

# ARCHITECTLESS ARCHITECTURE -- SERMONS IN STONE

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

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**A**N excellent abstract show opened at the Museum of Modern Art this week, which, not so incidentally, is an excellent architecture show as well. It should, of course, be put the other way round. The new exhibition, "Architecture Without Architects," is another of those smashing revelatory roundups of photographic enlargements in the field of building that the Museum comes up with periodically to disclose a whole new world.

And it is also, not at all incidentally, an extremely sophisticated demonstration of architecture - as - abstract - art shown through building types and patterns that stack up magnificently as non-objective pictures in themselves, on a purely visual level, selected with an extraordinarily knowing and gifted eye.

The eye belongs to Bernard Rudofsky, architect, engineer, designer, author and iconoclast of notable talents and many reservations about modern society. The show that he has assembled and installed is being sponsored by the Museum's International Council, which will circulate it after February 23.

### Timeless World

As has been customary with the Museum in these architectural undertakings, the job has been done with a freshness and conclusiveness that has the effect of establishing something as a historical or stylistic fact that existed only amorphously outside the bounds of scholarship and definition before. In this case, it is the world of communal building, or that huge, timeless body of spontaneous, rural, primitive, traditional and totally anonymous construction that has grown naturally out of common cultures and needs.

Mr. Rudofsky may not actually have invented the sub-

ject—there have been other studies, such as Sibyl Moholy-Nagy's "Anonymous Architecture"—but he has pursued it for forty-odd years in approximately sixty countries with a passion approaching fanaticism. His dedication has paid off in a solid, searching documentation of spectacular beauty and educational interest entirely of his own devising, with a catalogue that he has written and designed.

### Imperative

This is an exhibition not to be missed. It has a substance and vitality sometimes lacking in other Museum shows, but that is probably due to the unfair edge that architecture has as an art of reality, necessity and permanence.

The matter of permanence, however, is an increasingly open question. What Mr. Rudofsky has given us, in many cases, is a last look—a glimpse of what is going or even gone. Here is the hill town before tourism's assault.

These are examples of indigenous, regional architecture before "progress" has brought the materials salesman and his plastic substitutes. This is the self-contained community as it was until the automobile cracked it open and desolated the tightly knit architectural entity of another era.

More than an exhibition, then, this is a protest — a pointed, bitter, desperate broadside from a cultivated, rebellious heart and mind against the sacrifice of the well-built landscape to the urgencies of the industrial, nuclear age.

What the exhibition admits only tacitly, in its concern with traditional values, is that we are in a period of revolution. We are living through a time of violent social and scientific upheaval that is as disruptive as any revolution the world has ever known, for every revolution offsets its

advances with the destruction of a way of life.

What is being destroyed now, with little popular understanding of what is happening, is the physical or architectural aspect of traditional western civilization. Revolutions are never pretty and this one is particularly hideous in environmental terms.

### Better World

The world we built before, says Mr. Rudofsky, was better. See the evidence, says the exhibition: views of cascading mountain villages that have never known the bulldozer; the dazzling, white-washed cubes of Mediterranean towns in subtly complex compositions; the pleasing rhythm and chiaroscuro of pedestrian arcades; the

simple sculpture of native building and natural formations. Compare, by implication, "the serenity of architecture in so-called underdeveloped countries with the architectural blight in industrial countries." These are "models of true functionalism and timeless modernity . . . utopia," states the explanatory text.

How valid is the exhibition's thesis? There can be no argument, certainly, with the beauty and significance of the examples shown, nor with the satisfactory solutions of the unknown builders of the anonymous architectural world for their particular needs.

The catalogue is subtitled, rather devastatingly, "An Introduction to Non-Pedigreed

Architecture," which will not make those pedigreed architects any happier who are still smarting over the Museum's previous architectless-architecture show, "Twentieth Century Engineering."

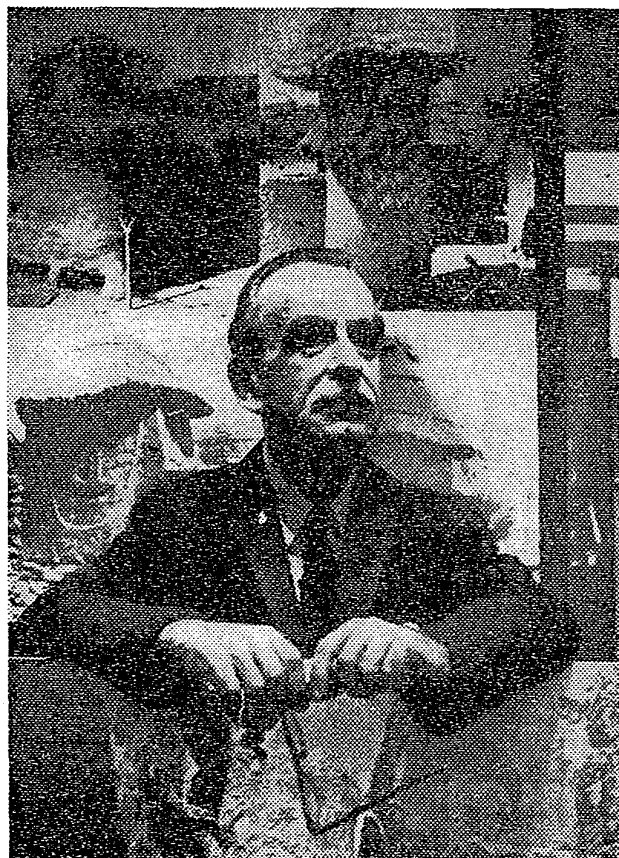
No one can fail to share the author's despair over the vandalism with which this century is treating its handsome vernacular heritage. The lesson, of course, is that radical and necessary changes in the contemporary environment are not being anticipated or planned for. Their force is permitted to be destructive beyond the bounds of sense or sensibility.

### Abstractions and Romance

Nor can anyone question Mr. Rudofsky's intensely personal taste and vision. There is enough pure abstract appeal in these photographs to titillate the most jaded eye and put today's painters and sculptors to shame.

But add this extremely specialized visual appreciation to the love of a primitive utopia peculiar to a highly sophisticated man (utopia may turn out to be complete with open sewers and the stench of pigs) and we have a romanticism that complex modern cultures can ill afford. There are few simple, picturesque solutions to contemporary problems.

Until now, Mr. Rudofsky has set standards for a small, elite group of the artistic intelligentsia. His offbeat causes have been too far out even for most of the conventional art world, which prefers a more recognizable standard product. If his new exhibition succeeds in making the public see and understand an environment that is little known or prized beyond its picture postcard value, it will have done no small job. This show is the sermon of a prophet in today's architectural wilderness. It may reach the broad audience it deserves.



Bernard Rudofsky

*The New York Times* (Falk)

"... prophet in an architectural wilderness"