

Balkrishna Doshi

Architecture for the People

Exhibition: 29.05.–29.06.2020 | Exhibition Hall 2

The Indian architect, urbanist and teacher Balkrishna Doshi is among the key proponents of an Indian modernity, although he has achieved world ranking and influence well beyond this. His visionary work in the low-cost housing and urban planning sectors as well as his strong commitment to education are central to his approach. In 2018, he became the first Indian architect to be awarded the prestigious Pritzker Prize, the Nobel Prize for architecture.

In over 60 years Balkrishna Doshi (*1927, Pune, India) has realised a wide variety of projects, including the well-known Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore (1977, 1992), the Aranya social housing estate (1989) and the architecture school he founded in Ahmedabad (1968). Having grown up in the progressive spirit of the Indian Independence movement, Doshi worked with such greats as Le Corbusier and Louis I. Kahn in the 1950s. He developed a vocabulary of his own early on, combining modern principles with traditional Indian techniques. By covering the spectrum from industrial to local craftsmanship, he adapts his architecture to suit local conditions. Doshi's humanist approach is influenced as much by his Indian roots as by his Western education. Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's teachings, Doshi developed new approaches to social and experimental housing based on the participation of prospective residents and enabling adaptation to changing needs and requirements – keywords 'growing house'.

Doshi's 'Architecture for the People' is carried by the conviction that the built environment has a decisive impact on people's wellbeing, their sense of belonging and the community spirit. He named the architecture office he opened in Ahmedabad in 1956 Vastushilpa – Vastu describes the wholeness of the environment, shilpa is the Sanskrit word for design. His approach is based on placing architecture in a broad context of culture, environment, society, ethics and religion. 'Doshi's notion of sustainability integrates the cultural, social and environmental dimension', says the director of the Architekturzentrum Wien Angelika Fitz. 'This makes his architecture extremely relevant for Europe as well.'

The exhibition shows projects from six decades, ranging from educational and cultural buildings, housing developments and interiors to planning concepts for entire cities. The show compiles a wealth of original materials such as models, sketches and Doshi's famous drawings inspired by Indian miniatures. Large scale installations allow visitors to experience the poetry of his architecture, while recent photographs and film footage show the continuing life of this architecture.

The Four Focal Points of the Exhibition

The exhibition is arranged into four thematic focal points covering the field of housing, via education and building institutions to the design of livable cities.

As an architect and teacher, Doshi has had a lasting impact on architectural education in India. The section **SHAPING AN INTEGRATED EDUCATION** is devoted, in part, to the Centre of Environmental Planning and Technology (CEPT) in Ahmedabad, one of Doshi's key projects. Built over a period of 50 years (1962 to 2012), a multidisciplinary university campus has developed as home to the School of Architecture he founded. Doshi designed the entire campus as a free-flowing space, reflecting his ideal of 'education without doors' and encouraging dialogue between students and teachers.

Doshi meets the lack of affordable living space and the fragmentation of society with experimental concepts for social housing developments. In the section **HOME AND IDENTITY** the exhibition shows his ideas on low-cost, environmentally sound and socially integrative living space. Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's notion of empowerment, Doshi combines prefabricated construction and local craftsmanship in modular systems that allow occupants to customise their homes and adapt them to meet their needs, their personal preferences and financial situation. There are flowing transitions between public and private spaces – people from different social strata meet on streets and squares, in courtyards and on the stairs. Doshi's housing developments have become an instrument for blurring social boundaries, contributing to lasting social and economic change.

Doshi's institutional buildings also demonstrate a high level of social awareness, as is clearly shown in the section on **BUILDING ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS**. His administrative buildings, research centres and schools promote informal interaction and exchange. At the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore, stairs and corridors, planted courtyards and interconnecting paths create overall coherence, blurring the boundaries between inside and outside and integrating everything in the learning space. The use of local materials and building techniques makes the architecture appear timeless. It also reflects Doshi's appreciation of traditional Indian construction methods well as his strong sense of environmental awareness.

The section **CREATING A LIVABLE CITY** shows that people's everyday lives are always at the heart of Doshi's work. Streets and paths, public spaces and buildings, private homes, office and commercial buildings, historic monuments, temples and cultural institutions – but most of all people and the activities they engage in – want to be combined into one functional whole. To improve the quality of urban life, Doshi has adapted traditional principles, such as dense structures, walkable distances and the multifunctional use of available space to the present-day context.

Balkrishna Doshi

Balkrishna Doshi, born into a traditional Hindu family in 1927, grew up in the spirit of the Indian Independence movement, whose leading figures included Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. He began studying architecture at the Sir J.J. College of Architecture Bombay (Mumbai) in 1947, the year of Indian independence. In the 1950s he travelled by ship to London, where he wanted to apply for admission to the Royal Institute of British Architects, ultimately moving on to Paris to work for Le Corbusier. Doshi's collaboration with Le Corbusier and later Louis I. Kahn extended over a whole decade and familiarised the young architect with the vocabulary of architectural modernism with a particular emphasis on elementary forms and building materials. Doshi called the architecture office he opened in Ahmedabad in 1956 Vastushilpa: Vastu describes the wholeness of the environment, shilpa is the Sanskrit word for design. In 1962, at the age of only 41, he founded the School of Architecture at the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology (CEPT) in Ahmedabad. In 1976 Balkrishna Doshi established the Vastushilpa Foundation for Studies and Research in Environmental Design with the aim of developing design and planning standards adapted to the society, culture and environment of India. Doshi has received numerous awards and honours, including the Global Award for Lifetime Achievement for Sustainable Architecture, the Aga Khan Award for Architecture and the Gold Medal of the French Académie d'Architecture. He is a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Indian Institute of Architects, a member of the Institut Français d'Architecture and an honorary member of the American Institute of Architects. In 2018 he was the first Indian architect to be awarded the Pritzker Prize.

Curator: Khushnu Panthaki Hoof

Curator, Vitra Design Museum: Jolanthe Kugler

The exhibition is a project by the Vitra Design Museum and the Wüstenrot Foundation, in cooperation with the Vastushilpa Foundation.

As part of the exhibition, Az W offers a comprehensive supporting programme with guided tours, workshops and a film screening. Details can be found at www.azw.at.

The press release as well as high resolution, rights free press photographs are available as downloads at www.azw.at/presse.

Press contact: Ines Purtauf, +43-1-522 3115-25, presse@azw.at

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