

# Leon Krier's Call for A Return to Urban Classicism

**T**he deceptively benign and very beautiful drawings by Leon Krier at the Max Protetch Gallery (37 West 57th Street, through Feb. 7) do not at first glance look like a revolutionary statement. The title of the exhibition, "Architectural Drawings for the Reconstruction of the European City: 1967-80," sounds more like an act of urban renewal than an act of resistance.

But these drawings are, in fact, a manifesto — a renunciation of the modern city and a call for a return to the urban traditions that the modernists disrupted. The appropriate revolutionary prose is in the exhibition catalogue: an introduction by the Belgian critic and theorist Maurice Culot, and a text by the architect in the best manifesto style — declarations, rules and key words in capital letters. In effect, the modernist revolution is being turned on its head.

Those traditions were embodied in the Paris's Place des Vosges and Place Vendôme, Rome's Piazza Navona and the formal, symmetrical squares and crescents of Bath, ceremonial public places surrounded by churches, palaces and low-arcaded buildings of brick and stone that were suddenly declared monuments to a past way of life. The Renaissance vocabulary of columns, pediments and pilasters, put together by hand and in the measure of man, were considered inappropriate in structure and style for the needs of an industrial age. Classical architecture was pronounced obsolete.

The new needs, which included offices, factories and housing on an unprecedented scale, were to be met by the new technology of concrete, steel and glass, which was to create a better and different world of skyscrapers and su-

perblocks. Le Corbusier envisioned tearing out the heart of old Paris, to replace it with a dozen huge towers in a park.

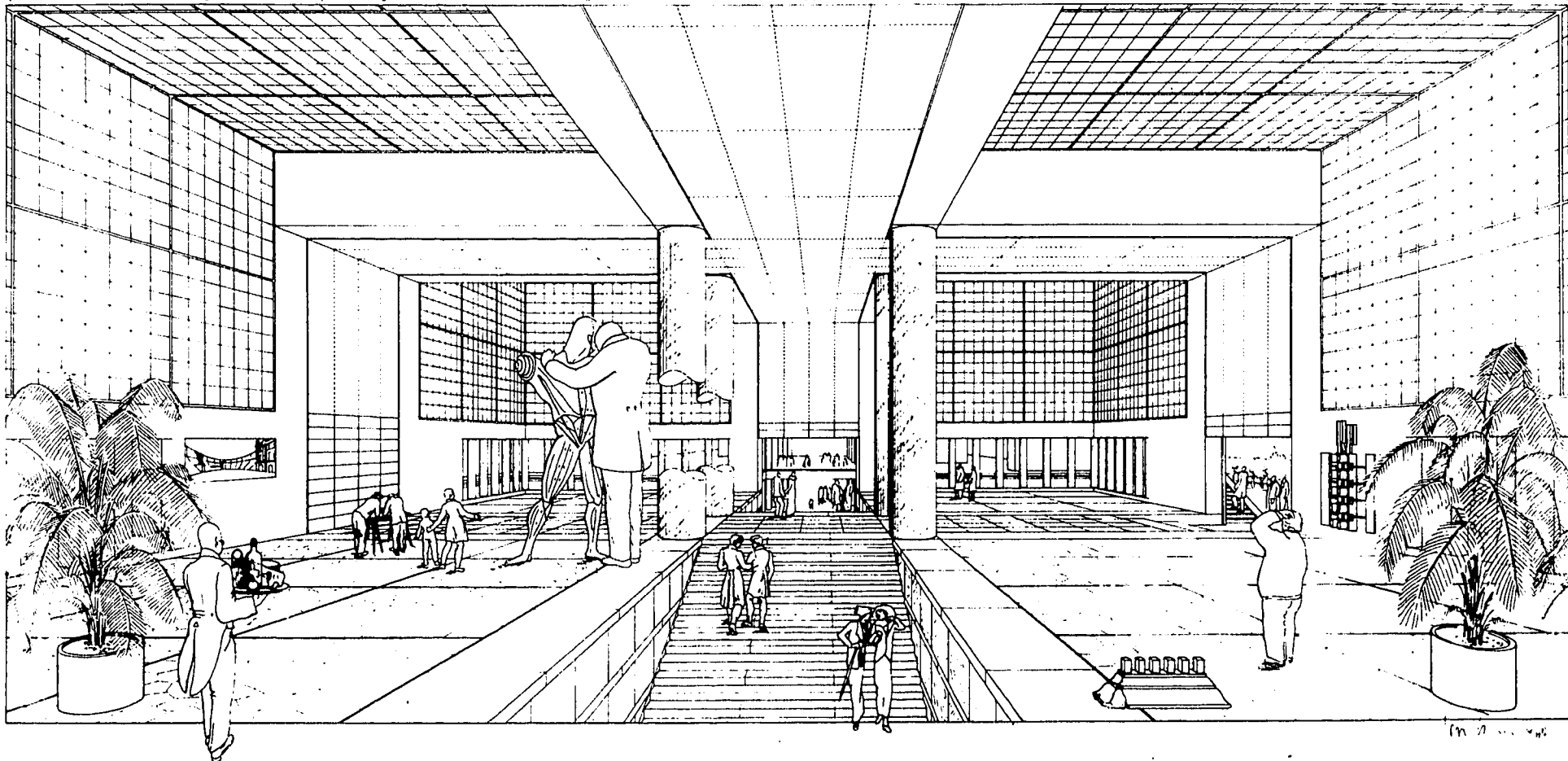
Today, architects like Krier want to go back to the old ways and the old forms, to construct again in the classical manner and at the intimate scale of the block and the neighborhood that endured from the 16th to the 19th centuries. They would roll back the 20th century.

Leon Krier and his brother Robert, born in Luxembourg, are part of the European branch of an international architectural avant-garde that reaches across borders and oceans. They stand for the most radical form of the current reaction against modernism. With other like-minded architects, such as Aldo Rossi and the North Italian group called La Tendenza, they are dedicated to a return to a more "rational" way of building.

But their position, which sounds reasonable enough, is extreme rather than moderate. Leon Krier is convinced that technology and industrialization and the innovations of modernism have destroyed everything good about the city — its cultural continuity, its appropriate social patterns, its proper architectural scale and symbolism — for the creation of ugly and alienating wastelands. To restore these qualities, he concludes, one must go back to the kind of construction, and the older building types, that produced them. In other words, the modernist dictum of "form follows function" becomes "function follows form."

Many of Krier's drawings are for the "reconstruction" of parts of Luxembourg, London, Paris and West Berlin on

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A drawing by Leon Krier in the exhibit at Protetch Gallery—back to "the Renaissance vocabulary"