

EXPLORE THE WORLD OF BRUTALIST ARCHITECTURE.

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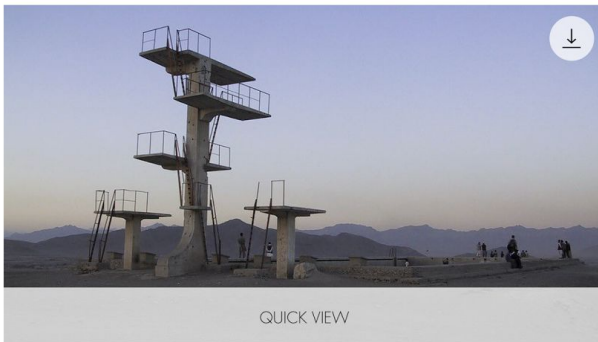


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EXPLORE THE WORLD OF BRUTALIST ARCHITECTURE.

Brutalism was an attempt to create an architectural ethic, rather than an aesthetic. It had less to do with materials and more to do with honesty: an uncompromising desire to tell it like it is, architecturally speaking.



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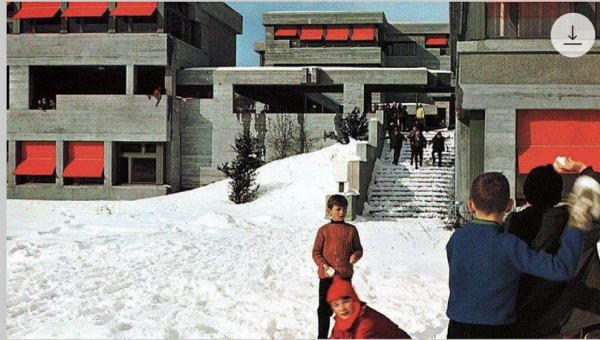
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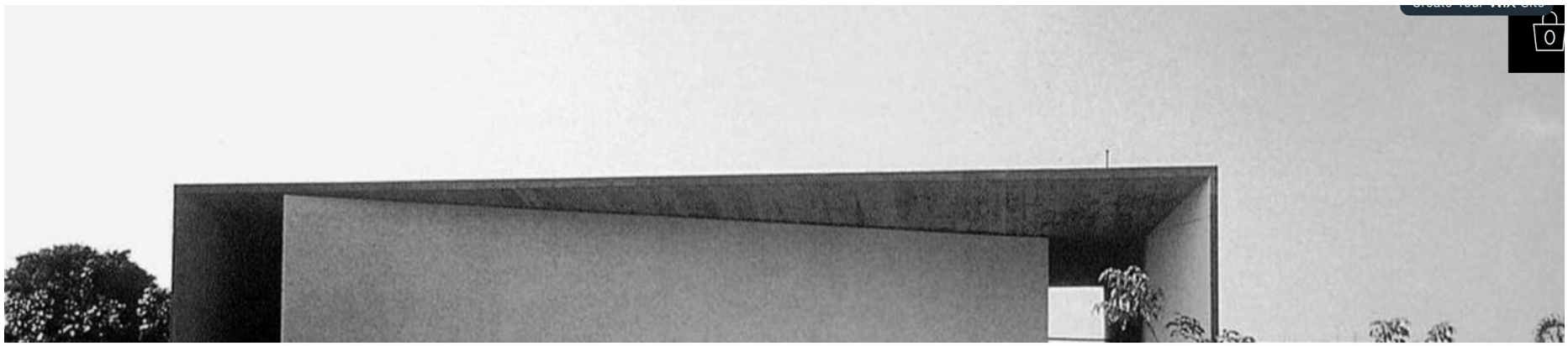


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about.

IN THE RANK OF UNFLATTERING monikers for an artistic style, “Brutalism” has got to score near the top. Like the much kinder-sounding “Fauvism” or “Impressionism,” it was a term of abuse for the work of architects whose buildings confronted their users — brutalized them — with hulking, piled-up slabs of raw, unfinished concrete. These same architects, centered on the British couple Alison and Peter Smithson, enthusiastically took up Brutalism as the name for their movement with a kind of pride, as if to say: That’s right, we are brutal. We do want to shove your face in cement. For a world still climbing gingerly out of the ruins of World War II, in need of plain dealing and powerful messages, this brand of architectural honesty was refreshing.

Despite a decade or so of unexpected popularity, at least among architects and planners, Brutalism went out of favor by the mid-’70s. Films such as “A Clockwork Orange” turned Brutalist masterpieces into symbols of future dystopia. Planning budgets were slashed, and the Brutalists lost their backers. Over the last three decades, the style’s many scattered examples have suffered from age and neglect, their walls crumbling and leaking, threatened everywhere with demolition. Tom Menino, the late former mayor of Boston, proposed to sell its city hall, one of the most famous American examples of Brutalism; and in 2013, despite a fervent preservation campaign, Bertrand Goldberg’s eerie, cloverleaf-shaped, alien-eyed Prentice Women’s Hospital in Chicago succumbed to the wrecking ball.

But now, like the chevron mustache, Brutalism is undergoing something of a revival. Despite two generations of abuse (and perhaps a little because of it), an enthusiasm for Brutalist buildings beyond the febrile, narrow precincts of architecture criticism has begun to take hold. Preservationists clamor for their survival, historians laud their ethical origins and an independent public has found beauty in their rawness. For an aesthetic once praised for its “ruthless logic” and “bloody-mindedness” — in the much-quoted phrasing of critic Reyner Banham — it is a surprising turn of events.

For long-suffering admirers of Brutalism, the internet has proved an unexpected boon companion. Popular Tumblrs unleash endless streams of black-and-white images of gravity-defying cantilevers from the world over. A hulking concrete school in downtown Miami swallowing students! A concrete ski resort in Chamonix, France, that appears poised to tumble off the edge of a mountain! Brutalism, it turns out, lends itself to Instagram-style scrolling, one eye-popping hunk of brush-hammered weirdness after another.



contact.

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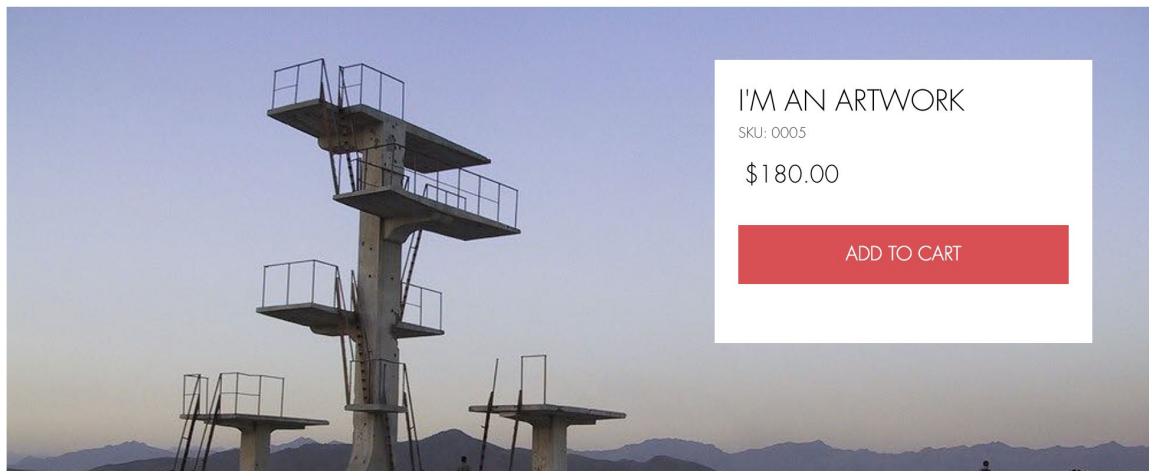
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