



**FROM CHICAGO FAIR OF 1893:** This photograph of Louis Sullivan's Transportation Building is among the pictures at the "World's Fairs" exhibit at Metropolitan Museum.

## Fairs and Architecture

### *Metropolitan Museum Show Recalls Expositions Since the First in 1851*

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

The legacy of World's Fairs, which began with the Great London Exhibition of 1851 when Prince Albert opened a spectacular, giant greenhouse filled with Victorian bric-a-brac and industrial novelties, has been 113 years of stunned exhaustion and striking technological advance.

This year visitors to New York can see all the fairs, with a minimum of fatigue and a maximum of fascination in one gallery at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "World's Fairs—The Architecture of Fantasy," arranged by John J. McKendry, opens today and will run through Oct. 18.

Like many of the museum's print department shows, which combine sensitive selection with witty exposition, this one is pure delight.

Sixteen international expositions are represented by over 75 prints and photographs, including posters, sheet-music covers ("The Great Exposition Polka"), souvenir booklets, guides and contemporary magazine illustrations, accompanied by "chat labels," which frequently give the reactions of distinguished visitors.

Of the Crystal Palace: "I find I am 'used up' by the exhibition," said Charles Dickens, anticipating the sentiments of every fairgoer since. "Fairyland," announced Queen Victoria.

"A most gorgeous sight, vast, graceful, beyond the dreams of Arabian romances," said Macaulay.

And this comment on a Daumier lithograph of the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1855: "Stupefaction, compression, suffocation."

So it goes, through London, Paris, Vienna, Philadelphia, Buffalo, St. Louis, San Francisco and New York, for an evocation of fairs past in all of their contemporary flavor and color—from the rich pudding of heavy red and gold Victorian taste to Chicago's classical white world of 1893. In Chicago, Louis Sullivan's Transportation Building spoke

of the world of the future in a fantasy world of the past.

But if fairs were fairylands, there was nothing nebulous about their architectural achievements. The international exposition is a history of structural progress.

The Crystal Palace was the precursor of prefabrication and glass curtain walls. The 1889 Galerie des Machines in Paris spanned an unheard-of 375 feet. The Eiffel Tower, built for that exposition, was a soaring, naked steel demonstration of skyscraper principles.

Although this was their solid achievement, fairs are equally interesting as indices of style. Temporary structures called out --and still do--the architect's sense of adventure. Some were high decorative art.

Paris in 1900 and Buffalo in 1901 served up plaster meringues that looked more like the work of pastry chefs than of architects. In such a puff-pastry concoction, the Temple of Music at Buffalo, President McKinley was shot on Sept. 6, 1901.

The 19th-century theme was peace and understanding through industry. The Victorians had a touching notion that the industrial revolution would save humanity.

Things don't change much, and 20th-century fairs promote peace and understanding through the wonders of science. It's "one world," for the duration of the fair at least, whether the instrument of salvation is a screw propeller or a space rocket.

The Museum of Art show ends with New York in 1939, the Trylon and Perisphere looking a little hollow after solid marvels like the Corliss engine, but surprisingly prophetic of the space age. The cut-off date accounts for one regrettable omission: Edward Stone's United States Pavilion for Brussels in 1958, one of the best fair fantasies in the fairyland tradition.

For a wonderful summary of delusions and delights, "Come, Come to the Fair . . ." at the Metropolitan Museum.