

communiqué /press release**For immediate release****CIVIC VISIONS, WORLD'S FAIRS**

17 March to 8 August 1993

Montréal, 16 March 1993 -- Civic Visions, World's Fairs looks at the contribution of site planning to the history of international exhibitions. The dazzling energies of world's fairs are well known – millions of visitors, encyclopedic displays of goods and ideas, fantastic settings of pavilions and exhibition halls – but the sites that gather the kaleidoscopic exposition experience into a spatial unity are often overlooked. Civic Visions, World's Fairs illustrates world's-fair landscape in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, using an assortment of contemporary exposition books, objects, and memorabilia drawn from the CCA collections.

At first, the exposition landscape was simply an entrepreneurial solution to the new formal and utilitarian demands of world's fairs, but it soon acquired a symbolic function as well. Host cities learned to pose the site in response to current issues of urbanization. Exposition sites became civic laboratories, where the rapid pace of construction made it possible to realize new ideas in town planning long before they could be translated into the actual urban fabric. World's fairs introduced municipal parks, technical and transportation infrastructures and zoning as ways to cast the outlook of local growth in a positive and dynamic light. Civic Visions, World's Fairs explores how fair planners guided the transitory exposition toward lasting values of modernization, beautification, and monumentality in the city.

The exhibition highlights seven instances in which the exposition site revealed a city poised at a crucial turn in its development. The earliest examples – London 1851, Paris 1867 and Philadelphia 1876 – present an age in which national power was firmly embodied in civic order. Expositions were built upon the most significant open urban spaces – Hyde Park, the Champ de Mars, Fairmount Park – expressly to create a sense of civic identity and historical resonance in the form of new public parks. Chicago in 1893 and Paris in 1900 were cities contending with self-renewal and -generation, wilfully asserting their status as global capitals. The clearly programmed landscapes and central planning evident at early expositions were deliberately avoided. Instead, these world's fair sites became diverse urban microcosms, flexible models of "progress."

By the twentieth century, traditional city bounds had been irrevocably shattered, and urban development had become far less manageable. Displaced to outer-city locales, expositions were assigned a new role, that of affirming metropolitan viability. The world's-fair sites at New York (1939-40) and Montréal (1967), rather than concentrating on large public monuments, demonstrated an increasing emphasis on highways, transit, communications, and other external links, projecting their potential as centres of commerce and tourism. With mixed success, however: both cities have since had to contend with abandoned exposition grounds that resist integration into the city fabric.

The forty objects exhibited in Civic Visions, World's Fairs come from the CCA Library's special collection of exposition materials, which includes prospectuses and other promotional publications; maps, souvenirs, and guidebooks; illustrated news reports; park histories and builders' "golden books." These are supplemented by selections from the Photography and Prints & Drawings collections: official views of the U.S. Centennial and the World's Columbian Exposition, and Albert Robida's extraordinary proposal for Paris's Exposition universelle de 1900. The exhibition culminates with a presentation model, showing the earliest site plan for Montréal's Expo '67. Civic Visions, World's Fairs is accompanied by an illustrated bilingual brochure with essays by American historian Neil Harris and by Ben Portis, CCA curator of the exhibition. The publication is available at the CCA Bookstore for \$ 9.95.