

Architecture: A View of Giants of 'Our Town, 1970'

22 Models and Photos Go on Display Today

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

MODELS and photographs of 22 major building schemes for New York's future are brought together for the first time in "Our Town, 1970," an exhibition opening today in the Park Avenue lobby of the Union Carbide Building. The sponsor is the Municipal Art Society and most of the displays are blockbusters.

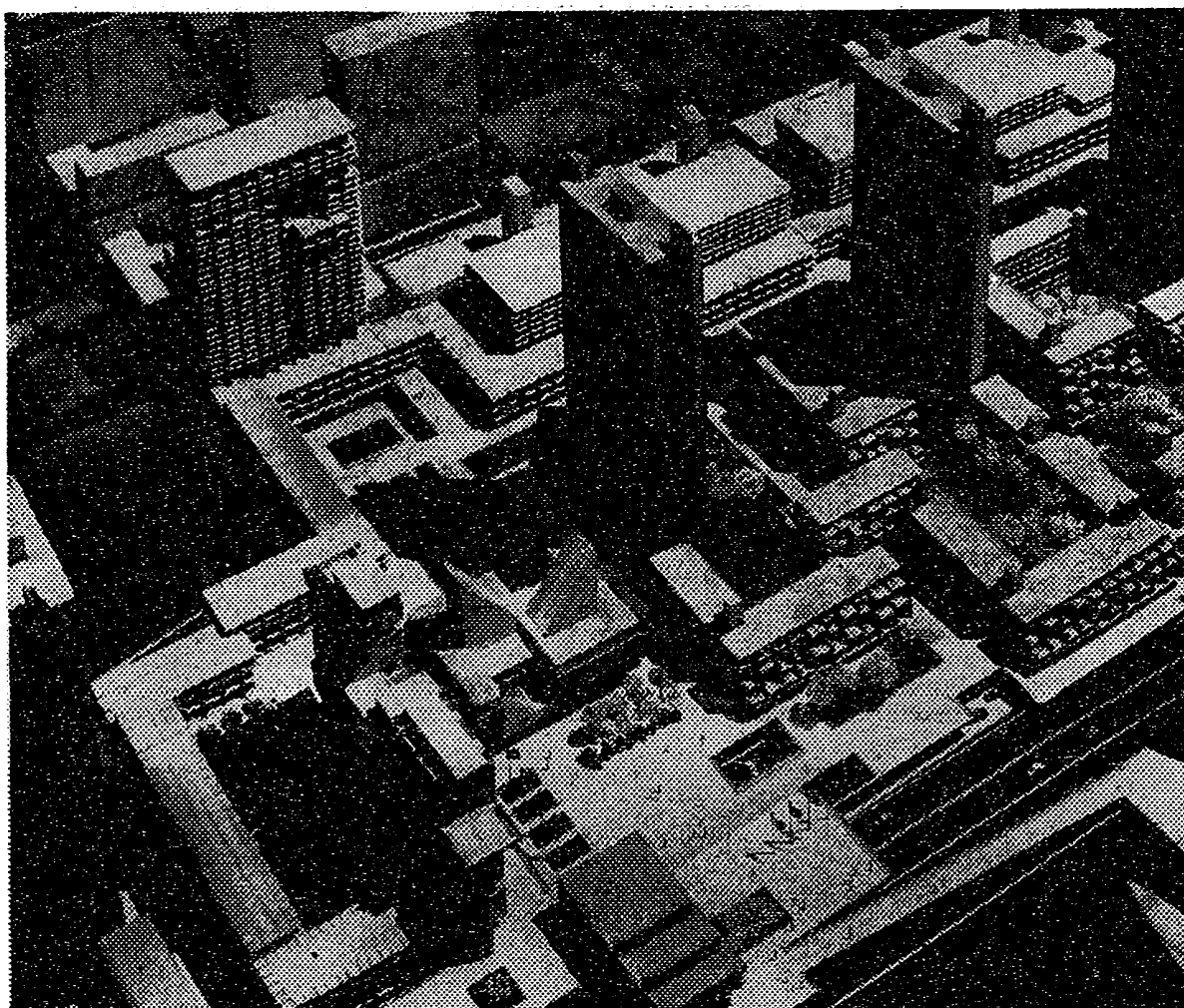
If all of these publicly and privately promoted projects were laid end to end or put side by side they would add up to a good-size city. Put in their proper places in greater New York, they add up to a virtually unrecognizable city of startling scale and appearance. In the aggregate, to use a serviceable cliché, they stagger the imagination.

They include the Port Authority's gigantic World Trade towers for lower Manhattan by Minoru Yamasaki and Emery Roth, topping everything else in existence, Kelly and Gruzen's monumental, 10-block Litho City development for the West Side, a staggering plan by Eggers & Higgins for the Department of Marine and Aviation that would fill and develop miles of waterfront along the Hudson River; an impressive network of parks for Queens; the Madison Square Garden complex by Charles Luckman; the large Lincoln Center complex; the every larger Civic Center complex, and some sizable schemes for Brooklyn and the Bronx.

Staggered? Multiply by three and add a few not in the exhibition: the large Brooklyn Bridge South project, Bellevue South, Tompkins Square and the West Side urban renewal program.

A few projects of less than superblock size are of particular interest because they are attempts to restore the sense of humanity and individuality to the city that the blockbusters generally remove.

Among these are a private redevelopment suggestion by Perkins & Will for the West Village, a community that has won its own holding war



Model of Litho City, to be built by Kelly & Gruzen near Lincoln Center, at exhibition

against the encroaching forces of gigantism after lusty battle, and a scheme by Charles Goodman for the Lavanburg Foundation, intended to give life to the dead spaces between big buildings.

An unconventional playground by Lou Kahn and Isamu Noguchi, and a pedestrian walk developed in two ways by Pomerance and Breines and a student group at New York University to cut through the large blocks between Fifth Avenue and the Avenue of the Americas from 42d to 59th Streets, add intimate delights.

These latter schemes, for people first and profit second, are in the small dream category. In New York, only big dreams are really practical. The largest proposals, eligible for the clearance and financing machinery of urban renewal or able to attract the investing community, stand the best chance of being built. This is the curious architectural and economic reality of the city.

This can have its advan-

tages, however, even if they are seldom realized. A big city needs big plans. But it needs them on a creative level to match.

These projects give a few tantalizing glimpses of glory, but on the average they are a letdown. In some cases, like Litho City and Madison Square Garden, critical outcry has been followed by vastly improved designs. Too often the superblocks fail to suggest supermen with super ideas, but only small minds with adding machines.

The complexities of planning and building in a city like New York are so great in terms of function and services, traffic and transportation, zoning and building codes, real estate and economics, politics and budgets, esthetics and human values, that combating and coordinating the forces brought to bear on even the best-designed and best-sponsored scheme almost always leads to varying degrees of compromise and defeat.

Our housing, for example,

has failed grievously. Most of it is formula design trapped in costs and specifications. Two schemes, the Ruberoid Competition for middle income housing to be put up by the city's Housing and Redevelopment Board (whatever happened to it?) and the latest version of Litho City, presented here in overwhelming splendor by its sponsor, Local 1 of the Amalgamated Lithographers of America, give an idea of what could be done in terms of design, but isn't.

The network of proposed Flushing Meadows parks, spreading from the World's Fair site and to be financed by World's Fair profits, is a fine example of the planned, linked green spaces that the city desperately needs. It will be the best thing to come out of the Fair, if Mr. Moses does battle as valiantly with Mr. Beame as he has with the A. & P.

Never underestimate the importance of an exhibition in a business building lobby. This show will run until May 11, and it is one that every New Yorker should see.