

Brutalism: Masterpieces or Monstrosities



A Smithsonian
Lecture Presented
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December 12, 2023
12, 2023



What is Brutalism

- ❖ Origin of the term
- ❖ As a reaction to formality of modernism
- ❖ Millions of buildings damaged or destroyed during the World War II
- ❖ Housing needs especially critical
- ❖ Brutalism was a low-cost option
- ❖ Both Europe and the United States experienced a population boom in the 1950's and 60's

Elements of Brutalism

- ❖ Extensive use of concrete
- ❖ Other materials also common:
brick, glass, steel, and rough-hewn stone
- ❖ Forthright geometric forms
- ❖ Massive monolithic and blocky appearance
- ❖ Rough and unfinished surfaces
- ❖ Minimized decorative features
- ❖ Modular elements
- ❖ Honesty in use of materials
- ❖ Both form and function revealed by design

Attributes of Concrete

- ❖ Concrete offered huge benefits: standardization, prefabrication and rapid construction
- ❖ Concrete overused, particularly by governments and national institutions
- ❖ Concrete can degrade over time
- ❖ Concrete makes changes to structure and mechanical elements difficult with solid concrete walls, ceilings, and floors