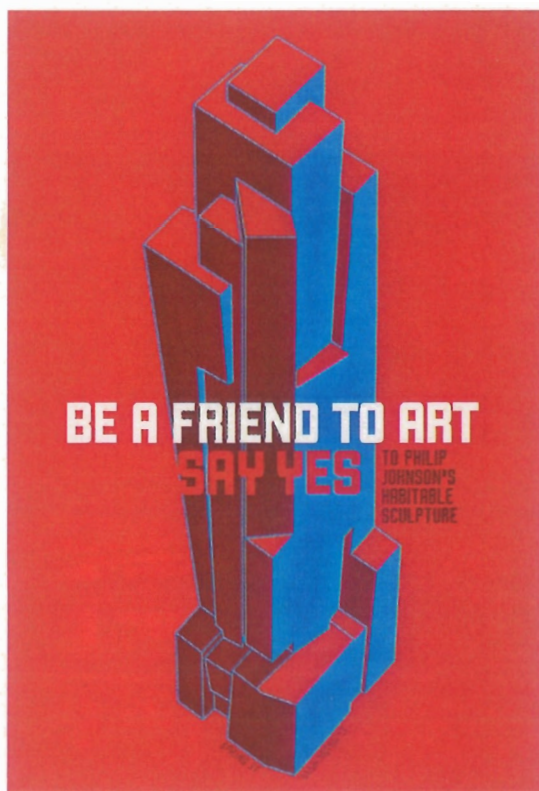
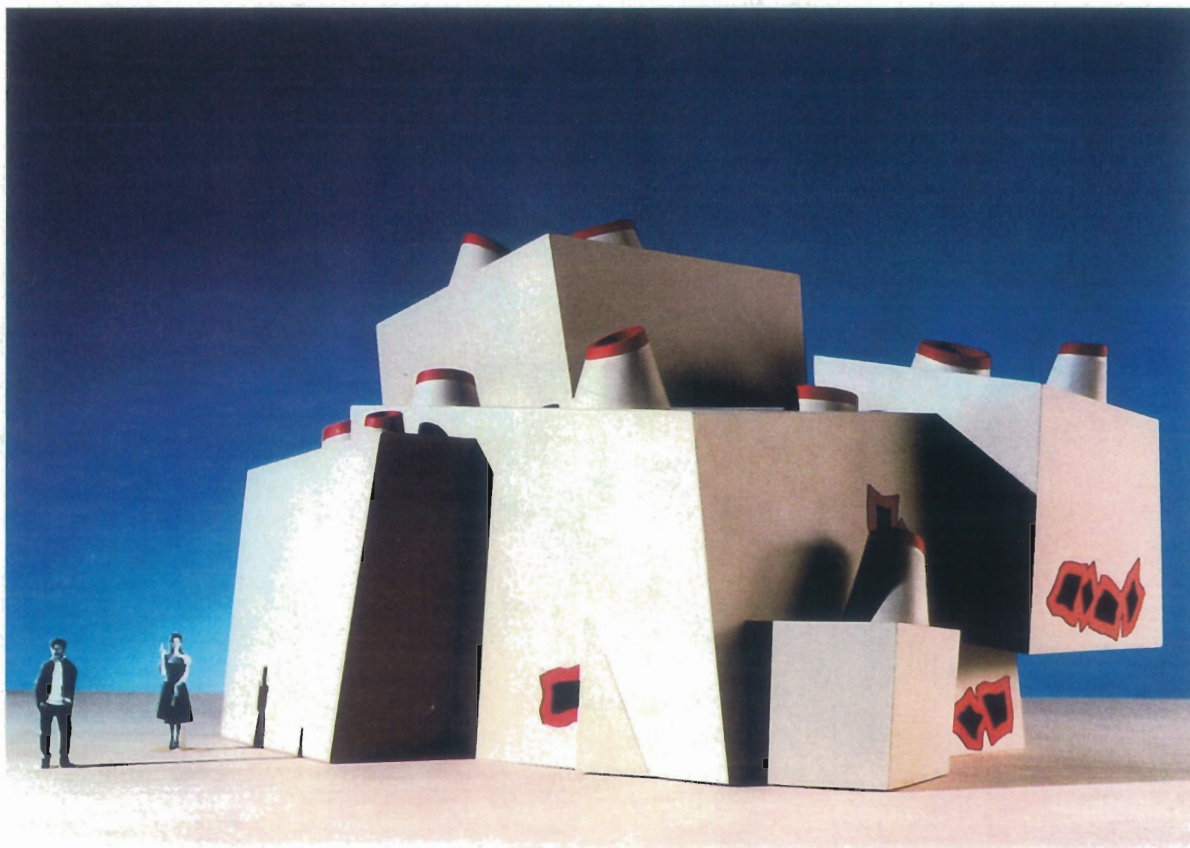


# THE RADAR DESIGN

BY GEORGE W. STONE



**MODEL LIFE** From top: Johnson's proposed projects, The Children's Museum Guadalajara and Soho's Habitable Sculpture, were groundbreaking in theory.

## FOREVER YOUNG *The Kreeger celebrates Philip Johnson's brash and brilliant final phase*

Call it a wrinkle in the space-time continuum or a case of eternal youth, but the most influential American architect of the last century is primed to be our newest enfant terrible. The late Philip Johnson would have it no other way. This icon of modernism, who died in 2005 at the age of 98, is reaching beyond the grave to revolutionize design today. "Johnson was an artistic and architectural omnivore who loved change," explains Hilary Lewis, exhibition curator of the Kreeger Museum's dazzling new show, which presents works—some of which are still in development—from Johnson's final two decades alongside his own paintings by Jasper Johns, Frank Stella and Andy Warhol.

"The question Johnson left us with is: What can be built in the 21st century that merges art and architecture in a glorious fashion? The exhibition shows how closely Johnson looked at precedents in the art world and how he converted these into architecture," says Lewis, a close collaborator with Johnson on books and articles. The show is perfectly at home in the Kreeger, a modernist structure designed some 40 years ago by Johnson; the space itself reinforces the idea that architecture and art are inextricably linked. Indeed, the "Dean of American Architecture" was evangelical about new ideas. "He was a proselytizer and permanently young mentally. He was excited with the freedom that was filtering through design, intrigued with the work of Philippe Starck and thrilled with Frank Gehry. He was inspired by Frank Stella, who bridged the worlds of art and architecture," says Lewis.

Johnson's career spanned European-minded modernism (the Glass House), Turkish-Baroque motifs (the Museum of Pre-Columbian Art at Dumbarton Oaks was one of his favorite projects) and classical ideas (the AT&T Building), and culminated in the radical geometry of sculpted towers and curving walls. When asked why he was a celebrity, Johnson reportedly answered, "Because I'm old." The achievements of his final years indicate otherwise, as the exhibition's drawings, models, photos and public programs prove. Some of Johnson's ambitious last projects, such as the planned Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, have life ahead of them. "In his later work, Johnson felt a greater sense of freedom to do whatever he wanted," says Lewis. "And he had a fine ability to be both quirky and elegant at the same time. He joked that when he turned 100 he'd move to Rome, but decided he had too much work to do and that Rome would have to wait until he turned 106." ■

"Philip Johnson: Architecture as Art" (March 15–July 31), The Kreeger Museum, 2401 Foxball Rd., NW, 202.337.3050, [www.kreegermuseum.org](http://www.kreegermuseum.org).