

The Museum of Modern Art

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Architecture Without Architects, a survey of communal architecture with examples from 60 countries, ranging from the undatable past to the present, will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from November 11 through February 7. Selected and installed by Bernard Rudofsky, well-known architect, critic and designer, the exhibition is mainly concerned with communal architecture, defined as "a communal art, not produced by the specialist but by the spontaneous and continuing activity of a whole people with a common heritage, acting under a community of experience." Mr. Rudofsky is a consultant to the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design.

"Far from being accidental, this non-pedigreed architecture gives tangible evidence of more humane, more intelligent ways of living," he says in the wall label introducing the exhibition. "What we take to be archaic buildings are often models of true functionalism and timeless modernity (as distinct from architectural fashions); what seems to us no more than quaint towns - 'picture postcard towns' we call them condescendingly - may in fact represent utopia. Besides, in communal architecture an instinctive understanding (not shared by us) of the limits of architecture finds application in confining the growth of a community. In other words, the untutored builders do not subordinate the general welfare to the pursuit of profit and progress, for they know that progress that takes no account of human needs is self-defeating."

Apart from the sophisticated minor architecture of Central Europe, the Mediterranean, South and East Asia, and primitive architecture proper, the exhibition also includes architecture by subtraction, or sculpted architecture, exemplified by troglodyte dwellings and free-standing buildings cut from live rock; rudimentary architecture, represented by wind screens which sometimes attain giant dimensions, shielding an entire village; and the architecture of nomads - portable houses, houses on wheels, sled-houses, houseboats and tents. Examples of proto-industrial architecture are seen in water wheels, windmills, both vertical and horizontal, and dovecots -
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vital fertilizer plants.

Among the "primitive" solutions which anticipate our technology are prefabrication, standardization of building components, flexible and moveable structures, floor heating, air-conditioning, light control and elevators.

Unit architecture in Spanish and Italian hill towns demonstrates that the use of a single building type need not produce monotony when irregularity of terrain and deviations from standard measurements can result in small variations which strike a perfect balance between unity and diversity. Pile dwellings, which have yet to be adapted for practical purposes in our civilization despite obvious need, are seen in Italy, China and Africa.

Arcades "altruism turned architecture--private property given to an entire community" make up one section of the show: examples are from Switzerland, Portugal, Spain and Czechoslovakia.

"In underdeveloped countries, such streets are usually as safe as a church at high mass. Still, although they are taken for granted by the natives, to us they seem unreal, devoid as they are of sidewalks, traffic lights, parked cars and batteries of garbage cans, all of which we have come to accept as the attributes of higher civilization," Rudofsky notes.

He concludes: "Every society has the architecture it deserves. If we are sometime less than happy about ours, it is because technology and wealth alone do not necessarily produce the best results. Architecture Without Architects drives home this point by comparing, if only by implication, the serenity of architecture in the so-called underdeveloped countries with the progressive chaos and blight of our urbs and suburbs.

"The exhibition, the first of its kind, approaches architecture not with a historian's mind but with a naturalist's sense of wonder. By offering a global, albeit incomplete, picture of human shelter it makes us realize the shortcomings of our own architecture. The wisdom to be derived goes beyond economic and esthetic considerations, for it touches the far tougher and increasingly troublesome problem of how to live and let live, how to keep peace with one's neighbors, both in the parochial and universal sense."

The exhibition was commissioned by the Department of Circulating Exhibitions under the auspices of the International Council of The Museum of Modern Art. Following the New York showing, Architecture Without Architects will tour this country and abroad.

A 128-page book with 156 illustrations, written by Mr. Rudofsky, has been published by the Museum to accompany the exhibition. It is on sale at the Museum bookstore (\$6.95 hard cover, \$3.95 paper bound), and can be ordered by mail. It is also being distributed to bookstores throughout the country by Doubleday and Co., Inc.

The exhibition consists of approximately 200 enlarged photographs mounted on a series of "hollow walls."

Catalog, photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, N. Y. 10019. CI 5-8900.