

Through Amateur Eyes

The Architecture of European Modernism as Photographed by an American Abroad, 1931

Nearly 200 photographs comprise this informal record of the Modern architecture of western and northern Europe as witnessed by an anonymous American traveler in 1931. Canonical works by such masters as Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Aalto, Mendelsohn, and Stam are represented together with lesser known landmarks by such talented practitioners as Kreis, Dudok, Taut, and May, illustrating the rich pluralism that prevailed in the early years of the Modern Movement. Special attention is paid to the architecture of Das Neue Frankfurt and the 1927 Weissenhofsiedlung and the profound impact of these projects on the development of a functionalist esthetic. In capturing the essence of the prewar avant-garde, these photographs provide an ideal viewpoint from which to examine the Modernist response to the political, social, and economic upheavals of the twenties and early thirties. And, taken as a whole, the collection engenders a deeper discussion of the role of the photograph in the dissemination of architectural ideas. Curated by Jeff Stvan of the University of Illinois at Chicago, the show draws its material from a collection of over 900 architectural snapshots recently acquired by the University Library and never before exhibited publicly.