

Smithson, Alison Margaret 1928 - 1993



Alison Margaret Smithson was born Alison Margaret Gill in Sheffield, England on 22 June 1928. Her father was principal of the South Shields School of Art from 1929 to 1950.

Between 1944 and 1949 she studied at the King's College School of Architecture, University of Durham, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. After graduating with distinction she moved to London to take up a post in the schools division of the London County Council (LCC) architects' department. While at the University of Durham she met [Peter Denham Smithson](#) (1923-2003) who also went on to work in the LCC Architects' Schools Division. On 18 August 1949 the couple married in London.

In 1949 while working at the LCC, the Smithsons entered and won a competition to design Hunstanton Secondary Modern School in Hunstanton, Norfolk (built 1949-54). The success of this project persuaded them to set up Smithson, their own architectural practice, in London. The Smithsons subsequently worked closely together on projects. The Hunstanton School, with its steel-framed structure, had evidently been influenced by Illinois Institute of Technology campus in Chicago designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) in 1945, however, by the mid 1950s the Smithsons had come to be associated with an architectural style termed New Brutalism, which was characterised by a rigid monolithic and geometric appearance with extensive use of poured concrete.

The Smithsons joined the Independent Group of the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London in 1952 and with Eduardo Paolozzi and Nigel Henderson organised the ICA exhibition Parallel of Life and Art in 1953. They also participated in the influential ICA exhibition This is Tomorrow at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London in 1956. They took part in the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) IX congress in Aix-en-Provence, France in 1953, and the CIAM X congress in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia in 1956.

The Smithsons wrote extensively on aspects contemporary architecture, and it is this aspect of their work that may be their lasting legacy

Alison Smithson died at the Royal Marsden Hospital, Chelsea, London, of breast cancer, on 14 August 1993

Worked in

UK

Works

Architectural projects by the Smithsons included Hunstanton Secondary Modern School in Hunstanton, Norfolk (1949-54); the Patio and Pavilion for the This is Tomorrow exhibition at the ICA, London (1956); Sanders Garage, Bark Place, London (1956); House of the Future for the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition, London (1956); Watford House, Devereux Drive, Watford, Hertfordshire (1957); Wayland Young Pavilion, 100 Bayswater Road, London (1960); Caro House, Frognal, Hampstead, London (1960); Iraqi House, Piccadilly, London (1961); Fonthill Folly, Upper Lawn, West Tisbury, Wiltshire (1962); Occupational Health Unit, Park Royal Hospital, London (1963); The Economist Building, St. James's Street, London (1964); Garden Building, St. Hilda's College, Oxford (1970); Housding, Robin Hood Gardens, Robin Hood Lane, London (1972); Garage and store, Ansty Plum Studio, Wiltshire (1972); Amenity Stage 1. University of Bath (1978); Second Arts Building, University of Bath (1981); Entrance Hall, University of Bath (1983); Amenity Stage 2, University of Bath (1984); School of Architecture and Building Engineering, University of Bath (1988); and the Cantilever Chair Museum (Kragstuhlmuseum), Lauenförde, Germany (2001-08) by Peter Smithson.

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