

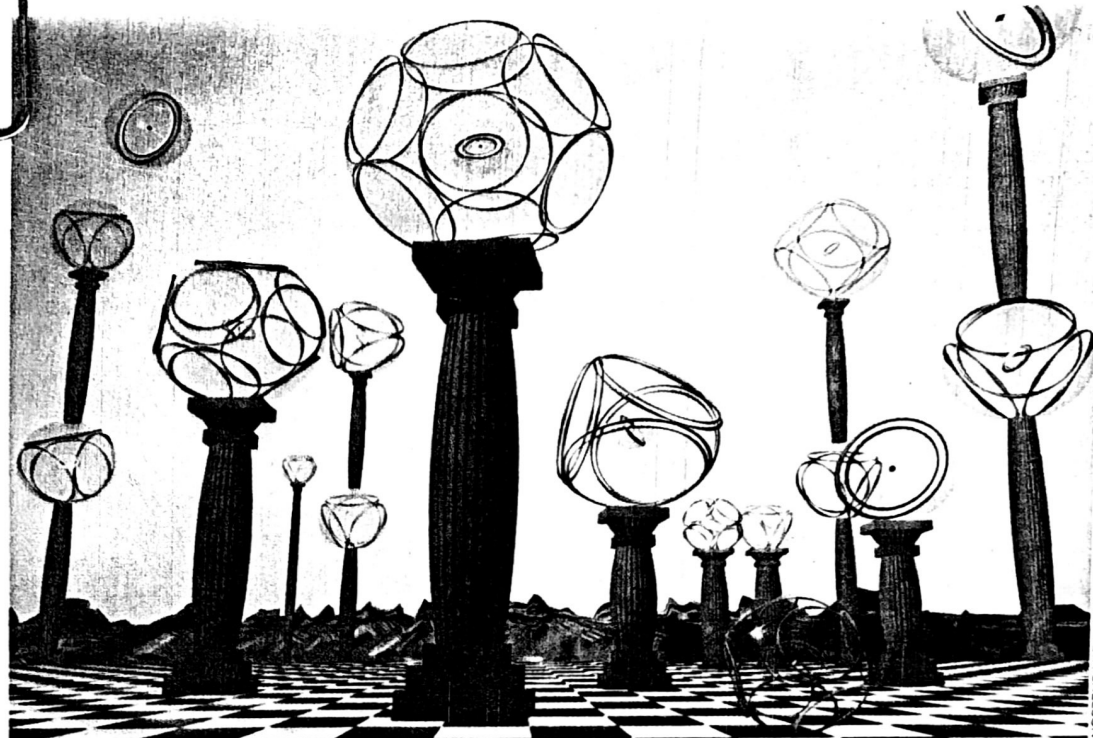
Cloud of Discord

In an effort to confer "world class" status on that Western terminus of Route 66, that place known for pioneering the drive-in cathedral, that collection of suburbs in search of a city—Los Angeles—city fathers devised a competition for a "West Coast Gateway."

What they had in mind was something like the Statue of Liberty or the Eiffel Tower. What they chose was a collision of Constructivist-inspired planes and beams nicknamed "The Steel Cloud." The winning design for the proposed \$33 million monument, the "Cloud" was selected from 100 entries.

Designed by Hani Rashid, 30, an Egyptian-born Canadian, and Lisa Anne Couture, 29, of Montreal, both now living in New York, the 12-story superstructure will span a four-block stretch of the Hollywood Freeway in downtown L.A. and house theaters, museums, libraries, and artwork. Rashid explains his design for the Gateway: "Los Angeles is not a melting pot. Each community is very unique. Hopefully, this project will join the different communities together."

So far, the project has generated more discord than cohesion. The mayor's office received hundreds of calls from irate citizens, many of whom were reassured to learn that the structure will not be built with public money. For the most part, the city's intellectuals and writers defend the project as an appropriate reflection of the



In Kenneth Snelson's computer-generated *Atoms at an Exhibition*, 1988, the forms appear atop columns in what seems a landscape brighter and quieter than any place we know.

city's horizontal esthetic.

But the cause célèbre may be a cause moot, since the cost of the project could escalate to \$90 million when the cost of leasing airspace from the state is added to the original estimate. L.A. *Herald Examiner* art critic Christopher Knight compared the structure to Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, noting that like that historic sculpture, the West Coast Gateway is likely to remain unbuilt. For reasons of cost, if not taste, the "Steel Cloud" may turn out to be a lead balloon.

—Hunter Drohojowska

Dancing the Quantum Dance

Sculptor Kenneth Snelson's lifelong aim has been to make visible the invisible order of the atom. But wood, steel, and plastic—until recently the only materials available to give form to his vision of the quantum dance—yielded results that he says "were sadly disappointing and clumsy compared with the immaculate gossamer atoms of my imagination."

The 1980s, however, offered Snelson a medium and a method exacting enough to capture the delicacy of his conception—graphic images created on a small computer.

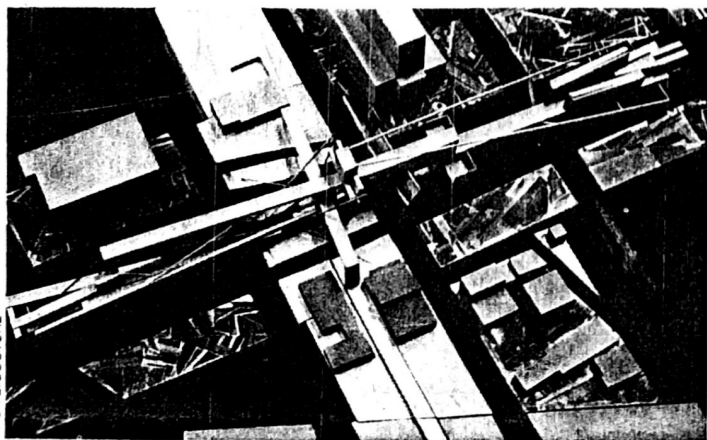
Snelson's atoms, on view last winter at the New York Academy of Sciences in a show titled "Kenneth Snelson: The Nature of Structure," are serene constructions of intensely colored rings, disks, and spheres that float in front of a pale field of light that could almost be a sky. Wherever it is, it is brighter and quieter than any place we know, but not so alien that we cannot imagine it. In one image, atomic forms

float through an earthly window. In another they are exhibited atop almost classical columns in a plausible landscape.

In Snelson's images, the ordered vision of the Constructivists combines with the playful hallucinations of the Surrealists. Two hundred years ago, Snelson, a medalist of the American Institute of Architects, would have been a designer of ideal buildings. Today, when not imagining atoms, he builds lightweight structures of metal tubes and wires in which metal seems to float in calm defiance of its own weight. The physics that hold these structures up is simple, but the eye refuses to believe the simplicity.

The third peak of Snelson's work is a series of panoramic photographs made by a rotating camera. The cityscapes in these seven-foot-wide images are both familiar (Paris, New York) and impossible (both sides of a street photographed side by side). "You could imagine the world spread out before you," he says. "It's an ideal beyond reach, but at least the ideal is there."

—Edward Mendelson



The controversial "Steel Cloud" is a 12-story structure to be built over a four-block stretch of the Hollywood Freeway.