

ARCHITECTURE VIEW

ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

'Wrong but Impeccable'

The Lehman Wing of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, which opens to the public this week after a stormy five-year course from concept to reality including a trip through the courts, is a fait accompli and a tour de force. Fait accompli, because construction is now complete, making all of the heated controversy about the Lehman collection's disposition and housing, including pressures for museum decentralization and a lawsuit to prevent expansion in the park, almost—but not quite—academic. Tour de force, because it carries out a highly questionable program with consummate ingenuity, artistry and skill.

What the Met and architects Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo and Associates have produced is a coolly impersonal and quite exquisite small museum dedicated to the myth of the perpetuation of the personal stamp of the donor, through a stipulation of the bequest that seven rooms from Robert Lehman's 54th Street house be re-created as they were in his lifetime, as part of the building and its installation.

If one can, as a start, accept as desirable the reproduction of a 1959 Paris decorator's version of how to turn 1905 rooms designed by the architect of Grant's Tomb into an "appropriate" background for Renaissance art—the rooms laid end-to-end in the park (buried and blind) instead of top-to-bottom on a city street—then one will have no ambivalent feelings about the building.

If it seems a little ludicrous or less than ideal for the art—then this handsome building falls down, conceptually, like a pack of elegant cards. But if the premise is accepted, the talented agility with which this curious handicap is metamorphosed into a structure of considerable esthetic

Continued on Page 27