While Houstonians are hard at work drawing relationships between their city and places like Chicago and Los Angeles, we sometimes overlook our relationships to other peer cities. Miami, for example, is a city that, like Houston, started the 20th century small and boomed after WWII. "Interama: Miami and the Pan-American Dream," an engaging exhibition at the Historical Museum of Southern Florida

Interama:

Miami and the Pan-American Dream

by David Rifkind

that ran from June 21, 2008 to January 25, 2009, explored a project whose personality and vision finds no equivalent in the history of the Bayou City. When Houston was building SOM, Johnson, and Pei, Florida chartered utopic visions for Miami of unbuilt Kahn, Rudolf, and Breuer.

Aerial perspective of Marcel Breuer's design for the Eastern South American Community, 1967.

The exhibition "Interama: Miami and the Pan-American Dream" documents the numerous unrealized designs for Interama, a vast exposition site and urban design project planned for North Miami's Biscayne Bay coast. Conceived as a Truman-era exercise in hemispheric diplomacy, Interama originated in 1951 as the permanent Pan-American fairgrounds and later evolved into an ambitious plan to develop commercial and cultural facilities on a new cite created over a landfill. Curators Allan Shulman and Jean-François LeJeune, professors in the School of Architecture at the University of Miami, have mined numerous archives to gather previously unexhibited and unpublished materials that chronicle the project's 24-year history and trace the vicissitudes of its numerous schemes. The exhibition features a wealth of engrossing material that rewards careful inspection.
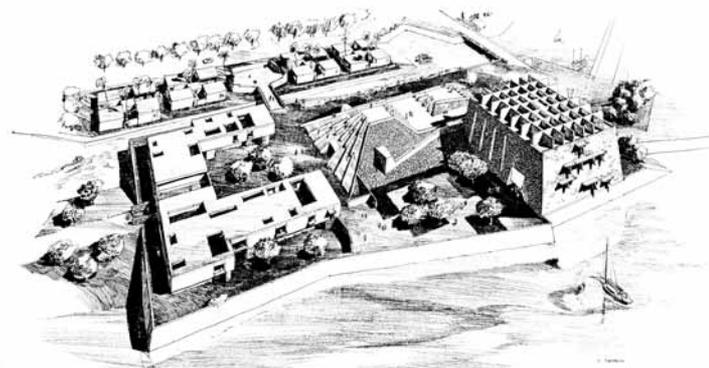
International fairs have always provided a testing ground for formal invention, and Interama's numerous schemes record two decades of postwar modernism's search for an appropriate form for expressing regional political ambitions. Shulman and LeJeune's exhibition locates the project within the two-century history of "Pan-Americanism"—from the Monroe Doctrine to the Cold War—and demonstrates how local business and government elites leveraged federal interest in fostering hemispheric relations into support for Miami's bid to mediate commercial and diplomatic ties between the United States the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. The state of Florida chartered the Inter-American Center Authority in 1951, a decade after the city emerged as the country's principal port of entry, handling nearly half of all international arrivals and departures. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Interama bore witness to the period's changing trends in exposition planning and pavilion design.

Hugh Ferris, a veteran of the 1939 New York World's Fair and a member of the large team that designed the first three schemes for Interama, produced many of the most compelling images in the exhibition. The architects of the initial project—as did the designers of the contemporaneous United Nations headquarters building—intended their architecture to represent the abstract notion of peaceful transnational cooperation. This group included Paul Rudolph, Alfred Browning Parker, Rufus Nims, Tripp Russell, Russell Pancoast, and Luis Malaussena; it was led by Miami architect Robert Fitch Smith. Another early contributor was University of Miami-trained architect Fernando Belaúnde, who later served two terms as President of Peru.

Ferris's gorgeous renderings convey the giddy exuberance of Interama's first decade, where pavilions drawn from the period's repertoire of structural invention (parabolic arches, hyperbolic vaults, hypocycloidal towers, and accordion-folded plate roofs) surround a dome and tower (the "Hemisphere" and "Spire") whose skeletal forms resemble the unclad armatures of their 1939 predecessors in New York. By 1955, the lagoon-centered circular plan of the first two schemes had been replaced by an elegant Persian carpet of interlocking canals and land, and the Hemisphere dome had given way to a dynamic play of three nested but untouching arches "symbolizing the unity between North, South, and Central America."

Yet none of these schemes came to fruition, stamping Interama as a project whose ambitious plans never found sufficient support to ensure realization. With the 1960s came great changes to

Paul Rudolph's International Bazaar, 1966-67.

Rudolph arranged his International Bazaar as a collection of open-air and enclosed spaces under a series of billowing concrete canopies carefully sited for shade and ventilation. Weese assembled the national houses of the Caribbean community into a long, narrow bar, pierced with shaded circulation spaces and sheltered from the western sun by two rows of trees cut into a single topiary volume that matched the building's height and massing.

The simple geometry of Weese's prismatic design emphasizes the unity of the Caribbean region, rather than the specific concerns of its constituent states. Both Sert, in the Western South American complex, and Breuer consolidated freestanding national houses under expansive, unifying canopies that express the transnational aspirations of the Interama authority's organizers. The theatrical space of Kahn's great plaza establishes a locus for collective activity. The themes of community and cooperation extend to the International Area's site plan, which evolved through the close collaboration of its six architects.

"Interama: Miami and the Pan-American Dream" offers a valuable chronicle of the site's numerous designs, all of which address the question of representing regional and hemispheric relations in architectural terms. The exhibition's chief drawbacks are its relatively small size, its uneven treatment of the various schemes, the inclusions of numerous unattributed and unidentified drawings, and the lack of a catalogue. The last is particularly irksome, given that Shulman and LeJeune hint at such issues as Interama's ties to contemporary geopolitics, but cannot explore these ideas in depth within the constraints of an exhibition. A catalogue would have allowed the curators to examine in detail the collaboration among the six architects of the International Area and to situate each project within its designer's oeuvre. A catalogue would also have accommodated the lengthier historical analysis necessary to determine the extent to which architects from outside Miami (such as Ferris or Sert) were hired for their expertise with expositions or for their "star" quality. Further historical analysis could have addressed as well the lingering influence of Interama's numerous schemes on two generations of Miami architects.

The occasional failure of the exhibition to distinguish the sequence of development, and even the definitive version, of particular projects would have been redressed in a catalogue, too. The exhibition's rich trove of archival materials deserves to be published, as do the illustrative digital models commissioned by the curators, lest"Interama" share its subject's fate and lapse into undeserved obscurity.

both the motives driving Interama—whose patrons in the federal government now included a Kennedy administration seeking to counter the Cuban revolution with the Alliance for Progress program—and the authority's governance and design team. Under the theme "Progress with Freedom," architect Robert Browne assembled a design team that included Milton Harry and Edward Durell Stone Jr., who produced a new site plan of paths and biomorphic building plots centered on a star-shaped lagoon. One quarter of this plan and subsequent schemes is dedicated to an "International Area," whose elaboration commands nearly half the exhibition.

The International Area began to take shape with the 1966 commission of six prominent architects: Louis Kahn, Marcel Breuer, Harry Weese, José Luis Sert, Rudolph, and Stone. All six had designed embassies or consulates for the State Department, as had Minoru Yamasaki, who contributed several designs for a tower in the center of the lagoon. The International Area represented a unique collaboration whose charge was to represent the nations of the Americas both individually and collectively. A unifying theme of community animates projects by all six architects, especially the four (by Kahn, Breuer, Sert, and Weese) intended to serve regional groupings of nations.

The "pre-Columbian and tropical" designs developed for the International Area are striking for their embrace of archaic forms drawn from the monumental ruins of Central America. Here the search for an appropriate formal expression of regional identities intersected with modern architecture's broader turn toward primitive and monumental non-western sources for a language that could fulfill modernism's emerging need for emotive, yet non-figurative vocabularies. Kahn, for example, centered his triangular complex (with seven pavilions representing the countries
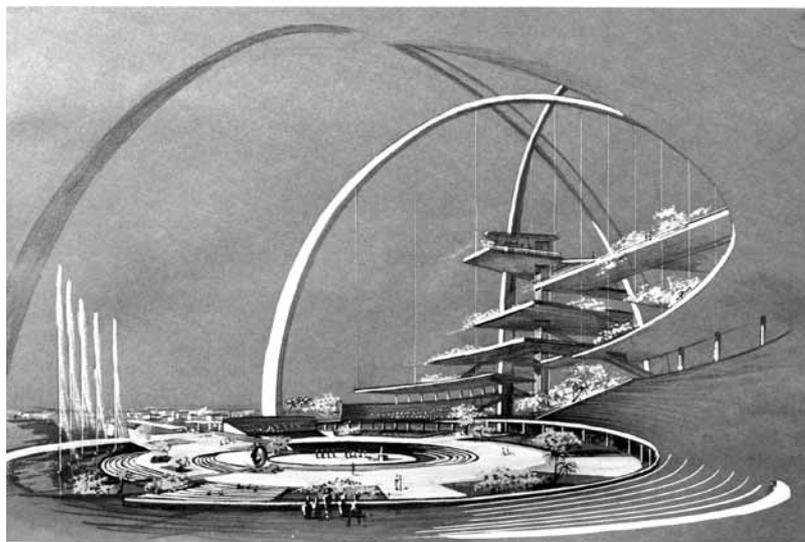
The Interama Hemisphere, c. 1955-56.

of Central America) on a great ceremonial plaza bordered by seating in a configuration that recalled Mesoamerican ball courts. Breuer's Eastern South American community (representing Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay) included exhibition and auditorium structures that consciously, if inappropriately, evoked the pyramids of Teotihuacan and Tikal, which are located much further north of that region. The perimeter battlements of Stone's United States Pavilion also echoed the battered masses of pre-Columbian pyramids and ball courts, but opened unexpectedly onto a lush garden planted on an archipelago of irregular islands in a pool at the heart of this otherwise rigorously symmetrical cruciform building.

Stone's rich landscape design speaks to another of the International Area's formal concerns: the tropical climate. Each of the six projects approached the region's weather with architectural gestures—such as broad canopies—intended to moderate light, reduce heat, and promote breezes.