

The Museum of Modern Art

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LIGHT CONSTRUCTION

September 21, 1995 - January 2, 1996

A new architecture of transparency and translucency exemplified by the recent work of thirty international architects and artists is explored in an exhibition opening at The Museum of Modern Art on September 21, 1995. Organized by Terence Riley, Chief Curator, Department of Architecture and Design, **LIGHT CONSTRUCTION** features more than thirty projects from ten countries, representing a broad range of building types, scales, and technologies. In this architecture of lightness, buildings seem intangible, structures shed their weight, and facades appear unstable and ambiguous. While much of the work recalls the visionary projects of such early Modernists as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Pierre Chareau, it is also profoundly influenced by such aspects of contemporary culture as computers and electronic media.

On view through January 2, 1996, this exhibition is made possible by generous grants from Lily Auchincloss and Mrs. Arnold L. van Ameringen. Additional support has been provided by the Contemporary Exhibition Fund of The Museum of Modern Art, established with gifts from Lily Auchincloss, Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro, and Mr. and Mrs. Ronald S. Lauder.

"In recent years a new architectural sensibility has emerged," states Mr. Riley. "After three decades of architectural debate on issues of form,

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contemporary designers are now investigating the nature and potential of surfaces and the meanings that may be found in them." Many of the structures in the exhibition are sheathed in semitransparent glass or other translucent materials, such as plastic, metal mesh, or thin alabaster, whose physical properties allow some visual penetration but, unlike plate glass, possess myriad aesthetic properties of their own.

LIGHT CONSTRUCTION consists of thirty-four large-scale photographs, fourteen models, and six backlit transparencies that investigate both the projects' theoretical bases and their material qualities. Principally comprising built works, such as the Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art by Jean Nouvel (Paris, 1994), the Goetz Collection by Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron (Munich, 1992), and the Shimosuwa Municipal Museum by Toyo Ito (Shimosuwa, Japan, 1993), the exhibition also features projects that go beyond the traditional definitions of architecture. Projects include *Radcliffe Ice Walls*, a landscape installation by Michael Van Valkenburgh (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1988); *Two-Way Mirror Cylinder inside Cube*, an urban park pavilion for a New York rooftop by Dan Graham (1988); and theatrical set designs by Tod Williams and Billie Tsien (Amsterdam and New York, 1990-91). Dennis Adams' *Bus Shelter IV* (1987), originally constructed in Münster, Germany, is installed in the galleries.

In many of these works the facade acts as a veil, distancing the viewer of the building from the space or forms within. The heavily screened facades in Kazuyo Sejima's Saishunkan Seiyako Women's Dormitory (Kumamoto, Japan, 1991) provide few hints of the open interior spaces and the light filtering through the facades and descending from above. The open facades of Fumihiko

Maki's project for a new Congress Center in Salzburg (1992) reveal the internal spaces as nesting inside one another, removed from the viewer's grasp.

The use of transparent materials in these structures indicates an attitude that is distinctly different from classic Modernist projects of the past; these works achieve extreme visual complexity through multiple surface reflections. The Goetz Collection, for example, whose supporting structure is enclosed within its frosted double-glass facade, appears ghostlike, a complete reversal of the so-called Miesian glass box. In the Cartier Foundation, three parallel glass surfaces create an overlapping buildup of views and reflections.

By focusing attention on the surfaces, many of these works diminish the importance of overall form. The sheer scale of Renzo Piano's mile-long Kansai International Airport (Osaka, Japan, 1994) prevents the viewer from even grasping it in total; its silvery, undulating skin is more critical to its design than its formal composition. Similarly, Nicholas Grimshaw and Partners' Waterloo International Terminal (London, 1994) resembles a sinuously curving snake with crystalline scales that move when the high-speed Chunnel trains brake to a halt.

The pervasive presence of film, television, video, and computer screens, representing a unique sensibility of light, movement, and information, has found its way into current architecture. In Herzog and de Meuron's Olivetti Bank project (1993), which is represented in the exhibition by a model, the building's facade literally becomes a screen for the projection of financial quotations. Among built projects, Bernard Tschumi's Glass Video Gallery

(Groningen, the Netherlands, 1990) and Mehrdad Yazdani's CineMania Theatre (Universal City, California, 1994) demonstrate the ability of architecture to both incorporate and be transformed by the flickering image of the electronic media.

In addition to being technologically advanced, this architecture of lightness is visually compelling. "This recent architecture can be described as beautiful -- a word infrequently heard in architectural debates," writes Mr. Riley in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition.

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PUBLICATION

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

List of Projects

ABN-AMRO Head Office Building (project; 1992)	Harry C. Wolf
ACOM Office Building (1993)	Ben van Berkel
Bus Shelter IV (installation; 1987)	Dennis Adams
Business Promotion Center (1993)	Norman Foster
Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art (1994)	Jean Nouvel
CineMania Theatre (1993)	Mehrdad Yazdani
Congress Center (project; 1992)	Fumihiko Maki
Definitions Fitness Center 2 (1993)	Thanhäuser and Esterson
Floor Plan (installation; 1991)	Melissa Gould
Ghost House (1985)	Philip Johnson
Glass Video Gallery (1990)	Bernard Tschumi
Goetz Collection (1992)	Herzog and de Meuron
Helsinki Museum of Contemporary Art (project; 1993)	Steven Holl
ITM Building (1993)	Toyo Ito
Kansai International Airport (1994)	Renzo Piano
Kirchner Museum Davos (1992)	Gigon and Guyer
Kunsthaus Bregenz (project; 1991)	Peter Zumthor
Kyle Residence (project; 1991)	Joel Sanders
Leisure Studio (1992)	Group
Municipal Gymnasium (1991)	Abalos and Herreros
Museum of Modern Art (project; 1990)	Ortner and Ortner
Olivetti Bank Project (1993)	Herzog and de Meuron
Phoenix Art Museum Sculpture Pavilion (1990)	Tod Williams and Billie Tsien
Radcliffe Ice Walls (installation; 1988)	Michael Van Valkenburgh
Saishunkan Seiyaku Women's Dormitory (1991)	Kazuyo Sejima
D. E. Shaw and Company Offices (1991)	Steven Holl
Shimosuwa Municipal Museum (1993)	Toyo Ito
Signal Box auf dem Wolf (1994)	Herzog and de Meuron
Tower of the Winds (1986)	Toyo Ito
Two Patio Villas (1991)	Rem Koolhaas
Two-Way Mirror Cylinder inside Cube (1991)	Dan Graham
Waterloo International Terminal (1993)	Nicholas Grimshaw
Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum (1993)	Frank O. Gehry
The World Upside Down (stage set; 1990-91)	Tod Williams and Billie Tsien