

Lauding and exposing modernism

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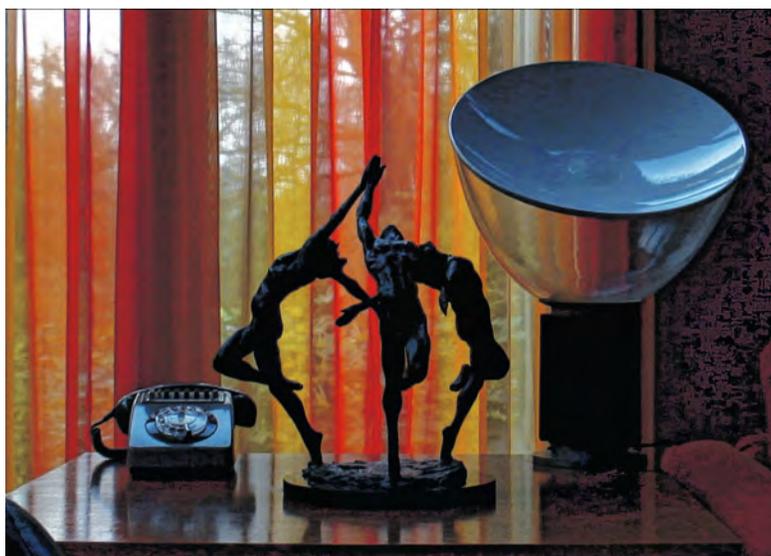
el,” installed in the building’s sunken plaza, riffs on and flouts the architect’s clean geometry. Yoes adds gray-painted wooden forms to Le Corbusier’s concrete ones; they look like outgrowths. Triangles recur; the architect would likely be appalled. Simple digital animations of lines and circles — a nod to modernism’s infatuation with a machine aesthetic — play over the forms.

Modernist architecture left history behind. The catalog for this show quotes philosopher Walter Benjamin’s modernist edict, to “live without traces.” Several artists visit modernist homes and illustrate the tension between that aesthetic and the practicalities of life: We’ve got stuff and we have to put it somewhere.

Nobody even lives in cosmetic entrepreneur Stanley Picker’s London home, which Elizabeth Price hauntingly explores in her video “AT THE HOUSE OF MR. X,” but Picker has cluttered the place with icons of art and design. Martha Rosler made a video, “How Do We Know What Home Looks Like?” at Firminy-Vert, Le Corbusier’s French housing complex. “You can’t furnish a Corbusier,” says one of the residents. Yet they display as much pride in their building as frustration with its limitations.

Architecture must function, but art needn’t. Le Corbusier and his ilk set many wheels in motion in art. Working in the 1920s, they envisioned projects using photomontage. Photographer Thomas Ruff revisits that aesthetic in pieces such as “w.h.s. 04,” a photo of van der Rohe’s Weissenhof Apartment Building in Stuttgart, designed in 1926. Ruff retouches the image so that it looks unreal, composed, like a photomontage.

Sculptor Josiah McElheny blends two visions in “Bruno Taut’s Monument to Socialist Spirituality (After Mies van der Rohe).” Taut’s devotion to color, and his view of glass as a spiritual medium, collides with van der Rohe’s pragmatic, less colorful approach. McElheny’s piece is a gorgeous sculpture, ringed by low wooden cutouts representing older buildings. Sometimes history can provide contrast.



THE WAY WE LIVE NOW, MODERNIST IDEOLOGIES AT WORK

At: Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, 24 Quincy St., Cambridge, through April 5. 617-495-3251, www.ccva.fas.harvard.edu

DIGNITY: Tribes in Transition
At: Boston University Art Gallery at the Stone Gallery, 855 Commonwealth Ave., through March 29. 617-353-3329, www.bu.edu/art



The works in “The Way We Live Now” traffic in the ideals of modernism, which revolutionized architecture, art, and intellectual life, but can still feel insular, antiseptic, and off-putting. The show lauds the modernists, and struggles to make peace with their vision. That may take another century. Even then, nobody will be able to hang a picture on one of the concrete walls at the Carpenter Center.

Character captured in portraits

Dana Gluckstein has been photographing indigenous people around the world for more than 30 years. There’s nothing modernist or even contemporary about her show, “Dignity: Tribes in Transition” at the Boston

University Art Gallery at the Stone Gallery. She travels with an old Hasselblad camera and shoots large-format, black-and-white, deeply humane portraits of the people she encounters.

Some photos capture men and women in their native costume. Gluckstein shot “Masai Warrior Initiate, Kenya, 1985” from below, so the warrior, imposingly adorned in beads and chains, towers over us. Sunlight reflecting off a medallion on his forehead suggests a third eye; it’s a picture of power, yet the man is young, and vulnerable.

Other images show global culture seeping into local ways of life. The youngster in “Young Boy at Religious Festival, Bhutan, 2010” wears a tradi-

tional smock stitched with intricate patterns, but his sneakers fasten with Velcro and he cradles a rifle in his arms. I hope it’s a toy.

These are square portraits. The format imbues them with a sense of monumentality. Gluckstein may be focusing this body of work on change, but what most strongly comes across is the character of each sitter. The woman in “Aboriginal Artist, Australia, 1989” rests her head in her hands. She may be spent, but like all these subjects, she has a regal presence that makes it hard to look away.

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MOT INTERNATIONAL (LEFT); ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY, NEW YORK (ABOVE)



PHOTOS BY DANA GLUCKSTEIN

Clockwise from top left: An image from Elizabeth Price’s “AT THE HOUSE OF MR. X,” Josiah McElheny’s “Bruno Taut’s Monument to Socialist Spirituality (After Mies van der Rohe),” Dana Gluckstein’s “Young Boy at Religious Festival, Bhutan, 2010” and “Masai Warrior Initiate, Kenya, 1985.”