

**CHARLES MOORE  
BUILDINGS AND PROJECTS  
1949-1986**

Charles Moore is an important architect because he has over the past three decades produced an architectural oeuvre that reflects the conflicting tendencies of our time. He has done this with a grace, wit, and consistent intelligence that has made his achievements all the more remarkable. Moore's buildings are deceptive. The obvious playfulness, the drama and the surprises, the allusions that make his buildings thoroughly accessible also suggest a sensibility that is perhaps too attuned to a casual or populist gesture. It is hard not to like a Charles Moore building just as it is hard not to like Walt Disney. Good-natured fun sticks out all over at the expense of an obvious and inflated self-importance.

As accessible as Moore's work is, there is also far more to it than first meets the eye. It is precisely his perceptive recognition of the utilitarian nature of architecture in the context of the transitional elements of human nature that guides him in the design of spaces. His acute awareness of his time, reflected in both design and process, makes his work far more profound and complicated than it initially appears. Moore has understood that the building of habitable structures is not an exercise in theoretical design. He knows that the shapes of buildings are probably determined more by the variety of attitudes and pressures of a given culture than by a prescient inspiration of an individual designer. He works with rather than against that understanding.

Charles Moore incorporates both process and culture in his work. For more than thirty years he has surveyed the landscape and seen a society emerging that no longer feels compelled to assert, through its architecture, control over its environment, but rather harmony within it. Harmony for Moore is not measured in terms of a romantic balance with a traditional and mythical Mother Nature. Rather he sees it as consistency with the changing attitudes and artifacts of contemporary society that comprise our regular experience of the world. In this sense Moore is the quintessential contemporary architect. The neoclassical elements in his vocabulary come more from the vernacular of Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas than from the Parthenon in Athens. His choice of materials is guided more by his unsurpassed ability to find unique combinations of the feasible and available than by a reliance on the sleek or the distinctive. His method of working is turned more to a flexible collaboration between client and designer than to the authoritarian attitudes of a genius.

Many architects have been popularly represented as strong-willed visionaries who impose a personal concept of design and order that transcends existing canon. Moore's strength is that he works with culture, not canon. His importance as a practicing architect is grounded in the fact that he does not find contemporary society threatening. He positions himself to intuitively embrace change rather than seek shelter under the protective umbrella of a handful of well-formed ideas. He intuitively understands that the fundamental division in contemporary society is between that which is known and that which is not known.

Through his work he seeks to bridge this gulf in a gentle manner by remaining open, noniconoclastic, nondogmatic, irreverent, and available. As a result, his buildings are humorous and colorful, ironic and complicated, and they inevitably convey a sense of lively and vibrant accessibility. Moore's fundamental ideas about architecture are larger than just the designs of buildings. Moore uses his clients and his opportunities to maximum advantage to orchestrate buildings that reflect the scale of his ambition for architecture and its role in society.

The buildings and projects in this exhibition have been subdivided into four categories chosen by Charles Moore himself. The first, **Houses for the Architect**, contains his own houses. The number of houses is large because Moore has been remarkably peripatetic. In these buildings are worked out many ideas he later used in structures created for others. These houses form the core of his work. The second category, **Houses As the Center of the World**, contains single-family houses designed for others, followed by housing projects. The third, **Frivolous and Serious Play**, is made up mostly, but not exclusively, of large outdoor public projects in which people are asked to participate in an architectural experience, rather than simply observe. The last, **Fitting**, the largest and most inclusive, contains a variety of building types. What holds them together in one category is the fact that each is concerned with fitting into its environment, in the broadest sense. For some, environment may mean landscape, for others, older buildings. For all, there is the question of fitting the building to local architectural traditions, as well as to the function it must serve. A final group of works presents a selection of drawings of architectural fantasies that Moore has been doing since at least 1971. These last are highly personal expressions of architectural ideas that seem to have informed his built work more and more directly in recent years.