194×

In 1943, *Architectural Forum* and *Fortune* magazines teamed up to commission and publish a series of predictions for postwar America. *Architectural Forum* asked twenty-three prominent architects, including Charles Eames, Louis Kahn, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, to design components for the future of an ideal midsize American city, a "hypothetical town of 70,000" modeled on the urban fabric and local economy of Syracuse, New York. "Individual buildings," the brief explains, "must take into account the increasingly important factors of community development. A single building, designed to meet a progressive and farsighted program, can become a potent force towards better overall planning." Though imagined by different designers, each element—post office, library, bank, office building, city hall, hotel, restaurant, or museum—was intended to relate strategically with the others, part of a larger city plan that prioritizes infrastructural upgrades, park areas, and centralized pedestrian walkways, among other elements, for long-term urban improvement. The designs—published in the May 1943 issue of *Architectural Forum* as "New Buildings for 194X"—helped redefine urban community life and the relationship between architecture and urban planning, optimistically projecting a postwar period of growth and prosperity that would begin as soon as hostilities ended.

MUSEUM FOR A SMALL CITY

Describing his Museum for a Small City, in 1943 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe wrote, "The first problem is to establish the museum as a center for the enjoyment, not the interment of art. In this project the barrier between the artwork and the living community is erased by a garden approach for the display of sculpture. . . . The architectural space, thus conceived, becomes a defining rather than confining space." This novel museum concept had its origins in a thesis project produced by Illinois Institute of Technology student George Danforth under Mies's tutelage. It calls for a flexible, open space derived from the architect's earlier interest in continuous floor and roof planes leading to an open horizon. In this scheme, Mies believed, a painting like Pablo Picasso's 1937 mural-sized canvas *Guernica* (depicting the bombing of the town of Guernica by Nationalist forces during the Spanish Civil War) could be shown to its "greatest advantage" and transformed into part of the architectural space as a freestanding plane or divider wall. In 1942, with Franco's victory in Spain, the safekeeping of *Guernica* was entrusted to MoMA, where the work had been exhibited in 1939. It remained in the Museum's care until 1981.

MIES + URBANISM

German architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe engaged in debates about the shape of the modern European metropolis (particularly Berlin) beginning in the 1920s, but it was not until after his emigration to the United States in 1938 that he was able to realize buildings that were integral parts of urban design schemes. With architect Ludwig Hilberseimer (also a former Bauhaus instructor), Mies transformed the school of architecture at the Armour Institute of Technology, Chicago (renamed the Illinois Institute of Technology shortly after his arrival), into a center for thought about the relationship between individual buildings and urban form, using the design for a new campus as the first laboratory. In this project for Chicago, and later in New York, Newark, Detroit, and Baltimore, Mies conceived of the modern city as a landscape. "There are no cities, in fact, anymore," he said. "It goes on like a forest. That is the reason why we cannot have the old cities any more; that is gone forever, planned city and so on. We should think about the means that we have to live in a jungle, and maybe we do well by that."

MIES + IIT

In 1938 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe left Germany to become head of the architecture school at the Armour Institute of Technology, Chicago (renamed the Illinois Institute of Technology shortly after his arrival). He had been recruited for his considerable prominence as an architect and his role as the final director of the experimental Bauhaus school of art and design (from 1930 to 1933), where he had defined an influential approach to design pedagogy. Perhaps the most important aspect of the new position for Mies was the potential to build, as master planner, the institute's new campus—an unprecedented opportunity to design an assemblage of structures in an urban center. Between 1939 and 1941 he undertook preliminary studies for a 120-acre campus on Chicago's Near South Side, built over neighborhoods, mostly African American, that had been razed and cleared as part of federally funded urban renewal initiatives. In Germany Mies had been dedicated to building houses and projecting theoretical projects for skyscrapers; in Chicago he developed an architectural language that honored American steel technology and offered a new way of integrating a variety of scales and landscapes with the American city's urban grid.

UNITED NATIONS + URBAN RENEWAL

The permanent home for the newly formed United Nations was the most symbolically charged building project of the immediate postwar period. The organization's goal was to supplant national traditions and prejudices with a universal, progressive design; it was determined not to repeat the political and symbolic mistakes of its predecessor, the League of Nations, which had resulted in a compromised and out-of-date building program in Geneva.

After a national site search that considered Flushing Meadows in Queens, New York (the location of the 1939–40 World's Fair), and Philadelphia, John D. Rockefeller Jr. purchased a seventeen-acre site on the east side of Manhattan—a riverfront parcel then lined with slaughterhouses, industry, and a power plant—and donated it to the United Nations. (The previous owner, William Zeckendorf, had intended to develop the site into "X-City," a microcity to be masterminded by Wallace Harrison, a principle architect of Rockefeller Center, but he was hindered by insufficient funding.)

In February 1947, an international group of architects, overseen by Harrison, gathered in New York. In roughly four months, this Board of Design developed a proposal for a modern headquarters on the cleared site. The two central components of the proposal are an office building and an assembly hall, drawn largely from contributions by Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer and Swiss-born French architect Le Corbusier. The United Nations campus is one of the earliest examples of modernist site planning in New York.

LOUIS KAHN + PHILADELPHIA

“What spaces, what activities, what buildings form the creative center of human communication?” This probing philosophical question, posed in 1955 by Louis Kahn, underlies the buildings and projects for which the architect is best known, including his work on Philadelphia’s downtown. Kahn had very few building projects in the 1950s, but he was at the forefront of Philadelphia’s immense urban redevelopment initiative. His numerous studies, many made without a commission, focus on the historic Center City district at the heart of William Penn’s famed 1682 grid plan, one of the earliest American town plans.

Kahn believed that a centralization of buildings and activities, supported by a clear ordering of streets and traffic, was key to preserving a meaningful civic life. These visionary drawings are significant not as blueprints for Philadelphia’s redevelopment—in fact, Kahn and the city’s principle urbanist, Edmund Bacon, often diverged—but because they suggest a fervent reconsideration of typical urban planning and the pursuit of a utopian, experimental modern city. Kahn’s traffic analysis was published in 1968 in the influential *Team 10 Primer*.

BRIDGE CITY

In the 1960s a young generation of architects, many inspired by the structural experiments of iconoclastic engineer R. Buckminster Fuller, launched a critique of the reigning corporate, modernist consensus in American architecture, embracing the avant-garde verve of the 1920s. They attempted to integrate architecture and urbanism with megastructures, designing large flexible frame-works that could accommodate multiple functions and be adapted as needed to reintegrate the functional zones of the city.

Many of these architects were championed in MoMA's exhibition *Visionary Architecture*, organized by Arthur Drexler in 1960, including the little-known architect James Fitzgibbon, whose installation from the show is recreated here. (One of Fuller's business partners and the head of his research foundation in Raleigh, North Carolina, Fitzgibbon collaborated with the famous futurist on many levels.) For Fitzgibbon and the other architects, the megastructure represented a new vision of modernity, unhindered by the social and technical constraints of the past. Like the pioneers of modern architecture of the early twentieth century, their aim was to bring about a utopian transformation of the built environment at an unprecedented scale and speed and to conquer and exploit new territory in the city, including, for example, the unclaimed space above its rivers.

THE NEW CITY

The Department of Architecture produced a series of exhibitions on housing in the mid-1930s, but it was not until after World War II that curators began to mount exhibitions with decidedly urban themes. This shift was influenced by the prevalent focus on urban renewal in postwar architecture—seen, for example, in the work of Louis Kahn—and by the utopian urban visions of 1960s avant-garde architects, who heralded architecture's capacity to shape the social and cultural life of cities.

Under the directorship of Arthur Drexler, the department worked with city agencies and other think tanks to research the architecture and planning of American cities. One notable product was *The New City: Architecture and Urban Renewal*, a 1967 exhibition for which Drexler asked four teams of architects to develop proposals that could relieve the overcrowding and congestion that plagued New York City. Reimagining four large sites, teams drawn from Cornell, Columbia, and Princeton universities and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology were headed by figures soon to be prominent in the architecture and urban planning of the 1970s. Their proposals, under the headings Modification of Existing Grid Plan, Housing without Relocation, Waterfront Renewal, and New Land, deployed small-scale and megastructural interventions that integrated solutions for pressing social problems.

LEON KRIER + POSTMODERN URBANISM

Leon Krier, who worked for British architect James Stirling before opening his own practice in 1974, has rejected modernism and contemporary technology in favor of the classical traditions of Western architecture, calling America's export of modern urban planning methods "a global ecological disaster." "Worldwide adaptation of the American 'downtown,' 'sub-urb' and 'strip' model have not only laid waste the cities and landscapes of her friends and foes alike," he has said, "but meant for American urban culture a historic tragedy of unprecedented dimension and gravity." His 1985 scheme to complete Pierre Charles L'Enfant's 1791 plan for Washington, D.C., calls for reviving an unrealized component of L'Enfant's original vision: flooding much of the Mall in the capital's core and adding canals like those of Venice.

In 1985 MoMA curator Arthur Drexler exhibited Krier's unbuilt designs (in the show *Ricardo Bofill and Leon Krier: Architecture, Urbanism and History*) precisely because they challenged what modern architecture had espoused and symbolized: Krier "has virtually invented his own vernacular," Drexler wrote. His work in the 1970s and 1980s laid the foundation for so-called New Urbanism in the United States, a movement to reclaim the civic pedestrian townscape from an increasingly automotive urban society, and for the new town of Poundbury in England.

9/11

In the wake of the collapse of the World Trade Center's twin towers on September 11, 2001, New York City was faced with an opportunity to reconsider not only the World Trade Center but also the planning of Manhattan's historic downtown and waterfront. In 2002, after rejecting six unpopular plans for the site, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation issued an open call for designs. Out of over four hundred submissions, the jury selected seven finalists—Studio Daniel Libeskind; United Architects, guided by Greg Lynn, Jesse Reiser, and Ben van Berkel; THINK (Frederic Schwartz and Rafael Viñoly); a team composed of Peter Eisenman, Charles Gwathmey, Steven Holl, and Richard Meier; Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM); and Barbara Littenberg and Steven Peterson—each of which was given eight weeks and a stipend to prepare a more developed proposal. The objects on view here are primarily by these finalists but also by other participants, including a model of one of the nonfinalist schemes (by Morphosis) and an early adaptation of Studio Daniel Libeskind's winning proposal by SOM and Guy Nordenson. A decade later the area is one of the largest construction sites in the city.