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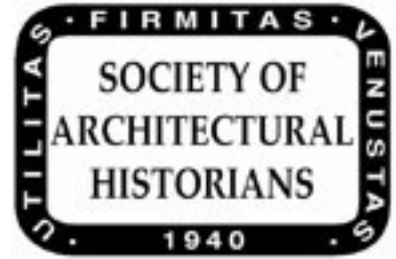
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Lessons from Bernard Rudofsky

Review by: Jean-François Bédard

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graphic conventions and to Sebastien Leclerc's persistent use of the device of a trompe l'oeil—pin-on in his engravings for Claude Perrault, whether in his anatomical studies of 1671 onwards or, as Claudia Funcke remarked, in his translation of Vitruvius of 1673. Nicola Giobbe presented both a collection of French navigational charts and a copy of the second edition of the Vitruvius, of 1684. Rosand revisited the spiral and the serpentine line. Barry outlined the politics and symbolical intent inherent in Piranesi's design for San Giovanni in Laterano, to greatly enlightening effect. His presentation was a shortened version of his excellent article "*Rinovare, anzichè ristorare*. Piranesi as architect," published in 2006 in *The Rome of Piranesi*—an article, incidentally, that provides more grist to counter the criticisms of Sorensen. Surprisingly, Barry omitted, in both variants of his analysis, to mention the clear intent to reestablish the nave and the high altar as the principal alignment of the church, displaced in the late sixteenth century by the building of the Benediction Loggia at one end of the transept and the altar of the Sacrament at the other. But he brought his presentation to a triumphant climax with the showing of a computer simulation (made with Andrew Williamson, concept artist for the *Harry Potter* films) of a stroll down the nave, into an aisle, to culminate in the most ambitious of Piranesi's apses. This was altogether stunning.

ROBIN MIDDLETON
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Publication related to the exhibition

Sarah E. Lawrence, ed. *Piranesi as Designer*. New York: Editions Assouline, 2007, 360 pp., 250+ illus. \$60, ISBN 0-910503-96-6

Note

1. Robin Middleton, *Architektur weiterdenken*. Werner Oechslin zum 60. Geburtstag (Zurich, 2004); and Fabio Barry, *Francesco Borromini*. *Atti del convegno Internazionale* (Rome, 2000).

Lessons from Bernard Rudofsky

Architekturzentrum Wien, Vienna
9 March–28 May 2007

Canadian Centre for Architecture,
Montreal
4 July–30 September 2007

Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles
11 March–8 June 2008

The architect Bernard Rudofsky (Suchdol nad Odrou, Moravia 1905–New York 1988) was at the margins of high modernism but nonetheless shared the obsessions of the age. Like his more famous colleagues, he advocated for a reformed lifestyle suited for modern individuals. Yet, unlike some of his heroic counterparts who embraced industrialization, he shunned the dream of an efficient reengineering of the human environment made possible by the machine. Nor did he wish to follow formalist programs for a new architecture, like that prescribed by the proponents of the International Style. Instead, he relied on the lessons provided by the collective wisdom of generations of form-makers and users, one he saw encapsulated in traditional design.

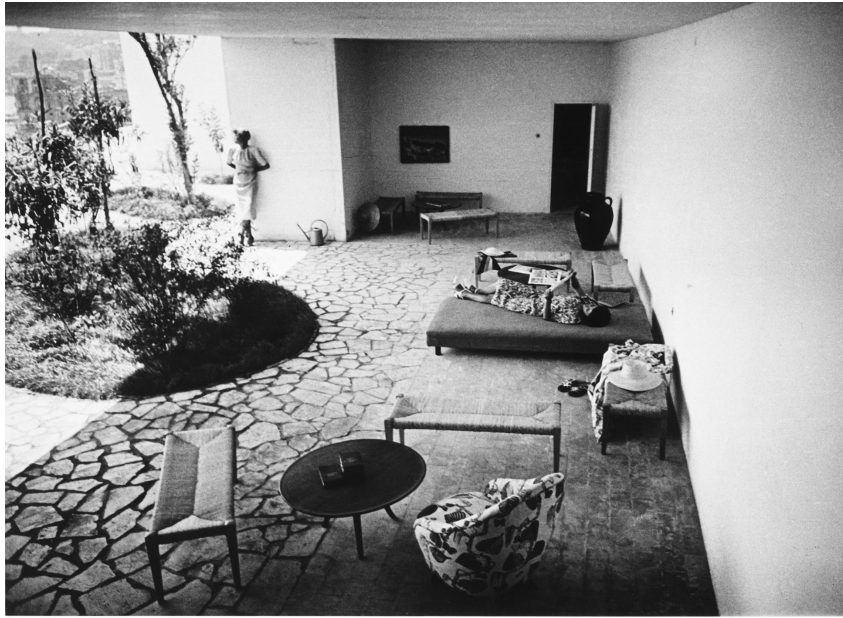
Rudofsky's "primitivism" was hardly a novelty in modernist circles. Since the Enlightenment, critics have used pre-modern or foreign cultures as counterexamples to the shortcomings of their own societies. In the visual arts, the quest for origins was a crucial catalyst for much of the avant-garde, and important architects such as Le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and José Luis Sert studied traditional buildings to hone their revolutionary agendas. The indigenous would be an even more crucial motor in Rudofsky's intellectual enterprise.

Rudofsky relentlessly confronted the familiar and the "other" throughout his life. These contrasting positions underpinned his activities as writer, photographer, designer, and architect alike. They informed his wide-ranging analysis of material culture that covered territories as diverse as clothing and urban form. In apparel design, he wished to replace the extravagance of Western

fashion with a more reasoned approach. His designs for shoes and clothing celebrated a body freed from illogical and unhealthy garments produced by a perverse fashion system. He countered his historicist, Beaux-Arts training at the Technische Hochschule Wien, where he had graduated in 1928, by studying vernacular structures of foreign civilizations. Thus he championed indigenous Mediterranean buildings and traditional Japanese houses as models to emulate. Rudofsky's lifelong commitment to the study of native buildings and their settings culminated in the seminal exhibition that he curated at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1964, *Architecture Without Architects*, an immensely popular event that definitively established his reputation as a relentless critic of the vacuity of modern life.

An elegant exhibition organized by the Architekturzentrum Wien and the Getty Research Institute (GRI) in association with the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) outlined Rudofsky's career and theoretical interests. Its cocurators Monika Platzer, curator of the Archive/Collection at the Architekturzentrum, and Wim de Wit, head of Special Collections and Visual Resources and curator of Architectural Collections at the GRI, masterminded the staging of objects. A lavishly illustrated catalog accompanies the exhibition. It comprises an introduction by Platzer and essays by Maria Welzig, de Wit, Andrea Bocco Guarneri, and Felicity D. Scott that were presented originally at a 2005 symposium held in Vienna on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of Rudofsky's birth. Documentary sections devoted to Rudofsky's photographs, the books he authored, and reprints and translations of some of the architect's articles in *domus* complete the publication.

Two introductory galleries preceded six main sections at the CCA. The first gallery featured suspended reproductions of some of Rudofsky's iconic drawings and photographs, a display strategy that mimicked one favored by the architect in his own exhibition designs. Copies of Rudofsky's principal publications were



Bernard Rudofsky with Luigi Cosenza, Casa Oro, via Orazio, Naples, Italy, 1935–37, view of the veranda. Courtesy of the Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

made available to the visitors in the second introductory gallery, which included a display of projected images from Rudofsky's travels and brief chronologies of his life and that of his wife and collaborator, Berta Doctor.

Sections one and two, "Life as a Voyage, Travel as a Lifestyle" and "Sensuous Austerity: The Mediterranean and Japan," illustrated the crucial role foreign cultures played in Rudofsky's intellectual development. The curators paired watercolors and sketches from his student years with turn-of-the-century Viennese publications that expounded the architectural beauty of Capri and provided an intellectual context for Rudofsky's early infatuation with Italy.¹ His powerful, abstract watercolors of Thera villages (some of which the architect had exhibited at the Künstlerhaus in Vienna in 1931) revealed his particular fondness for the Mediterranean vernacular. Documentary photographs that illustrated his doctoral thesis on Cycladic structures, "Eine primitive Betonbauweise auf den südlichen Kykladen, nebst dem Versuch einer Datierung derselben" (A primitive

concrete building technique of the southern Cyclades, and an attempt to date it), completed in 1931 at the Technische Hochschule Wien, complemented the watercolors. The Mediterranean also figured in Rudofsky's brief collaboration in the 1930s with the Italian architect Gio Ponti. This association, featured on another wall of the gallery, resulted in several projects for hotels. The images presented at the CCA, all taken from publications, documented a 1937–38 scheme for an ideal hotel (*albergo ideale*) and the unrealized 1938 Hotel San Michele in Capri. Rudofsky's other great love, Japan, was featured in a long case with two of the architect's travel sketchbooks and contemporary publications, including Tetsuro Yoshida's *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* (1935), Bruno Taut's *Houses and People of Japan* (1938), and Walter Gropius's *Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture* (1960).

The third section, "Casa Procida, a Manifesto," introduced Rudofsky's program regarding the art of living and its proper architectural frame. The architect's hedonistic agenda was exemplified

in his unrealized Casa Procida of 1935, a courtyard house laden with dreams of classical Greece and the starting point of all his subsequent designs. The visitor could assess the evolution in the architect's thinking about dwellings by comparing this early project with his own house in Spain (La Casa, Frigiliano, near Málaga, 1969–71). The fourth section, "The House, an Instrument for Living," completed the overview of Rudofsky's domestic designs. Copies of plans, contemporary photographs, original drawings, and two models documented Rudofsky's four most important built houses: the Casa Oro (Naples, 1935–37; with Luigi Cosenza), the Casa Frontini (São Paulo, 1939–41), the Casa Arnstein (São Paulo, 1939–41), and the Nivola House-Garden (Amagansett, New York, 1949–50; with Costantino Nivola).

Rudofsky's ideas about the human body and its proper dress comprised the exhibition's fifth section, "The Unfashionable Human Body." The curators documented his 1944 exhibition at MoMA, *Are Clothes Modern?*, with installation photographs, newspaper clippings, and a recreation of an original display that demonstrated the irrational complexity of the 1940s businessman's attire. Rudofsky's pessimistic assessment of modern clothing led to the development of his own line of shoes, garments, and fabrics. Examples of his popular Bernardo sandals (1946–64), his Bernardo Separates (1950–51)—a modular wardrobe of leisure wear for women made from single pieces of fabric—and his Stimulus Collection (1949), designed for the innovative fabric-maker Schiffer Prints, were also displayed.

A sixth section, "A Natural History of Architecture," concluded the exhibition. Suspended from the ceiling were original panels from Rudofsky's acclaimed MoMA exhibition, *Architecture Without Architects*. A long case with publications in praise of vernacular building and others questioning the fate of the modernist city highlighted the postwar crisis in the ideology of modernism that unfolded at the time of the MoMA presentation.²

To complement Rudofsky's inquiries

about the body, the curators amusingly revisited a selection of images of bodily transformations featured in *Are Clothes Modern?*. They displayed Rudofsky's vignette of "foot molds" next to Adidas basketball shoes, showed the analogy of an x-ray image of a Chinese banded foot to that of a woman wearing high heels, stressed the uncanny similarity between the earrings of Santa Cruz islanders and a Motorola v600 Bluetooth earpiece, and juxtaposed frightening diagrams of head-deforming techniques with a chronological chart plotting the popularity of plastic surgery interventions mimicking the eyes, noses, and lips of famous movie stars. Dispersed throughout the exhibition spaces, in the thresholds of each gallery, these paired images underlined the pertinence in today's commercial culture of Rudofsky's dissidence with fashion.

For all the documentary richness of the exhibition, Rudofsky remained elusive. This resulted partially from the single provenance of the artifacts exhibited: most of the material shown came from the Getty's Rudofsky archive. Given the architect's polymathic interests, the visitor might have been disappointed to find Rudofsky's career documented almost exclusively on its own terms. The CCA's expansive galleries underscored this narrow focus; the Los Angeles viewer will be able to assess if the show's narrow archival basis functions better in the GRI's more intimate presentation spaces and within the bounds of its specialized program. The indispensable exhibition catalog reveals how the displayed artifacts might relate to one another and, more importantly, how they resonated with more familiar examples of twentieth-century architecture and design.

The curators were well aware of the limitations of a focused monographic approach and presented contemporane-

ous publications to serve as foil to Rudofsky's ideas. Intended to evoke the complex debates that situated Rudofsky's polemics, the books functioned as shorthand notations, conjuring ideas well-known to the specialist viewer but less so to the general public. One would have wished, for example, for more than a few pages of *domus* to highlight Rudofsky's crucial encounter with the Italian avant-garde of the 1930s. The wall-size reproduction of the plan for the Casa Procida taken from the Milan periodical needed a full discussion of Rudofsky's espousal of a philhellene, stripped-down classicism to distinguish it from its contemporary embrace by the very fascist regimes from which Rudofsky fled.

The shortcomings of the curators' comparative strategy came to the fore in the last gallery. The immense impact of *Architecture Without Architects* on architects and the general public alike (it was one of the most popular architectural exhibitions of the twentieth century) called for a comprehensive discussion of its effect on contemporaneous architectural practice and patronage. Vernacular architecture had served the first generation of modernists in rejecting historicism; it also bolstered postwar architects in their search for alternatives to a discredited International Style. It would have been interesting to see how movements and architects as diverse as Team X, Peter and Alison Smithson, Yona Friedman, the Japanese Metabolists, and even the late buildings of the modernist masters responded to or conversely ignored Rudofsky's polemical and ambiguous espousal of "non-pedigree" architecture.

The exhibition's minor deficiencies undoubtedly stemmed more from logistical imperatives than articulated positions, and one should salute the three collaborating institutions for reintroducing Rudofsky to contemporary discourse.

His criticism of the negative effects of commercial culture fits nicely in the intriguing project of Mirko Zardini, director of the CCA, to broaden the analysis of the built environment by considering those qualities obscured by a blind espousal of technology. With the recent, increasingly abstract architectural forms generated by parametric design, the engineered sensory control of the new environments demanded by the "experience economy," or the disastrous consequences of hypercapitalistic urban development at a global scale, Rudofsky's plea for a truly humane art of living might indeed be more relevant than ever.

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Publication related to the exhibition

Monika Platzer, ed. *Lessons from Bernard Rudofsky: Life as a Voyage*. Basel: Birkhauser, 2007, 304 pp., 200+ color and b/w illus. \$64.95, ISBN 978-3-7643-8359-6

Notes

1. Joseph August Lux, *Das Moderne Landhaus. Ein Beitrag zur neuen Baukunst* (Vienna, 1905); and Josef Hoffmann, "Architektonisches von der Insel Capri," *Der Architekt* 3 (Vienna, 1897).
2. The publications on vernacular building included: Giuseppe Pagano, *Architettura rurale italiana* (Milan, 1936); Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, *Native Genius in Anonymous Architecture* (New York, 1957); Ronald Rainer, *Anonymes Bauen in Nordburgenland* (Salzburg, 1961); Raimund Abraham, *Elementare Architektur* (Salzburg, 1963); and Hans Hollein, "Pueblos," *Der Aufbau* 9 (1964). The publications on the modernist city included: José Luis Sert, *Can Our Cities Survive?* (Cambridge, Mass., 1942); Jane Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York, 1962); Serge Chermayeff and Christopher Alexander, *Community and Privacy: Towards a New Architecture of Humanism* (Garden City, N.Y., 1963); Victor Gruen, *The Heart of Our Cities* (New York, 1964); and the Museum of Modern Art, *The New City: Architecture and Urban Renewal* (New York, 1967).