

The Museum of Modern Art

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THE ARCHITECTURE OF GUNNAR ASPLUND, an exhibition of the work of Sweden's leading architect in the years between the two World Wars, will be on view from June 30 through September 10, 1978 in the second-floor Goodwin Galleries. The exhibition is guest directed by Stuart Wrede, an American-educated Finnish architect, whose book reassessing Asplund's career will be published by MIT Press.

Employing a combination of photo and text panels, GUNNAR ASPLUND will provide an important and long-overdue analysis of Asplund's remarkable oeuvre. Erik Gunnar Asplund's (1885-1940) untimely death at age 55 ended a brilliant career at its height. Although his work has had an important influence on a small group of today's leading architects and theorists, Asplund has remained largely unknown to a wider post-war generation.

After finishing his architectural studies in 1911 under the influence of the masters of Swedish National Romanticism, his architecture gradually evolved through a free integration of vernacular and classical motifs towards a more rigorous classicism which culminated in the Stockholm Public Library. The work of this period established him as Scandinavia's most innovative and influential architect.

His conversion to the International Style led to his much admired buildings for the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930 and to the general emergence of functionalism in Scandinavia. However, having embraced functionalism, Asplund was one of the first architects to react against it. From the mid-1930s onward he began to reintegrate modern architecture with classical, vernacular and archaic sources. His ability to distill and combine formal and psychological essences from different architectures makes Asplund's work especially fascinating today.

(more)

In the introduction to the exhibition Stuart Wrede writes: "Asplund's architecture has a strong emotional resonance, conjuring up memories, moods and associations through highly evocative forms and symbolic details. His architecture appears to continue the 19th century's concern with significance and symbolism--yet there is a difference. If the purpose and meaning of traditional symbolism was clearly defined and carried through with a conscious intellectual consistency, Asplund's apparent symbolism is often elusive and ambiguous. It appears to be highly intuitive, based on deeply felt and freely mixed associations. In certain cases there is little hard evidence that it was conscious, except for the consistency of the motifs. Yet his overt use of symbolism in his earlier work as well as his subtle and sophisticated use of forms seems to argue against the theory that he was a naif who did not know what he was doing. Rather, Asplund appears to have followed a course which closely parallels developments in modern literature and psychology, with their conscious interest in archetypes, dreams and the unconscious."

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