, Oedipal hostility in the resulting design.

See CITYSCAPE, F4, Col. 1



Michael Graves' design of the Whitney Museum with addition.

# Whitney Addition

CITYSCAPE, From F1

At its core this architectural argument of the year is a conflict between generations. Breuer represents the old generation, the Modernists, whose ideas triumphed in post-World War II American cities; Graves, both as a thinker and as a designer, has been a leading force in the movement to reject or revise Modernism's calcified orthodoxies. Thus his Whitney design—which almost literally swallows up Breuer's building—can be seen as a form of revenge.

Two strong criticisms can be made of the Breuer structure. The first is that its flexible, open-space galleries, though characteristic of the mid-'60s, are especially ill-suited to the type of permanent art display the museum now desires and needs.

The second is a more ideological objection. As Graves says, the existing building is a "modern monument in distinct contrast to the smaller scale and more elaborate façades of the remainder of Madison Avenue." It is a species of pure form that is more than a tad standoffish in its physical and psychological relations with busy city streets. In fact, Breuer's cutaway cube, its gray granite walls punctuated by oddly shaped windows in just a few places, reverses the normal Manhattan order of things. Instead of meeting the sidewalk head-on in its lower portions and stepping back toward the top, the building is set back from the sidewalk and expands outward in three clearly defined planes as it gets higher. In the abstract, a building standing on its head like this in an established urban neighborhood sounds like a recipe for disaster.

But it wasn't. From the beginning Breuer's fortress had a strange, if solemn, allure. Like Wright's otherwise very different Guggenheim Museum on Fifth Avenue, Breuer's brooding Madison Avenue masterwork was an immediate popular hit, and like the Wright building it remains proof positive that, in exceptional cases, architectural contrast wtih the surrounding urban environment—a sharp break in the pattern—can be an effective, moving idea. Obviously, neither Graves nor his client sees it this way.

Given the site (the other half of the city block south of the existing building) and the size requirements (more than doubling existing space, from 83,500 to 217,500 square feet), Graves had but two alternatives: to go up in skyscraper fashion on the southern site, leaving the Breuer building untouched, or to build over the existing building. (A third alternative, to destroy the present building and start over, apparently was not considered; a fourth, to locate the new building somewhere else, seems to have been ruled out at the start by the client.) Graves chose the second alternative, he says, because "it provides greater areas for individual museum floors and thereby better establishes the continuity of the museum experience."

Within these boundaries, Graves did fairly well. He balanced the mass of the Breuer building with a similar, though more richly inflected, mass to the south, and tied the two together with a semicircular "hinge." This hinge is a brilliant piece of work, mediating between two buildings of similar weight but discordant style and philosophy. It is the only really persuasive visual element of the Graves exterior.

Atop these two five-story buildings would rise another structure, also five floors high, in a series of gradual setbacks. The massing of these upper stories is ponderous at best; the detailing, featuring a huge "eyebrow" type window and an ungraceful horizontal tower, is bombastic. As a whole the design has a nervous, disparate, exaggerated quality. (To be sure, there is much to be said for establishing commercial retail outlets on the ground floor of such a center-city museum, although Graves' officious colonnade is by no means enticing in the conventional Madison Avenue way.)

Of course, in all of this very little allowance was made for the dignity and individuality of Breuer's building. Graves' "figurative" design converts Breuer's lone frontal window into one eye of a somewhat comically monstrous visage (the hinge being the nose and Graves' enormous triangle with a cat-like vertical "pupil" being the second eye). When seen in this light, the Graves plan would appear to be a natural consequence of the museum's disrespect (perhaps hatred would not be too strong a word) for its own building.

Graves' design is very clever, and also very mean.

The debate is replete with ironies. The existing building is not nearly so off-putting as its opponents would have it, nor would the proposed addition be so welcoming to the city as its admirers predict. Perhaps the crowning irony is that Graves' way of thinking—his insistence upon traditional styles and patterns, and belief in the incremental, collage-like nature of urban growth—is a richer and more appealing prescription for urban architecture than Breuer's functional, pure-form esthetics.

But the debate really isn't about ideologies. It is about effects. No one would want streets lined with Breuer-like buildings; nor would anyone care to live on streets crammed with monumental structures in the Graves mold. Graves' Whitney design is a "signature" product—it is every bit as much a "Graves" as the existing museum is a "Breuer."

In the name of civility and reform, and because of "program requirements" (which sounds suspiciously like the old Modernist dogma of functionalism), Graves is doing something his generation has long resented about Modernist architecture. He is making a big, arrogant, singular statement at someone else's expense.

# New Midtown Branch for Whitney

By DOUGLAS C. McGILL

The lobby of a new corporate skyscraper in midtown will soon become the home for a Whitney Museum of American Art branch, making it the latest and largest addition to an extensive collaboration between a major art museum and the corporate world.

The skyscraper — a 54-story, $200 million structure designed by Edward Larrabee Barnes — is the new headquarters of the Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States, at Seventh Avenue between 51st and 52d Streets. Adjoining the skyscraper's lobby will be two galleries, to open Feb. 13, in which the Whitney will present temporary exhibitions of painting and sculpture.

The new galleries will join three her branches in corporate lobbies it the Whitney will operate by this ing.

't takes our permanent collection our works of contemporary art to uch greater audience," said as N. Armstrong, the director Whitney Museum. "It's our role ent the work to as wide a public an identify, so as many people ible can see and understand n art."

rst two exhibitions in the s new Equitable branch are oint. One of the shows, to h June 4, will be a selection ngs and sculptures show- ay's artists interpret con- life through depiction of figure, from classical its to Neo-Expression- r exhibition will contain 40 works from the museum's permanent collection that give a chronological overview of American art from the turn of the century through today. The show will run through April 1987.

In addition to the new Equitable galleries, the Whitney has branches in the lobbies of the Champion International Corporation in Stamford, Conn., and at the Philip Morris Company's headquarters at 42d Street and Park Avenue. The museum will open the fourth branch this spring in the Park Tower Realty building lobby at 33 Maiden Lane in lower Manhattan.

**Branches to Have 21 Exhibitions**

Altogether, the branches expand the Whitney Museum's reach far beyond the potential of its headquarters at Madison Avenue and 75th Street. That building contains 17,400 square feet of temporary exhibition space, while the branches total 18,900 square feet of space.

The branches will present about 21 art exhibitions altogether each year, as compared with the home building's 15 shows, which are usually larger than branch shows. The Champion International and Philip Morris branches draw 150,000 visitors a year, as compared with the main Whitney's 500,000.

At all of the branches, the corporation offers the space without charge and pays the salaries of three full-time museum employees, as well as all exhibition costs.

Through the branches, the Whitney is also able to offer specialized educational programs geared to the needs of people living in the area. At the Champion International branch, for example, weekly seminars and night-time symposiums on various art topics are held for local university students, the elderly and amateur collectors.

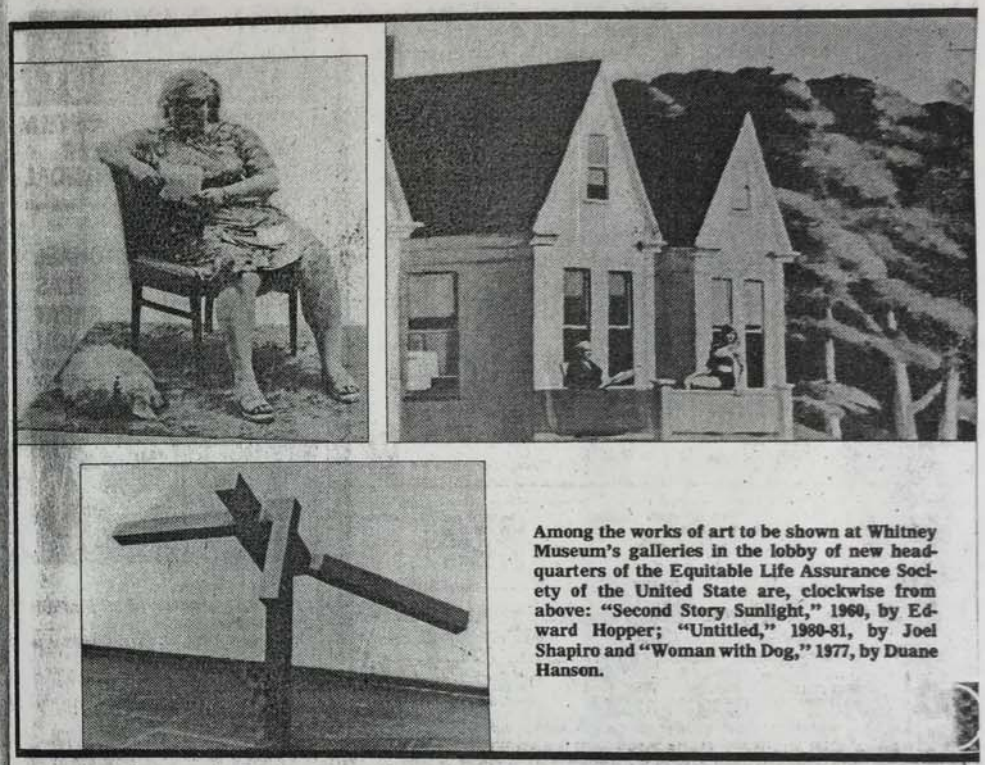
At the Philip Morris branch, educational programs for New York City schoolchildren are conducted five days a week, and its large sculpture garden is an oasis of space and color amid the congestion of midtown Manhattan.

Severe space problems limit the number of paintings in its own collection that the Whitney can put on permanent exhibit. Of its 3,000 paintings and sculptures, only 72 are put on permanent display. In the opening show of works from the permanent collection at the Equitable branch, the Whitney will be able to display paintings by artists who have never before been included in its permanent exhibition, including works by Thomas Hart Benton, Richard Pousette-Dart and Philip Guston.

**Creation of Public Arts Complex**

The branch museum is in fact only a small part of the insurance company's plan to create a public arts complex based on the model of Rockefeller Center. In addition to the branch, the company has spent about $7 million on commissioned and directly purchased work (much of it bought after consultation with Whitney curators) by Thomas Hart Benton, Roy Lichtenstein, Sol LeWitt, Sandro Chia and Barry Flanagan. The company has also spent an undisclosed sum on art by 14 important modern American artists whose works will decorate 15 executive dining rooms in the new building.

The artworks on the ground floor, including several public seating arrangements by the sculptor Scott Burton, will be shown in the skyscraper's atrium, its first-floor hallways and a blocklong plaza. In effect, the street level of the city block between 51st and 52d Streets and Seventh Avenue and Avenue of the Americas will be transformed into a permanent exhibiton of American art.



**Among the works of art to be shown at Whitney Museum's galleries in the lobby of new headquarters of the Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United State are, clockwise from above: "Second Story Sunlight," 1960, by Edward Hopper; "Untitled," 1980-81, by Joel Shapiro and "Woman with Dog," 1977, by Duane Hanson.**

Officials of the museum and the insurance company say the museum will be free to present whatever works of art it chooses in the new branch.

"We're not going to think about censoring the Whitney about what they do," said Benjamin D. Holloway, the chairman of Equitable's real-estate group, who asked the Whitney to open its Equitable branch.

Mr. Armstrong, the director of the Whitney, said that although the museum's five-year lease with Equitable contained an escape clause if either didn't believe such a problem would arise.

The insurance company's interest in supporting the museum branch is not limited to its concern for art.

"This is an investment property for Equitable, there's no question about that," Mr. Holloway said. "We are doing these things because we think it will attract and hold tenants, and that they will pay us the rents that we're looking for.

"But it's also a home office for us," he added, "and a place the public will use a lot. The idea that the arts are ancillary to what we're doing in life is nonsense. The fact that we can come to work and look at these beautiful things reminds us, while we're work

C28 L

# Whitney to Give Up Collection of Russell Art

The Whitney Museum of American Art has agreed in an out-of-court settlement to give up the collection of paintings, drawings and sketches by the American Synchromist painter Morgan Russell (1886-1953) that was donated to it in 1978 by Henry Reed, an insurance agent and art collector who lives in Montclair, N.J.

The collection of artworks, together with its accompanying documentary material, will be sent next week to the Montclair Art Museum.

Last February, Mr. Reed sued the Whitney for the return of the collection, on the ground that the museum had not fulfilled its pledge to exhibit the works and publish a catalogue of them. The terms of the new agreement were described by both sides as entirely amicable, but neither party was willing to comment upon it.

**Influence in Paris**

With Stanton Macdonald-Wright (1890-1973), Morgan Russell played a significant part in the development of abstract painting in Paris before 1914. While there, he met Henri Matisse and Amedeo Modigliani, among painters, and Guillaume Apollinaire and Blaise Cendrars among poets, and was taken seriously by all of them. Leo Stein, the brother of Gertrude Stein, helped him financially and showed great interest in his work. The extensive correspondence that formed part of the gift is likely to be of value to all students of the period.

The collection formed by Mr. Reed, believed to be worth several hundred thousand dollars, includes six oils on canvas, some 50 watercolors and sketches, around 200 drawings and a number of notebooks. The Museum of Modern Art owns seven paintings and three drawings by Russell.

The director of the Montclair Art Museum, Robert J. Koenig, said yesterday that he hoped to exhibit the collection in 1988 and to produce a catalogue of the kind stipulated by Mr. Reed.

## Benefit for Gallery

An art auction to benefit ABC No Rio, an art gallery on the Lower East Side, will be held today at 5 P.M. at the City Gallery of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, 2 Columbus Circle, at 59th Street. The auction will feature paintings, sculpture, prints and video tapes by such contemporary artists as Keith Haring and Claes Oldenburg. The works have been on display at the gallery since last month as part of an exhibition marking the fifth anniversary of ABC No Rio. Registration for bidders is $20; part of the proceeds will be used for workshops and media production [illegible] Information: 974-1150.

THE NEW YORK TIMES
7/2/85

**Charlotte Curtis**

# Drawing the Battle Lines

ARCHITECTURE has always had its star wars, and sniping is not unknown. But it was something of a shock when, in accepting an award recently from the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, Abraham W. Geller used the platform to condemn the proposed addition to the Whitney Museum and criticized the selection of Michael Graves, its architect.

In effect, Mr. Geller was calling on the Whitney to scrap its plans and ditch its architect. He didn't like it that Mr. Graves's "stated philosophy is the antithesis of the philosophy of the museum's first architect, Marcel Breuer." He wondered how the Whitney, with its foremost collection of modern American art, "justifies a building addition which features applied classical forms."

He said "the Breuer building is being literally crushed," "subjugated to an assemblage of many diverse and unrelated blocks," and he pleaded with all concerned not to "smother" it.

His thinking would have been a delicious topic for a debate with both sides represented. But they weren't. And reading about the attack the next morning — the first he knew of it — Mr. Graves was stunned.

**Summer doldrums or not, the fight over the Whitney addition heats up.**

"Would Mike Nichols do that to Edward Albee?" the Princeton-based architect asked rhetorically. "If I were to attack anybody the least I would do is invite them to the meeting."

Well, Mr. Geller didn't. He made copies of his speech. He had the press alerted. Small "Save the Whitney" signs were distributed. Clearly, the man whose professional reputation rests with the Ittleson Child Care Center in Riverdale and Cinemas I and II in Manhattan, was not acting alone.

Internecine warfare was in the works. The Whitney, Mr. Graves and architecture's brightest stars braced themselves for the next fusillade. Regardless of the rhetoric, and there will be plenty in coming months, the central issues concern "respect" (Mr. Geller's favorite word) for Breuer's minimalist masterpiece as well as the nature of Mr. Graves's proposals.

"Mode[illegible]d. [illegible]hitecture's clean, unadorned skyscrapers tend to see Mr. Graves's work as "retrograde." He is a "postmodernist" trail-blazer whose richly colored and complex buildings purposely incorporate classical overtones. That's what makes him "new-fashioned" and the "modernists" "old-fashioned." Unless, of course, you're a "modernist."

His Portland Building in Oregon and Humana's corporate quarters in Louisville, Ky., bristle with provocative ideas. That's what the brash, experimental Whitney has always been about. And just what it got with the Breuer building in 1966. "They chose me," Mr. Graves said, "at the same point in my career as they did Breuer in his."

He says his Whitney addition is an effort "to unite the neighborhood." It's far more brilliant than that, of course. But his critics say he failed to "defer" to Breuer. "Deference" is the "respect" they want. Obviously, no addition would be the ultimate respect.

Presumably, this explains talk that the Whitney was never meant to have an addition, a contention with which even Hamilton Smith disagrees. Mr. Smith, a "modernist" and Graves critic, was Breuer's collaborating partner. His firm, Gatje Papachristou Smith, was among those the Whitney considered and rejected.

Predictably, the Gatje firm's top trio sided with Mr. Geller. And Philip Johnson, celebrated as both a "modernist" and "postmodernist" (and therefore always in fashion), took his place beside Mr. Graves.

"It's a beautiful building," Mr. Johnson said of the Graves-Breuer embrace. "Michael's been very sensitive to his predecessor. He has paid a decent respect."

Mr. Johnson has had some experience with additions. He altered Edward Stone's original Museum of Modern Art and has seen Cesar Pelli "revise" his own work. "It was inevitable," he said. "Change is the name of the game."

And then some. Calvert Vaux designed the Metropolitan Museum. Richard Morris Hunt changed it. McKim, Mead and White altered Vaux and Hunt. And Kevin Roche did the glass wing, redid the facade and rebuilt the Hunt steps.

The big question is what I.M. Pei, the esteemed "modernist" and himself embroiled in the controversy over his plan to add "modern" glass pyramids to the traditional Louvre in Paris, would do. He is "disturbed" by the Graves proposals, but stayed on the sideslines, mostly because he didn't want to align himself with "reactionary" forces.

In the meantime, Mr. Geller was busily seeking architects to sign a petition. Postures were being assumed. Position papers were being circulated. And Murray Levi, an associate of the Stein Partnership, was organizing an Ad Hoc Committee to Save the Whitney.

Just when that group, the petition and the full extent of the opposition would surface was not clear.

"It's summer," Mr. Levi noted. "Nobody's in town."

# Art Complex Planned in New Tower

By DOUGLAS C. McGILL

In what is perhaps the largest partnership ever forged between art and real estate in Manhattan, the Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States announced yesterday that it plans to integrate three art galleries and numerous major sculptures, murals and designed plaza spaces into its new midtown corporate headquarters.

The arts complex will form the most publicly accessible portion of the Equitable's new corporate headquarters — a 54-story, $200 million skyscraper now nearing completion on Seventh Avenue. So far, company officials say, about $7 million has been spent on art, and more purchases are expected before the Equitable Center, as it is to be called, opens in October.

In effect, the first-floor level of an entire city block — between 51st and 52d Streets and Seventh Avenue and the Avenue of the Americas — will become a permanent exhibition of American art that includes major works by Roy Lichtenstein, Sol LeWitt, Scott Burton, Thomas Hart Benton, Paul Manship and other modern and contemporary artists.

In addition to the commissioned artworks, three galleries will occupy the space, two of them operated by the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has also acted as arts consultant to Equitable in the last two years of planning. The third gallery will be operated by PaineWebber Inc., which will occupy the Equitable's current headquarters on the Avenue of the Americas between 51st and 52d Streets, when Equitable moves to its new home in the fall.

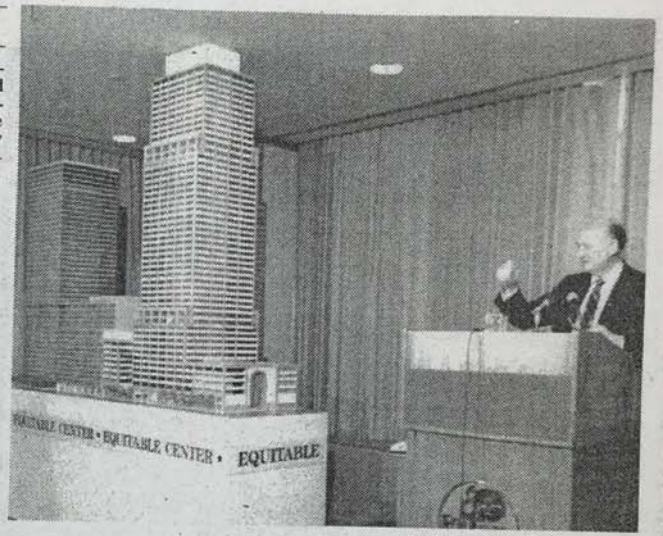
### Art for Dining Areas

The insurance company also plans to decorate 14 executive dining rooms and three first-floor restaurants with paintings and sculpture. The private dining rooms will each contain works by a different American artist — among others, Milton Avery, Marsden Hartley and Lee Krasner.

At an unveiling ceremony yesterday at the Equitable's current headquarters, representatives of the company and the artists involved described the new center as a project whose unusually large size and genesis signaled changes — possibly profitable ones — in their respective fields.

"This is investment real estate," said Benjamin D. Holloway, chairman of Equitable's real-estate group and one of the project's founders. "We are doing these things because we think it will attract and hold tenants, and that they will pay us the rents that we're looking for."

John B. Carter, the president of Equitable, said yesterday that the company hoped to create a public arts complex similar to Rockefeller Center — one that would attract public attention and also attract more blue-chip firms to Seventh Avenue. Equitable is the first major corporation to locate its headquarters on the avenue.




The New York Times/Marilynn K. Yee

**Mayor Koch yesterday with a model of the Equitable Center. An art complex is to occupy the ground floor of the building.**

### Corporate Art Increasing

While many large Manhattan-based corporations have installed art galleries in their first floors and lobbies in recent years — among them Philip Morris Inc., I.B.M., Metropolitan Life, Chemical Bank, and Olympia & York — the Equitable Center is the largest of these relatively new forms of corporate art displays.

Several of the artists whose work will be displayed in the Equitable Center said yesterday that in addition to the project's size, the close collaboration between artist and architect in the project was part of a growing trend toward making public art more accessible to a non-art audience.

Scott Burton, for example, an artist best known for making sculptural furniture, designed a semicircular, green marble sculptural seating and fountain arrangement at the center of an 80-foot-high atrium at the entrance to the Equitable tower. He has also designed two plazas — with tables, chairs, fountains and plantings — that run along the 51st and 52d Street sides of the building.

"Art in public spaces is often addressed to an art audience in a non-art space," Mr. Burton said. "This is addressed to a non-art audience as much as to an art audience. It's functional and pragmatic. You can sit on it, eat on it."

In addition to Mr. Burton's sculpture, the two most prominent contemporary works in the Equitable Center will be works by Roy Lichtenstein and Sol LeWitt. Mr. Lichtenstein's painting, a mural 68 feet high and 32 feet wide, is done in his present style, merging Pop Art and classical designs — and contains among other images a giant hand wiping the mural itself away.

Mr. LeWitt's commission will be a series of murals — colorful geometric designs executed in acrylic paint on limestone — that will reach nearly to the top of a nine-floor-high "galleria" connecting 51st and 52d streets. Both the Lichtenstein and LeWitt murals are scheduled for completion by mid-November.

A gallery space operated by PaineWebber will be part of the Equitable Center. After moving out of its current headquarters this fall (moving one block west), the Equitable company will lease its former headquarters to PaineWebber for that company's headquarters.

PaineWebber will turn its first-floor lobby into an exhibition space where it will mount both temporary exhibitions of work from its corporate collection and revolving exhibitions of work by institutions like the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the International Center of Photography and others that have long sought affordable exhibition space in midtown Manhattan.

GALLERY VIEW

# Whitney Satellites

stationery and printing. It draws fa

GALLERY VIEW

GRACE GLUECK

6/9/85

# Are the Whitney's Satellite Museums on the Right Course?

Moving onward and — it is hoped — upward with the visual arts, the ambitious Whitney Museum has recently revealed expansion plans on more than one front. It will build a $27.5-million extension to its main facility on Madison Avenue; and it will colonize yet another corporate lobby — the new headquarters of the Equitable Life Assurance Society going up on Seventh Avenue at 52d Street — with a satellite museum. What's more, early in 1986, its Downtown branch — established 13 years ago in part as a project to help develop young curatorial talent — will relocate in a new office building on Maiden Lane, west of the Park Tower Realty Corporation, a New York-based developer.

The Equitable and Park Tower ties join Philip Morris on East 42d Street and Champion International, the paper company with headquarters in Stamford, Conn., in providing four satellite museums that aid the Whitney to serve both corporate image and public interest. And, while the museum itself is hunting up money to finance its building expansion, these branch facilities are fully supported by the sponsoring corporations, and then some. For instance, Equitable, in return for the Whitney's creating and staffing its lobby museum, as well as providing advice on commissioning and collecting art for its building, will not only pay all of the branch's expenses, but will give the Whitney additional operational money for each year of the contract's six-year duration. According to a Whitney spokesman, similarly beneficial arrangements have been made with the other companies.

Tom Armstrong, director of the Whitney, and other staff members, give firm voice to their belief that the satellite activity is a boon to the museum and the public, even as it serves the advantages of corporations from which the Whitney derives a good deal of support on its home ground. Three of the corporations have had long sponsorship associations with the Whitney. Since 1967, when Philip Morris established a special purchase fund at the museum, it has contributed to the Whitney's operational budget and picked up the tab for such exhibitions as "The Flowering of American Folk Art," 1974, "Jasper Johns," 1977, and two Edward Hopper shows.

Equitable, among its contributions, backed last year's "Reflections of Nature: Flowers in American Art," and a display of prize acquisitions in 1984. Champion has funds for a Winslow Homer show in 1972 and the exhibition "Calder's Universe" in 1976, and will sponsor one devoted to the painter Ralston Crawford this fall. (Additional funding was given by the National Endowment for the Arts.) And each corporation will continue to sponsor two at the Whitney's main building, in addition to such activities.

* * *

Certainly no one can accuse the Whitney of lacking in enterprise (no pun intended), and the benefits are visible enough. A Manhattan public has the advantage of free drop-in" galleries at convenient locations, and a Connecticut public has one in downtown Stamford. The museum gains additional income, better exposure, and the ability to bring more of its holdings, much of them buried in storage, to "new" audiences. And the corporations are perceived as "doing something" for the arts while in the process acquiring an image of enlightened benevolence, creating a more alluring ambiance for clients, tenants and employees, and gaining certain tax advantages. (As the country's leading cigarette manufacturer, Philip Morris has reason to be more concerned with its "image" than the others.)

The New York Times/Kathy Willens

Visitors relax near a George Segal sculpture in the Philip Morris Gallery, a branch of the Whitney Museum, at Park Avenue and 42d Street.

Still, the satellite program raises certain questions. For one, the orientation is strictly Manhattan and suburban; there are no Whitney branches in the boroughs. Do the museum's branches, — housed in expensive lobbies not all that remote from its boutique-y home turf on Madison Avenue — really extend its "outreach" to different audiences? Or is the Whitney simply enhancing the corporate atmosphere while — as one critic suggests — "bringing more art to the Yuppies?"

Asked why, as long as the Whitney was extending itself, it could not venture — even modestly — into the city's more disadvantaged areas, Mr. Armstrong said that the museum's trustees had decided, when the branch activity began, that the facilities would have to be self-supporting, that they "could not be a drain on the resources of the Whitney proper." And obviously, the showcase corporate buildings that pay for such galleries tend to be in Manhattan or the suburbs. Whitney officials assert that the branches — which account for almost a third of the museum's overall attendance — expose more and different types of people to art than would ordinarily come to the main building. "With branches in Lower Manhattan, 42d Street and Seventh Avenue, we're extending a lot more into the city," says Tom Armstrong. "They are very high-density working areas with transient, five-day-a-week populations. Also, beyond Greenwich in Connecticut, people don't come into New York to visit museums, and the Stamford branch has become a real community center."

* * *

Perhaps a more important question is whether the Whitney's heavy alliance with corporations poses a danger of too much corporate influence. Museums subsidized by public tax money — as are all nonprofit institutions in this country — and general admission fees should address the needs of the public as a whole. Corporations are, of course, part of that public. But they have more clout than others in the museum audience, and care must be taken lest their support could mean a use of the museum for inappropriate purposes. (A glaring example of corporate favor-seeking was a recent letter from Philip Morris to its donee arts institutions, soliciting their help in defeating restrictive smoking legislation proposed for public places in New York City. Neither the Whitney nor the city's other major art museums responded.) And there is some danger that they could exercise control over exhibitions — not so much by outright interference as by conservative selection of what they will fund and staff anticipation of what they will approve. None of the shows mentioned above, it will be seen, is of a particularly controversial nature.

"I would never consciously let any funding source jeopardize the integrity of the museum," Mr. Armstrong says. He adds that at the main museum, shows are conceived well before funding sources are sought, "and so they come into the process very late." (It's worth noting here that the Whitney's much-lamented Biennial exhibition, which this year had a good deal of overtly sexual material, was funded by a private, anonymous donor and not a corporation.) Lisa Phillips, head of the Whitney branches and associate curator at the museum, suggests that "fear of the corporate world is a bit of a hangover from the 60's, and we're starting to get over it." She asserts that shows at the branches are entirely staff-selected, with corporate hosts having no input whatsoever.

"Champion gives us absolute freedom," insists Roni Feinstein, director of the Champion branch in Stamford. And David R. Brown, the corporation's vice president for communication, adds, "We only see the shows after they open to the public. There's no review process. If the conservatism comes from the institution itself, that's their choice. I think it's more the managers' and staff sense of the role and possibilities of the community that figures; not what Champion wants." At Philip Morris, Frank Saunders, staff vice president for cultural affairs, says, "I never get involved with curatorial affairs. Our sole consideration is excellence of the work." But he acknowledged that he didn't know what the reaction would be "if we had a really controversial show."

* * *

The most popular Whitney branch at the moment is at Philip Morris, 42d Street and Park Avenue, opened in 1983. Its lobby houses a pleasant sculpture court where works by Bryan Hunt, George Segal, Nancy Graves and John Chamberlain currently share the space with attractive greenery and — at lunch-time — hundreds of brown-baggers who work or shop in the area. A small but well-run gallery for changing exhibitions — some five to six a year — opens off the court, now devoted to "The Surreal City," an interesting show of Depression-era paintings by urban fantasists. Other shows, using objects in the Whitney's collection supplemented by outside loans, have included artists' views of 42d Street, a selection of contemporary masks made by artists, musical instruments as depicted in American paintings, and "The Box Transformed," the work of contemporary artists taking off from the box form. Susan Lubowsky, director of the Philip Morris branch, estimates that "about one-third of the crowd is art-interested; the rest are tourists and drop-ins. We get a lot of people here who hang out on 42d Street, people to whom it would never occur to go uptown to the Whitney. They sort of get the art by osmosis."

The branch, whose tiny staff — like that of the other branches — was hired specifically for the operation and devotes full time to it — has an active program for school children, who visit in one or two groups a day five days a week. Over the last year, Miss Lubowsky points out, more than 3,600 have come, receiving free literature and kits devoted to each show. Free concerts, dance performances, poetry readings and films and the like are also offered on an informal basis to visitors. According to Frank Saunders, staff vice president for cultural affairs at Philip Morris, the operation costs the company "under $1 million a year, and everyone here is enormously pleased."

At the Champion Corporation in Stamford, the spacious street-level branch, opened in 1981, is known as the Whitney Museum of American Art, Fairfield County. It mounts about five shows a year, including the current "Working on the Railroad," a display of art projects com-

Continued on Page 34

GALLERY VIEW

# Whitney Satellites

*Continued from Page 31*

missioned by the Federal Government to adorn rehabilitated railway stations in the Northeast Corridor. Other shows have been devoted to the auto in the American landscape, artists from the Connecticut area, Winslow Homer (the branch's best-attended show), art of the 70's, and the figure in contemporary art. As with the Philip Morris branch, all of the exhibitions are conceived and mounted by the gallery's small staff headed by Miss Feinstein, a Ph.D. candidate at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts.

The branch, situated in a rather bleak downtown area of large corporate buildings, operates at an annual cost to Champion of some $350,000, which includes such house services as stationery and printing. It draws fa less attendance — about 40,000 a yea — than the Philip Morris branch. B its series of lectures, concerts, an other cultural events as well as school program, has helped build into something of a community ce ter, and it is eagerly staffed by group of local volunteers.

"Of course it's good for our ima though I prefer the word 'repu tion,'" says David Brown. "Not o that, it contributes in a real and tan ble way to the life of the town. As f as I'm concerned, Champion has the better end of the arrangement."

There are those who feel that Whitney's involvement with its sa lite branches — an involvement scale that's rare in the museum w — deflects staff time and ener that might better be spent on the lections, exhibitions and other mu logical functions in its primary tion. To this criticism, Whitney cials respond that the branches, with its separate personnel, d very little on the resources of house staff. "We see it all very m as one institution, anyway," Lisa Phillips. It is a very ambit institution that seems to be casting future with corporations. Let's h that the benefits to all are kep proper balance.



LOUIE PSIHOYOS/CONTACT

# CELEBRATING AMERICAN DESIGN

*The Whitney this week presents the first inclusive exhibit of 20th-century objects from this country.*

**By Carol Vogel**

ON THE FOURTH FLOOR OF A CONVERTED factory building on Lafayette Street in lower Manhattan, hundreds of sheets of plywood are stacked along one side of an 8,000-square-foot loft. The scene changes dramatically from week to week as a crew of carpenters, following the detailed blueprints of Robert Venturi, the noted Philadelphia architect, deftly cut and mold the plywood into a series of portable walls and platforms that zigzag and undulate and fold like sheets of origami into 8-by-10-foot sections.

Initially, the bare walls are indistinguishable from one another. Then, curved outlines recall the streamlined look of the 1930's. Amoeba-shaped platforms suggest the silhouettes of 1950's furniture. One week, interlocking walls and platforms representing various time periods march down the center of the loft; the next, they are dismantled and replaced by new set pieces.

On Thursday, the sets, together with some 300 of the finest objects produced in America between 1900 and 1985, will be in place at the opening of "High Styles: 20th-Century American Design" at the Whitney Museum of American Art. For the Whitney, an institution known primarily for its painting and sculpture exhibitions, this foray into the decorative arts is the most complex in its 55-year history.

Although New York's Museum of Modern Art is well known for its collection of contemporary design, it has never mounted a comprehensive exhibition of American objects dating as early as 1900. "Right now, no other museum would have done a show like this," says Martin Filler, an editor of

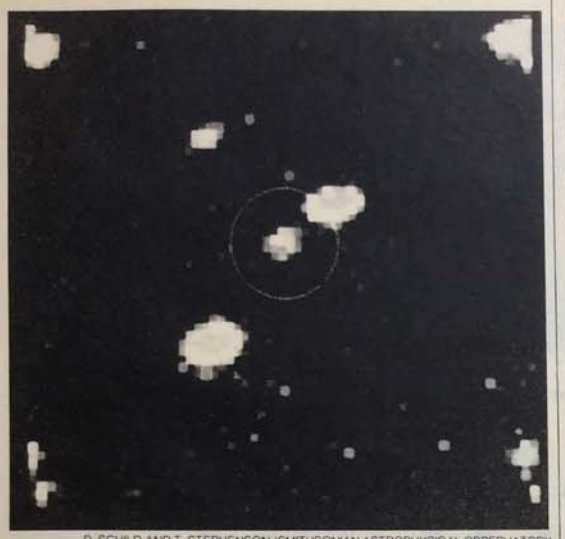
*Carol Vogel is the home design editor of The New York Times Magazine.*

**Top of page: Whitney curator Lisa Phillips with Robert Venturi, who designed the installation.**

**A Tiffany & Company vase, left, circa 1900, shows the influence of American Indian art.**

**Right: Representing pop culture is a Barbara Stauffacher Solomon supergraphic, first designed in 1966 for Sea Ranch in California.**

MORLEY BAER



R. SCHILD AND T. STEPHENSON/SMITHSONIAN ASTROPHYSICAL OBSERVATORY

*Halley's comet (circled) in 1985, surrounded by stars in Orion.*

tional optical telescopes based on mountaintops are not being put out of business. Astronomy needs all the windows on the universe at its command.

"No one working in one wavelength region can do it all," says Gerry X. Neugebauer, an astronomer working with infrared frequencies who is also director of Caltech's Palomar Observatory. "We in infrared have to go to the radio and X-ray and optical people to help us explain what we are seeing. The space telescope and other orbiting observatories are not going to close down Palomar. We're going to have more demand at Palomar. Every new instrument puts more pressure on the others."

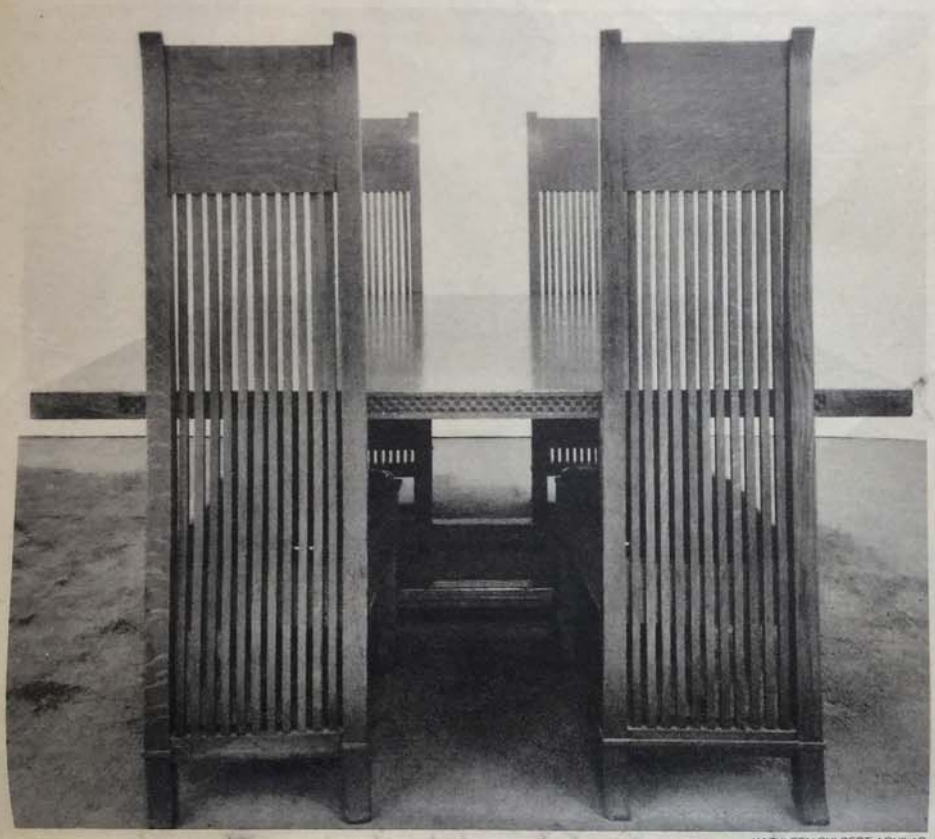
Put another way, when an astronomer looking through one window of the spectrum shouts out that he has seen something unusual, others rush to their own particular windows to catch a glimpse, if they can, and see if they can elucidate this new phenomenon. The spirit is at once competitive and collegial.

To meet the demand for more precise data and the competition from instruments in space, the big earth-bound optical telescopes are constantly being upgraded. Many are now equipped with the charge-coupled devices like those designed for the space telescope. Recent tests at the National Solar Observatory on Sacramento Peak in New Mexico demonstrated an effective electronic-optics technique for removing most of the atmospheric blurring from ground-based observations, providing images whose resolution for bright objects may match that of space-borne telescopes. The experimental instrument breaks the dancing image into 19 separate ones, senses and balances the displacement of each, and then recombines them at a common focus. These adaptive optics, as they are called, produce images of solar phenomena five times sharper than the uncorrected images obtained simultaneously.

Even so, astronomers believe the current instruments have been improved almost to their theoretical limits. They have thus laid plans to build much larger telescopes capitalizing on innovative mirror-fabrication technology. Roger Angel, for example, an astronomer at the University of Arizona, has developed a technique for spinning molten glass in a mold to form the surface of a honeycomb mirror as much as 26 feet in diameter, the largest ever. The wider a telescope's mirror, the greater its light-gathering capacity. Such a telescope for optical and infrared viewing, being planned by Arizona and Ohio State University, would have 2.5 times the collecting area of the Palomar instrument.

Even more ambitious is the project by Caltech and the University of California to build an optical-infrared telescope twice as large and four times more powerful than Palomar. To be completed in 1992, it is called the Keck Telescope and will feature a primary mirror that is a mosaic of 36 hexagonal mirrors, each 6 feet wide and only 3 inches thick. These segmented mirrors, designed by Jerry Nelson at the University of California's Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, will be effectively combined into a

*(Continued on Page 74)*



KATHLEEN CULBERT-AGUILAR

*'The time seemed right' for the show, said a curator at the Whitney. 'American design is finally coming of age.'*

LANGDON CLAY

RONALD BAXTER SMITH

House & Garden, who is one of the six curators of the Whitney exhibit. "The Whitney's desire to increase its presence on the art scene almost requires its doing bravura gestures. It's by far the liveliest cultural institution in town."

"The Whitney has done more dramatic shows in the last five years than any other museum" in New York, says the Boston art collector and architect Graham Gund, perhaps because "it is not perceived as having a solid foundation — great art from the past . . . So little of the museum is devoted to its permanent collection." The museum is especially vulnerable now with the controversy over the design plans for the Whitney's $37.5 million expansion by the architect Michael Graves.

"High Styles," which runs through February, is one of the most ambitious shows the Whitney has produced. It features everything from a rare Frank Lloyd Wright dining-room set (shown left) to a silver, turquoise and copper Tiffany & Company vase (on page 44) to a 1950's book of wallpapers by the designer Alexander Girard. There are everyday objects, such as a 1937 streamlined Electrolux vacuum cleaner, a 1936 radio by Walter Dorwin Teague (shown below), even an Apple IIc personal computer.

Each piece bears the stamp of what is considered quintessentially American design by the exhibit's curators, who, besides Martin Filler, include Lisa Phillips, a curator at the Whitney who originated the idea for the show; David A. Hanks, an expert on Frank Lloyd Wright and formerly a curator in the department of American art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art; David Gebhard, professor of architectural history at the University of California at Santa Barbara; Rosemarie Haag Bletter, adjunct associate professor of art and architecture at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts, and Esther McCoy, the architectural historian.

Yet, just what constitutes 20th-century "American design" the curators and Venturi — whose own furniture, fabric and tableware are included in the show — are hard put to say. While the characteristics of Italian (sleekly functional), English (elegant, refined), French (ornate) or Japanese (minimalist) design come readily to mind, American design, by contrast, defies definition. "There is no pat definition for what makes American design American," says the art critic Hilton Kramer. "These objects have always reflected changing tastes, encompassing what's comfortable and desirable at the moment."

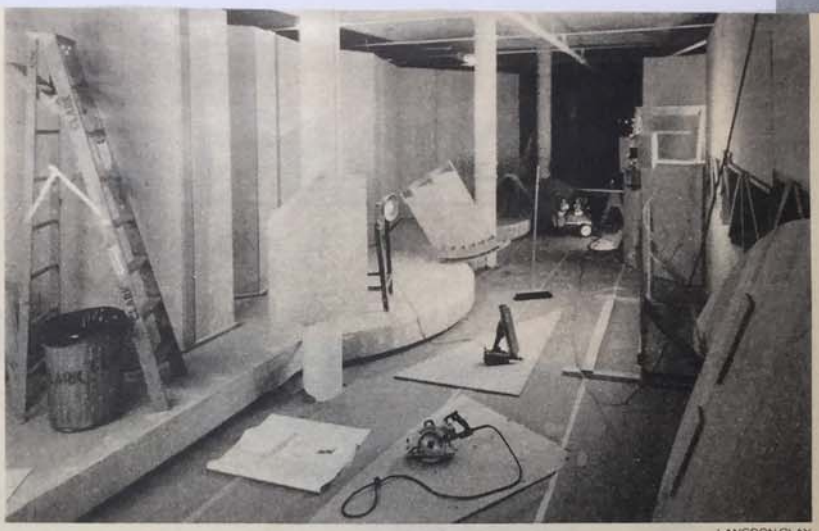
"Technological ingenuity and marketing have always been an important part of American design," notes the architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable. "But unlike European modernism, which was tied to social idealism, American design lacks ideology. Rather, it is market-oriented, a response to the consumer's needs."

During many moments of the 20th century, American design has expressed purely vernacular styles. Frank Lloyd Wright's solid wood-crafted furniture or the organic motifs of his stained-glass windows, for instance, came to bear the stamp of the Midwest Prairie style, while the craftsmanlike objects designed by the California architects Greene and Greene reflected a slightly more ornate West Coast sensibility. Louis Tiffany's opalescent glass objects and the Colonial carved pine or oak furniture produced by Wallace Nutting's Framingham, Mass., workshop became two diverse kinds of

**Top of page: For the first time, this dining table and eight chairs, designed in 1899 by Frank Lloyd Wright, will be on exhibition.**

**Center: Everyday objects, such as a radio by Walter Dorwin Teague (1936), will be shown.**

**Left: A chair designed by Charles and Ray Eames (1949) has an animal-skin covering.**



LANGDON CLAY

*The installation for the Whitney show was built in modular foldable units in a lower Manhattan loft.*

East Coast esthetic. It wasn't until after World War II that styles became less regional. More sophisticated systems of communication coupled with technological advances resulted in a flurry of machinemade objects. In the process, design grew in scope, encompassing stylish yet functional items such as radios, vacuum cleaners, clocks, even dishwashers.

Although American design has long been highly influenced by European prototypes, it was in the 20th century that the exchange of ideas crossed the Atlantic in both directions. Ernest Race, a major British designer of the 1940's and 50's, designed a chair in 1951 called the Antelope that has a molded plastic seat recalling the innovations of Charles Eames. And wood chairs made by the Dutch architect-designer Gerrit Rietveld acknowledged his debt to Frank Lloyd Wright. Smaller objects, such as the silver produced around the turn of the century by such well-known companies as Tiffany & Company and Gorham Manufacturing Company, directly influenced English and French silver designs.

Increasingly, 20th-century American decorative arts, long eclipsed by the fine arts in academic and curatorial circles, is being seriously considered by the nation's major museums, and the number of private collectors investing in this area is growing rapidly. It's a matter of economic necessity, says David Hanks. "Not only are paintings outpricing the market, but they're getting rarer. Most of the finest decorative objects from the 17th, 18th and even 19th centuries have already been bought up. This is really the last area left."

THE TIME SEEMED right," says Lisa Phillips in her sun-filled office at the Whitney. "American design is finally coming of age. Just at the Whitney, so many artists whose pieces are in our permanent collection have begun making utilitarian design objects."

The show's modest predecessor was "Shape and Environment: Furniture by American Architects," held three years ago at the Whitney's Stamford, Conn., branch. Miss Phillips spent a year putting that show together. It was such a success she felt confident the subject could be expanded. And expanded it is. For the last two years, the six curators and a project coordinator, Nancy Princenthal, have been combing the country for the objects on display. Robert Venturi's team, members from his firm — Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown — including Steven Izenour and Christine Matheu, spent a year and a half devising ways to show the objects to their best advantage. Construction of the sets on Lafayette Street began in early July by a crew of eight from the C. Clark Construction Corporation; they have 12 days prior to the show's opening to paint and install the sets and objects.

"The title of the show was the initial subject of debate," Miss Phillips recalls. "At first, it was going to be called 'High Style,' but we all agreed the term was too narrow — it seemed to reflect only the upper classes. It was Bob's idea to add the 's' and make it 'High Styles.' "

The majority of the curators interpreted the title to mean not so much how the average person lived, but what from each decade was of design importance. "There were no ground rules," explains Miss Phillips. In fact, over the last two years, the curators met as a group only three times. "Most of us chose what we felt has been historically enduring, and the most interesting to look at. Often that meant choosing pieces which may have been conceptually polemical instead of objects which are more commonplace."

Rather than the popular glass-and-chrome coffee tables that are a department-store standard, for example, Miss Phillips — who is responsible for the final decade, 1975-85 — chose a sand-blasted glass column and marble table lamp by the artist R. M. Fischer. Neither is there a reproduction of early-American scrubbed pine furniture that was so popular four or five years ago. Instead, the Josef Hoffmann-inspired chair by the architect Richard Meier and the modern interpretation of a Chippendale chair by Robert Venturi were chosen.

Alone among the curators, David Gebhard feels that this approach may be a mistake. He took a more ethnographic look at his years, 1915-30. " 'High Styles' to me represents that which is at the forefront of fashion," he says, "which also includes traditional objects, like the reproduction furniture so important during much of this century. None of the other curators would have been caught dead using reproductions. They took a purely modernist approach. The 1930's, for example, was a brilliant Colonial Revival period, yet none of the Williamsburg wallpapers or fabrics will be in the show. And from 1945 on, the Baker Furniture Company has been manufacturing

superb reproductions, too. They're simply eliminating huge chunks of history, as though they don't exist."

Filler, who oversees 1960-75, disagrees. "Reproductions would be fine if this were for the Smithsonian Institution, but it's not. We're working in limited space and it's our job to portray a period through good design." As an example, while looking for 1960's objects, Filler opted not to include a waterbed. "Granted waterbeds were quintessentially 60's, but they have no real design value."

In looking for objects that best captured the crosscurrent of designs for each period without showing too many familiar pieces, many of the curators discovered they were delving into uncharted waters.

"Unlike the major American painters, whose work have been carefully recorded," says David Hanks, who is responsible for the years 1900-15, "the work of so many of the important 20th-century American furniture makers haven't yet been documented. As a result, many of them have been virtually forgotten." He cites Marie Zimmermann, whose 1915 silver covered bowl he has selected for the show. A noted metalsmith at the early part of this century, she was only recently rediscovered when the Metropolitan Museum of Art held a small exhibition of her work.

Many of the pieces in the show are by designers who will be little known to the general public. William Codman, for instance, a major designer for the Gorham Manufacturing Company, made richly ornate silver pieces that illustrate the opulent tastes of the early 20th century. Frederick Kiesler produced a pair of nesting tables in 1938 that are so biomorphic in shape they can easily be mistaken for 1950's furniture; yet they are a perfect example of the work of a group of designers in the 30's who made objects in this surrealistic vein.

"I never realized how difficult it was going to be," says Rosemarie Haag Bletter, who presides over the years 1930-45. "Finding just the right objects was like going on an archeological dig. You start with a wish list and end up with two-thirds at best."

Curators often had to go to great lengths to obtain an important object. When looking for what he considered the best example of Frank Lloyd Wright furniture that had not been exhibited before, David Hanks set his sights on a dining set originally designed in 1899 for the Joseph W. Husser House in Chicago. Venturi wanted a "strong visual ensemble, which the table and high-back chairs certainly are," Hanks explains. "*And since it was made right on the eve of the century, I thought it couldn't have* been a more perfect way to begin the show." But the only way Hanks could get the piece was to strike a deal with the collector. Realizing she would be without a dining-room table and chairs for five months, she agreed to lend the pieces only if Hanks could produce a suitable replacement. After a four-month search, he finally found something acceptable: a Chippendale-style dining table and chairs.

In their search, the curators also discovered that many of this country's leading manufacturers did not keep proper archives. And few of even the specialized museums had what they were looking for. Only about 20 percent of the pieces on exhibit are on loan from other institutions.

"RCA didn't have the first commercially made television set, which was like Ford not having a Model T," says Miss Bletter. Esther McCoy — culling objects from the postwar era 1945-60 — had similar problems. She discovered that General Electric had not saved either an example of the early combination sink, range and dishwasher it made in 1958 or a wall-mounted refrigerator from the same period. Determined to include one of them to illustrate the changing direction of the American home, she had to settle for a wall-sized photograph of a kitchen with a wall-mounted refrigerator.

Each period had its special problems. To the curators, it was astonishing how few objects are now available

*(Continued on Page 70)*

# AMERICAN DESIGN

*Continued from Page 50*

from the 1920's and 1930's. Gebhard had trouble finding good examples of wicker furniture. "If I had carte blanche to rummage through attics along the shore of the East Coast, I'm sure I would have found them by the bushelbasket," he says. As it was, he was left scouring museums and the few private collections he could locate. Also rare were ship models from the period that captured the romantic fascination for the sailing ship among the upper and middle classes during that time.

For Filler, objects dating between 1960 and 1975 were particularly elusive. "Not only is the period too recent to be collected, but so many pieces were consciously ephemeral and had no intrinsic value," he says. "Being made of plastic and even paper, many of them simply were not worth saving. Also, by the 60's many of the most important design innovations were not American.

"I really tried to avoid the Museum of Modern Art's fettishism for showing the unapproachable object," he adds. Instead, Filler has culled such objects as Plexiglas picture frames and a plastic planter complete with ficus tree — the ever-present 1960's greenery.

Wall-sized supergraphics were so much a part of the pop culture of his period that Filler is having several examples recreated for the show. The artist Barbara Stauffacher Solomon is flying in from San Francisco to reconstruct her 1966 supergraphic (shown on page 45) for the Sea Ranch Swim Club I, designed by the architect Charles Moore. (This supergraphic will be created right on the museum's wall and painted over when the exhibition ends.) The artist Sheila Hicks is remaking a Pony Tail Forest wallhanging that was originally made in 1968 for the Georg Jensen showroom in New York.

Supergraphics will be in full view even before the visitor to the exhibit sets foot in the museum. A giant tea cup — 11 feet in diameter, about three times the size of the original tea cup on a 1962 sign Venturi designed for Grand's Restaurant in Philadelphia — is the show's billboard with the words "HIGH STYLES" *tipping over the handle in electric red letters.* Placed high above the entrance to the Whitney, it is a bit of kitsch against the gray granite of Marcel Breuer's modernist facade.

MOST OF THE CURATORS VISited Venturi's Philadelphia office to work on their portion of the exhibit.


## Solutions to Last Week's Puzzles


**LEWIS THOMAS: THE LIVES OF A CELL** — The color photographs of the earth are more amazing than anything outside: we live inside a blue ... bubble of air blown by ourselves. The other sky beyond, absolutely black and appalling, is wide open country, irresistible for exploration.

Venturi flew to Los Angeles, however, to see Esther McCoy, the 80-year-old architectural historian. "Her postwar years, 1945-60, were particularly difficult to record because it was a time when design objects were actually built into the architecture," says Venturi. "And Esther was really the only one of the curators who was also a prominent figure of her period. Therefore, she knew exactly what she wanted."

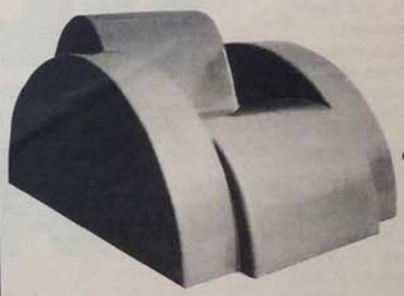
"The postwar years were a time when architects and designers were at home with the machine," notes Miss McCoy. Which is evident in much of the multifunctional furniture made by such well-known designers as Eliel Saarinen, Harry Bertoia and Charles and Ray Eames. This was also a period of great change in the layout of the American house. "The building boom caused a move away from small towns into cities and suburbs," Miss McCoy adds. "The need arose to limit the floor space of suburban houses and apartments. The dining room disappeared, bedrooms became smaller. Children's bedrooms were often divided by sliding screens, and in tract houses the parents' bedroom sometimes opened to the living room by a folding wall. The living room nearly always connected to a terrace by sliding glass."

To best capture these changes, Robert Venturi and Esther McCoy designed a series of stylized environments that are by far the most architectural portions of the show. To depict such postwar innovations as the efficiency kitchen, for instance, a wall-sized photograph of a built-in kitchen designed in Hollywood in 1958 by the architect Pierre Koenig hangs on the wall behind a curved platform. In front of it is a marble-top pedestal table designed by Eero Saarinen and two wire chairs by Charles and Ray Eames.

Then, to suggest the feeling of a porch — a ubiquitous feature in American homes at the time — there is a patiolike arrangement of outdoor furniture set in front of a scrim simulating the blue sky of Los Angeles. There is also a platform featuring Eames furniture. "It was hard not to let Eames dominate the show," says Miss McCoy. "His pieces captured such an important moment in American design."

Venturi agrees. "Eames represents perhaps the most supremely original moment

LANGDON CLAY



*The Whitney will display two nested coffee tables designed in 1938 by Frederick Kiesler, and a Volks Armchair (1970) designed by William Lansing Plumb with the collaboration of Charles Keane.*

in American design," he says. "When I was a graduate student of architecture at Princeton in 1948, I remember seeing an Eames chair for the first time. It made a profound impression on me. The bent plywood with its organic and terribly complex curves was unlike anything I'd ever seen before."

The architect's designs for the show reflect these memories. At the entrance, for instance, Venturi created a Palladian-style forced perspective. A series of curved narrow walls focuses attention on a 5-foot-high stepped platform 50 feet away displaying a molded plywood Charles Eames chair, spotlighted to signal the prototypical chair of the modern movement.

To Lisa Phillips, it was Venturi's sensitivity for decorative objects that made him a natural choice as the architect to do the installation. "With such a large group," adds Miss Phillips, "I also felt Bob would be a good spiritual leader."

Throughout his career, Venturi has been unquestionably a leader in his field. In 1966, his book "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture" first denounced the modernist glass-and-steel buildings of the International Style, which began in the 1920's, favoring the use of historic, classical elements in design. Later, in 1972, Venturi teamed up with his wife, the architect Denise Scott Brown, and his associate Steven Izenour to write "Learning From Las Vegas," a book that explored the architecture of the urban landscape with its honky-tonk commercial strips, neon signs and billboards/supergraphics. Such iconography, the architects believe, has great cultural significance. On the basis of these theories, Venturi has been widely regarded as the father of postmodernism.

*Now, at age 60, Venturi* runs an office that is involved in many major projects, including two museums (the Laguna Gloria Art Museum in Austin, Tex., and the new Seattle Art Museum) and two molecular biology buildings (one at the University of Pennsylvania, the other at Princeton University).

At such a busy moment in his career, why did he accept the Whitney's invitation, especially since he was passed over to design the museum's new building? "Installations such as this one are excellent background for designing museums," Venturi replies. Besides, he admits the show itself was intriguing. Especially since he has always had a special affection for the decorative arts. His own Philadelphia house, with its stenciled walls and furniture ranging from chairs salvaged from the Traymore Hotel in Atlantic City to a sofa by the famous Arts and Crafts designer Gustav Stickley, is proof enough. So enamored of well-designed furniture and objects is he that two years ago Knoll International, the noted furniture manufacturer, introduced a line of his furniture and fabric designs. In the same year, Swid Powell, a New York firm specializing

in architect-designed tableware, produced several of his tableware schemes.

MUSEUM INSTALLATIONS are not new to Venturi. Nine years ago, his firm designed another Whitney exhibition, "200 Years of American Sculpture." That installation, with sculptures placed cheek by jowl, was highly controversial: several sculptors even threatened to pull their pieces from the show. Part of the problem was that sculpture is a medium that needs to be viewed with a good deal of space and, according to the Whitney director, Thomas Armstrong III, "the artists were not prepared to see their work displayed in close proximity to other artists."

Design objects, on the other hand, are arguably made to be seen in often cluttered environments. "We've purposely made 'High Styles' a dense exhibition," says Venturi. "I'd rather be on the rich side, give people almost too much. Seeing this show will be like reading a newspaper. You can go through and just read the headlines to get a gist of what's happening or you can carefully pore over every article."

Nevertheless, says Venturi, "High Styles" has been quite a production because "furniture and objects need to be displayed carefully, with a sense of the environment they were made for. Which is why this show is far more complex than, say, a painting or sculpture show. After all, modern paintings are designed with less context in mind than furniture. But you have to give a sense of the correct background — of walls and floors — to finely crafted objects."

The architect could have taken one of two standard directions for the installation. Objects could have been arranged in the context of period rooms or laid out in a classic modern way, with furniture and objects grouped against a neutral white background. Venturi chose neither course.

His design is a progression of labyrinthine, 10-foot-high walls with recesses of varying sizes — some room-size, some not — that, along with a changing color scheme, suggest the interior architecture of the period. "The trick was to come up with a system that is standardized yet particular and sensitive to the various scale of the objects," says Christine Matheu, a member of the Venturi team. "All the curators have a space of their own, like houses on a block."

The earliest years, 1900-1915, for example, are the most tightly condensed with furniture, vitrines and a fireplace surround designed by George Washington Maher (a contemporary of Frank Lloyd Wright's) arranged intimately to give that part of the exhibit an almost domestic environment. For the 1930's, the walls become more rounded or streamlined, reminiscent of Art Deco style.

Keeping the furniture within the viewer's direct range of vision — instead of elevating objects on pedestals and thereby losing a sense of human scale — was crucial to Venturi. All the platforms are, therefore, unusually low, scarcely a foot off the floor, with information about the objects on a white banding around the edge of the platforms. "The banding acts as a psychological moat," says Venturi. These strips of information will keep people moving through the show as they read about each section.

"In this kind of show, you're constantly walking a tightrope between clarity and confusion," says Steven Izenour, another member of the Venturi team. "It's easy to get carried away, to forget the point is to create a background that highlights the objects rather than upstages them."

Originally, the architects thought of inventing a system of moldings and graphics that changed to reflect each of the different periods, but this was soon abandoned because they felt it would have been too confusing. "You have to work harder to be low-key," Venturi says. As a result, after trying several alternatives, a simple scheme was adopted using a single style of molding that recalls a classical turn-of-the-century pilaster. These vertical moldings also help separate the various time periods and many of the color changes that occur throughout the show.

"Color, every bit as much as the architectural details, helps to create atmosphere," says Izenour. And while the architects are planning to use neutral grays as the wall color, certain sections will feature shades that best recall the feeling of the period. An acid green, for instance, has been chosen for the 1960's pop era; dusky rose, for the earliest years, and plain white for the modernist decades. But rather than plan the color palette far in advance, the architects are waiting until the last minute. "We'll be able to best judge the colors once the sets are in place," says Venturi. "We're going to have a painter handy to mix paints, the way old-fashioned painters used to, at the site."

The architect also paid particular attention to pacing. Although the different configurations of walls and built-in vitrines create linear paths, at key points there are crescendos, or specific areas of drama. The set piece at the entrance, for example, dramatically represents 85 years of American decorative styles in one glance. A series of six steps features one chair from each of the six periods, beginning with an early 20th-century oak chair designed by George Grant Elmslie and ending with a galvanized steel-pipe Einstein chair by the artist Robert Wilson.

In a similar manner, for the final decade a floating island is arranged like a runway set against industrial gray walls. Here Lisa Phillips shows the current revival of artist- and architect-designed objects by arranging a final series of chairs beginning with the most traditional — a ladder-back chair designed by the architect Steven Holl — and ending with a pair of granite chairs by the sculptor Scott Burton. "It's like a Flash Gordon fantasy," Miss Phillips explains, "arranged to make people wonder about what the future holds." ■

# CORPORATE CULTURE

Flora Whitney Miller cuts the ribbon at the opening of the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1966

URBAN CRITIC

## A Confrontation In Context

THE MOST FASHIONABLE BUILDing to hate in New York at the moment is Michael Graves's proposed addition to the Whitney Museum of American Art at 75th Street and Madison Avenue. The animosity it incites brings into focus key issues about museum design, city planning, landmarks preservation, and, ultimately, about architectural evaluation. Whatever the outcome, the debate could (or should) establish precedents that will influence future criticism and action.

Graves's $37.5 million scheme would add 134,000 square feet to the Whitney's 83,500-square-foot building. A group of brownstones to the south of the museum would be razed for one portion of the expansion, and the original Whitney, designed by Marcel Breuer and Hamilton Smith in 1966, would virtually become a five-story "base" for five more floors of Graves's architecture. Altogether, the ensemble, which includes galleries, offices, restaurants, an auditorium, and a study center, rises to a height of 188 feet, comparable to that of an eighteen-story building.

"Too much building," clamor Upper East Side community groups trying to preserve the character of their heavily nineteenth- and early twentieth-century residential neighborhood.

"Too much museum," argue architectural critics, who complain that the Whitney's ambitious program requires excessive expansion. Does the museum really need a restaurant, a library, and an auditorium in addition to new gallery space? Less building would mean lesser problems.

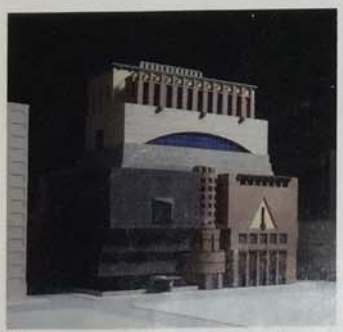
"Too much architecture," protest a number of architects, who contend that the original Breuer building is swallowed whole by this design. They reason that the artistic integrity of the tough, granite-clad modernist structure, famous for its stepped-forward tiers of overhanging floors and its moatlike sculpture court, will be more than overwhelmed by the new expansion wrapping over and around it.

Because the Whitney is located in a Historic District, any changes to the

PHOTOGRAPH: WOMEN'S WEAR DAILY

*The most active—and effective—opponents in the fray have come from within the architectural profession*

Breuer's Whitney didn't escape criticism either. The caption for this 1966 *New Yorker* cartoon reads: "Why can't someone design a museum that doesn't have to be explained?"



The Graves scheme for the Whitney: a thoughtful and serious work that requires a second look and causes us to rethink the purpose and experience of architecture

building as well as the demolition of the brownstones must be given a certificate of appropriateness by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, which is expected to review the case in the next few months. And because the museum is located in the Madison Avenue Special District, new construction must follow height and setback limits established by the City Planning Commission, and it must include 150 linear feet of retail space long the avenue. At the City Planning Commission review, the Whitney will be seeking a variance for the back of the new building, which oversteps the "midblock transition zone" that attempts to protect lower-height buildings in the cross streets.

Faced with this lengthy approval process, both sides are preparing for battle. The Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, the 75th Street Block Association, the co-op board of 35 East 75th Street are all energetically raising money to oppose the Graves scheme. They have hired as their lawyers Berle Kass & Case, the firm that helped win the Westway battle for the environmental groups. And Michael Kwartler, an architect and expert on zoning legislation, has been brought in to consult. Meanwhile, the Whitney has lined up Sandy Lindenbaum of Rosenman Colin Freund Lewis & Cohen as its honcho lawyer, and it has retained the high-rolling Howard J. Rubenstein Associates to handle its public relations.

The most active—and, so far, the most effective—opponents in the fray come from within the architectural profession. The first to speak out was Abraham Geller, a solid, conscientious older architect who registered his disapproval of the Graves proposal when he accepted the 1985 Medal of Honor from the New York chapter of the American Institute of Architects. "To put it succinctly," he said, "the Breuer building is being literally crushed. It is being subjugated to an assemblage of many diverse and unrelated blocks." Geller also questioned why the Whitney, which boasts the "foremost collection of modern American art in the world," would turn to "a building addition which features applied classical forms."

In July, the AIA held a special meeting—actually, it was more like a hearing—at which both sides aired their views. Then in October came a petition signed by over 500 architects and artists (mostly architects) urging the Whitney to abandon the proposal. And in November the Executive Committee of the New York AIA wrote to the Landmarks Preservation Commission expressing its concern that the Whitney was not being reviewed as a separate landmark. Since the museum is too young to be designated a landmark—a building must be thirty years old—it is being considered only as part of a Historic District. The Landmarks Commission told them, however, that district buildings are given the same careful scrutiny regarding additions and alterations as official landmarks. Still, additions can be placed on top of landmarks as long as they are "appropriate." But the architects supporting the Ad Hoc Committee to Save the Whitney argue that, as a summary statement of a major modern architect's career, and as a work of art, the Breuer building—and the space around it—should be protected from such encroachments. Decisions about which buildings are "works of art" depend on elusive aesthetic standards, standards that change from generation to generation, from viewer to viewer.

The original Whitney did not escape criticism in its time either. "At the moment, the most disliked building in New York is undoubtedly the Whitney Museum," Ada Louise Huxtable wrote in 1966 in the *New York Times*, before going on to defend it. While most of the press was solidly adulatory at the opening of Breuer's chunky building, curbside critics fastened disparaging epithets on it, such as "Madison Avenue's Alcatraz," the "Madision Avenue Monster," or "Breuer's Big Blooper Bunker."

Still, the Whitney was even then called a "landmark," or as one writer put it, "instant Stonehenge." Over the years the museum darkened with grime, but it also became a familiar object, a distinct cultural insignia sewn into the urban fabric. "Maybe I built it to rebel against skyscrapers and brownstones," Breuer told *Newsweek* in 1966. "I didn't try to fit the building to its neighbors because the neighboring buildings aren't any good."

Breuer's attitude of detachment toward the surrounding milieu was typical of his generation and the "progressive" spirit of the time. But in the wake of the constant destruction and alteration of historic (or just older) architecture during the building booms of the past few decades, architects and the public have become increasingly cynical about new construction. As early as 1968, Breuer's own proposal to erect a fifty-five-stor tower on top of Grand Central Termina

then recently designated a landmark, raised a storm of protest. Huxtable summed up the reaction: "This is having your landmark and destroying it too."

Today the prevailing architectural principle is "contextualism"—fitting a building into its urban setting by deferring to the scale, massing, colors, and architectural motifs of the surrounding buildings. Indeed, this principle explains why Graves was selected to design the Whitney expansion: he is known to be particularly drawn to the traditional vocabulary of the brownstones, town houses, and other domestically scaled buildings. Contextually, however, Graves was faced with the double problem of designing a museum addition to "fit" both the neighborhood character and the "isolationist" Breuer building. It was a heavy agenda, but one that Graves addressed with a great deal of conviction and thought.

Breuer, a good modernist, was expected only to acknowledge the dissonance and fragmentation inherent in modern life through art that "confronts." Graves, like other architects who turned away from the abstraction of modernism, wanted to restore continuity with the humanist tradition and bring order and meaning to the fragmented landscape. Paradoxically, his scheme for the Whitney—with its cornices, brackets, keystones, pergolas, and an eyebrow window—is perceived as "confrontational" instead of "contextual." Graves does maintain the scale and the mass of Breuer's Whitney in the base of his addition to the south, and he echoes materials, openings, and other features in his own way. Yet he makes certain moves that turn the scheme into one that *challenges* rather than defers to the original. For example, the original building has an asymmetrical composition, but in his proposal Graves has emphasized the center, creating a strong axis marked by a half cylinder or "hinge" that connects the dual bases. The centered symmetrical stepped top underscores the classical organization, and although it decreases in size as it rises, it increases in complexity and in the multiplicity of its parts. This reversal of the themes of Breuer's building (which gets heavier and simpler as it rises) augments that sense of confrontation. Graves's scheme proves that architecture, by virtue of the architect's personal approach, can be both contextual and confrontational; there are no established visual standards by which it is one or the other. This conceptual "glitch" will have to be faced by the Landmarks Commission when it decides whether or not the design is "appropriate" to the Historic District.

The Whitney addition is not a drop-dead sublime harmonious whole. Rather, it is something that requires another look. Graves has come up with the very kind of architecture Robert Venturi seemed to be propounding in his seminal postmodern tract *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*—which was published the year the Breuer Whitney opened. He has given us what Venturi termed the "difficult whole," which searches for a "unity through inclusion" of strangely familiar building parts that keep wanting to separate. His scheme even has the "duality" and "degrees of multiplicity" that Venturi deemed implicit in architecture that attempts to learn from the past. Indeed, Graves has here pushed duality and multiplicity to the hilt, holding it all together through a certain febrility of compositional grouping.

Venturi was excoriated by modernist architects for his heretical ideas, and as late as 1976 he was turned down for a fellowship in the AIA. Graves has inherited his mantle, so to speak: at the 1983 AIA convention held shortly after Graves's controversial Portland Building opened in Oregon, architects were sporting buttons that said, "We don't dig Graves."

Graves's brand of postmodernism, of course, is not the only contemporary architecture that can cause controversy. So, too, can the work of an avowed modernist like I.M. Pei, whose addition to the Louvre, a six-story-high glass pyramid that marks the new redirected underground entrance to the museum, spurred resounding public and professional outcry in Paris. There the protest was to no avail. Obviously Pei must believe such actions carry more weight in the U.S., for he was one of the signatories of the petition sent to the Whitney protesting the new expansion. For his part, Graves had been asked to sign an anti-Louvre expansion petition but declined, saying, "Architects don't do that."

In many ways it is tempting to see the hostile reaction to the Whitney addition as part of a larger architectural debate—one that involves professional loyalties, sympathies, jealousies, and disappointments as well as architectural convictions and predilections. It has not gone unremarked that the best known of the architects protesting the expansion rep-

*It is tempting to see the hostile reaction to the Whitney addition as part of a larger architectural debate*

I.M. Pei, who signed a petition protesting the Graves addition, designed this controversial addition to the Louvre. Graves declined to sign a petition against Pei's plan. "Architects," he said, "don't do that"

In 1968 Breuer proposed this plan for building a tower above Grand Central. Ada Louise Huxtable said of the design: "This is having your landmark and destroying it too"

PHOTOGRAPH (BOTTOM): NYT PICTURES

# CORPORATE CULTURE

resent a certain generation that made its reputation designing decent modern buildings twenty or more years ago. In the seventies, these architects—including Breuer and his successor firm of Gatje Papachristou Smith—witnessed the new wave of postmodernist architects attract attention from the media and clients. Some of the modernists managed to maintain mainstream practices, having only to borrow a barrel vault here and a keystone there for their glass-and-steel high rises. But some did not fare so well, and all found themselves handicapped because they could not turn out luscious drawings, could not talk theoretically about "meaning" in architecture, and above all, could not allude to past historical styles with understanding.

But the tide is turning on postmodernism: younger as well as older architects are criticizing the style for its trivialization of architecture. Pretty drawings, it is now evident, don't guarantee great buildings. Too many of postmodernism's perpetrators were overly optimistic about being able to weld historical elements to today's building materials, methods, and programs. Too many cavalierly changed the scale and proportion of borrowed arches, columns, and windows. And the postmodern belief that architects should not be so serious often resulted in concoctions that traded the grimness of modern architecture for lighthearted silliness.

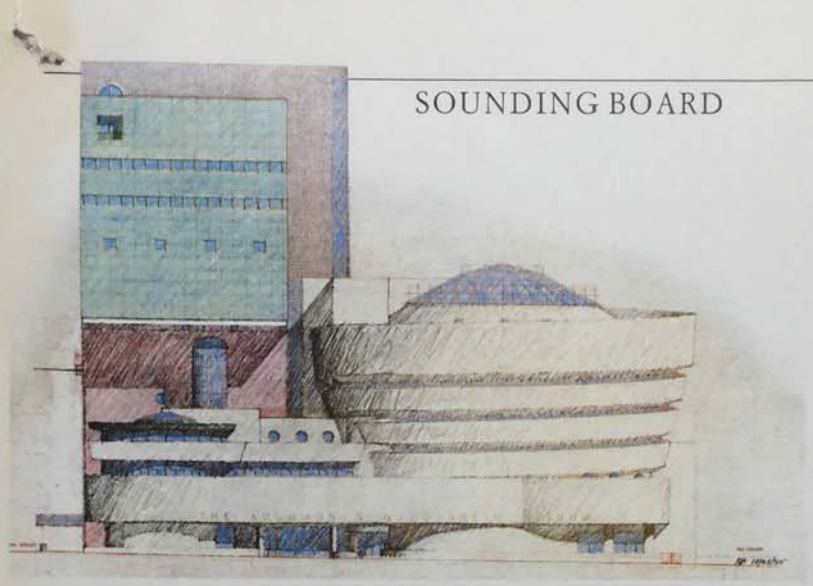
Michael Graves's Whitney expansion is not, however, silly. It is a very thoughtful and serious work that is caught in a nexus of changing beliefs, viewpoints, fears, and suspicions. The opposition to the proposal is not just the result of the taint of postmodernism. It has more to do with our larger disillusionment with change. A community familiar with the notion that development usually replaces small, old, and even plain buildings with larger and uglier ones is not going to be predisposed to take chances. And architects, critics, and historians who value the individual architectural artifact are acutely aware of the need to guard such a work against the ever-present pressures of building and construction. Even now the plan for an office tower for Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum brings up once again the issue of how close another building can come to the "perceptual field" of the artifact without destroying its visual identity. Museumgoers who have watched expansions and remodelings such as those at the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan have learned that the drawings and models may look harmless, but the improvements turn out to effect major shifts in the experience of the building either within—as in the case of MoMA—or without, as in that of the Met, where airplane-hangar-like accretions now engulf three sides of the older structure.

The expansions at MoMA and the Met are not postmodern. They are contextual only in the sense that they are "background" buildings—that is, composed of simple, geometric, unadorned forms in modernist glass, steel, and concrete. What, then, are we to make of the Whitney expansion, which is actively, aggressively, and complicatedly contextual? We sense already that it is especially difficult to evaluate it on the basis of available evidence: For one, the relationship of the parts and materials to each other and to the observer is hard to gauge in diminutive models and softly colored drawings. Second, since the design is so complex, the new building is highly susceptible to vagaries and variables of execution—including the choice and use of materials, interior finishes and detailing—that gradually affect the final result. So we shall only really know when it is too late.

And will we know even then? Some buildings take getting used to. In 1966 Ada Louise Huxtable described the "difficult" aspect of "beauty" with regard to Breuer's brutalist Whitney: "If there are any basic ground rules for architecture watchers, they should be, first, don't look for something pretty, and second, look again." The irony is that Graves's addition *is* composed of "pretty" pieces and many critics find them disturbing. We are faced with an expansion that is both contextual and confrontational, that takes risks by its juggling of the radical and the familiar. But this interplay also causes us to rethink the purpose and experience of architecture. This observer initially found the scheme just too overburdened. But then, after looking at the model and the drawings over and over again, perceptions began to change. The surface discontinuity of the separate buildings began to cohere. The older Whitney—sculptural, asymmetrical, and jagged—started to come forward and the other buildings receded into a dimensional mosaic.

It has begun to look good.

—Suzanne Stephens



COURTESY GWATHMEY SIEGEL & ASSOCIATES

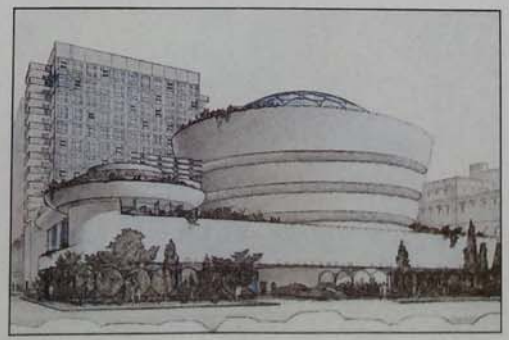
# WRIGHT WRONGED

## Gwathmey Siegel's proposed Guggenheim addition raises crucial questions about the museum's role as cultural caretaker

By Martin Filler

The architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright is essentially about freedom—freedom from historical convention, spatial confinement, and the strictures of routine responses to the world around us. It might even be said that at the heart of Wright's philosophy lay an almost anti-architectural impulse. So fervently did he wish to "break out of the box," literally and figuratively, that one sees in his approach the poignant contradiction between an artist working in a medium while simultaneously trying to transcend its physical limitations.

The building in which Wright surely came closest to achieving his dream of dematerialization is The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the dynamic concrete helix with which he crowned his momentous career. Between 1943 and 1959, it was designed, redesigned, delayed, and at last constructed on New York's Fifth Avenue. (The complex saga of the museum's realization is told more completely than ever before in *Frank Lloyd Wright: The Guggenheim Correspondence,* selected and with commentary by Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, published this month by the California State University Press.) The Guggenheim was instantly recognized as one of the most wholly original and singularly brilliant structures ever raised on this continent, and is now appreciated as its creator's last indisputable masterwork.



*Top:* Drawing of the Fifth Avenue elevation of the proposed Gwathmey Siegel Guggenheim addition. *Above:* Wright's unexecuted 1952 design for a fifteen-story studio-residence building next to the museum, which was completed in 1959.

COURTESY ARCHITECTURAL FORUM

The Guggenheim is not without its formal and functional flaws, and ever since it opened, six months after Wright's death, its shortcomings as an art gallery have been much commented upon: the downward cant of its ramp, the outward tilt of its walls, its idiosyncratic lighting, and perhaps most important lately (even after its other quirks have subsided into familiarity) its stubborn resistance to enlargement. Yet this was never conceived as a comprehensive museum for conventional art, but rather was meant for a specialized collection of


## SOUNDING BOARD

nonobjective painting (especially the work of Wassily Kandinsky), which inspired a resonant architectural echo in the unfettered forms of Wright's spiraling rotunda. Despite decades of complaints about how poorly served some artists have been by this assertive setting, there have been occasions—such as the Mark Rothko retrospective in 1978–79 and the three-part Kandinsky survey between 1982 and 1985—when art and architecture have meshed perfectly, making Wright's great space come alive in just the way he intended, and imparting special power to those abstract paintings.

It is now almost thirty years since the Guggenheim appeared (in the words of Vincent Scully) "among its starched neighbors, like the pulsing sanctuary of a primitive cult on Fifth Avenue." Though it has been a landmark in all but the legal sense since the very beginning, this perpetually futuristic building will not reach the statutory minimum age required for designation by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission for another three years. Today the Guggenheim is experiencing the same growing pains that have prompted the other major art museums in New York—the Metropolitan, the Modern, and the Whitney—to embark on ambitious expansion plans in recent years. But it is not unlikely that the Guggenheim's administrators have been trying to beat the coming Landmarks deadline in hope of avoiding one certain obstacle to carrying out their proposed addition by Gwathmey Siegel & Associates.

The new design, announced last October, is by no means the first move to increase the museum's space, though one must question the claim of the former deputy director, Henry Berg, who wrote that "there is nothing fixed or immutable about the monolithic structure." If that were so, why have the alterations to Wright's original been largely unsuccessful? In 1965, the Justin K. Thannhauser Collection of modern paintings was installed in the second-floor "bridge" (which originally contained the library) between the rotunda and the smaller monitor to its north; this dull and static gallery is the antithesis of Wright's vision for art display at the Guggenheim. Three years later, a four-story annex for art storage and conservation was built to the designs of William Wesley Peters of Taliesin Associated Architects (Wright's successor firm) on the small open remnant at the northeast corner of the tightly cramped site. In order to raise money for that epigonal addition, the institution sold the adjacent apartment building at 4 East 89th Street.

The most ill-considered and defacing alteration came in 1974, when the curving driveway beneath the "bridge" was glassed in. That void gave crucial negative emphasis to the sculptural and propulsive nature of Wright's bipolar arrangement of rotunda and monitor, and though it caused only a flurry of criticism at the time, that seemingly small modification wrought tremendous damage to Wright's composition. Easily the best addition to the Guggenheim has been Richard Meier's 1978 Aye Simon Reading Room, a small library tucked away in a protuberance off the rotunda ramp, left undesigned by Wright at the time of his death. Highly inventive yet carefully deferential, it is a fine example of one first-rate architect playing off another in contrapuntal harmony.

The same, however, cannot be said for the most extensive addition yet projected: the eleven-story, $9-million Gwathmey Siegel tower. The scheme, according to Charles Gwathmey, is "interpretive but respectful," with the dual intention of providing the client with as much new space as possible while remaining unmistakably distinct from the Wright building. The architects propose seven new stories atop the existing four-story annex, which will be remodeled and integrated into their design. Rather than adopting the Guggenheim's curving forms and neutral color, Gwathmey Siegel decided to do just the opposite. The strong orthogonal character of the tower, the terra cotta of the eastern wall behind it, and the pale green of the porcelain enamel tile panels were all chosen as deliberate departures from the Wrightian conception.

The design as it now stands is actually a revision of the first version released to the press last fall. (A preliminary proposal was prepared by the same firm in 1982 as part of their feasibility study.) The major change involved cantilevering the seven new stories out over the existing building to visually lift the new structure and thereby make

## SOUNDING BOARD

it seem to float above the old. Unfortunately, this effort to lighten the tower's bulk does not work, in part because the cantilever transfer girders line up with the top of the rotunda and the projection extends out as far as the center of that circular mass. If anything, the impression of a weighty imposition is only accentuated.

Questions of size aside, what is most objectionable about the Gwathmey Siegel scheme is the designers' fundamental shift from Wright's bipolar idea to their own tripartite arrangement. Theirs is no "background" structure, no matter what angle it is viewed from, and its construction would irreparably destroy one of the greatest formal masterstrokes of the architecture of this century. Frank Lloyd Wright was fond of claiming that in the event of a thermonuclear attack, the concrete coil of the Guggenheim would be compressed but would spring back up again; this new threat is one assault he never dreamed of.

The project would also involve a number of internal changes to the Wright building, including the transformation of the monitor into a circular gallery (with a new restaurant above), and links between the rotunda and the new building, most significantly at the very top of the spiral. (There the ramp now comes to an abrupt halt, but it was Wright's intention that visitors take the elevator to the top and work their way downward.) In addition to increased room for art preparation, staging, and storage, as well as a bookstore twice the size of the present one, the Guggenheim would gain 12,500 square feet of new exhibition area. It would also lose its soul.

It might be tempting to say that any high-rise addition to the Guggenheim is doomed to failure, were it not for the existence of a design by Wright, published in *Architectural Forum* in 1952, that shows an unexecuted studio-residence building on the approximate site of the 1968 annex. Certainly the gridded façade of the thin Wright slab, uncommonly recessive for him at that late stage of his career, would have provided a more appropriate backdrop for the Guggenheim than the party wall of the late Art Deco apartment building that stands there still. But it is inconceivable that Wright would have approved a tower that literally

The architect's model showing the entrance to the new tower on East 89th Street.

overshadows the circular forms on Fifth Avenue in the way that the Gwathmey Siegel proposal does. Regardless of the relative modesty of the museum's increase of space in contrast to those lately sought by its sister institutions, there is clearly too much here: it is ten pounds of architecture on a five-pound site.

The recent tendency in New York to build tall towers above or behind low-rise landmarks has reached alarming proportions since the ever-hideous Pan Am Building was completed in 1963, dwarfing the monumental Grand Central Terminal. The Helmsley Palace Hotel behind the Villard Houses, Park Avenue Plaza behind the Racquet & Tennis Club, and a proposal (lately and fortunately dropped) for an apartment building atop the New-York Historical Society threaten to give Manhattan the crushing scale of the behemoth city in Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis*.

Museums—which one used to think would know better—are not exempt from this trend. If they cannot branch out laterally (as has the Metropolitan), they move over and up (as has the Modern with its massive mid-block condo and the Whitney with its much-maligned design by Michael Graves). But such gambits are one thing when they concern a minor example of early modernism (the original MOMA) or a suddenly beloved example of New Brutalism (the Whitney), and quite another when they involve the incomparable Guggenheim.

All the clever design in the world, even if supported by Gwathmey Siegel's painstaking research into Wright's proportional system, cannot camouflage a direction that is conceptually wrong to begin with. The Solo-

DAN CORNISH/ESTO

mon R. Guggenheim Foundation's director, Thomas M. Messer, is the same man who approved the decision to sell 4 East 89th Street less than twenty years ago, very short foresight in the life of an institution. Had that property been retained, the museum's expansion problems could now be solved without resort to this drastic trashing of its most important work of art, the Wright building itself.

The impossibility of adding more gallery space to Wright's rotunda is a source of understandable frustration for the museum's staff. Like the Whitney's curators, they are unable to display more than a tiny fraction of their permanent collection (a capacity that would be more than doubled by the Gwathmey Siegel plan). And as at all other museums today, there is intense pressure to give priority to the changing exhibitions that stimulate higher attendance figures. But what price should the museum be willing to pay—or, should one say, exact from us—in the name of its expansion?

"The wrong building in the wrong place at the wrong time" is a phrase that has been bandied about quite a bit lately, but never more meaningfully than in the face of this very clear and present danger. If the Guggenheim cannot expand down either East 88th or East 89th Street adjacent to its property, let it consider a branch somewhere else in the neighborhood where loan shows could be held or its permanent collection housed. The apparent inability of even such skilled architects as Messrs. Gwathmey and Siegel to reconcile their client's wishes with Wright's original should be evidence enough that this is the kind of architectural problem-solving that ought not to have even been attempted.

It is odd that the Gwathmey Siegel proposal has thus far provoked nowhere near the professional and public fury that followed the presentation of Michael Graves's Whitney Museum addition plans five months earlier, especially since Wright's Guggenheim is a far greater work of architecture than Marcel Breuer's Whitney. There is no lack of resolve on the part of Wright experts, however. As Professor Edgar Kaufmann Jr., the preeminent Wright scholar, has put it, "Why can't the design be more thoughtfully related to what Wright was trying to do without being subservient?" And in a recent letter to House & Garden voicing his concern, Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, director of archives for the Frank Lloyd Wright Memorial Foundation at Taliesin West, wrote that "to watch such vandalism perpetrated . . . by Gwathmey Siegel is sickening to say the least; at least the Japanese had the mercy to tear down the Imperial Hotel before sticking up their multi-storied addition. Gwathmey and Siegel seem to be practicing no such mercy. The Frank Lloyd Wright building will really be destroyed, as indeed it has been over the past 25 years by constant unsympathetic—one might correctly say ignorant—changes and additions wrought on the building by its own occupants."

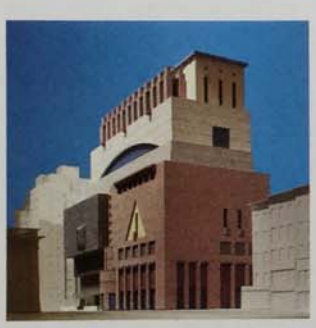
But the Guggenheim Museum is much more than a historic artifact worthy of the concern of specialists and preservationists. It is one of those rare works of art that seems literally to be alive, and a compellingly convincing demonstration of Wright's profound belief in an "organic" architecture. In an astounding exercise in institutional doublespeak wherein the exact opposite of what is planned is claimed, the president of the Guggenheim Foundation, Peter Lawson-Johnson, has averred that "We are delighted with this simple, elegant design which is sympathetic to the Frank Lloyd Wright masterpiece. . . . The public will finally gain total access to the original structure and be able to enjoy the full breadth and sweep of Frank Lloyd Wright's vision."

The full breadth and sweep of Wright's vision—diminished though it has already been—can be much better appreciated now than it could possibly be if this act of cultural cannibalism were perpetrated. Even the recent campaign to protect New York's St. Bartholomew's Church pales to insignificance next to this civic outrage. It is safe to predict that the way in which this generation will be regarded by its architectural heirs hangs on the outcome of this misguided and unconscionable scheme. □

# THE SUM OF ITS ARTS

## Graves tops Breuer with an ingenious addition to New York's Whitney Museum

BY MARTIN FILLER
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ED CORNISH



One of the greatest challenges facing the high-style architect is how to devise a distinguished addition to a building by an eminent predecessor. The current interest in contextualism is intensified when an existing work by a well-known architect is involved. Although the recessive approach can sometimes be taken to ridiculous extremes, most people would agree that the introduction of new buildings in crowded city settings must be done with greater care than the recent past has shown. The cause-and-effect relationship between the profit imperative and urban density has led to some monstrous impositions on our civic landscape, but only lately have our great cultural institutions begun to feel the lure of commercial gain that has long spurred real-estate developers. The staggering increase of public interest in the arts, coupled with the burgeoning of what can only be termed the museum industry, has resulted in a wide range of architectural responses, from the construction of money-making condos to the conversion of warehouses.

The Whitney Museum of American Art, one of the most spirited presences on the contemporary scene, is faced with a set of problems shared by other museums in this country: insufficient room for both the display of its permanent collection and the changing exhibitions necessary to attract attendance; the desire to increase its educational programs for a public hungry to learn about art; and the need for more office and service spaces to support the growth that almost every American collection (save the Frick and the Freer) sees as desirable, if not inevitable.

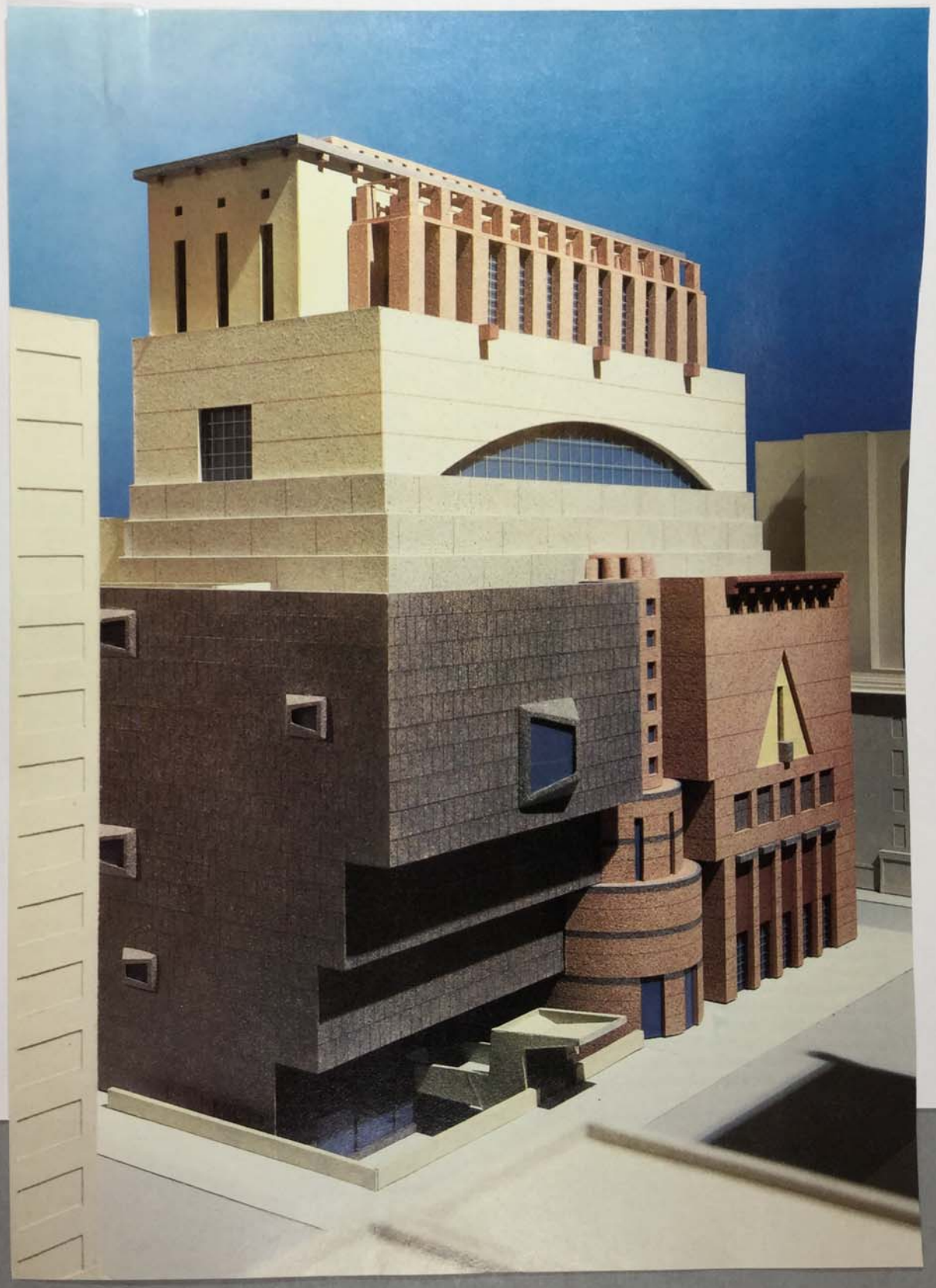
The dark gray granite mass of Marcel Breuer's 1966 building for the Whitney Museum, *opposite*, will be balanced by the pink granite base of Michael Graves's addition, *above*, the upper stories of which will span both structures on Madison Avenue.

What makes the Whitney's case unique is its existing home, the cantilevered gray granite monolith that has loomed over the corner of 75th Street and Madison Avenue since 1966. Marcel Breuer's assertive design has had few vocal supporters over the past two decades, but lately it has come to be more widely admired for its undeniable strength and integrity. Unfashionable though it may appear in the dawn of the Post Modern Age, the Whitney's Brutalist building has at last attained a kind of period fascination.

It would be hard to name a contemporary architect whose aesthetic is more opposed to Breuer's than Michael Graves. His selection in the fall of 1981 as architect for the museum's expansion was greeted with surprise that turned to deep concern when word leaked out that he intended to build not only next to the Breuer structure, as had been announced, but also on top of it. The juxtaposition of Graves's polychrome palette and his taste for historicizing detail seemed certain to fatally diminish the original building. Thus the unveiling of his scheme in May turned out to be one of the pleasantest architectural surprises of the year.

This is Graves's best design yet. A large work with neither the coarseness of his Portland Building nor the finickiness of his Humana Headquarters, it captures much of the liveliness and variety that have marked his most successful small-scale projects. The architect has not tried to obliterate Breuer's given; deftly and respectfully, he simultaneously sets it off and incorporates it into the larger whole. On the southern half of the block-long site along Madison Avenue between 74th and 75th Streets, Graves proposes a cubic base wing approximate to the Breuer building in size and volume. Its pink granite cladding assures the legibility of the old structure as a separate entity, a more sensitive choice than trying to co-opt it by matching the stone. The distinctive trapezoidal window above the canopied entrance to the 1966 wing will be playfully echoed by a triangular, translucent alabaster window reminiscent of those by Arata Isozaki at his Tsukuba Civic Center in Japan.

Joining old and new will be a stepped, cylindrical "hinge," a telescoped, pink granite column banded in gray, emphasizing the symmetrical nature of the composition and rising only a bit higher than the level roof lines of the Breuer building and Graves's base structure. Surmounting both will be a triple-tiered frieze *(Text continued on page 169)*



**Abraham W Geller & Associates** /Architects 24 West 25th Street New York New York 10010 Telephone: 212 807 0202

Ms. Julie Gray
New Yorker Magazine
25 West 43rd Street
New York, New York

February 5, 1986

Dear Ms. Gray:

I thought you should have a copy of my talk and I am therefore enclosing it for your file.

Very truly yours,

Abraham W. Geller, FAIA

AWG:ra
Enc.

Remarks by Abraham W. Geller, the 1985 recipient of the Medal of Honor, granted by the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects at the annual meeting of the chapter on June 20th (6 PM) at the Bridgemarket Vaults under the Queensborough Bridge at 59th Street near Second Avenue, in Manhattan.

---

When Terry Williams called me to tell me that I was to be this year's medal of honor winner, I had conflicting emotions. I was, at first, moved, then overwhelmed, unprepared and finally, thinking of the noted architects who have preceded me, very deeply honored.

I am sure that each of you knows someone who is as deserving as I to be thus honored but I must resign myself to the judgement of the Awards Committee and modestly agree that they made a reasonably good choice.

But one thing I have learned throughout the years is that you cannot go it alone. Without my wife, Marion, and her wit, intelligence, loyalty and help throughout the years, I would never have reached this rostrum to say nothing of having an office at all. Associations with dedicated, involved team members who contribute their talents is, of course, the base for all worthwhile architectural solutions. The pursuit of excellence is, it seems to me, a singular obsession with most architects. They are daily combatting the negative forces of meager budgets, unrealistic deadlines, fatiguing delays and sorry remuneration -- but, on the positive side, striving to achieve some architectural worth, are you and I and the AIA. I know from my long years of experience that the uncertainties of our profession make, by comparison, a life of horse-betting an assured way of earning a living.

Now, with your indulgence, I must bring a note of sadness to this festive occasion. Even while acknowledging that I may not be the best prepared advocate for my point of view and that this may not be the proper forum, I am compelled to mention the proposed additions to the Whitney Museum.

The New York Times reported on the proposed scheme about a month ago and included a critical appraisal by Paul Goldberger which was, at least on alternative lines, an accolade. Another, more recent review appeared yesterday in the Village Voice, written by Michael Sorkin, is more to my thinking.

I have, I realize, been more likely than not to accept the opinions of noted critics and the observations of noted architects, believing that they were accountable and reliable. After all, Goldberger has been given a Pulitzer prize for his writings and Michael Graves has been often honored.

This seemed to me reasonable until the more recent past when, with greater reflection, I realized that what I was reading was not true. I also learned that I was not alone; that many of my friends were similarly disenchanted. There seems to be some force at work which makes the leading observers in our field myopic at times.

This myopia of brilliant minds has never been more apparent than in the proposals for the Whitney additions. First there was the choice of an architect whose stated philosophy is the antithesis of the philosophy of the museum's first architect, Marcel Breuer.

The Whitney states that it has the foremost collection of modern American art in the world today. One is prompted to ask, then, how it justifies a building addition which features applied classical forms? Why is the Whitney backing away from its original concept of what a museum should look like? Surely, it is not because of a lack of praise. These are some of the quotes -- and there were many more -- which appeared at the time of the museum's opening:

New York Times editorial: "The museum itself may prove to be the most important, if not the most beautiful, new work of American art of 1966."

John Canaday, again in the New York Times: "...and the pleasure it gives is increased by a pleasure in being able to congratulate the Whitney not only on the show but on the showplace."

Emily Genauer in the New York World Journal Tribune: "...the Breuer building looks positively romantic, a great hunk of abstract sculpture in which can be found small but subtle variations in surface, tone, texture, material."

Life Magazine: "When the Whitney Museum of American Art opened its new Manhattan home last week, the most impressive work on display was not any piece in the famous collection but the building that housed it."

Now, how has the building fared at the hands of those who are proposing the expansion? To put it succinctly, the Breuer building is being literally crushed. It is being subjugated to an assemblage of many diverse and unrelated blocks.

James Marston Fitch, editor, author and writer for many years on architectural matters, writes: "Breuer's design for the Whitney Museum was a model of rationality. Its formal properties derive from the severe restraints which he imposed upon himself and which, in large measure, explains the stylistic durability of this 19-year old design." He concludes with: "....surely a less assertive, more discreet design is called for in the manipulation of what has already become a landmarked monument on the New York steeetscape."

Peter Blake, former editor of the Architectural Forum and presently head of the School of Architecture at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. has written to the New York Times, a letter which has still to appear in their letter column. "To me -- and I would guess, to many others -- Breuer's building seems extraordinarily elegant, a fine museum, a delightful place to visit, and a great asset to Madison Avenue. Moreover, far from being "nearly impossible to add to," it is extremely easy to expand, and was clearly intended to be expanded in a logical and harmonious fashion. Any architect of modesty would find it so. The original Whitney, incidentally, now almost twenty years old, has aged beautifully -- unlike some post-modern stage sets built in recent years that seem to start cracking and crumbling the day after the ribbon is cut."

I have spent some time reviewing the proposed plans at the Landmarks Preservation Commission offices and the judgements of Fitch and Blake are reinforced by what I observed there. My plea is -- give the Breuer building air to breathe and exist -- both on the side and on the top. Don't smother it.

An equally important concern to whether Whitney can be saved is the continuous, one-sided reportage in the most respected press in this country. Some of the most important structures in our city and the philosophies of some of our greatest modern architects and humanists, like Breuer, are not only being ignored but denigrated.

Let us hope that the editors of leading papers will see the light and give us a forum for a fairer representation of the current architectural scene. It is time to reveal that some experts are not so much experts as exponents, bringing to mind an old quotation: "An expert is one who avoids the small errors as he sweeps on to the grand fallacy."

Let me tell you it has been difficult for me, a quiet man, to speak as I have, so let me end in a less combative tone. In a past issue of the magazine, "Skyline", I came across the words of Leon Krier, classicist and anti-modernist architect: "...those architects who design modern buildings will suffer in hell." When I look at the distinguished modern architects who have previously received this honor, I would be happy to join their stimulating company in the lower world.

Thank you once more for the medal, the honor and the microphone.