The American Image Abroad: Architecture The American Image Abroad
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By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

THIS is a description of a cultural casualty. It is about the exhibition pavilion that the United States will not put up at the Japan World Exposition at Osaka in 1970, one of the largest and most important First Category World's Fairs in the 117 years of World's Fair history and the first to be held in Asia.

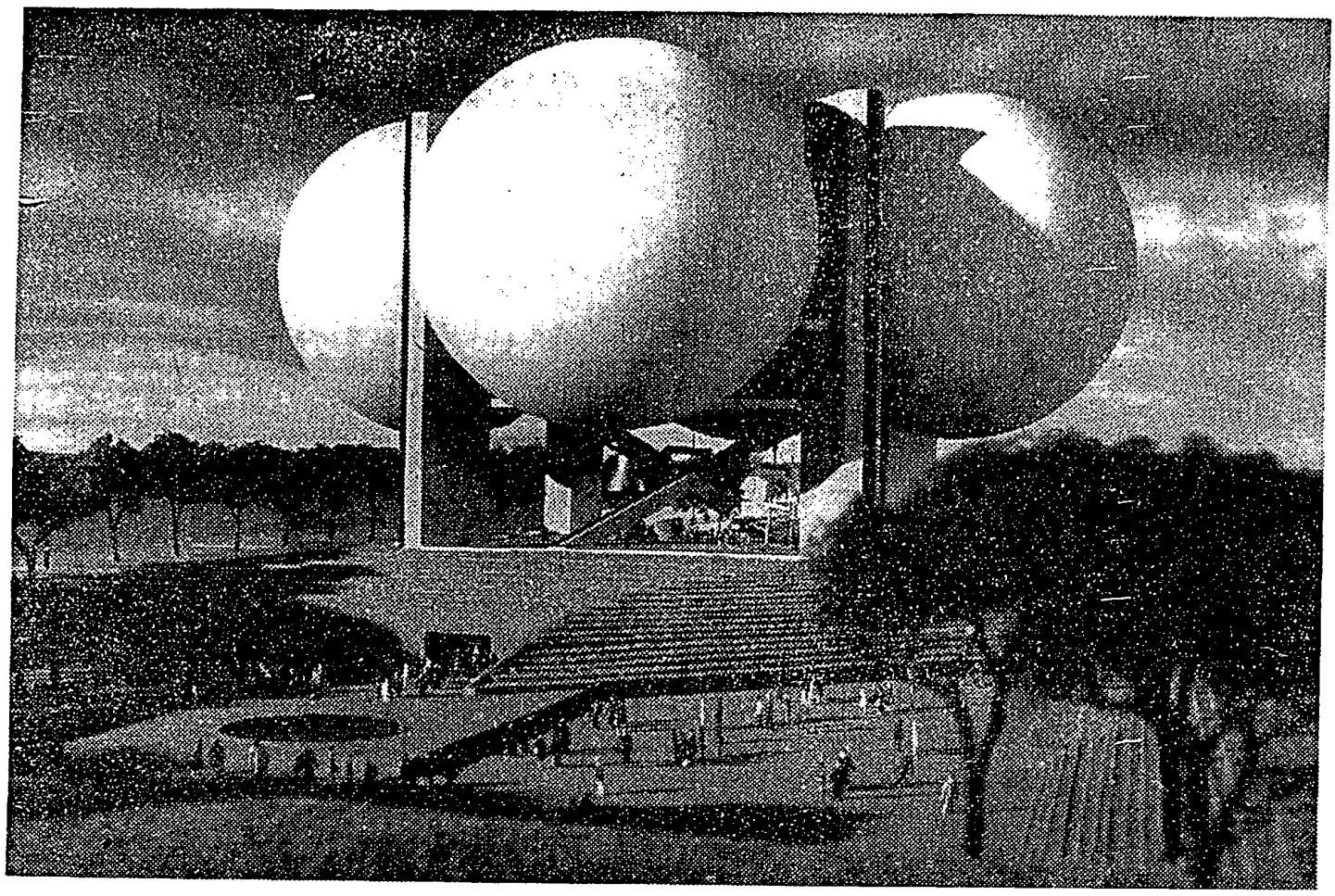
It will not put it up because the Congressional appropriation for Expo 70 at Osaka has been cut from $16-million to $10-million. This means that the design developed over the last year must now be scrapped for something cheaper, in far less than enough time to do the job. Something will be built, but it will not be the pavilion shown here.

It is hard to protest the cut with any passionate conviction when cuts are being made in all poverty and social programs and aid to cities is being whittled to heartbreaking inadequacy. It is difficult to measure a few theater or dance groups wiped out of existence, or the vitiation of a Federal arts program, or the sacrifice of a really first-rate Fair pavilion against the critical, unmet needs of a sick society and a decaying environment.

But these are all tragedies, since actors or dancers out of work starve as surely as anyone else, and the arts have achieved a new equation with hope and self-respect in the ghettoes. What this country has now is a choice of tragedies, which is affluence of a sort.

Still, it is of interest to review how this latest cultural casualty came about. First, the pavilion that will not go up at Expo 70 is one of the better designs in our spotty international Fair pavilion record. Traditionally, government and mediocrity have a kind of magnetic attraction, frequently cemented by handy political friendships.

Only three First Category World's Fairs have been accredited by the Bureau of International Expositions in the last three decades—Paris, 1937, Brussels, 1958, and Montreal, 1967. These are the great shows. Edward Durell Stone's airy palace at Brussels and Buckminster Fuller's glowing bubble at Montreal (*Continued on Page 22*)



Louis Checkman

Design for the United States pavilion at Expo 70 at Osaka, being revised because of budget cuts
An "air structure" of clustered bubbles outside; a multi-level drama inside

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made this country stand tall. The cost was $13-million at Brussels, and $12-million at Montreal, with the pavilion representing half the total.

The New York Fair of 1964-65, a motley huckster's brew, was never accredited by the B.I.E. as First Category or anything else. First Category means a full range of official international representation, with pavilions designed and built by the participating countries, and strict control of commercialism. (New York had the lineup in 1939-40, but lost accreditization because the Fair ran two years, and six months is the B.I.E. rule.)

The 1964-65 fiasco got a whopping $17-million from the Federal government and the $11-million Federal pavilion—perfectly useless and pretentiously awful — still stands among the strange totemic objects of Flushing Meadow, surely one of the most surrealist landscapes in the world.

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The comprehensive planning of the Osaka Fair is by Kenzo Tange, one of this century's leading international architects. The United States scheme, which would have cost about $7,800,000, is by Davis, Brody Associates, architects, and Chermayeff, Geismar and de Harak, designers, all exceptionally talented young men who have already sky-rocketed to brilliant success. What this country has in top professional talent is very good indeed, and has a lot to do with the happier aspects of the American image abroad.

The American design is an "air structure," in the tradition of fairs as the spectacular experimental ground for new kinds of building. Rigid inflated forms, not to be confused with children's balloons, are one of the frontiers of today's engineering. This pavilion would have four "air structure" semi-spheres attached to a soaring framework crisscrossed with exhibition levels. The hollow spheres would be four theaters for simultaneous projection of sound, light and color films on their inner, curved walls. What looks like clustered bubbles outside would contain a high drama of space and show inside.

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Unlike Bucky Fuller's modular geodesic domes, this kind of design cannot be expanded or contracted at will with the budget. As a result of that $6-million cut, the architects will simply have to begin all over again, one year late now with working drawings, and faced with all the complications of translation into Japanese drawings with a collaborating Osaka firm and the intricacies of foreign construction. If there is dismay at the United States Information Agency, the sponsoring agency, with a 220,000 square-foot site reserved for the United States as one point of the triangular orientation of the U.S., Japan and U.S.S.R., it is understandable.

Why does this happen? Why is Canada, for example, already out for working drawing bids on an $11,600,000 exhibition, after a successful national competition for a design? The Soviet Union, almost needless to say, will have a $20-million extravaganza — twice the U.S. budget — packed with hard sell.

The best way to explain our peculiar debacle is to give a blow-by-blow procedural account. In July of last year the U.S.I.A. interviewed exhibition design team candidates suggested by an advisory panel. A properly constituted architectural advisory panel is something most government agencies avoid like the plague. This one recommended some of the country's top talent, which rarely gets a foot in the government door.

In August the U.S.I.A. selected 11 all-star teams from the recommendations and commissioned preliminary presentations, which were seen and judged by the advisory panel in September and October. Acting on the panel's advice, the U.S.I.A. selected Davis, Brody, Chermayeff, Geismar and de Harak on October 31.

In December the project began with a visit to the Osaka site and by February, 1968, design was under way. But there was no money yet. In February the U.S.I.A. requested $17,750,000 for the United States exhibition at Osaka from the Bureau of the Budget. In March the Bureau of the Budget approved $15,993,000, to be requested from Congress. The architects kept working, using the Bureau of the Budget figure as a guideline. They had to, if anything was ever to get built.

In April the U.S.I.A. appeared before the House Appropriations Committee to ask for the $15,993,000. In May, with the architects still clutching air instead of a budget, phase two of design work began.

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On June 7 the House Appropriations Committee cut U.S.I.A. from $15,993,000 to $10-million. On June 17 the Senate Appropriations Committee requested restoration of $4 million. On June 20 the House and Senate conference committee reduced the appropriation to the House figure of $10-million.

In July, just one year after the project began, the U.S.I.A. gave the architects their actual budget — $4,800,000 for pavilion and exhibits based on the $10-million total. Out the window—one year's work, one year's costs, one pavilion design.

Now — ready for the clincher? Of that $10-million, $5-million is in appropriated U.S. money and $5-million is in what is dramatically called "blocked yen." The U.S. has great reserves of blocked currencies abroad that must be spent locally and cannot be taken out in dollars; they are controlled by Congressional Appropriations Committees and the foreign governments involved. Agreements vary with different countries but in Japan the blocked yen must be used for cultural purposes.

In other words, using a few more of the blocked yen already limited to cultural expenditures for the Osaka exposition would have taken nothing away from the war on poverty or aid to cities, or even, heaven help us all, from the war in Vietnam. It was the principle of cutting that was upheld.

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Aside from that little irony, the whole cockeyed process of working without a budget, on pure speculation, until the last minute, with the dangers and disasters illustrated perfectly by the Osaka story, is a government procedure that defies logic, efficiency, economy or credulity. No sane businessman would sanction it for a minute.

It is reasonably sure that the cut-back solution, if it makes opening day, will still be good. But it takes an architect with a firm love of country to accept the sure risks of lost time and money built into this extraordinary system. Some fight the system, when young, anyway, because they care about creative design as the best representation of the American spirit. More than 25 million people are expected in Osaka. They should be very impressed by the $20-million Soviet pavilion.