Creations of 3 Top Architects Shown
By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE
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pg. 38

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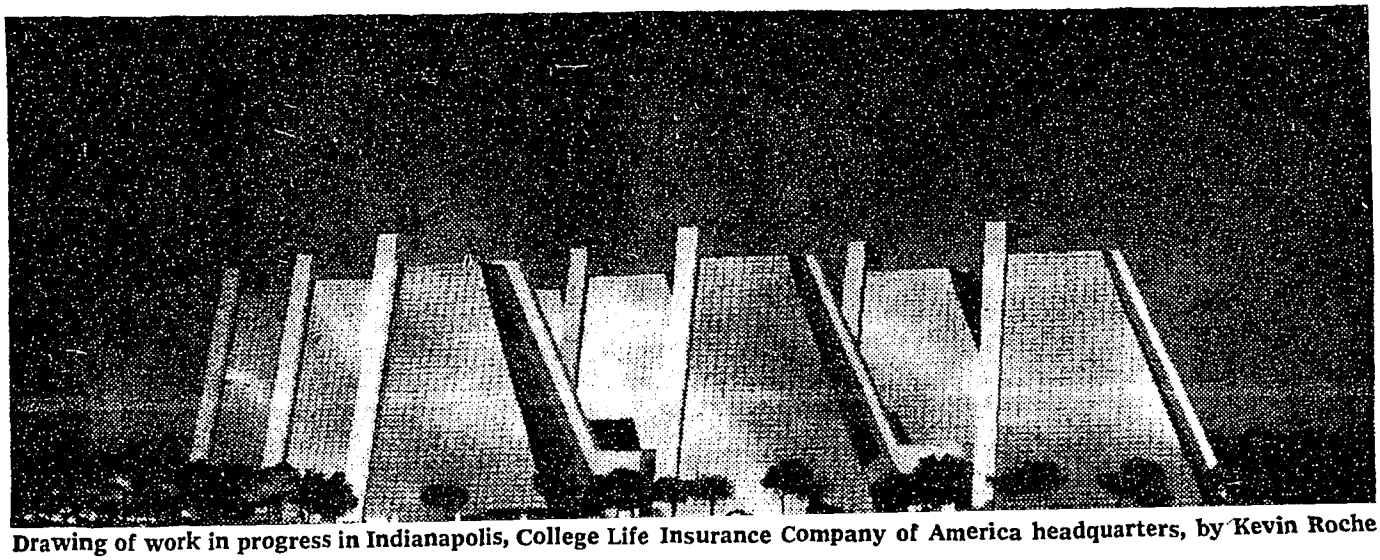

Drawing of work in progress in Indianapolis, College Life Insurance Company of America headquarters, by Kevin Roche

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

"Work in Progress: Architecture by Philip Johnson, Kevin Roche, Paul Rudolph," the exhibition opening at the Museum of Modern Art today and continuing through Jan. 3, may turn out to be this season's most fashionably hated show. That could make it a resounding anti-success, the only kind of success that has any real intellectual currency these days.

It is an Establishment show in every sense of the word: sponsor, architects and clients. The 25 projects displayed in models, drawings and photographs are by three of the country's major practitioners currently executing major commissions and, in the words of Arthur Drexler, director of the museum's department of architecture and design, making major contributions to the American scene. This is the best work of some of our most gifted men. And the presentation makes those gifts clear.

"Collectively," Mr. Drexler says, "they have brought American architecture to a level of competence unmatched anywhere else in the world."

The statement is unarguable and the show is stunning. But if Mr. Drexler had wanted to be arbitrary—and he does not—he could not have picked a threesome more scorned by the current crop of architectural graduates.

This generation does not question their competence. Or even their talent. What is seriously questioned is their goals. There has been considerable impassioned rock-throwing at the reputations of Messrs. Johnson, Roche and Rudolph from the architecture schools and in intellectual circles as producers of expensive and meaningless monuments, and the gentlemen can show the scars. Paul Rudolph's Art and Architecture Building at Yale was systematically sabotaged by the student body before it burned mysteriously last year.

The approved goals of the present generation are social and environmental reform through architectural practice. The arguments center on housing the poor and creating communities rather than the creation of monuments. For much of the younger group, the corporate status symbol is equated with original sin.

If anyone has wondered where the museum stands in the matter, it puts itself unequivocally and traditionally on the line with this show. It is on the side of the monument, defined as a recognizable, qualitative work of architecture.

All of the examples, Mr. Drexler announces firmly, "reflect a commitment to the idea that architecture, besides being technology, sociology and moral philosophy, must finally produce works of art if it is to be worth bothering about at all."

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What is worth bothering about, for the museum, is being built by the only clients today who can afford to build at all: the commercial corporation, the investment banker and, occasionally, the public or governmental sponsor.

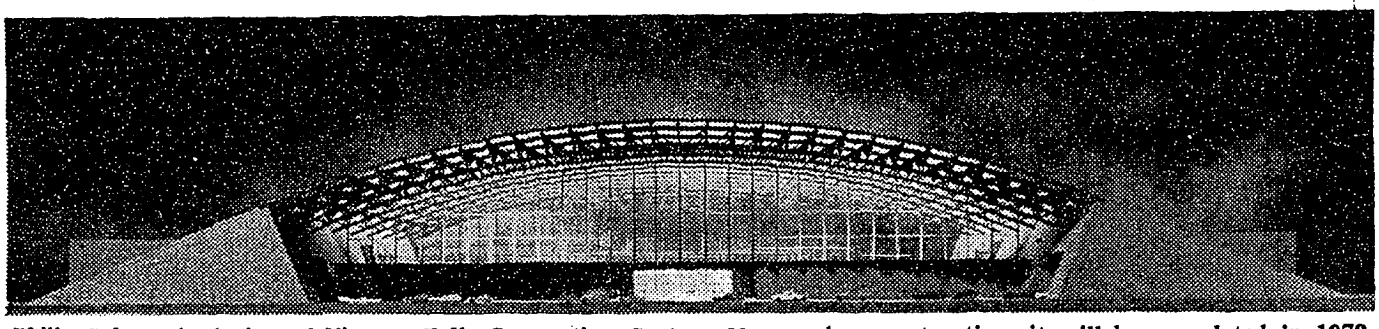
Big budgets and gung-ho construction schedules are usually corporate. University projects tend to go ahead. It is the housing schemes, however, or the community plans —and there are several of particular interest in the show—that either never get built at all or are vastly compromised in the obstacle race of financing and subsidy.

And so there is something magnificently anachronistic about Kevin Roche's Ledoux-like vision of mirror-clad, truncated Babylonian pyramids for the clerks and computers of the College Life Insurance Company of America in Indianapolis. (His Metropolitan Museum expansion plan is conspicuously absent from the show.)

Philip Johnson comes through at his best, surprisingly, as a planner for people and a designer of public delights, such as the Welfare Island master plan and the Fort Worth Water Garden. Strange, after all these years as *l'architecte du roi.*

And Paul Rudolph, in buildings ranging from the Arts Center for Southeastern Massachusetts University—a structure that is as great a success as the Yale Arts Building is a failure—to housing for the Buffalo waterfront, produces notable environmental and architectural experiences.

There will be many who will dismiss much of this work as irrelevant to a society in crisis. Picket lines have been formed for less. What is relevant, however, is the system that makes it possible to produce corporate symbols, but not housing. That is what any debate should be about.



Philip Johnson's design of Niagara Falls Convention Center. Now under construction, it will be completed in 1972

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