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**SCHWEIZERISCHES ARCHITEKTURMUSEUM  
/SWISS ARCHITECTURE MUSEUM**

**S AM**

## **PRESSINFORMATION**

### **RICHARD NEUTRA BUILDINGS AND PROJECTS 1960–1970 IN SWITZERLAND**

S AM Swiss Architecture Museum  
22.08-24.10.2010

Forty years ago on 16 April 1970 Richard Neutra (b. 1892 in Vienna) died in Wuppertal. Living in Los Angeles since 1925 Neutra created an icon of the International Style with the Lovell Health House (1929), but only became first well-known by a broad public in the 1950s through his elegant flat roof villas, which were realised above all in sunny southern California. Neutra's complete oeuvre includes almost three hundred completed buildings.

Less known is the fact that Neutra spent the greater part of the last years of his life in Europe and here – in Germany, France and Switzerland – was able to realise eight villas and two housing developments. Neutra's Swiss projects during this time constitute the centre of this exhibition: the four villas in Ascona, Brione sopra Minusio, Wengen and Stettfurt, as well as three unrealised for Zurich, Ermatingen and Ennetbaden.

Preparation for the exhibition has led to new basic research that will serve as the foundation for a new chapter in European architecture history: plans, drawings and further materials from the Richard Neutra estate in Los Angeles not only document the Swiss oeuvre of the architect, but also make his way of working, his relationships to his clients and his understanding of architecture manifest. As well, photographs by the Dutch architecture photographer Iwan Baan that were especially completed for the exhibition will be presented. The housing developments in Germany prove that Neutra did not only succeed in Europe as the architect of luxurious villas. After visiting the Siedlung Halen near Bern by Atelier 5 he enthusiastically proclaimed that the project was: 'really doing honor to Switzerland'.

Neutra described his architecture as 'bio-realistic'. What are always part of the beginning of the design process are the analysis of views, the exact investigation of the visual potentials of the lot. Neutra's villas react to the surroundings through their cascading quality or the way that the volumes spread out in the tract; however, they always remain orthogonally shaped, organically curved forms are only to be founded in isolated cases. In this way the architecture preserves its autonomy in contrast to the landscape and becomes the apparatus of perception, a quasi technical 'dispositif' that with reflecting pools, mirroring and fenestration intensifies the experience of the landscape. Cloud formations, mountains and landscapes are mirrored, the reflections of the outside world penetrate the interior of the house and dynamise it, even animated it with the changes of the time of day. Through skilful lighting in the exterior space Neutra succeeded to also aesthetically stage the night. Through the means of illusionism he created the appearance of a harmony between nature and the everyday world we live in – at a time when this harmony had

receded in the utopian distance.

The decisive wish of his clients to live in a Neutra house fed on these longings and Neutra's success can be explained by the fact that in a time shaped by the International Style he was able to build alternatives. 'My buildings do not really belong to the "International Style",' he writes in 1965: 'Nobody can exactly find the gap that my work actually fits in.'

As soon as Neutra had accepted a commission, he asked the client for a series of documents. First he requested exact scheduling and situation plans as well as photographs of the property. Also to be mentioned here are descriptions of daily routines, which the husband and wife were to formulate separately; details concerning the desired space program; as well as photographs of furniture that should be moved to the new domicile. On the basis of these materials Neutra would complete – often without any knowledge of the building site – a first design concept that he would submit to the client in the form of a portfolio. This portfolio included photographic reproductions of large-format pastel sketches showing the main perspectives and the floor plans as well as a project description. In addition to Neutra himself the office in Los Angeles and the local project architects were involved in the further elaboration.

Neutra maintained a close relationship to many of his clients and cultivated the contact also after the completion of the building project. He was often surrounded by a flock of followers and friends. His wife Dione took care of the correspondence and organised travel, visits and appointments.

Initially developed for the Museum MARTa in Herford, the travelling exhibition was adapted and enlarged with additional materials for the stop in Basel.

## **CONTACT**

Please contact us for images, interviews and further information.

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### **Opening Hours:**

Tue/Wed/Fri 11am – 6.00pm

Thu 11am – 8.30pm

Sa/Sun 11am – 5.00pm