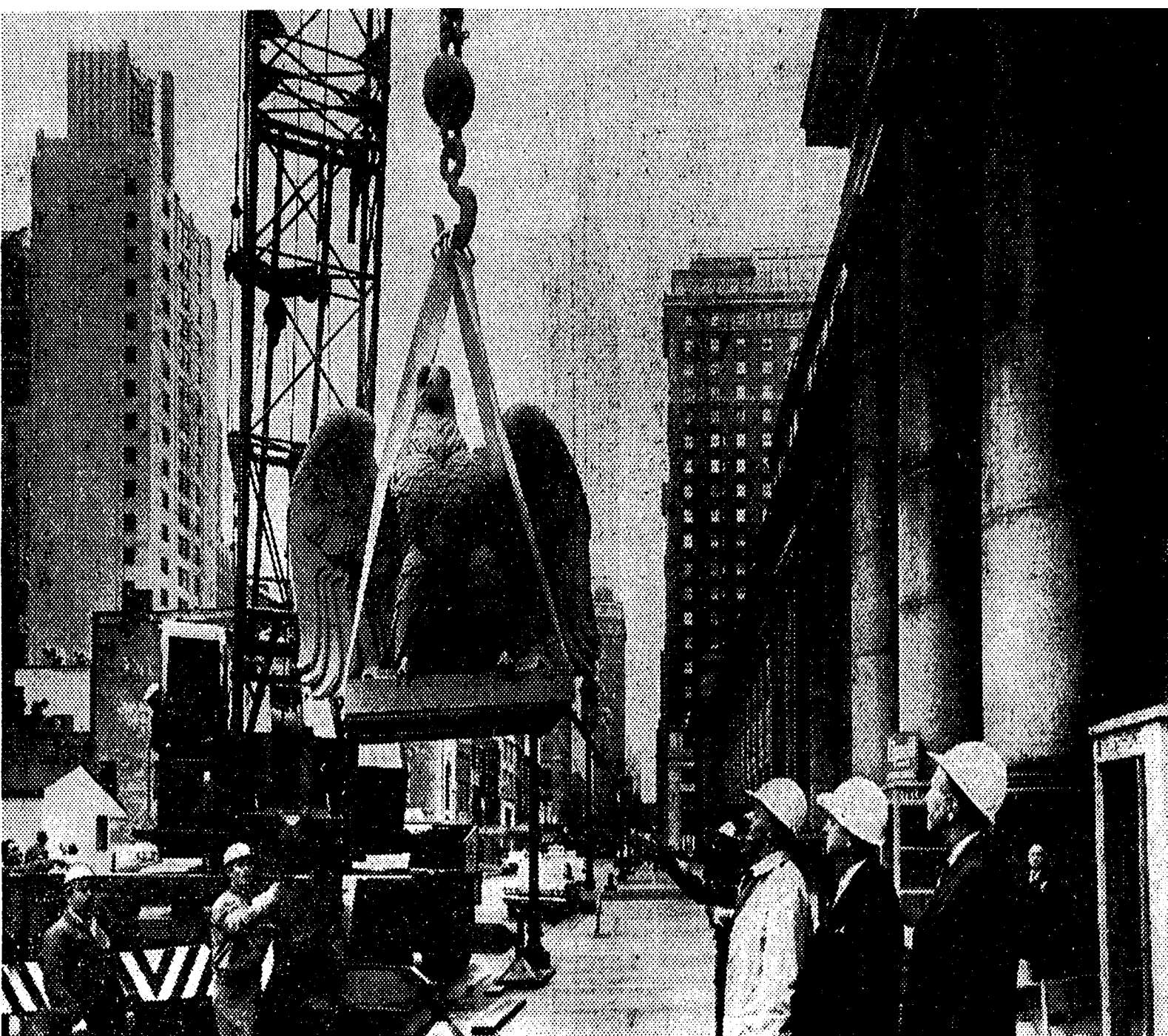


# Demolition Starts At Penn Station; Architects Picket: Penn Station ...

By MARTIN TOLCHIN

*New York Times (1923-Current file)*; Oct 29, 1963; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times

pg. 1



The New York Times

**BEGINNING OF THE END OF A LANDMARK:** The lowering of this stone eagle marked start of transformation of Pennsylvania Station yesterday morning. Observ-

ers, from left: J. Benton Jones of Pennsylvania Railroad, Irving Mitchell Felt of Madison Square Garden Corp., and Thomas M. Goodfellow of the Long Island Rail Road.

## *Demolition Starts At Penn Station; Architects Picket*

By MARTIN TOLCHIN

Pennsylvania Station, a grimy monument to an 'age of expansive elegance, suffered the fate of an anachronism yesterday.

A demolition crew began a two-stage operation that will eventually convert the architectural landmark into a futuristic sports palace and a 33-story skyscraper.

A building that sometimes made a ceremony out of a journey, the station reached the end of the line, architecturally, at 9 A.M. Electric jackhammers tore at the granite slabs of the side of the terminal near the 33d Street entrance, crushing the hopes of a band of architects who had rallied to save what the Municipal Art Society called "one of the great monuments of classical America."

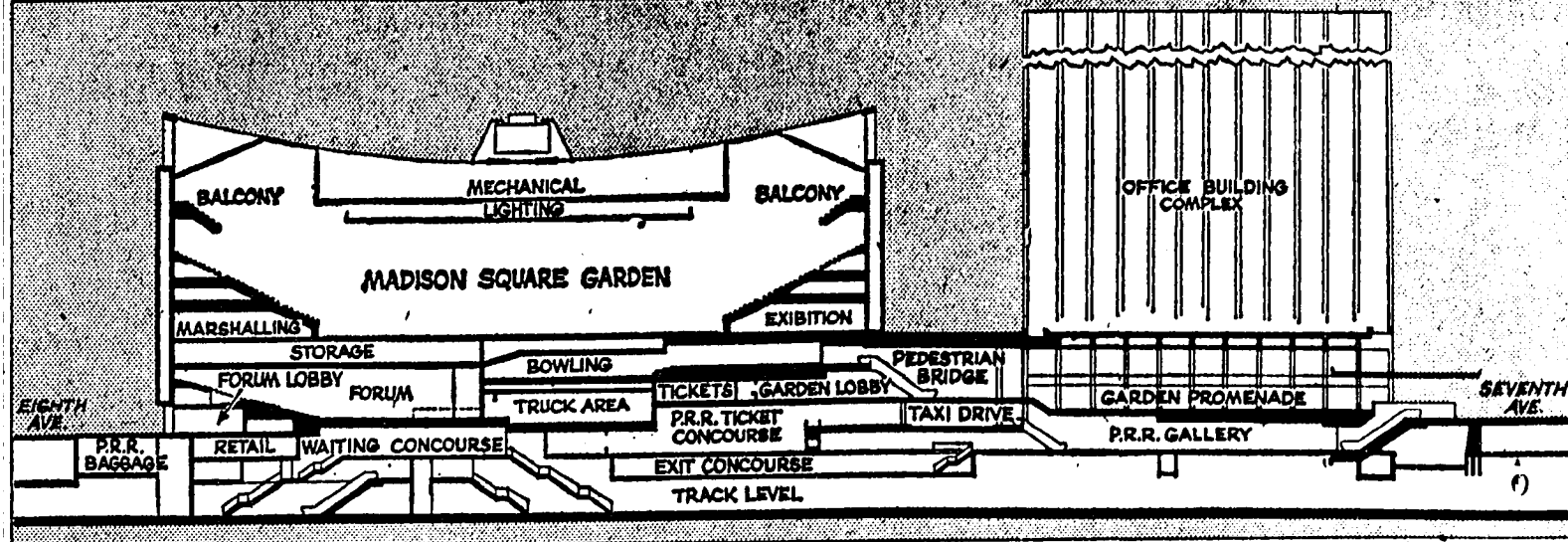
The jagged interiors of the granite slabs had a clean, pinkish hue that contrasted sharply with the building's sooty exterior.

"Just another job," said John Rezin, the crew's foreman.

"This is a sad day for us," said Norman Jaffe, an architect who is a member of the Action Group for Better Architecture in New York, which picketed the station a year ago to protest its demolition.

"We regard Pennsylvania Sta-

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The New York Times Oct. 29, 1963  
**X-RAY VIEW:** How facilities of Garden-Penn Station complex will be set up as it might be seen from south side

# Penn Station Demolition Begun; 6 Architects Call Act a 'Shame'

Continued From Page 1, Col. 5

tion as an excellent example of an architectural style—the eclectic American style of the early 20th century,” Mr. Jaffe said. “It’s an index to an era of America that was great and noble.”

There were no pickets yesterday when ceremonies began in a light drizzle shortly after 10:30. But late in the afternoon, Mr. Jaffe and five other architects picketed while wearing black armbands and carrying signs that said “Shame.”

At the ceremony, a giant crane slowly lowered the first of six 5,700-pound stone eagles that have been perched on a ledge above the entrance since 1910, when the station was opened. Business leaders flanked the bird, posing for photographers.

The eagles will be moved temporarily to a parking lot on 31st Street.

## Top Officials on Hand

Top officials present were Irving M. Felt, chairman and president of Madison Square Garden Corporation; J. Benton Jones, vice president of the Pennsylvania Railroad; Thomas M. Goodfellow, president of the Long Island Rail Road, and officials of the Turner Construction Company, the Tishman Realty and Construction Company, the Lipsett Division of Luria Brothers, and Charles Luckman Associates, which designed the new sports center.

The future of the station’s 84 Doric columns is in doubt. Park Commissioner Newbold Morris has endorsed a plan to move 18 columns to the Battery, where they would form a colonade. The move awaits support.

Construction of the \$70 million Madison Square Garden Sports Center, is expected to take three years. During construction the station’s 550 daily trains will continue to carry 200,000 passengers to and from the city. However, J. Benton

Jones, vice president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, warned:

“In a project so enormous and complex, there are bound to be some unavoidable inconveniences.”

The present station, which was modeled after a Roman bathhouse and a Greek temple, has proved unequal to present-day passenger traffic, according to Harry J. McNally, chief engineer of New York improvements for the Pennsylvania Railroad.

## Passengers Come First

“The outside is the only thing of artistic value as far as I’m concerned,” he said. “The handling of 200,000 passengers is much more important to me.”

Morris Lipsett, president of the concern that is preparing the site for the new center, said:

“If anybody seriously considered it art, they would have put up some money to save it. You always have half a dozen societies around trying to preserve everything. In some areas the land is just too valuable to save anything that doesn’t fully utilize it.”

However, Ralph Stephenson, counterman in the station’s Saverin restaurant, commented:

“This city’s got the right name—New York. Nothing ever gets old around here.”

At no time during construction will the station be completely leveled. Instead, the work will be done piecemeal, with construction immediately following demolition in various areas.

The sports complex will be built, owned and operated by the Madison Square Garden Center, Inc., which is 75 per cent owned by the Madison Square Corporation and 25 per cent by the Pennsylvania Railroad.

When the new building is opened the present Madison Square Garden will be closed. Its ultimate future has not been determined.

# Farewell to Penn Station

Until the first blow fell no one was convinced that Penn Station really would be demolished or that New York would permit this monumental act of vandalism against one of the largest and finest landmarks of its age of Roman elegance. Somehow someone would surely find a way to prevent it at the last minute—not-so-little Nell rescued by the hero—even while the promoters displayed the flashy renderings of the new sports arena and somewhat less than imperial commercial buildings to take its place.

It's not easy to knock down nine acres of travertine and granite, 84 Doric columns, a vaulted concourse of extravagant, weighty grandeur, classical splendor modeled after royal Roman baths, rich detail in solid stone, architectural quality in precious materials that set the stamp of excellence on a city. But it can be done. It can be done if the motivation is great enough, and it has been demonstrated that the profit motivation in this instance was great enough.

Monumental problems almost as big as the building itself stood in the way of preservation; but it is the shame of New York, of its financial and cultural communities, its politicians, philanthropists and planners, and of the public as well, that no serious effort was made. A rich and powerful city, noted for its resources of brains, imagination and money, could not rise to the occasion. The final indictment is of the values of our society.

Any city gets what it admires, will pay for, and, ultimately, deserves. Even when we had Penn Station, we couldn't afford to keep it clean. We want and deserve tin-can architecture in a tin-horn culture. And we will probably be judged not by the monuments we build but by those we have destroyed.

# ARCHITECTURE: HOW TO KILL A CITY

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

**T**HE final defeat for Pennsylvania Station was handed down by the City Planning Commission in January, and the crash of 90-foot columns will be heard this summer. What was not heard was the bitter and eloquent opposition at the hearings to the demolition of this New York landmark, and the Planning Commission's explanation of its action.

The explanation needs airing. What few realized, and this made all of the impassioned pleas for the cultural and architectural values of the city fruitless, was that however much the commission might be moved in the area of its civic conscience by such arguments, it was totally without power to act on them. As it pointed out in its report, it is permitted only to pass on the proposed use of land, not on its existing use, and therefore cannot rule on the value of a building that is already on the site, but only on the nature of its replacement.

## Joker

The matter would not have come before the commission at all except that a zoning variance was necessary to permit an occupancy in excess of 2,500 persons for the new Madison Square Garden, which will replace Penn Station. The decision rested entirely on whether congestion would be increased by issuing the variance. The joker here, and it is a terrifying one, is that the City Plan-

## Ours Is an Impoverished Society That Cannot Pay for the Amenities

ning Commission was unable to judge a case like Penn Station's on the proper and genuine considerations involved.

## Impotent Authority

What this amounts to is *carte blanche* for demolition of landmarks. The commission's hands are tied in any interpretation of the public good that rests on evaluation of old vs. new, or good vs. bad. If a giant pizza stand were proposed in an area zoned for such usage, and if studies showed acceptable traffic patterns and building densities, the pizza stand would be "in the public interest," even if the Parthenon itself stood on the chosen site. Not that Penn Station is the Parthenon, but it might just as well be because we can never again afford a nine-acre structure of superbly detailed solid travertine, any more than we could build one of solid gold. It is a monument to the lost art of magnificent construction, other values aside.

The tragedy is that our own times not only could not produce such a building, but cannot even maintain it, so that its fate is as inevitable as the Planning Board's decision. An interesting suggestion, like Robert Zion's in the *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, that the station's great stone vaults could have sheltered a remarkably handsome

and appropriate railroad museum, and that its adjoining glass and iron shell could have been converted into a public botanical garden, becomes a fairy tale in terms of economic realities. It's time we stopped talking about our affluent society. We are an impoverished society. It is a poor society indeed that can't pay for these amenities; that has no money for anything except expressways to rush people out of our dull and deteriorating cities.

An even stranger kind of poverty, that of imagination and ideals, is demonstrated by the proposed remodeling of another landmark, the Times Tower, into a modern showcase for the Allied Chemical Corporation. In this case, the old building will not actually be torn down; it will be defaced. But it will be defaced in a morbidly significant way.

## Radical-Picturesque

When it was designed in 1903 the Times Tower was a blend of progress and romanticism; it stood at the crossroads of the 20th century. Called "a valuable addition to our short list of artistic skyscrapers" by Montgomery Schuyler at the time, it was an anachronistic solution that combined the radical, still new, forward-looking steel frame with a nostalgic, backward-looking, Victorian-picturesque facade of Gothic and

Renaissance details in white (sic) brick and terra-cotta.

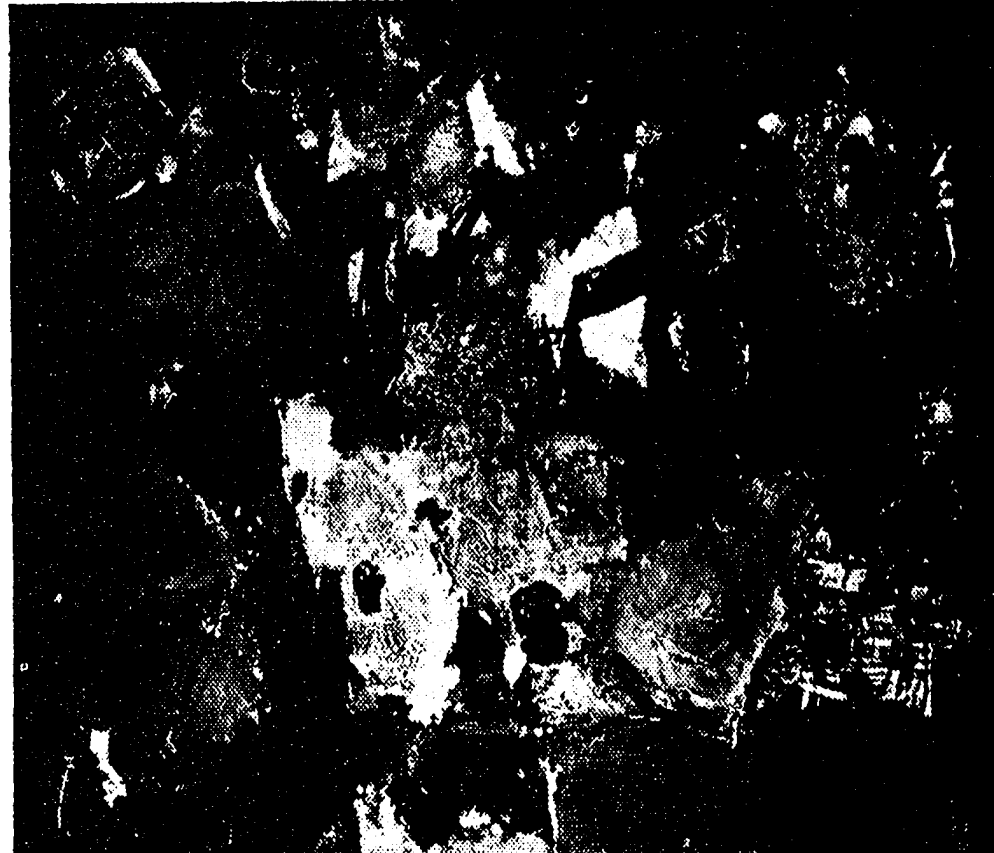
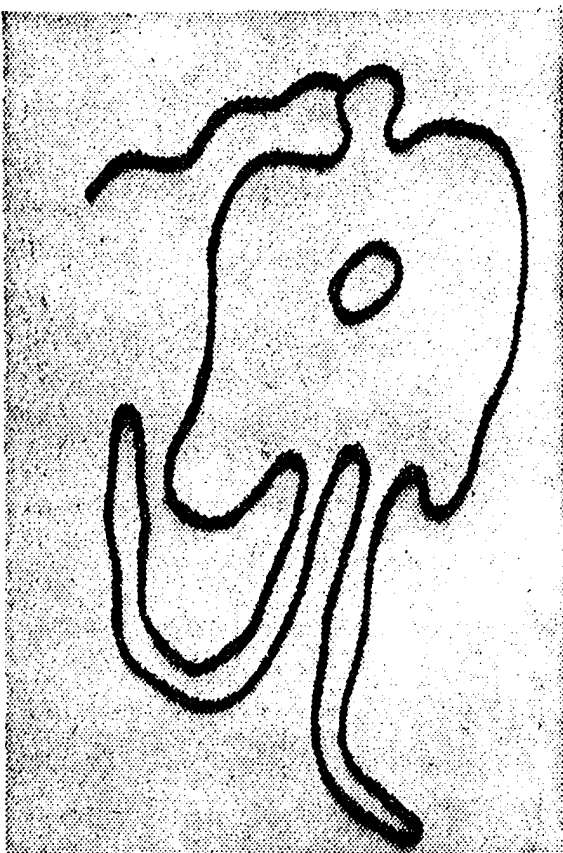
In what was considered an inspired solution for the city's most important new building on the oddly shaped lot formed by the crossing of Broadway and Seventh Avenue, the architects rather fetchingly inflated Giotto's bell tower in Florence and joined it with the lower office floors in a carefully calculated, but embarrassingly inept, articulation. The result was the building's well-known, and awkward, silhouette. The Times Tower was never a masterpiece; it was ambitious, pedestrian and dull. But it was legitimately conceived for its day, and such buildings, as they embody and preserve historic attitudes and styles, actually improve with age.

## For the Worse

The new design is also ambitious, pedestrian and dull, but without the virtue of singularity that marks its predecessor. All exterior detail will be cleaned off, and the building "refaced" with a routine, completely faceless contemporary curtain wall. The awkward silhouette, however, will be kept, although it becomes totally meaningless once its *raison d'être* is stripped away. Thus the publicity value of the landmark is retained, while the landmark itself is destroyed.

Surely there could be no more curious confusion of values than this, no clearer evidence of the current emphasis on expedient commercial advantage over all other considerations, no sadder revelation of the architectural standards that prevail today. Anything new is categorically preferred to anything old, no matter how shoddy or undistinguished the new may be. And if the old is wanted, occasionally, "reproductions" are preferred to originals, because they are newer and cleaner. It rarely occurs to anyone, as in the case of the 1905 Columbus Tower in San Francisco, or the Fidelity Building of the same period, adjoining Charles Center in Baltimore, that an old building can be profitably cleaned, restored, and even modernized where necessary, for civic enrichment, rather than civic loss.

The ultimate curiosity is the willingness, even enthusiasm, of the architectural firms employed by businessmen to wreak the damage; interestingly enough, for the Times Tower, the firm of Voorhees Walker Smith Smith & Haines is successor to the partnership of Eidlitz & MacKenzie, the original designers. Architects' inhumanity to architects surpasses understanding, particularly when the earlier ones are dead. It's a good way to kill off a city, as well.



**STARS IN THE WIND-UP**—With the art season entering its final month, the galleries are putting up their last big shows. Among last week's, Jean Arp is represented at the Sidney Janis Gallery with 37 marbles, bronzes and reliefs in various media going back to 1923, and Jannis Spyropoulos, at World House, is showing oils painted during the last two years. Spyropoulos, Greece's leading painter, maintains his international position as one of the most expert abstract artists alive. Arp is still a grand old man of sculptural poetry. Left, a minor poem of 1928, "Danseuse," a relief in cord on canvas. Right, Spyropoulos's "A Myth," 1962. Both of these exhibitions will close on May 25.

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