

20-Year Perspective On World's Fair

By HELEN A. HARRISON

IT is now nearly 20 years since the closing of the 1964-65 New York World's Fair, and it is being commemorated by "The Mighty Fair," an exhibition at the gallery of the Flushing Council on Culture and the Arts.

The gallery is not far from the fair site, known today as Flushing Meadow-Corona Park. More than a nostalgic display of the fair's souvenirs, the show analyzes the fair's place in history and offers a view of its meaning for the host community and as an indicator of national consciousness.

The exhibition was conceived and organized by David Oats, the director of community relations for the Queens Chamber of Commerce, and Peter M. Warner, an authority on international expositions and a founder of the World's Fair Collectors' Society. Both men have large collections of fair ephemera, and much of the material on view is from their holdings.

The Westinghouse Corporation has lent a replica of the time capsule that was buried outside the company's pavilion on Oct. 16, 1965, the fair's closing day. The metal cylinder contains artifacts meant to symbolize the era: a credit card, a Beatles record, birth control pills, a transistor radio and dozens of other items. Some of them, such as a giant computer chip, look remarkably antique only two decades later.

Displays trace the fair from genesis to demolition and highlight some of its important exhibits, including the General Motors Futurama, the Vatican Pavilion with Michelangelo's Pietà, and the elaborate structures of other nations, many participating in their first international fair.

For many visitors, the international pavilions and the fair's theme of "Peace Through Understanding" were overshadowed by the giant pavilions of American corporations

vying to outdo one another through advanced technology and show business spectacle. There was the ovoid I.B.M. building, with its ascending People Wall, Pepsi-Cola's Small World ride (the creation of Walt Disney, who later moved it to Disney World), and Bell Telephone's wing-shaped pavilion, in which a moving-chair ride told the story of communications "from drum beat to Telstar."

The current exhibition features a chair from the Bell ride and its taped narration. A video program, running continuously, shows highlights of some exhibits — including Futurama, with its predictions of manned colonies under the sea and in space — and shots of the fair being built and of the outdoor attractions and events. A handsome model of the grounds and aerial views that once graced the office of the fair's president, Robert Moses, are also on display.

The show covers the controversy that surrounded the fair's finances, its overlooking of many social and political problems of the day and its commercialism. Mr. Moses hoped the exposition would lead to the construction of a park he had conceived for the site after the 1939-40 fair. The park is now a reality and has many relics of both fairs, including the time capsules, the New York City Building, the Aquacade, Terrace on the Park, the Hall of Science and the 140-foot Unisphere, erected by U.S. Steel as the theme symbol of the 1964-65 fair.

Much of the fair's optimistic talk of peace and technological progress now seems naïve. "The Mighty Fair" shows how much attitudes have changed since the mid-1960's — indeed, how much they were already changing with the Vietnam War.

"The Mighty Fair" was to close Aug. 10, but the council says it will probably be extended through Labor Day. The gallery, at 136-73 41st Avenue, between Main and Union Streets in Flushing, is open 10 A.M. to 5 P.M. Wednesdays to Saturdays and 1 to 5 P.M. Sundays. Admission is free.