

Plan for Jewish Martyrs' Monument Here Unveiled

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

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The Museum of Modern Art has opened an unscheduled display of the latest and probably final design for a New York memorial to the six million Jews killed in concentration camps in World War II. A 6-foot scale model will be on exhibition in the main lobby through Nov. 15.

There have been several disastrous proposals for this monument over the past years in which the agony and the art were almost too much to bear — a memorial to genocide is a crushing problem, emotionally and esthetically. The Committee to Commemorate the Six Million Jewish Martyrs, an affiliation of Jewish groups created for the purpose of commissioning and constructing the monument, has been aided in this last attempt by an Art Advisory Committee, which recommended Louis Kahn, the architect.

In an age of violence that has made a flat mockery of conventional memorial values and platitudes, Mr. Kahn's solution is a cool, abstract, poetic, powerful and absolute statement of unspeakable tragedy. It could rank with the great works of commemorative art in which man has attempted to capture spirit, in symbol, for

the ages. All the wrenching angst of earlier proposals is noticeably absent.

The memorial consists of a flat gray granite base, 66 feet square and high enough to sit on, with seven glass rectangular solid forms placed on it.

Each rectangular form is 10 feet square and 11 feet high, constructed of tightly laid and jointed elongated glass blocks. In Mr. Kahn's words, "the sun could come through and leave a shadow filled with light." It is a concept expressive of death and hope.

Six of the rectangles represent the six million dead. The seventh, in the center, is open, so that people may enter. Inscribed, it would serve as a chapel. Again, in Mr. Kahn's words, "The one, the chapel, speaks; the other six are silent."

The design is beautiful, and chilling. There is about it a silent, almost frozen formality, a crystalline sense of the eternal emptiness of death. The glass rectangles reflect another kind of eternity, the changes of weather, light and season.

This is architecture and, at the same time, sculpture, and it is symbolism of the highest order, timeless and contemporary. Mr. Kahn weds poetry and philosophy to form.

The City Art Commission has

already approved the design. No cost estimate has been released by the sponsoring committee, but completion is hoped for by 1970.

Solution Breeds a New Query

The question to be raised is not about the monument, but about the site. It is meant for Battery Park, just behind the paved area and promenade facing the water. The Parks Department has approved the monument in principle.

The quality of the design and tragic importance of the cause do not cancel out the basic question that still must be faced: whether monuments belong in parks at all. New York's parks are an eroded testament to the popular tradition that puts them there.

Moreover, Battery Park, a green miracle at the base of Manhattan with a theatrical skyline backdrop, offers a surprisingly unsympathetic setting.

It is a most curiously landscaped park, with a blank, featureless grand allée leading to Castle Clinton, that marvelous circular red sandstone relic of New York history that has housed everything from guns to Jenny Lind to fish and is now being restored to its first incarnation as a fort.

The rest of the park is scalloped off into curves or ovals

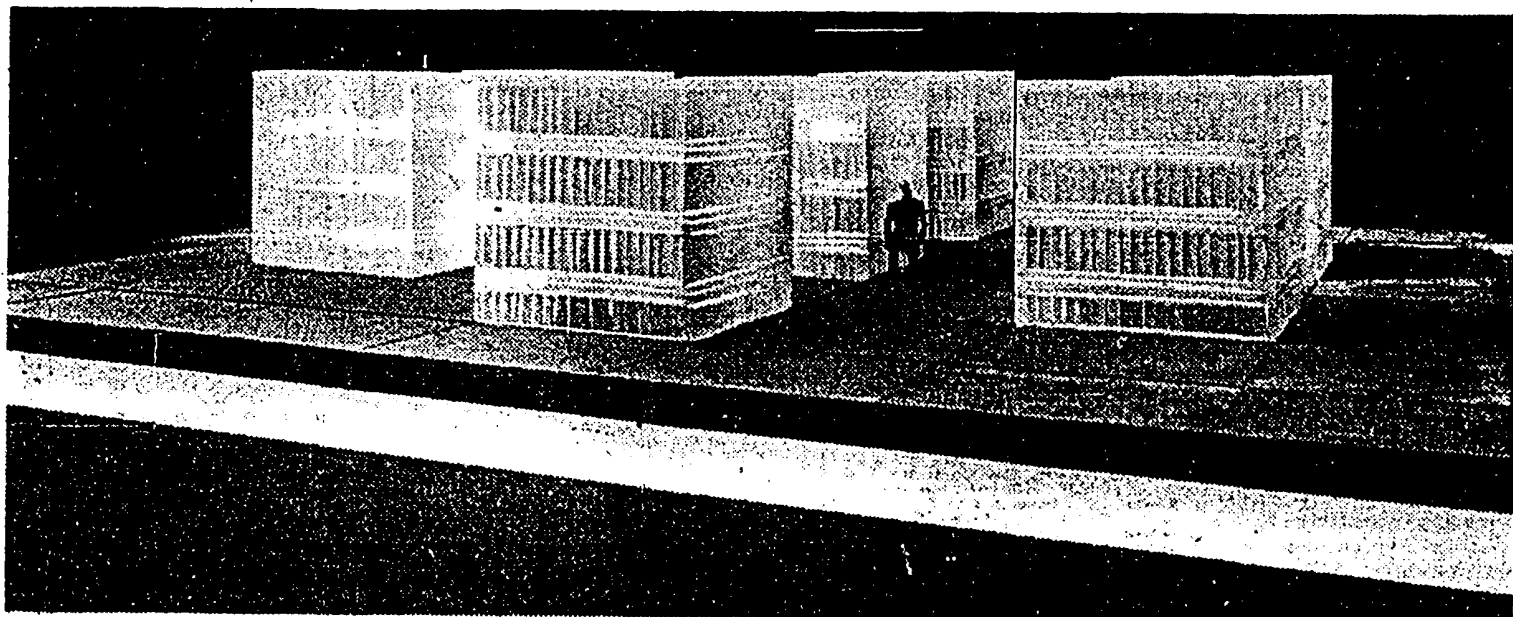
dotted with a chaotic accretion of things: In addition to the fort, there is an occasional statue, a Coast Guard building and a tomblike structure that contains either the remains of a Salvation Army official, commemorated by a nearby stone slab, or an air intake for the Brooklyn-Battery tunnel. It is, essentially, a pop landscape.

What this memorial needs is its own site, walled in, functioning much as Paley Park does on 53d Street near Fifth Avenue. It deserves nothing less and will be compromised by anything less, because there is, potentially, overwhelming art and symbolism here. It is a suitable memorial if a suitable site can be found.

The generation that lived through the time and events the monument proposes to commemorate will never forget them. We have that memorial seared in our souls.

The generations that are innocent of this kind of totalitarianism and ultimate tragedy will find no monument meaningful. That is one of the anachronisms of art and history in an age of violence.

This memorial could work, as art and as history, and as a lasting expression of the human spirit. In a nihilistic, value-destroying society, that is no mean artistic accomplishment.



This six-foot scale model of a planned monument to the Jewish victims of Nazi concentration camps is now on display in the lobby of the Museum of Modern Art here. The work's title is "Monument to the Six Million Jewish Martyrs."