

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

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October 29, 1969

An exhibition of ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS BY ERIC MENDELSON will be on view from October 31 through December 28 at The Museum of Modern Art, where the German-born architect's work was first introduced to the American public in a retrospective in 1941, a year after his arrival in the United States. The current exhibition of 80 drawings in pencil, ink, and crayon, done between 1914 and 1929, illustrates the visionary work of one of the members of the founding generation of modern architecture.

The drawings have been selected from an exhibition organized by the University Art Museum at Berkeley in cooperation with the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts. Included are early sketches for imaginary railway stations, factories, and grain elevators (1914-1915); a garden pavilion (1920); the Univer-sum Cinema (1925-1928); and Metal Workers' Union building (1929); as well as the "Trench Sketches" done during World War I, his "Dune Architecture" inspired by wind-swept sand dunes in northeast Prussia, and "Music Sketches" (1920-1925) suggested by particular musical passages.

Eric Mendelsohn (1887-1953) was convinced that the advent of steel and concrete would usher in a new age of architecture in the twentieth century; not only would these new materials change structural systems, but also the resulting architectural expression. He understood their potentials, and was able to combine the experiments and developments of his predecessors to express these potentials without relying on traditional forms.

Mendelsohn was a successful architect in Berlin and his varied designs for industrial structures, office buildings, stores, hospitals, residences, synagogues, and recreation pavilions were executed in Germany, Russia, England, Palestine, and the United States. But perhaps more than his buildings, his dramatic, visionary, and highly individualistic drawings testify to his versatility.

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The dynamic linear quality so characteristic of Mendelsohn's drawings first appeared in 1914. The early imaginary sketches for various types of buildings show the originality of his use of steel and concrete which was then unique. At the same time they reveal his attraction to art nouveau and his admiration for engineers of the nineteenth century. However, the many similarities with drawings by the Italian Futurist Antonio Sant'Elia -- the massing of forms, use of cylindrical shapes, and monumentality and space -- are not the result of direct influence, but rather of common roots in the school of the Viennese architect Otto Wagner.

What are perhaps Mendelsohn's most creative sketches were done in 1917 in the trenches of World War I. Out of no-man's land came machine monuments or monumental machines. His two-point perspective with a low horizon line appear to be periscope visions of the brave new age. Although tiny, these powerful designs with their flowing contours often depicted structures of mammoth scale. His primary concern was always the exterior elevation, and he developed his sense of perspective to such a point that large industrial complexes could be portrayed in inch-size sketches.

The well-known Einstein Tower, first conceived in the trenches, was the only such visionary project to be realized and was his first really important work. The Tower, a solar observatory built near Potsdam in 1920-21, illustrates the imagination, rhythmical flowing movements, and elastic continuity of Mendelsohn's work. "Unique in its organic plasticity, it remained a singular event in his oeuvre," states Ludwig Glaeser, Curator of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design, in the exhibition wall label. "Thirty years later it was to become a key monument of the organic tradition which professes to redeem the functionalist sins of the 'international style.' Ironically, this was the style of all the other buildings Mendelsohn designed during the 1920's.

It was Mendelsohn's "urbane version of elegantly curved facades and ribbon windows that popularized modern architecture," says Mr. Glaeser. The exhibition has been installed by Mr. Glaeser in the Philip L. Goodwin Galleries on the third floor. The exhibition catalogue published at Berkeley is on sale in The Museum of Modern Art Bookstores for \$5.00.

Additional information and photographs available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director and Linda Gordon, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. (212) 956 - 7501, 2648.

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