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## The Museum of Modern Art

### DRAWINGS AND MODELS BY ARCHITECT LOUIS I. KAHN EVOKE THE POWER OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE

*Kahn's Modern Monuments*  
March 16-August 22, 2000  
Ground Floor

In his search for meaningful buildings symbolic of the human desire for assembly and communication, Louis I. Kahn forged a modern architecture that resonated with universal values. *Kahn's Modern Monuments* presents eighteen drawings and three models by architect Louis I. Kahn (American, 1901-74) for some of his most important and monumental projects of the 1950s and 1960s. Kahn's sober exploration of the meaning, symbolism, and form of civic, religious, and cultural institutions is seen through the works in this exhibition, which is organized by Peter Reed, Curator, Department of Architecture and Design. *Kahn's Modern Monuments* is part of *Making Choices*, which is the second cycle of MoMA2000 and which focuses on the period 1920 through 1960.

Louis I. Kahn was a humanist and an idealist who realized the innate capability of buildings to affect human interaction positively. Through the use of abstract geometry and references to ancient monumental architecture, Kahn's buildings evoke an archaic, awe-inspiring past and project the impact Kahn believed architecture could have. The works in this exhibition reveal the formal language Kahn developed to address the fundamental issues of communication, inspiration, and transcendence. In the creation of this new vocabulary, Kahn revitalized modern architecture by synthesizing modernism's functional and structural purity with forms and values abstracted from the past.

In contrast to modernist notions of spatial continuity, transparency, and structure of minimal means, Kahn favors concentric plans with layered enclosure of massive walls and openings, differentiated spaces clearly defined by structure and use, and the juxtaposition of geometric forms. He consistently bases his compositions on a centralized enclosed space surrounded by secondary spaces. He creates a cloistered, contemplative atmosphere within the walls. Kahn's preference for the enclosed core is pervasive in his work, appearing at various scales--in rooms, buildings, and cities.

The plans for the unbuilt Philadelphia Civic Center consists of a central "forum" of municipal buildings surrounded by a ring of parking towers. As a group, the parking towers guard the city's institutions like the towers surrounding a medieval fortress, and serve to insulate the life of the city from the onslaught of cars. Kahn maintained that only by concentrating buildings and activities in the center could the city inspire powerful feelings and produce valuable activity. In the Mikveh Israel Synagogue, an unbuilt project planned for Philadelphia, the sanctuary is surrounded by cylindrical towers that serve to "fortify" the synagogue and shelter the spiritual world within. The towers are both a place for solitary reflection and a place from which to observe the sanctuary and the congregation.

The National Assembly Building in Dhaka, Bangladesh, surrounded by a man-made lake and raised on a plinth, stands in the center of the capital complex. By its size and location, the nation's most important and symbolic secular building dominates the site. It is a complex centralized core: the assembly chamber in the center is surrounded by an interior walkway that in turn is surrounded by eight distinct building elements, including a Prayer Hall at one end. The large openings in the outer walls--triangles, rectangles, circles--provide a formal unity and are intended to function as a massive screen sheltering the inner building from sun and rain. Similarly, the circular ring of dormers channels air and light to spaces below.

#### **SPONSORSHIP**

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