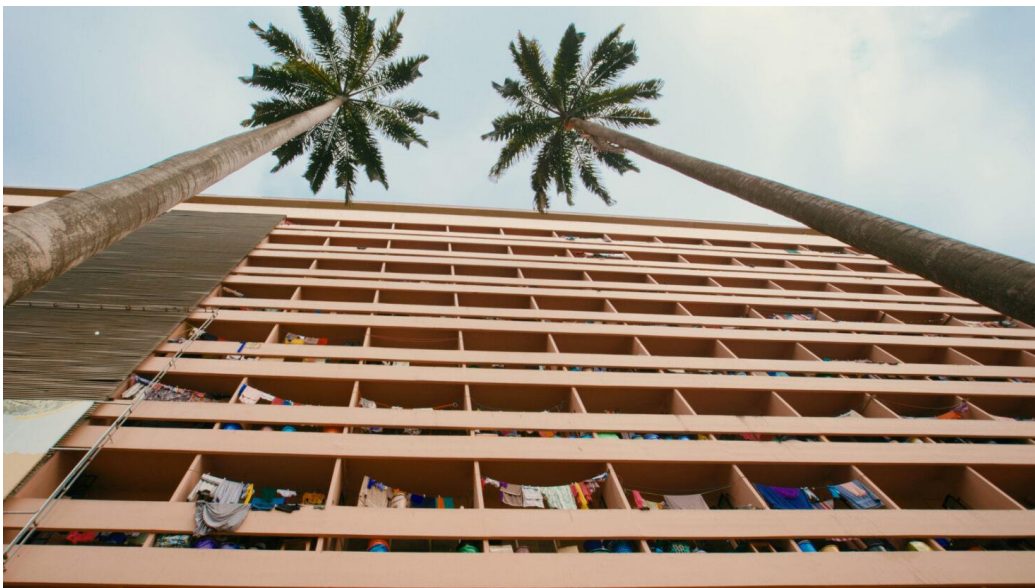


News Release



Major V&A Exhibition to Explore Architectural Style of Tropical Modernism in West Africa and India



Tropical Modernism: Architecture and Independence

Porter Gallery

V&A South Kensington

2 March 2024 – 22 September 2024

vam.ac.uk/exhibitions/tropical-modernism-architecture-and-independence

The V&A will stage a major architecture exhibition on the architectural style of Tropical Modernism. Tickets for the exhibition are available from 10am today. In the late 1940s, British architects Jane Drew and Maxwell Fry developed the tools of Tropical Modernism in West Africa, adapting a Modernist aesthetic that valued function over ornament to the hot, humid conditions of the region. Britain's unique contribution to International Modernism was a colonial architecture, developed against the background of anti-colonial struggle.

Drew and Fry worked primarily in Ghana and India. Following independence, Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Ghanaian prime minister Kwame Nkrumah commissioned major new projects in this style, using Tropical Modernism as a tool for nation-building and as a symbol of their internationalism and progressiveness. A new generation of national architects more sensitive to local context gave birth to distinctive alternative Modernisms. The exhibition centres and celebrates these practitioners and the alternative Modernisms they created.

Tropical Modernism, despite its colonial associations, became an architectural symbol of a postcolonial future, symbolising the utopian possibility of the transitional moment in which a break with the past was articulated through architecture and new freedoms were won.

The exhibition will include models, drawings, letters, photographs, and archival ephemera documenting the key figures and moments of the Tropical Modernist movement, and a half hour film installation displayed on three screens. These artifacts won't just speak to architecture, but also about modernism's wider role in narratives about decolonisation and the construction of national identity.

Christopher Turner, the V&A's Keeper of Art, Architecture, Photography & Design and Curator of the exhibition, said: "The story of Tropical Modernism is one of colonialism and decolonization, politics and power, defiance and independence; it is not just about the past, but also about the present and the future.

The exhibition looks at the colonial origins of tropical modernism in British West Africa, and the survival of the style in the post-colonial period when it symbolised the independence and progressiveness of newly independent countries like India and Ghana.

We deliberately set out to complicate the history of tropical modernism by looking at the architecture against the anti-colonial struggle of the time, and by engaging with and centring South Asian and West African perspectives.

As we look to a new future in an era of climate change might Tropical Modernism, which used the latest building and environmental science then available to passively cool buildings, serves as a useful guide?"

***Tropical Modernism: Architecture and Independence* is supported by James Bartos and Celia and Edward Atkin CBE**

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors:

For further PRESS information please contact press.office@vam.ac.uk

A selection of press images is available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk

- The exhibition *Tropical Modernism: Architecture and Independence* will run from 2 March 2024 – 22 September 2024.
- Tickets are available at vam.ac.uk

About V&A South Kensington

The V&A is a family of museums dedicated to the power of creativity. V&A South Kensington is a world of extraordinary global creativity, with unmissable exhibitions, experiences and educational programmes for all. One of London's most iconic buildings, it is home to national collections of art, design, fashion, photography and furniture to theatre, performance, architecture, and ceramics, as well as the UK's National Art Library. It is a place where everyone can experience a story of creativity that spans 5,000 years and every creative discipline, which brings that story to life through programmes and activities for all ages and specialisms, and world-leading research and conservation.

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