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Wright On Exhibit: Frank Lloyd Wright's Architectural Exhibitions



Synopsis

The first history of Frank Lloyd Wright's exhibitions of his own work—his practice central to his career—More than one hundred exhibitions of Frank Lloyd Wright's work were mounted between 1894 and his death in 1959. Wright organized the majority of these exhibitions himself and viewed them as crucial to his self-presentation as his extensive writings. He used them to promote his designs, appeal to new viewers, and persuade his detractors. *Wright on Exhibit* presents the first history of this neglected aspect of the architect's influential career. Drawing extensively from Wright's unpublished correspondence, Kathryn Smith challenges the preconceived notion of Wright as a self-promoter who displayed his work in search of money, clients, and fame. She shows how he was an artist-architect projecting an avant-garde program, an innovator who expanded the palette of installation design as technology evolved, and a social activist driven to revolutionize society through design. While Wright's earliest exhibitions were largely for other architects, by the 1930s he was creating public installations intended to inspire debate and change public perceptions about architecture. The nature of his exhibitions expanded with the times beyond models, drawings, and photographs to include more immersive tools such as slides, film, and even a full-scale structure built especially for his 1953 retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum. Placing Wright's exhibitions side by side with his writings, Smith shows how integral these exhibitions were to his vision and sheds light on the broader discourse concerning architecture and modernism during the first half of the twentieth century. *Wright on Exhibit* features color renderings, photos, and plans, as well as a checklist of exhibitions and an illustrated catalog of extant and lost models made under Wright's supervision.

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Customer Reviews

"The care, audacity, and originality with which Wright orchestrated the public presentation of his revolutionary architecture from start to finish . . . is laid out with exceptional thoroughness in Kathryn Smith's *Wright on Exhibit*. . . . An intriguing treatise on career development, and [it] is so illuminatingly detailed that it gives a richer portrait of Wright than many full-length biographies."--Martin Filler, *New York Review of Books*

"Smith refutes the public and historical notion of Wright as a self-promoter by drawing on evidence of his being an innovator and a social activist who sought divergent routes to publicizing his work for the sake of artistic progress and social improvements. Smith illuminates the multimedia component of Wright's work . . . to shed light on the broader discourse of architecture and design as it approaches a new age of modernity."--Metropolis

"In her book *Wright on Exhibit* (Princeton University Press), Kathryn Smith shows how Wright used exhibitions to keep his reputation alive . . . A study focused entirely on an architect's exhibitions, as Smith has provided, might seem specific to the point of narrowness--and for another architect perhaps it might be. But exhibitions and self-promotion kept the Wright flame alive."--Will Wiles, *Apollo Magazine*

"Kathryn Smith takes us on a comprehensive tour through Wright's exhibitions, from his first at the Chicago Architectural Club of 1894 to New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1959. The details are fascinating, especially because of what they tell about the inclusions in those presentations and why they were chosen. . . . Smith's book is a long-needed chronicle of changes in curatorial practice and technology, particularly at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), which mounted six solo exhibitions on Wright between 1932 and 1953, and eight others in which he appeared during this time."--Anthony Paletta, *Architectural Record*

"This invaluable book fills a huge lacuna in our understanding of Wright and his work. In Smith's hands, each exhibition presented here becomes a self-contained story that contributes to the larger narrative of Wright's relentless determination to advance his ideas."--Jack Quinan, author of *Frank Lloyd Wright's Martin House: Architecture as Portraiture*

"Meticulously researched and well written. This book will be a foundation for future scholarship."--Richard Cleary, author of *Merchant Prince and Master Builder: Edgar J. Kaufmann and Frank Lloyd Wright*

The literature on Frank Lloyd Wright is oceanic. And yet this book fills an immense void in what appears to have been covered time and again- Wright's architecture- but from a very different point of view: how Mr. Wright- as he loved to be called- mythologized himself. Kathryn Smith has tracked down the network of interactions, alliances, loyalties, break-ups, and anything dealing with how curators, the press and its intermediaries, architects, and others, interacted with such figure of authority with the precision of a passionate archeologist and the lucidity of Sherlock Holmes. She connected far away pieces of evidences that make the ascent of this extraordinary architect a logical outcome through chains of events that escape the awareness even of the many experts on this larger-than-life figure. There are also many books within this book. There is the history of the NY MOMA. an outline of how architectural photography shape the design message to the audience, the politics of the media and fame, the biography of FLW himself, and more. An essential publication for anyone who really cares about architecture, art, and the construction of one's own relevance.

It was a gift and was well-received.

Wonderfully written and a significant contribution to Frank Lloyd Wright Scholarship. A must have for anyone with a serious interest in Wright's legacy.

This is an excellent book. It is well-written and beautifully illustrated, a comprehensive, unprecedented presentation of FLW'S exhibits.

Kathryn Smith's newest book, *Wright On Exhibit* thoroughly details an important but overlooked aspect of the career of America's most famous architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. Myriad books describe and photograph his exceptionally engaging buildings. Others capture his chaotic, tragic, and narcissistic life story. In her exhaustively researched work, Smith describes Wright's parallel career: museum-exhibited artist. Throughout his life, Wright strove to ensure that installations which he preferred to oversee in exhibition halls around the world, opened with great regularity and a maximum of noise. These exhibitions contained photographs, drawings, polemical statements, and models of his designs. Through these, he sought to influence architectural design and his reputation, mostly in places distant from his actual buildings. Smith effectively weaves together several defining themes of Wright's life: his exceptional ability to create new architectural designs that engaged people during his lifetime and have done so ever since; his

ferocious aggression in publicizing his work through shows, polemics, and books; his ability to attract attention; and the willingness of other people to help him, even in the face of his overpowering narcissism. The cast of characters who helped him, sometimes worshipfully, others argumentatively, is huge and colorful: Marion Mahoney, Richard Neutra, Harriet Monroe, Lewis Mumford, Albert Barr, Philip Johnson, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, all major figures in American architectural history. And the photographers Henry Fuermann, Bill Hedrich, and Ezra Stoller and others contributed ravishing images in two dimensions on paper of Wright's work that communicate to wide audiences Wright's concepts of space and living even without the experience of actually being present in them. For someone interested in Wright's work and how he communicated with a large public, this is a required book. Smith's compilation of so many exhibitions is the definitive catalogue of his "second" career, one that, in terms of reach, is far greater than the buildings themselves. For someone who wants to understand how Wright communicated in words, the book lays out his evolving thinking, citing carefully from letters, essays and his correspondents' responses, and relieves one of reading his bombastic pronouncements. Smith's writing is scholarly, yet clear, concise, and graceful. And the catalogue of models is a delightful trove of work that serves to mediate between the buildings and the images and words.

Wright, in his many carefully overseen exhibitions was not merely promoting his designs, he was suggesting a new way of living as individuals and as members of society. Kathryn Smith takes us through more than half a century of these efforts of a master communicator and master designer. The ripples of these repeated efforts spread widely. Smith lets us see the continuity and development of his vision. Raymond Richard Neutra

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