

Smithson, Peter Denham 1923 - 2003



Peter Denham Smithson was born in Stockton-on-Tees, England on 18 September 1923 and studied at the King's College School of Architecture, University of Durham, Newcastle-upon-Tyne from 1939 to 1942. After serving in the Royal Engineers during World War Two, he returned to the university to complete his studies from 1945 to 1948.

In 1948 he moved to London where he attended the Royal Academy Schools in 1948-49. In 1949 he joined the schools division of the London County Council (LCC) architects' department as a Temporary Technical Assistant.

While at the University of Durham he met Alison Gill (1928-1993) who also went on to work in the LCC Architects' Schools Division. On 18 August 1949 the couple married in London, she changing her name to [Alison Smithson](#).

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

Peter Smithson died at his home, Cato Lodge, 24 Gilston Road, Chelsea, London on 3 March 2003.

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, Frognaal, 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.

Bibliography

Alison and Peter Smithson a critical anthology. Edited by Max Risselada. Barcelona : Poligrafa, 2011.

Alison and Peter Smithson: From the House of the Future to a House of Today, edited by Dirk Van den Heuvel and Max, Risselada. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2004

'Alison and Peter Smithson: Gentle Cultural Accommodation' L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui no. 177, 1975 pp. 4-13

Baker, Jeremy. 'A Smithson File'. Arena no. 81, February 1966 [Entire issue devoted to the work of the work of the Smithsons]

Banham, Reyner. 'The New Brutalism'. Architectural Review vol. 118, December 1955 pp. 354-361

Boyer, Christine M., Not Quite Architecture. Writing around Alison and Peter Smithson. Cambridge MA, The MIT Press, 2018

Colomina, Beatriz and Smithson, Peter. 'Friends of the future'. October vol. 94, Autumn 2000 [The Independent Group issue] pp. 3-30

Cook, Peter. 'Regarding the Smithsons'. Architectural Review vol. 172, 1982 pp. 36-43

Crinon, Mark. Alison and Peter Smithson. London: Historic England, 2018

Eisenman, Peter. 'Robin Hood Gardens, London E14'. Architectural Design vol. 42, September 1972 pp. 557-573, 588-592 [Robin Hood Gardens, London designed by the Smithsons (1972)]

Henley, Simon Brutalism Redefined. London: RIBA Publication, 2017

McKean, John Maule. 'The Smithsons: a profile'. Building Design no. 345, 1977 pp. 22-24

Modernism without Rhetoric. Essays on the Work of Alison and Peter Smithson, edited by Helena Webster. London: Academy Editions, 2007

Saint, Andrew. Towards a Social Architecture: the Role of School-Building in Post-war England. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1987

Smithson, Alison. 'Ruminations on Founder's Court'. Architectural Design vol. 45, 1977 pp. 524-529

Smithson, Alison and Furse, John. 'Alison Smithson' on Contemporary Architects. Edited by Ann Lee Morgan and Colin Naylor. London and Chicago, Illinois: St. James Press, 2nd edition 1987 pp. 851-853

Smithson, Alison and Smithson, Peter. A bibliography of the work of Alison and Peter Smithson. London : [publisher not identified], 1975-, regularly updated. [See

WorldCat]

Smithson, Alison and Smithson, Peter. Urban Structuring: Studies of Alison and Peter Smithson. London: Studio Vista, 1967

Spinelli, Luigi. 'Alison in the city; Original architects, 1959-64: Alison & Peter Smithson'. Domus no. 914, May 2008 pp. 42-47. [Discusses the Smithson's winning competition entry by the Smithsons to redesign the headquarters for The Economist in St James's Street, London]

Theron, D. 'The New Brutalists'. Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory no. 24. June 1965 pp. 49-52

Vidotto, Marco. Alison + Peter Smithson. Barcelona: Gili, 1997.

Links

- Elain Harwood, 'Smithson, Peter Denham (1923–2003)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography [Subscription service]

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/89834>

- Royston Landau. Smithson. Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online [Subscription service] <https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T079361>

- Diana Rowntree. 'Peter Smithson' The Guardian 8 March 2003

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2003/mar/08/urbandesign.artsobituaries>

- 'Peter Smithson' Independent 20 March 2003

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/peter-smithson-36357.html>

- Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alison_and_Peter_Smithson

- National Portrait Gallery, London

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp66271/peter-denham-smithson>

- The Independent Group

<https://web.archive.org/web/20171031181456/http://independentgroup.org.uk/contributors>

- Harvard University. Alison and Peter Smithson Archive: An Inventory.

<http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/~des00015>

- National Art Library Catalogue <https://nal-vam.on.worldcat.org/search?sortKey=LIBRARY&databaseList=&queryString=%22Peter%22>

- Twentieth Century Society. Cantilever Chair Museum (Kragstuhlmuseum), Lauenförde, Germany <https://c20society.org.uk/building-of-the-month/cantilever-chair-museum-kragstuhlmuseum-lauenforde-germany>

- Architects Architecture Arcitectuul <http://architectuul.com/architect/alison-and-peter-smithson>

- Video: Alison And Peter Smithson On Housing. Written by James Taylor-Foster.

ArchDaily <https://www.archdaily.com/579226/video-alison-and-peter-smithson-on->

housing

- YouTube. Alison and Peter Smithson - The Space Between. AA School of Architecture <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wPWTvjbeLc>
- YouTube. Robin Hood Gardens by Alison & Peter Smithson <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=83BR6jk2wK8>
- The gentle brutalism of Upper Lawn, Alison and Peter Smithson's rural retreat in the Wiltshire countryside. The Modern House <https://www.themodernhouse.com/journal/my-modern-house-upper-lawn/>
- UK Modern House - 10 houses by the Smithsons http://www.ukmoho.co.uk/html/architect/Alison_Peter_Smithson.html
- Dangerous Minds - England's Eccentric 'New Brutalist' Architects, The Smithsons https://dangerousminds.net/comments/englands_eccentric_new_brutalist_architects_the_s