

Thomas, Rodney Meredith 1902 - 1996

Rodney Meredith Thomas [commonly known as Rodney Thomas] was born in London, England on 4 May 1902. His father, Ernest Montague Thomas (1878-1916) was an architect and soon after his son was born took his family to India where he had been appointed consulting architect to the Madras government. In 1910 Rodney Thomas returned to England for his schooling, however, at the age of 15, his father died as did his mother shortly afterwards. His uncle, Sir Brumwell Thomas (1868-1948), took him under his wing and saw to his continued education.

He studied at the Byam Shaw School of Art in London and at a private school run by the sculptor Leon Underwood (1890-1975) in London. However, his uncle dissuaded him from becoming an artist, assuring him that architecture was a safer career option. Consequently he studied at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College, London from 1921 to 1924. However, he also attended classes at the nearby Slade School of Fine Art. He then worked as an assistant in the offices of Giles Gilbert Scott, Louis De Soissons, Grey Wornam, and in his uncle's practice.

Thomas subsequently practised independently as an architect and designer and had an office in London. In the inter-war years he designed displays and showrooms for Ascot Heaters and designed interiors for the Crawfords Advertising Agency and for Eileen Agar (1899-1991), whom he had met at Leon Underwood's school. Interiors designed by him featured in *Decorative Art* vol. 28, 1933 (p.48) and vol. 29, 1934 (p. 47). He also spent some time in the Architects' Department of Southern Railways working alongside E. Maxwell Fry (1899-1987) and Guy Morgan designing new stations, and creating window displays for the London department store Simpsons. Examples of furniture designed by Thomas during this period are in the permanent collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum in London.

In 1943, with Edric Neel (1914-1952) and Raglan Squire (1912-2004), Thomas founded ARCON, a company that designed and manufactured prefabricated houses. These low-cost, simply built structures, commonly known as prefabs, were desperately needed in post-war Britain and thousands were built. The ARCON partnership was eventually dissolved in 1967 and was absorbed into the Taylor Woodrow group, which later became Taylor Wimpey.

Thomas designed the Transport Pavilion for the Festival of Britain on London's South Bank in 1951. The building, which proved highly popular, was evidently influenced by Le Corbusier whom Thomas admired.

Following a serious illness in the 1940s, Thomas all but gave up architecture and turned more to painting. He was also encouraged by his friend and collaborator, the sculptor Lynn Chadwick (1914-2003) to make mobiles. In the 1950s he began teaching and held posts at Chelsea School of Art, Wimbledon School of Art and at the London School of Furniture. He died in London on 26 April 1996.

Worked in

UK

Bibliography

Williams, Gareth. 'The Return of the Curve: Rodney Thomas, Architecture and Interior Design'. The Journal of the Decorative Arts Society 1850 - the Present no.19, 1995 pp.41-50

The Work of Rodney Thomas, Architect. London : Chelsea School of Art 1967 [Catalogue of an exhibition held at Chelsea School of Art, London, 1967]

Links

- Andrew Lambirth. 'Obituary: Rodney Thomas' Independent 6 May 1996
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-rodney-thomas-1345982.html>
- Andrew Lambeth. Rodney Meredith Thomas.Oxford Dictionary of National Biography [Subscription service]
<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-75904?rskey=DiOzM6&result=1>
- Artist Biographies [Subscription service]
<https://www.artbiogs.co.uk/1/artists/thomas-rodney-meredith>
- Victoria & Albert Museum
<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/search/?q=%22Thomas%2C%20Rodney%22&page=1>
- The National Archives
<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/c/F55004>
- Campbell, Louise. (2012) Surrealism, domesticity and subversion : Eileen Agar at home. Interiors: Design, Architecture and Culture, Vol.3 (No.3). pp. 227-246. University of Warwick
http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/49825/1/WRAP_Campbell_Surrealism_domesticity.pdf
- Tate. Photograph of a clock designed by Rodney Thomas for Eileen Agar
<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/items/tga-8927-4-21/photograph-of-a-clock-designed-by-rodney-thomas-for-eileen-agar>

- Wikipedia - entry on Lynn Chadwick https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lynn_Chadwick
- Historic England. Roman Catholic Church of the Annunciation and St. Augustine, 88 Beckenham Hill Road, London <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1422500>