



## History of Modern Architecture - 2 Vol. Set

*Leonardo Benevolo*

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Let it be said at once that the format of this work is richly handsome: it is a two-volume boxed set comprising 844 pages and well over 1,000 high-quality illustrations, and it reflects throughout its publisher's conviction that good design is an essential, not superficial, part of bookmaking.

Beyond that, it should be emphasized that this work is not another facile cultural tour of modern architecture. It is a serious and original study of the beginnings and development of modernism in which the pictorial aspects are designed to aid in the communication of the author's closely reasoned formulations, rather than to gloss over a lack of substantive content.

The book is a translation of the third Italian edition, published in 1966. Benevolo, who is on the faculty of architecture in Venice, has earned an international reputation as a historian of architecture and town planning, and his publications embrace the span of time from the Renaissance to the foreseeable future. One such publication, *The Origins of Modern Town Planning* (The MIT Press, 1967), may be read as a prelude to the present work as well as an independent contribution. Perhaps more than any other architectural historian in our time, Benevolo has made a determined effort to place developments in design and planning in their proper social and political settings.

Indeed, the author argues that the development of the modern movement in architecture was determined, not by aesthetic formalisms, but largely by the social changes that have occurred since about 1760: "After the middle of the eighteenth century, without the continuity of formal activity being in any way broken, indeed while architectural language seems to be acquiring a particular coherence, the relations between architect and society began to change radically.... New material and spiritual needs, new ideas and modes of procedure arise both within and beyond the traditional limits, and finally they run together to form a new architectural synthesis that is completely different from the old one. In this way it is possible to explain the birth of modern architecture, which otherwise would seem completely incomprehensible...."

The first volume provides the work with its solid historical roots. It describes the component parts of modern architectural thought, discovers their origins in the various fields in which they arose, and follows their convergence from 1760 to 1914. The author traces the physical events that gave birth to the modern European city through 1890 and discusses in particular the influences that led to the thought of Owen, Ruskin, and Morris. He next explains why certain urban experiments took place in America earlier than in Europe, and he ends the volume with a discussion of European *avant-garde* movements between 1890 and 1914.

The second volume is concerned with the modern movement proper, from 1914 to 1966. The author emphasizes the *unity* of the movement, rejecting the usual treatment that allots to the individual architects separate and unconnected biographical accounts.

Benevolo remarks at one point, "When one talks about modern architecture one must bear in mind the fact that it implies not only a new range of forms, but also a new way of thinking, whose consequences have not yet all been calculated." His main concern is to provide a more exact calculation of those consequences.

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