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| Mendelsohn, Erich (1887-1953) |
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| Mendelsohn was born on March 21st 1887 in Allenstein, East Prussia. He received his architectural education from the technical universities in Charlottenburg and Munich in 1908-12. Immediately after WWI he established his office in Berlin. Like other German avant-garde architects in the revolutionary atmosphere after the war, he was affiliated to the Arbeitsrat für Kunst [Work Council for Art] in 1919. In 1925 he became member of the architectural organisation Der Ring [The Ring] which promoted Neues Bauen [New Building]. The 1920s were probably the most successful period in the work of Mendelsohn and his crowded office. Shortly afterwards the changed political situation led to a brief exile of the Jewish Mendelsohn in Amsterdam after which he established a new office in London in 1933. The opening of a second office in Jerusalem followed in 1935, before completely moving to Palestine in 1939. His late career developed in the US from 1941 until his death on Sept. 15th 1953 in San Francisco.  Mendelsohn who was inspired by Henry Van De Velde, Joseph Maria Olbrich, and Frank Lloyd Wright, began his career with the Expressionist, organically shaped Einstein Tower in Potsdam (1919-22), a research observatory and at the same time a dynamic symbol for Albert Einstein’s theories of energy and matter. It gained him many private engagements, making him one of the most successful modern architects of the 1920s with numerous commissions in Germany and one in Leningrad (Red Flag Textile Factory 1925), despite not being mentioned in Sigfried Giedion’s influential *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941). |
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His late career developed in the US from 1941 until his death on Sept. 15th 1953 in San Francisco.  Mendelsohn who was inspired by Henry Van De Velde, Joseph Maria Olbrich, and Frank Lloyd Wright, began his career with the Expressionist, organically shaped Einstein Tower in Potsdam (1919-22), a research observatory and at the same time a dynamic symbol for Albert Einstein’s theories of energy and matter. It gained him many private engagements, making him one of the most successful modern architects of the 1920s with numerous commissions in Germany and one in Leningrad (Red Flag Textile Factory 1925), despite not being mentioned in Sigfried Giedion’s influential *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941).  File: EinsteinTower.jpg  Einstein Tower, Potsdam (1919-22).  <http://c1038.r38.cf3.rackcdn.com/group1/building2601/media/cover_image_2601.jpg>    His work in Germany is associated with the trends Expressionism, although Mendelsohn did not share the utopian visions of his Expressionist contemporaries, and with Neues Bauen. In contrast to his avant-garde colleagues, Mendelsohn was predominantly engaged with private commissions during his German period, the Woga-Complex (1927-31) and the Metal Workers’ Union Building (1928-30) in Berlin being the only projects of public nature.  Mendelsohn’s architectural sketches since 1914 display an expressive vertical and horizontal dynamism. The horizontal, combined with rounded (protruding) corners, dominates many of his designs such as the department store at Kemperplatz, Berlin (1921). It expresses the urban dynamics and reflects his concept of a combination of function (represented by the ‘objective’ DE STIJL of Rotterdam) and dynamism (represented by the ‘visionary’ Amsterdam School) resulting in his formula of a ‘functional dynamism’. Although his expressionist vocabulary reduced due to the Neues Bauen in the late 1920s, the horizontality with rounded corners re-appears in many designs, from the Petersdorff Department Store in Breslau (now Wroclaw, Poland; 1927-28) to the Russell House in San Francisco (1951).  Due to the Nazis’ seazing of power, Mendelsohn left Germany forever in 1933. During a short stay in Amsterdam he worked with Theodor Wijdeveld and Amedee Ozenfant on plans for a Mediterranean Academy of modern culture in Saint Tropez. In England a partnership with Serge Chermayeff was established, of which the De La Warr Pavillion in Bexhill-on-Sea (1933-35) became an icon of early British modernism. Its glazed, rounded staircase-tower encases a dramatically turned stairway and is encased by protruding cantilevered decks, being a variation of the corners of his department stores in Stuttgart and Breslau. Parallel to and after the collaboration with Chermayeff he realized private and public projects in Palestine such as the Schocken House (1934-36) and the General Hospital in Haifa (1937). Seeking a synthesis of Orient and Occident, elements of Mediterranean architecture found their way into his designs, e.g. smaller windows, closed walls and the use of stone cladding.  File: Pavillion.jpg  Figure 1 De La Warr Pavillion, Bexhill-on-Sea (1933-35)  <http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-pwLRyRsdZy4/UH6PR4jbzPI/AAAAAAAABM4/bRT0vte9Lww/s1600/De+La+Warr,+Bexhill.JPG>  File: Pavillion2.jpg  Figure De La Warr Pavillion, Bexhall-on-Sea (1933-35)  <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/47/Delawar_in_Bexhill.jpg>    Disappointed by the architectural development in Palestine, where Mendelsohn realized only very few projects since he had moved to Jerusalem in 1939, he left for the US in 1941 where he died in 1953. In the US he was especially engaged with the design of synagogues, which display a heightened symbolism such as the ship metaphor of the Park Synagogue in Cleveland (1946-53), symbolizing a spiritual ship or the religious community.  File: Synagogue.jpg  Figure Park Synagogue, Cleveland, Ohio, USA (1946-53)  <http://www.bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/ohio/cleveland/synagogue/0048.jpg> List of Works: 1919-22 Einstein Tower, Potsdam, Germany.  1921 Department store, Kemperplatz, Berlin, Germany (not realised).  1925 Red Flag Textile Factory, Leningrad, Russia.  1927-31 Woga-Complex, Berlin, Germany.  1927-28 Petersdorff Department Store, Breslau, Germany.  1928-30 Metal Workers’ Union Building, Berlin, Germany.  1933-35 De La Warr Pavillion in Bexhill-on-Ses, England.  1934-36 Schocken House, Palestine.  1937 General Hospital, Haifa, Palestine.  1946-53 Park Synagogue, Cleveland, Ohio, USA.  1951 Russell House, San Francisco, USA. |
| Further reading:  (Cobbers)  (Conrads)  (Frampton)  (Heinze-Greenberg)  (Huse)  (Kähler)  (Lampugnani and Schneider)  (Pehnt)  (Stephan)  (Stephan, Eric Mendelsohn: Architect 1887-1953) |