



A drawing by Charles Moore in the Cooper-Hewitt/Drawing Center show

## ARCHITECTURE VIEW

ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

# The Fine Points Of Drawings

**A**rchitectural drawing has come out of the drafting room closet. It is going public with a bang this fall, in at least five shows in three cities, either on view now or scheduled later. An important double exhibition opened in New York this week called "Drawing Toward a More Modern Architecture" that is being held simultaneously at the Cooper Hewitt Museum (2 East 91st Street) and downtown at The Drawing Center (137 Greene Street). It will continue until Nov. 6 at both places. This will be followed by a show at the Leo Castelli Gallery in October.

The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (8 West 40th Street) has pioneered a series of drawing shows, as has the gallery at Cooper Union on Astor Place (best to check them for schedules). The Spaced Gallery (165 West 72d Street) currently has drawings of "New York, Past, Present and Future." In Boston, there is an exhibition of "conceptual houses" at the Marcus Krakow Gallery (through Oct. 1) that relies heavily on drawings. The Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia will present "Seven Architects" later this winter. All this is leading up to the big blast—the major exhibition of architectural drawings to be held at the Museum of Modern Art next year.

There are several reasons for this sudden efflorescence. The Museum of Modern Art's 1975 Beaux Arts show was an immensely influential factor in the revival of interest in architectural drawing, which had been knocked badly out of favor by the modern movement. The early modernists not only reacted against the restrictive techniques of Beaux Arts practice, they also preferred to work with the clean cardboard abstractions of models, which were far more expressive of their emphasis on interpenetrating space and detached geometry.

Currently, a younger generation of architects has been questioning both the dogma and the techniques of modernism. There is underway a theoretical and philosophical *bouleversement* of the received principles of modernism in which concepts and treatment of space and functions of facade and enclosure, ornament, symbolism and satisfaction of the senses are all involved. The manner in which these architectural components are being understood, assembled and ex-

perienced signals dramatic developments in attitude and style. Revolution, or transition—depending on how you read it—requires different techniques, which also includes the revival of old ones. With the new ideas has come a greater understanding of the expressive flexibility of drawings. In a sense, the medium is the message. From the popular axonometric projections to the most romantic renderings, the language of drawing is being used for its exploratory subtleties. And the drawings themselves clearly indicate the stylistic and conceptual changes that are taking place.

There is a lot of beauty and excitement in the paired Cooper-Hewitt and Drawing Center shows. Beyond the suggestion of the reach and ferment of today's architecture, these examples are often elegant and ravishing products in themselves. The pastel-colored pencil renderings of John Hejduk at The Drawing Center are pure poetry, informed by a remarkably sensuous intellect. Lauretta Vinciarelli's intricate assemblies of innocent elements, also at The Drawing Center, are rich geometric abstractions with their roots in Renaissance order and 1920's formalism. At the same gallery Coy Howard's use of graphite on tracing paper recalls the charcoal-shadowed world of Hugh Ferriss, but Howard's dramatic romanticism depends on Cubism and Art Deco recalled by a generation to which it is perfumed by cinema and the elusive aura of a recent past that none of them has experienced. He draws like a demon.

Much of the current Italian work, under the hypnotic spell of Aldo Rossi, is a cross between De Chirico and Mussolini-modern—that stripped International Style classicism with roots in Ledoux and Boullée and overtones of Marxist nihilism in which variety and human scale are totally irrelevant. This is a dangerous beauty.

But although that kind of vision is greatly admired by American architects, it is not much emulated here. Instead, eclecticism, mannerism, nostalgic historicism, pop sensibility, free borrowings from past and present, are all present in a pastiche that provokes reactions from exasperation to awe.

It is possible, for example, to be profoundly intrigued by Michael Graves's Warehouse-Solarium (just think about that for a minute as a building type) in terms of seductive patterns, and speculate at the same time about how those esthetic intricacies could become a bit of a mess. Or one can admire the Venturis' sophisticated ironies in deadpan paeans to "soft pretzels," knowing that their buildings still deal in absolute and timeless refinements. But with all of the freewheeling fantasy on view, these displays are not without the skillful representations of what the architect wishes to convey of the spirit and appearance of his building—the traditional perspective rendering. There are marvelous views from the Mitchell-Giurgola office, in superbly graded pencil. Renderings by William Turnbull for Charles Moore (who is no

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## Architectural Drawings

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mean draftsman himself) are in both shows.

The Drawing Center exhibition has been assembled by architect Robert A. M. Stern, with a sharp and sensitive eye. The Cooper-Hewitt selection is the work of Richard Oliver, curator of architecture and design and also an architect, with the assistance of Nancy Ferguson. The Drawing Center and its exhibition have been aided by the New York State Council on the Arts. The catalog for both shows is a special issue of the British magazine, *Architectural Design*.

Mr. Oliver has followed a more didactic approach for the Cooper-Hewitt, carefully defining types and techniques of architectural drawings, and sometimes showing their stages and styles in a single project, from conceptual sketch

to working drawings. This, in itself, is fascinating. Charles Moore's "napkin" drawings are literally that, done in airport cocktail lounges while waiting for planes. James Coote's first shorthand notations show the same delicate relationship of house and nature in later, detailed representations. But there is fantasy here, too, in the special kind of environmental commentary provided by Roger Ferri's skyscraper crossed with a lush, craggy mountainside that rises immaculately among the more mundane monuments of Madison Square.

Because the approaches of the two shows are so different and the material so rarely overlaps, both must be seen. You will find at least one drawing that will enchant you, one that will haunt you, one that will suggest a new world to you, and one that you will want to take away.

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