

# Libeskind's legacy

NICK HACKWORTH | EVENING STANDARD | Monday 20 September 2004 00:00 |



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**For decades the Polish-born Daniel Libeskind, now 58, was renowned as an architectural teacher and theorist, one whose avant-garde ideas might never take physical form.**

Then, in 1996, the completion of his first major building, the extraordinary Jewish museum in Berlin, turned him into one of the world's most famous architects.

Since then, his fame has grown, encompassing the controversy engendered by his proposed "'exploding cube" extension to the V&A, finally ruled out as a possibility by the museum on Friday, and reaching new heights with his winning of the competition to design the master plan for the rebuilding the World Trade Center site.

In the UK, he has completed two buildings in the past two years, one a modestly sized postgraduate centre for London Metropolitan University on the Holloway Road, the other the grand Imperial War Museum North, in Manchester, nominated for this year's Stirling prize, Britain's most prestigious architectural award.

The exhibition is a fascinating journey, employing architectural models, text and videos, through 16 key projects designed by a man who will have a significant and lasting impact on the world's visual culture.

Though Libeskind's style, dubbed deconstructivism, is at odds with the straightforward rationality of classic Modernism as practised by Mies van der Rohe or Le Corbusier, he uses the same visual alphabet of straight lines and radical inorganic forms, scrambling it to create irregularity and angularity.

Walls and ceilings fly off at surprising vectors; windows are oddly placed. The buildings have the distinctive and pervasive look of crystalline growths, leading to a uniformity in his work.

These days, every city wants signature buildings. But just such a fad, say some, left us with the hideous legacy of Sixties architecture that created a widespread public resentment against the profession neatly encapsulated in Auberon Waugh's suggestion that the correct form of greeting on meeting an architect was to punch them in the face.

In isolation Libeskind's buildings are thoughtful and sometimes stunning. Were they to spawn a generation of poor copy-cats, however, it might be time to reach, once more, for the boxing gloves.

*Until 23 January. Information: 0845 120 7550. ■*