

The Museum of Modern Art

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Sixty-five years of modern architecture in the United States are reviewed in a major exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art on view from May 18 through September 6.

Selected and installed by Arthur Drexler, Director of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design, MODERN ARCHITECTURE, U.S.A. is being shown under the joint sponsorship of the Museum and The Graham Foundation for Advance Studies in the Fine Arts.

The extraordinary variety of work produced during the last 15 years is seen in the broader context of the history of modern architecture in this country. About half the buildings date from 1950.

Seventy-one buildings by ^{approximately} 38 architects are included, some unique masterpieces, others primarily of historical significance. "Some buildings are shown because they launched an idea; others because they carried an idea to its conclusion. All of them remind us that architectural excellence has many forms," Mr. Drexler says in the exhibition wall label.

The buildings are shown in large color transparencies, each mounted in its own free standing light box. The boxes, ranging from one and one-half feet to four feet high, are grouped on platforms and held in place by aluminum tubes.

The exhibition begins with an early work by Frank Lloyd Wright, the Unity Church built in 1906 in Oak Park, Illinois, which illustrates some characteristics of his architecture much admired in Germany and Holland.

"Throughout this American story, Frank Lloyd Wright appears in numerous guises. His work may be called a sustained explosion. Aspects of his architecture once rejected as naive - mass and solidity, for example - again seem relevant and curiosity 'modern,'" Mr. Drexler notes.

The emergence in the '20s of the international style is seen in houses in California by Schindler and Neutra. "The principles of the new style were meant to

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be internationally valid, but its European aspects were again emphasized at the end of the '30s, when refugees, converging on the United States, made major changes in our teaching and practice of architecture." Among the buildings in this section of the exhibition are the PSFA office building in Philadelphia by Howe and Lescaze and Walter Gropius' house in Massachusetts. It was also in the late '30s that Frank Lloyd Wright produced two of his greatest works: Fallingwater in Bear Run, Pa., the famous house for Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., and the Johnson Wax Administration Building in Racine, Wisconsin.

"The post-war building boom provided ample opportunity for contending schools of thought, but through the late '40s and most of the '50s the American imagination was dominated by the inspired method of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe," Mr. Drexler says. Six of Mies' buildings are shown including the 1946 Alumni Memorial Building at Illinois Institute of Technology and the Seagram building designed by Mies and Philip Johnson in 1958. Other work from the '40s and early '50s on view includes Marcel Breuer's bi-nuclear Galler House (1945), Philip Johnson's elegant steel and glass pavilion in Connecticut (1949), Charles Eames' house in California (1949), Mies' Farnsworth House (1950), and Lever Brothers' office building in New York City, designed by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill with Gordon Bunshaft, partner in charge of design (1952).

Another influence is illustrated by the Finnish architect Alvar Aalto's only major work in the U.S.A., the Senior Students Dormitory at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1948). "Aalto anticipated and, like Le Corbusier, helped create a post-war enthusiasm for the restless, sometimes brutal forms that have rivalled Mies' architecture of structural purity." And again, Drexler comments, "The great French architect Le Corbusier has been an acknowledged influence everywhere since the '20s. In recent years his use of complex sculptural form has coincided with a world-wide restlessness - a suspension of dogma that has led to new freedom as well as disorder."

Two houses in Norman, Oklahoma, illustrate a kind of personal statement: Bruce Goff's Bavinger House of 1950 ("Goff's architecture of fantasy accurately reflects

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an aspect of the American temperament"); and Herbert Greene's house of 1961 ("Shingles on a wood frame contribute to the unnerving insectile quality of this house-as-sculpture.")

Recent buildings from the '50s and '60s include Minoru Yamasaki and Associates' Wayne State University Education Building, 1958-1961, ("as proscriptions against ornament lose their authority, ornamental interpretations of structure appear"); Philip Johnson's New Harmony Shrine, 1960, ("the undulating shell suggests forms from both ancient history and modern engineering"); Kahn's Richards Medical Research Building, 1961-63, ("Kahn's effort to make architectural form coincide with real and symbolic functions has profoundly impressed students and influenced his peers - more perhaps than any other architectural philosophy since that embodied in Mies' work of the '40s"); Saarinen's Terminal for Trans World Airlines, 1962, ("forms borrowed from engineering are here amplified for expressive purposes. Essentially a sculpture to walk in..."); Paul Rudolph's parking garage in New Haven, 1962, ("skillful modeling of its piers and parapets and its great length give this utilitarian structure of poured concrete the splendor of a Roman viaduct"); Soleri's underground house and studio in Arizona, 1961-; Skidmore, Owings and Merrill's office building in Kansas City using the conventional rectilinear skeleton frame, 1964, ("it is difficult to imagine any further clarification of the system."); Victor Lundy's Office Building for IBM in Cranford, New Jersey, 1965, ("...all exterior walls are built up of concrete blocks arranged in a pattern whose intricacy suggests both Mayan architecture and computer diagrams."); and the largest office building to date, the Chicago Civic Center, C. F. Murphy Associates, supervising architects, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill; Loeb, Schlossman and Bennett, associate architects, 1963, ("Technological advances are used to modify and enliven, with a new sense of proportion, Chicago's traditional building type.")

MODERN ARCHITECTURE, U.S.A. is the 178th exhibition presented by the Department of Architecture and Design of The Museum of Modern Art since the famous International Exhibition of Modern Architecture in 1932. In 1944, a survey called Built in USA - Since 1932 was presented and in 1953, Built in USA: Postwar Architecture.

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Other exhibitions have dealt with the work of individual architects - Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright for example; or of a particular categories of buildings - structures by engineers (1964), buildings for business and industry (1957), for the State Department (1953), schools (1942), war-time housing (1948); or with a geographic area such as Latin American Architecture since 1945.

After the New York showing, MODERN ARCHITECTURE, U.S.A. will travel here and abroad under the auspices of the International Council of The Museum of Modern Art.

An illustrated checklist annotated by Arthur Drexler will be published by the Museum at the end of May.

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

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