

Press Release

SUPERSTRUCTURES: THE NEW ARCHITECTURE 1960-90

Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts 40th Anniversary Exhibition

Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich

24 March 2018 – 2 September 2018



The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts presents 'SUPERSTRUCTURES: The New Architecture 1960-90', marking the 40th anniversary of the opening of the gallery, the first ever public building designed by Norman Foster.

The exhibition tells the story of architecture's fascination with technology in the post-war decades, and the drive to develop new architectural forms utilising lightweight structures, industrialised building techniques and innovative engineering solutions. In doing so, architects and engineers evolved a new typology of building or 'superstructure', rethinking the places and spaces of culture, work, travel and living in ways that have been globally influential.

Often referred to as 'High-Tech', this label is regarded unfavourably by some as misleading in its suggestion of a singular 'style'. The exhibition evidences how this new modern architecture emerged from a generation of (largely British) architects who challenged convention. Immersed in the utopian and experimental ideas of late modernism, they shared a commonality of ideas, forms and materials. They were fascinated by the structural engineering innovations that followed the 19th century, and were determined to apply the techniques of industrial production and assembly to buildings.

Norman Foster's Sainsbury Centre building epitomises the new architecture born of this technological spirit: a 'well-serviced shed' with a lightweight and extendable steel structure wrapped in a 'skin' of glass and plastic clip-on panels, adaptable (and adapted) as the building's functions changed or grew over time. It quickly became a paradigm of new museum building, but the ideas of structural ingenuity and expression, appropriate technology and industrial materials were applied to projects of all types and scales including factories, offices, transport hubs and homes.

The exhibition invites visitors to discover not only how the Sainsbury Centre was made, but also to understand how earlier feats of engineering such as The Crystal Palace inspired buildings of its kind. Audiences encounter striking examples of superstructures created for many different uses.

On display for the first time, a brand new three-metre-long model of the Sainsbury Centre is joined by a selection of iconic models on loan from international collections, rarely seen together. These include the Reliance Controls Factory by Team 4 (Norman Foster, Wendy Cheesman, Georgie Wolton and Richard Rogers); the Pompidou Centre by Rogers and Renzo Piano; Rogers' Lloyd's of London Building; Foster's Willis Faber Dumas Office; Waterloo International Rail Station by Nicholas Grimshaw and the Hopkins House by Michael and Patty Hopkins.

Image credit: Pete Huggins Camera Techniques

The exhibition explores the seminal influence of figures such as Buckminster Fuller, Jean Prouvé, Charles and Ray Eames and Cedric Price. Examples of ‘technology transfer’ show how techniques were adapted from the automotive, nautical, aerospace and information industries to create bold new materials and innovative industrial processes.

The exhibition includes a range of fascinating objects from drawings and paintings, models, furniture and product design to photographs and film, and consists of national and international loans, as well as items from the Sainsbury Centre’s own collection.

The steel, glass and tensile structures associated with the High-Tech label are now ubiquitous, found on retail outlets and office blocks the world over. The exhibition demonstrates how the most distinctive and experimental architectural idea to emerge from modernism at its end also became one of the most enduring and influential architectural languages of the late 20th century. The exhibition is accompanied by a book published by the Sainsbury Centre.

– ENDS –

Notes to Editors

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About the curatorial team

The guest curators of the exhibitions, Jane Pavitt and Abraham Thomas, have previously curated groundbreaking architecture and design exhibitions at the V&A: Pavitt’s work includes *Cold War Modern: Art and Design 1945-70* (2008) and *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970-1990* (2011). Professor Jane Pavitt is Head of the School of Critical Studies and Creative Industries at Kingston University, and Abraham Thomas is the Fleur and Charles Bresler Curator-in-Charge at the Renwick Gallery, Washington D.C.

About the Sainsbury Centre

The Sainsbury Centre was established when Sir Robert and Lady Sainsbury generously gave their art collection to the University of East Anglia in 1973. The building was designed by Norman Foster and opened in 1978.

For over 40 years, Robert and Lisa Sainsbury collected works of art which ranged across time and place. They sought work both from major European artists, as well as art and antiquities from different periods and cultures around the world. The Sainsburys were equally radical in commissioning the young Norman Foster in 1974 as the architect for the new building to house their works. Robert Sainsbury saw Foster’s innovative building as the great jewel of the Sainsbury Collection.

The Sainsbury Centre is one of the most prominent university art galleries in Britain, and a major national centre for the study and presentation of art. As well as housing the Sainsburys’ art collection, one of the few intact modernist collections of the 20th century with many seminal works by artists such as Pablo Picasso, Edgar Degas, Francis Bacon, Jacob Epstein, Henry Moore, Alberto Giacometti, and Amedeo Modigliani, it also displays the Anderson Collection of Art Nouveau and the University’s Abstract and Constructivist Collection. Alongside these permanent collections, it hosts a range of temporary exhibitions in the new galleries, which provide the largest climate-controlled exhibition space in Eastern England.

Lenders

Lenders to the exhibition include the Centre Georges Pompidou, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Canadian Centre for Architecture, and the studios of Norman Foster, Richard Rogers and Nicholas Grimshaw.

Sponsors

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HUDSONArchitects

Hudson Architects is one of the UK's leading contemporary architecture practices, with a worldwide reputation for innovative and exciting design. The practice has achieved award success across the commercial, homes, arts and heritage sectors. It is celebrated for addressing each project with an open mind: responding to context with a flexible and imaginative approach to create high-performing, beautiful buildings for people to inhabit.



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