

TRANSFORMATIONS IN MODERN ARCHITECTURE

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TRANSFORMATIONS IN MODERN ARCHITECTURE

"Modern architecture is a great deal more varied than our daily experience is likely to suggest," notes Arthur Drexler, director of the major exhibition TRANSFORMATIONS IN MODERN ARCHITECTURE, on view at The Museum of Modern Art from February 23 through April 24, 1979. Photographs of more than 400 buildings, many of which seem to reject familiar notions of what modern architecture is, illustrate the exhibition's claim that the history of modern architecture during the last two decades involves the elaboration of ideas first propounded 30 or 40 years ago.

TRANSFORMATIONS IN MODERN ARCHITECTURE, which has been made possible through the generous support of The Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts and PPG Industries Foundation, will later travel to The Cleveland Museum of Art and the Art Gallery of Toronto. On Tuesday, April 10, 1979, at 8:00 p.m., Mr. Drexler will deliver a lecture on the exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art.

Over three hundred architects are represented in this exhibition. Many of the major names in contemporary architecture are included, as are many lesser known architects whose work, often in far-flung places, underscores the fertile inventiveness inherent in the modern tradition.

FEBRUARY 23 TO APRIL 24, 1979

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART 11 WEST 53 STREET NEW YORK, N.Y. 10019

The exhibition has been organized into three major categories: architecture as the invention of sculptural form; architecture as structural form; and vernacular architecture.

Sculptural form derives from post-World War II interpretations of Cubism and Expressionism. Le Corbusier's post-World War II work led the way toward a new preoccupation with mass, weight, rough textures and deliberately crude workmanship, often called Brutalism.

Structural form deals with what the architect Mies van der Rohe called "skin and bones" architecture: a steel or concrete skeleton structure that is covered by a glass or metal skin. This type of architecture relies on structure to communicate visual information about a building, regardless of its intended use. The current development of this kind of architecture returns to the earlier emphasis on the skin, as can be seen in today's ubiquitous "mirror" buildings. Utilizing tinted and reflecting glass, they communicate little or no information about themselves and carry architectural abstraction to its furthest point. A special feature of this exhibition is a room devoted to color transparencies of these mirror buildings, in which "substance dematerializes and objective technique culminates in the subjective contemplation of clouds and sunlight."

The third section of the exhibition deals with regionalist or vernacular architecture, in which modern forms are subordinated to traditional modes. Regionalism is characterized by natural materials used much as local craftsmen have always used them, a preference for small scale, and the use of a visible roof as a primary design element. As Mr. Drexler points out, "Regionalism and its vernacular variations address problems of survival and co-existence--of historical continuity. Both open the door to eclectic

historicizing in architecture." The exhibition includes a selection of work over a twenty year period that has pursued this connection with history.

In addition, TRANSFORMATIONS IN MODERN ARCHITECTURE examines the uses of detail (e.g. windows, roofs, parapets) independently of a systematic design aesthetic. As adherence to a single, unifying architectural theory has weakened, the design importance of unique, non-structural elements has grown.

TRANSFORMATIONS IN MODERN ARCHITECTURE suggests that the history of architecture during the last two decades involves sorting out, developing and transforming possibilities implicit in its beginning. As Mr. Drexler observes: "It is unlikely that anyone can offer a definition of modern architecture to which there are no exceptions. But one modernist commitment was shared universally, even if it proved impossible to fulfil. Modern architecture, like engineering, sought to deal only with the truths of structure and function. It wanted all architectural pleasures to derive from the straightforward encounter with necessity. Architectural fictions, the play of unnecessary forms with which the historical styles sought to transcend necessity, were rejected as unworthy. But no one can tell the truth all the time, if only because no one always knows what it is.

"Disguised in various ways, the fictions that modern architecture claimed to reject were soon smuggled in. What we now reject is the idea that fictions have to be disguised. How architectural truths and fictions transform each other constitutes a large part of recent history, and is the subject of this exhibition."

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For further information, please contact Luisa Kreisberg, Director (212) 956-2648 or Sharon Zane, Associate Director (212) 956-7295, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019. Photographs available on request.
