

The Museum of Modern Art

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Biographical Notes on Bernard Rudofsky

Bernard Rudofsky, director of the exhibition "Architecture Without Architects," on view at The Museum of Modern Art from November 11, 1964 to February 22, 1965, is an architect, engineer, writer and critic. He considers exhibitions a medium for communicating an idea rather than an occasion for competing with display men (although occasionally he has done so, as in "Textiles, U.S.A.," shown at the Museum in 1956). Besides, he likes to choose subjects that no museum has presented before.

To his surprise, his first show, "Are Clothes Modern?," which concerned neither costume history nor dress-making but our pathetic efforts to compensate for the fur and feathers which nature denied us, made a great stir. In 1961, he directed "Roads," another controversial show which, as John Canaday put it in The New York Times, "makes most painting exhibitions look like esthetic maunderings of escapists...." It was followed that year by "Stairs," an elegiac treatise on an element of architecture largely unfamiliar to the short-winded habitués of escalators and elevators. "Vernacular Graphic Arts of Japan," selected from Mr. Rudofsky's own collection which he acquired during his two years tenure of a research professorship in Japan, presented an art virtually ignored by art historians and artists alike.

These shows, however, were dwarfed by his work as chief architect of U. S. Government exhibits at the 1958 International Exposition in Brussels. "The Face of America," an exhibit for which he had carte blanche, while enthusiastically received abroad, caused heated controversies in the United States and made President Eisenhower hurriedly send an investigator abroad. (He okayed it.)

In "Architecture Without Architects," another first, Mr. Rudofsky acquaints us with old, sometimes millenarian architectural traditions, evolved and upheld by people, bright enough not to need to be told what is good for them. His interest in what he calls non-pedigreed architecture goes back to his student days - his doctoral dissertation concerned his discovery of a prehistoric method of concrete vaulting - when travel was still an art and sometimes a struggle for survival. ~~Yet he still~~ ^{Besides, the} more...

recording and photographing of anonymous architecture was, and still is, looked upon with suspicion. Mr. Rudofsky has been shot at and arrested as a potential spy - in Turkey and Bulgaria - and shadowed by the Italian police for five years. His first-hand experience of habitations runs the gamut from troglodyte dwellings to the emperor's suite in a Japanese mansion.

Mr. Rudofsky, who was awarded Ford, Guggenheim and Fulbright Fellowships for his more recent searches and researches, has lectured widely on architecture and related subjects, and has served as visiting critic to the graduate schools of architecture at Yale and M.I.T. He is the author of Behind the Picture Window, "a work that deflates our most cherished illusions of national superiority" (Christian Science Monitor) and established him as "one of the true independents who dare to question the mythology of conservatism when among conservatives, the folklore of liberalism when among liberals." (The New York Times) - Are Clothes Modern?, called "a psychoanalysis of dress" by the New Yorker, was based on his exhibition of the same name. The Kimono Mind, to be issued in the spring of 1965, carries the bland announcement of being an informal guide to Japan and the Japanese. At present, he is at work expanding his introductory booklet Architecture Without Architects into a full-size book on the universal problems of human shelter.

"Mr. Rudofsky's charm as an unorthodox critic," wrote Life magazine, "may lie in the fact that it is difficult to tell whether he views mankind's foibles with a reformer's zeal or an aficionado's delight." To which he replies that nothing could be more uncongenial to him than the role of a reformer. He honestly believes that man is unimprovable. He never thinks of his exhibitions as homilies but rather as works of art, supremely unfunctional and, therefore, enjoyable.

Born in Austria in 1905, Mr. Rudofsky graduated as an architect and engineer from the Vienna Polytechnic University in 1928 and received a doctor's degree from the same institution in 1931. He practiced architecture in Austria, Germany, Italy and Brazil and traveled extensively in Europe, and North and South America, before coming to the United States in 1941, when he won a prize in the Organic Design Competition sponsored by The Museum of Modern Art. He now lives in New York.
