

The Museum of Modern Art

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MAJOR RETROSPECTIVE OF THE ARCHITECTURE OF ALVAR AALTO OPENS AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART IN FEBRUARY 1998

Original Drawings and Models on View for the First Time in the United States

- TITLE:** *Alvar Aalto: Between Humanism and Materialism*
- DATES:** February 19–May 19, 1998
- ORGANIZATION:** Organized by Peter Reed, Associate Curator, Department of Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art; with Kenneth Frampton, Ware Professor of Architecture, Columbia University, as curatorial consultant; assisted by Elina Standertskjöld, Museum of Finnish Architecture; with the cooperation of the Alvar Aalto Foundation and the Museum of Finnish Architecture.
- SPONSORSHIP:** This exhibition is made possible by an anonymous donor, and by a generous grant from Artek. Additional support is provided by Elise Jaffe and Jeffrey Brown. The publication accompanying this exhibition is made possible by grants from Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder and The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art.
- THE EXHIBITION:** In celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of the renowned Finnish architect, designer, and town planner, *Alvar Aalto: Between Humanism and Materialism* will be the first large-scale retrospective in the United States to present original drawings and models of Aalto's architecture.

Alvar Aalto (1898–1976), one of the most influential modern architects of the twentieth century, continues to have a profound influence both within his native Finland and internationally. During his fifty-four-year career, Aalto completed a large number of diverse commissions, primarily in Finland and Scandinavia, but also in the United States and Europe. These range from cultural institutions such as auditoriums, museums, and libraries to factories, apartment buildings, churches, and town halls. Aalto is also known for his innovative bent-wood furniture and glass designs. Aalto was of the same generation as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and Louis I. Kahn, and his career followed a similar development in many ways: a neo-classical beginning; a lucid “functional style”; and important later work characterized by expressive and humanist aspirations, which sought to balance regional with international influences, modern with ancient and vernacular architecture, and nature with an increasingly standardized technology.

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CONTENT:

The Alvar Aalto Foundation has granted The Museum of Modern Art unprecedented access to its vast holdings, which have rarely been loaned outside Finland in the last twenty years. In addition, original drawings and models which have never before been seen in the United States will be loaned from museums and private collections in Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Germany.

The exhibition will present fifty buildings and projects from all phases of Aalto's career. Approximately 175 original sketches and competition drawings, 15 models, and new and archival photographs will form the core of the exhibition.

The exhibition will include major institutional, residential, and commercial works as well as lesser-known projects, including Municipal Library, Viipuri, Finland (now Russia) (1927-35); Tuberculosis Sanatorium, Paimio, Finland (1929-33); Finnish Pavilion, New York World's Fair (1938-39, demolished); Avesta Town Center, Sweden (1944, project); Baker House Dormitory, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Mass. (1947-49); Opera House, Essen, Germany (1959, completed 1988); Helsinki University of Technology (1949-66); and Mt. Angel Abbey Library, St. Benedict, Oregon (1964-70).

An integral component of the exhibition will be several new video walk-throughs of Aalto's most important and best-known buildings. Produced by Yleisradio Oy (The Finnish Broadcasting Company, Ltd.)/TV 1, the short films will be shown on large screens throughout the exhibition to provide visitors with a rare opportunity to experience the light, the spatial qualities, and the setting of such Aalto works as Villa Mairea, House for Harry and Maire Gullichsen, Noormarkku, Finland (1938-39); Säynätsalo Town Hall, Finland (1948-52); and Church of the Three Crosses, Vuoksenniska (Imatra), Finland (1955-58).

Full-scale constructions will punctuate the installation and provide visitors with a tangible experience of Aalto's architecture. The new constructions will include a kiosk from the 1929 Turku 700th Anniversary Exhibition; a portion of the brick-and-tile wall of the Experimental House, Aalto's own summer house in Muuratsalo (1952-53), which epitomizes his interest in materials and aesthetics; a wall of the unique wedge-shaped bricks from the House of Culture, Helsinki (1952-60); and different column types made of wood and glazed tiles from various buildings. Several new models will also be constructed for the exhibition. Examples of Aalto's furniture, glass, and bent-wood sculptures will be exhibited to demonstrate their connection to his architecture. The Museum also plans to include Aalto-designed chairs, which are still in production, for use by visitors in the galleries.

PUBLICATION: The exhibition is accompanied by a major illustrated publication that provides both an historical overview and a discussion of Aalto's legacy and significance for contemporary architecture. The publication includes new photography of Aalto's built work and critical essays by architects and leading Aalto historians, including Kenneth Frampton; Vilhelm Helander, Professor of History of Architecture, Helsinki University of Technology; Pekka Korvenmaa, architectural historian and Research Director, University of Industrial Arts Helsinki; Juhani Pallasmaa, architect and former dean, School of Architecture, Helsinki University of Technology; Peter Reed; and Marc Treib, Professor of Architecture, University of California, Berkeley.

The publication studies Aalto's career within the context of Finnish and Scandinavian architecture, culture, and history. Aalto was by no means the only modern architect in Finland, but he was the best known and the most important. This overview examines Aalto's early background and the architectural culture of the preceding generation; the role of modern architecture and design in the newly independent country; and the significance of the landscape and vernacular architecture.

Aalto's role as an international figure in twentieth-century architecture is also explored. Because Aalto was extremely well known outside Scandinavia, and was familiar with the leading figures of modern architecture including Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, a discussion of Aalto's architecture, themes, and ideas within the context of other modernists is extremely important. The publication also defines the relevance, legacy, and impact of Aalto's work on modern architecture, discussing his ideas and architecture in terms of their ongoing relevance to contemporary architects and society.

Published by The Museum of Modern Art. Hardbound, distributed in the United States and Canada by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, and paperbound editions will both be available in The MoMA Book Store.

TRAVEL: Following its show in New York, the exhibition will tour internationally.

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For further information or photographic materials, contact Lisbeth Mark, 212/708-9847, Department of Communications. Visit our Web site at www.moma.org.