

Bernard Rudofsky. A Humane Designer

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Rudofsky nonchalantly brings together and compares kites and nomadic tents, termitaria and dove-cotes, cemeteries and hypogeal habitations. He is interested little or not at all in symbolic values, the psycho-cultural reasons for taboos, historical and cultural contextualization, the structure of the community.

His point of view in *Architecture without Architects* was soon regarded as unsatisfactory by scholars; the fact that many of the categories and descriptive terms — “spontaneous,” “anonymous,” “timeless,” belonging “to an earlier paradigm of modern architecture”²¹⁷ — used by him were challenged early on is due to the advances made by research aiming at a greater cultural and historical contextualization. In any event, *Architecture without Architects* is the realization of a “modernist” project that Rudofsky would probably have carried out in an analogous way in the early forties or, perhaps, even earlier; in it, he expresses ideas that were common in modernism’s formative phase, especially around 1930.²¹⁸ Oliver and Guidoni have attacked his “admiration for...an architecture defined as naive, sincere, in keeping with society’s needs[, which] can no longer disguise an entirely superficial attitude that is colonialist in nature,” and the ambiguity of a “substantial problematic similarity between ‘primitive’ architecture, current ‘popular’ architecture, and the ‘vernacular’ kind.”²¹⁹ Scott has also recently noted “the heterogeneous, inconsistent, and often opportunistic nature of [Rudofsky’s] speculations;” she maintains that “[f]rom today’s standpoint, Rudofsky’s approach is dismissible as an unconscionable primitivism” and that “[t]his aesthetic recolonization indicates an astounding disregard given the ongoing political struggles over decolonization. [He doesn’t allow] the ‘others’ to speak for themselves.”²²⁰

Price has demonstrated that “spontaneous” and “anonymous” are ingenuous words: quite often, a work is believed to be “anonymous” out of ignorance or a lack of interest in investigating its origin. Rudofsky — even though he wishes to get beyond the limitations of a study of art focused on the “life and works of individuals who have a name, and on the historical succession of distinct artistic movements” — is among those who believe that “a work born outside the Great Tradition must be produced by an anonymous figure who represents his community, and whose manual abilities follow the dictates of very ancient traditions”: “anonymity” brings with it the corollary of “timelessness.”²²¹ But Price has shown that the ahistorical evaluation of primitive societies should be imputed to cultural prejudices and the limitations of the method of study. A formal reading, almost always in aesthetic terms, may save from destruction, and even glorify, works belonging to a remote historical or cultural context; but their inner meaning is not even considered.²²² Many share Valéry’s conviction that “[i]n art, learning is a sort of defeat: [because it] substitutes theories for sensations[, transforms Venus] into a document.”²²³

217 AR01, p. 234.

218 One of the departure points for Rudofsky’s research was Franz Oehlmann (ed.), *Haus und Hof im Altertum. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des antiken Wohnhaus*, Berlin-Leipzig: Verlag von Walter De Gruyter & Co., 1927.

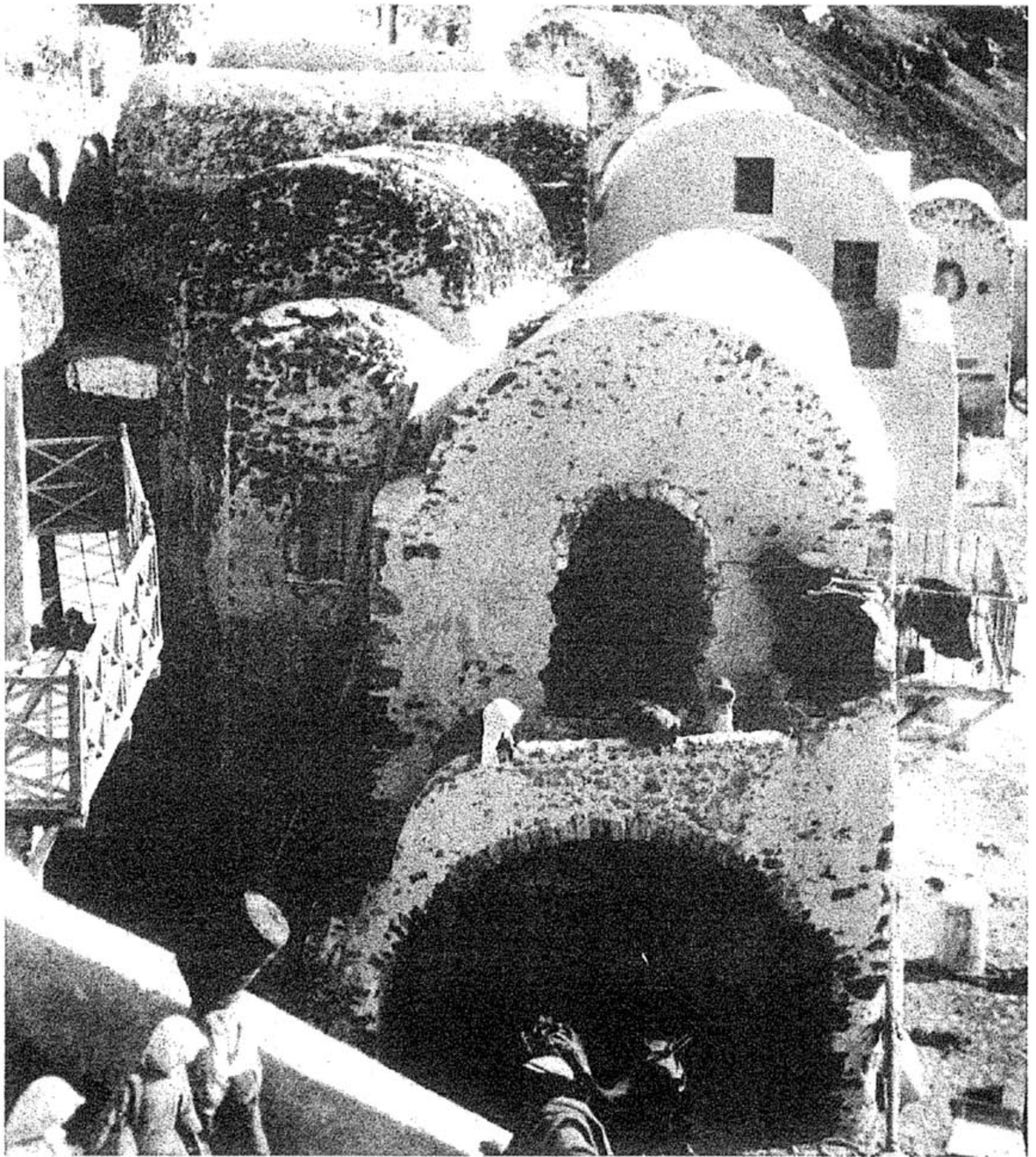
219 AR69.2; AR75.1, p. 5 and 7.

220 AR01, p. 217 and 219.

221 Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1989.

222 Federico Zeri, “Prefazione”, Sally Price, *I primitivi traditi*, Torino: Einaudi, 1992, p. ix.

223 Paul Valéry quoted in Frederick Baekeland, “The Art Collector: Clues to a Character Profile”, *The New York Times*, 16 September 1984, p. 27.



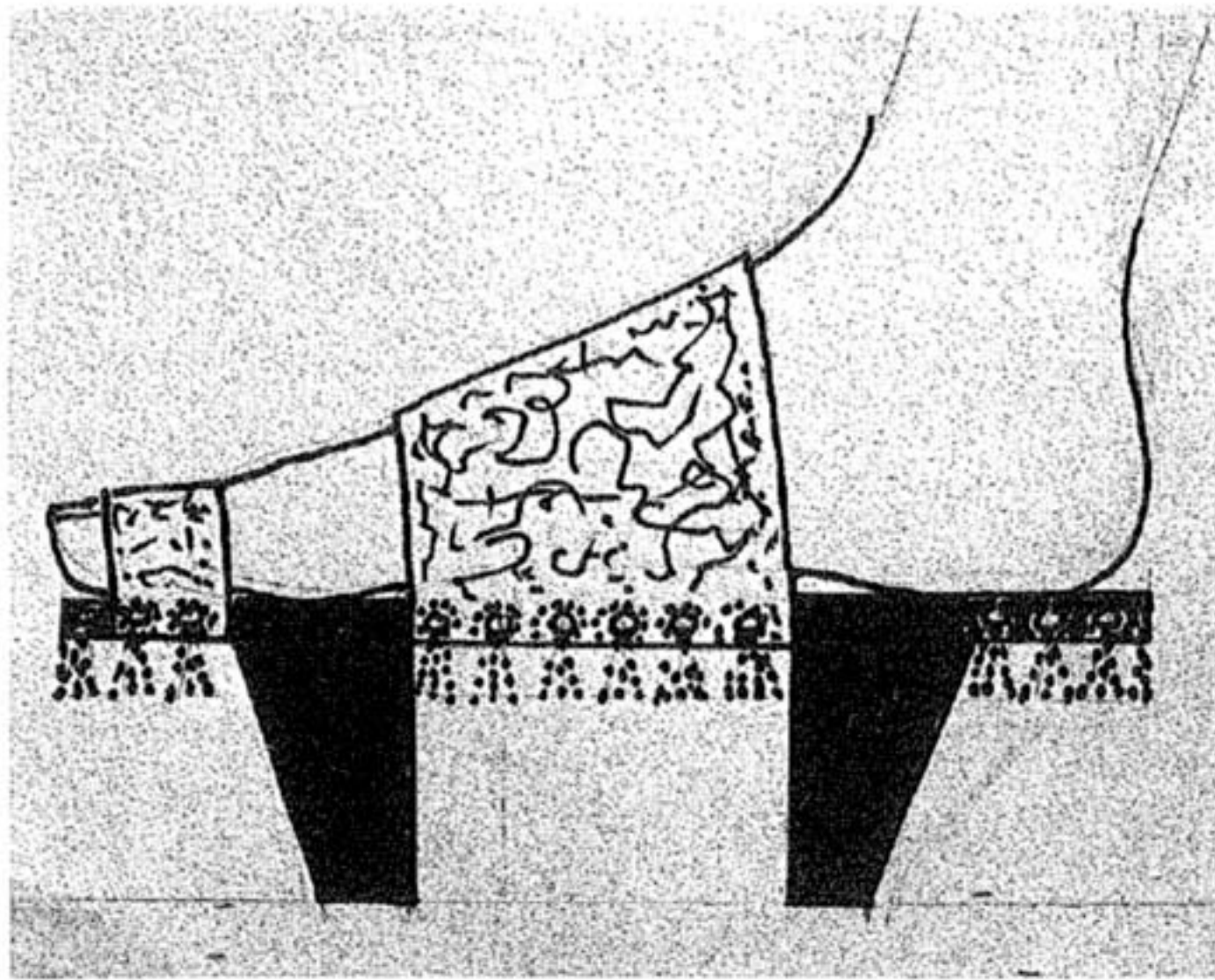
Bernhard Rudofsky. The village on the sea at Oia [Apanomeria], 1929.

Rudofsky's ideas on "spontaneous" architecture were formed in the twenties, when he traveled in Asia Minor, Greece and other Mediterranean countries. Architecture without Architects is the realization of a project that Rudofsky would probably have carried out in an analogous manner decades earlier.

Bernard Rudofsky. Contemporary "architecture without architects" in Tokyo, 1955.

"I believe that the modern [Japanese] vernacular with all its vulgarisms is just as remarkable as the old vernacular." Rudofsky liked, among other things, the triviality of the written words in the streets, which concealed the buildings.





*Bernard Rudofsky. Design for the Golden Eye project, 1985 (?).
Unproduced geta-like piece of footwear with a wooden sole and two embroidered loops, ornamented with short metal fringes all around the edge of the sole.
A typically Rudofskian re-elaboration of Japanese and Indian traditional elements.*

The appeal of the images in *Architecture without Architects* had as a consequence, entirely undesired by Rudofsky, a new mimetic trend. (Despite his appreciation of vernacular architecture, an entire generation of thought separates *Architecture without Architects* from Venturi's *Learning from Las Vegas*.²²⁴ Jan C. Rowan was right to admonish Rudofsky that "[i]n today's complex civilization of unlimited choices, the selective reduction of the design vocabulary can come only from a highly trained and intellectualized mind. The paradox... is that today the uneducated, spontaneous design leads to overabundance and chaos; only the highly educated, disciplined design can achieve simplicity and order."²²⁵ *Architecture without Architects*, perhaps in part because of its passionate tone, "has remained understood in prescriptive terms."²²⁶

In fact, when the show reached London (1974), the book/catalogue had already become "the well-thumbed bible of architectural schools and faculties of design in Britain," and it was possible to state that "[t]he influence of these photographs of primitive architecture can be seen in recent architecture all over the world."²²⁷ A whole generation of architects took *Architecture without Architects* as its point of departure for the attempt to escape from modernist formalism.²²⁸ Without Rudofsky's work, Couëlle, Rotthier, Spoerry, Halprin, Aronson, and many others would have been considered eccentric;²²⁹ it facilitated the identification of the vernacular as a source of inspiration and imitation. Other architects were likewise pursuing the same path as Rudofsky at the time: Luis Barragán, Geoffrey Bawa, Edoardo Gellner,

After Architecture without Architects, after Architects

224 Robert Venturi, *Learning from Las Vegas*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1972.

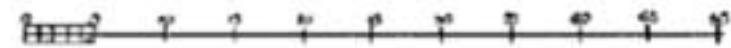
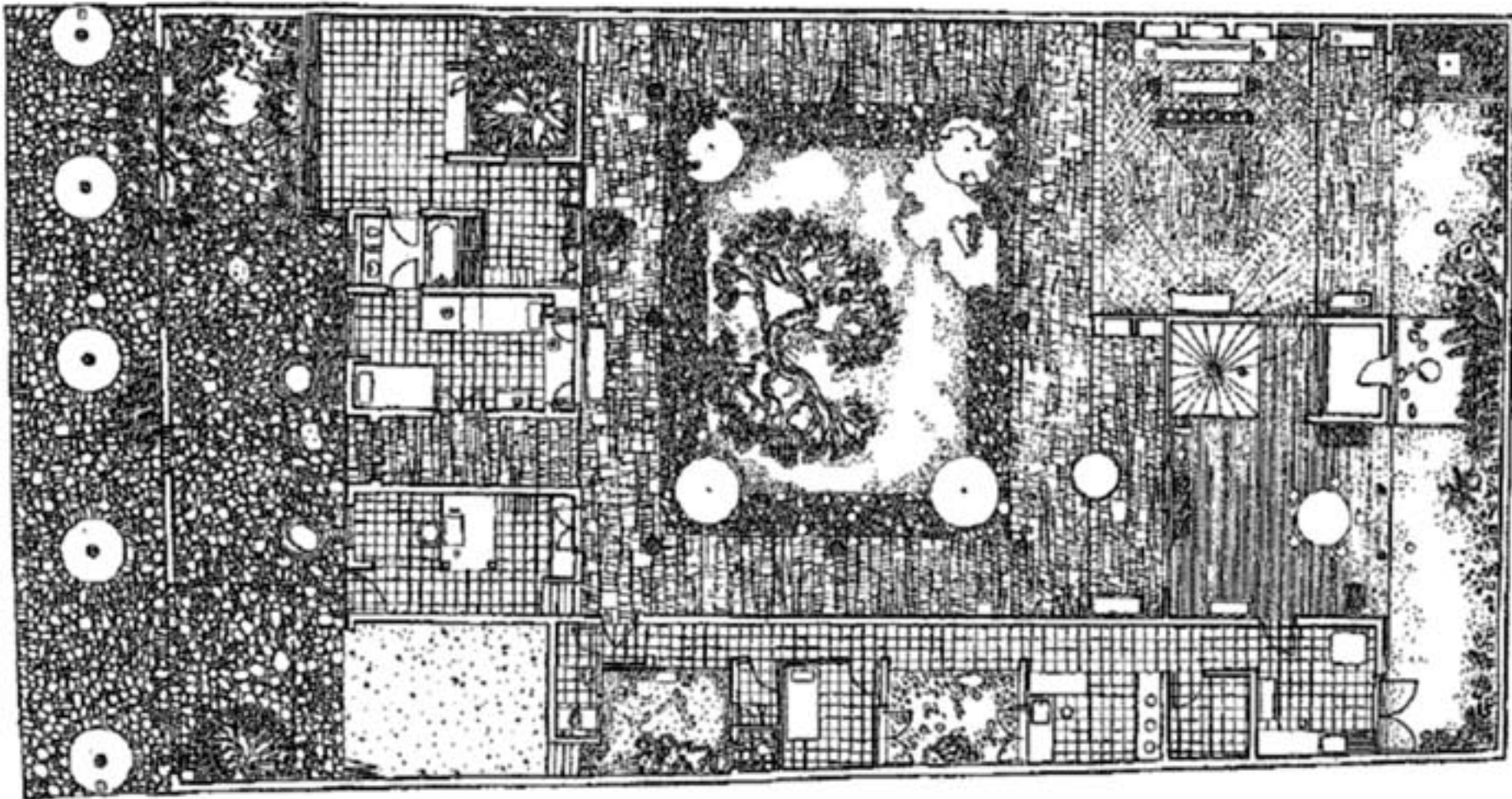
225 AR64.4.

226 AR98.4, p. 70.

227 AR74.1.

228 AR76.3. See also AR88.26.

229 Cf. also AR77.2, p. 95.



Geoffrey Bawa. *Ena de Silva house, Colombo. Section and ground floor plan, 1962.*

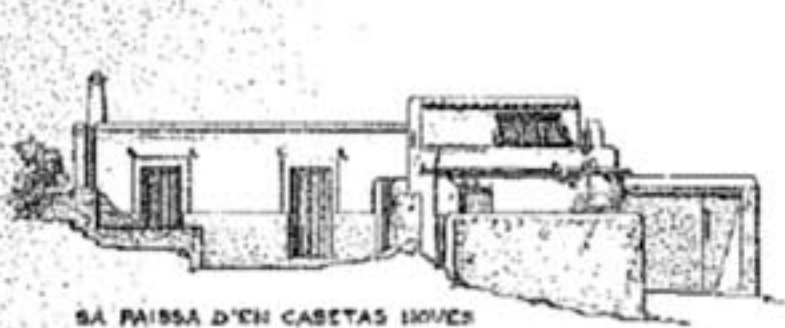
Manuel Manzano-Monis, Dimitri Pikionis, and, of course, Hassan Fathy. The book and the show also led to a rich offspring of texts.²³⁰

Montaner properly emphasizes the context in which *Architecture without Architects* appeared, a context that helps explain its rapid success: "During the sixties and seventies, [for] the first time, a part of culture in general, and of architecture in particular, showed itself willing to accept the full consequences of cultural and anthropological relativism... In the seventies, some urban planners, architects, and designers began...searching for solutions that were alternatives to the cultural, economic, technological, urban, and planning criteria of the moment: solutions that would be more experimental, daring, versatile, and adequate to every social context... [I]t was a question of reaffirming an architecture that did not impose models, but was capable of learning from every situation, and thus of reconstructing a shared sense that had existed for centuries but was now threatened with extinction."

230 They include, among others, Myron Goldfinger's *Villages in the Sun* (AR69.1); the special issue of *L'Art Sacré* devoted to spontaneous architecture (II, 2^e trimestre 1969); Hans Hollein's exhibition *Mantransforms*, and, in particular, the contribution by Peter M. Bode, "Protection Create [sic] Design" (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1976, p. 76-85); Norman Carver jr., *Iberian Villages*, Kalamazoo (Michigan): Documan, 1981; Carrollee Pelos, Jean-Louis Bourgeois, *Spectacular Vernacular. The Adobe Tradition*, New York: Aperture Books, 1989; and *Mediterranean Vernacular* by Viacheslav I. Atroshenko and Milton Grundy (AR91.1).

PHILIPPE ROTTHIER, ARQUITECTE, A EIVISSA
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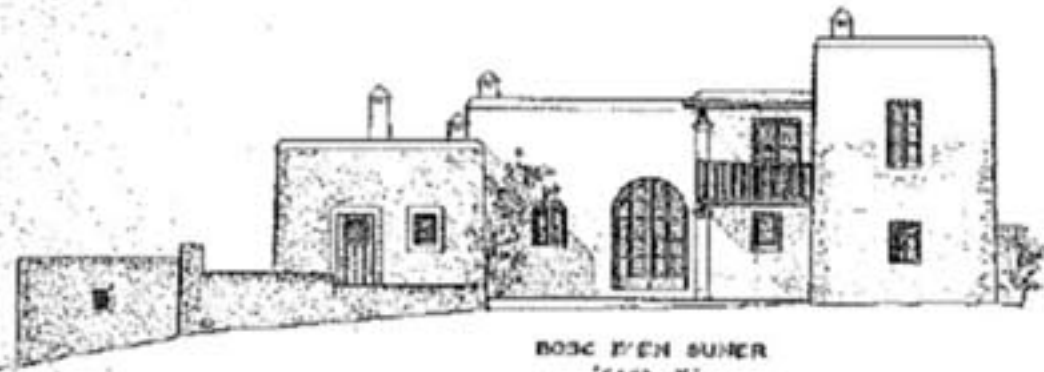
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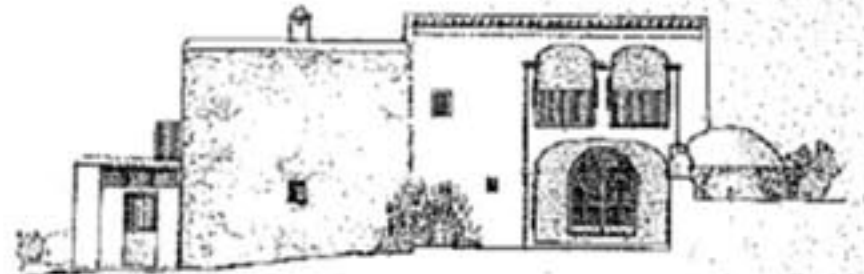
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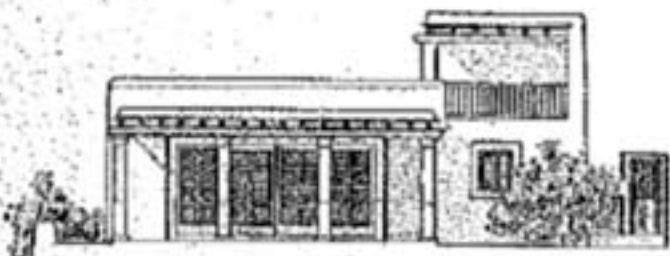
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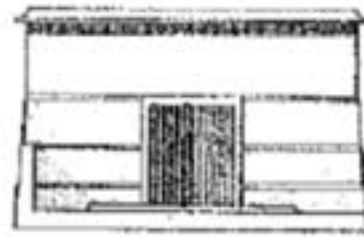
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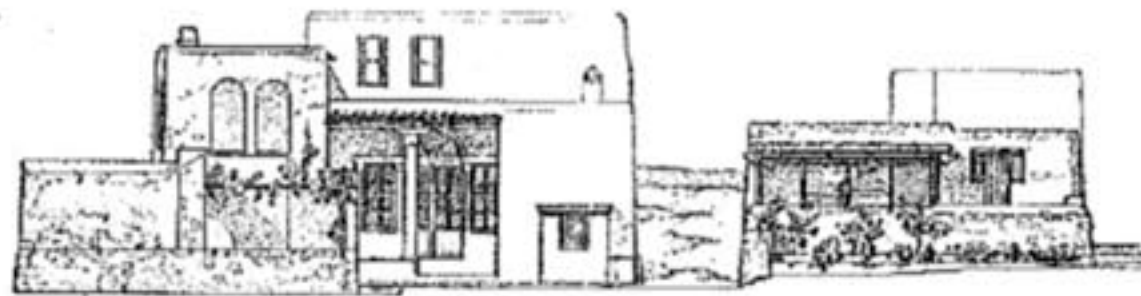
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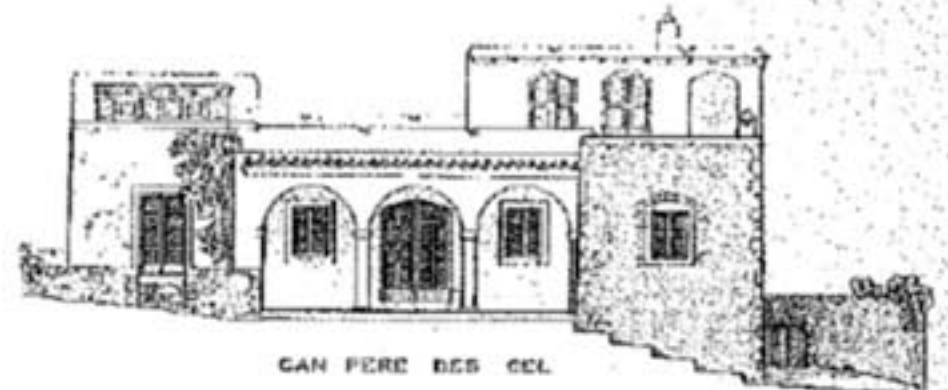
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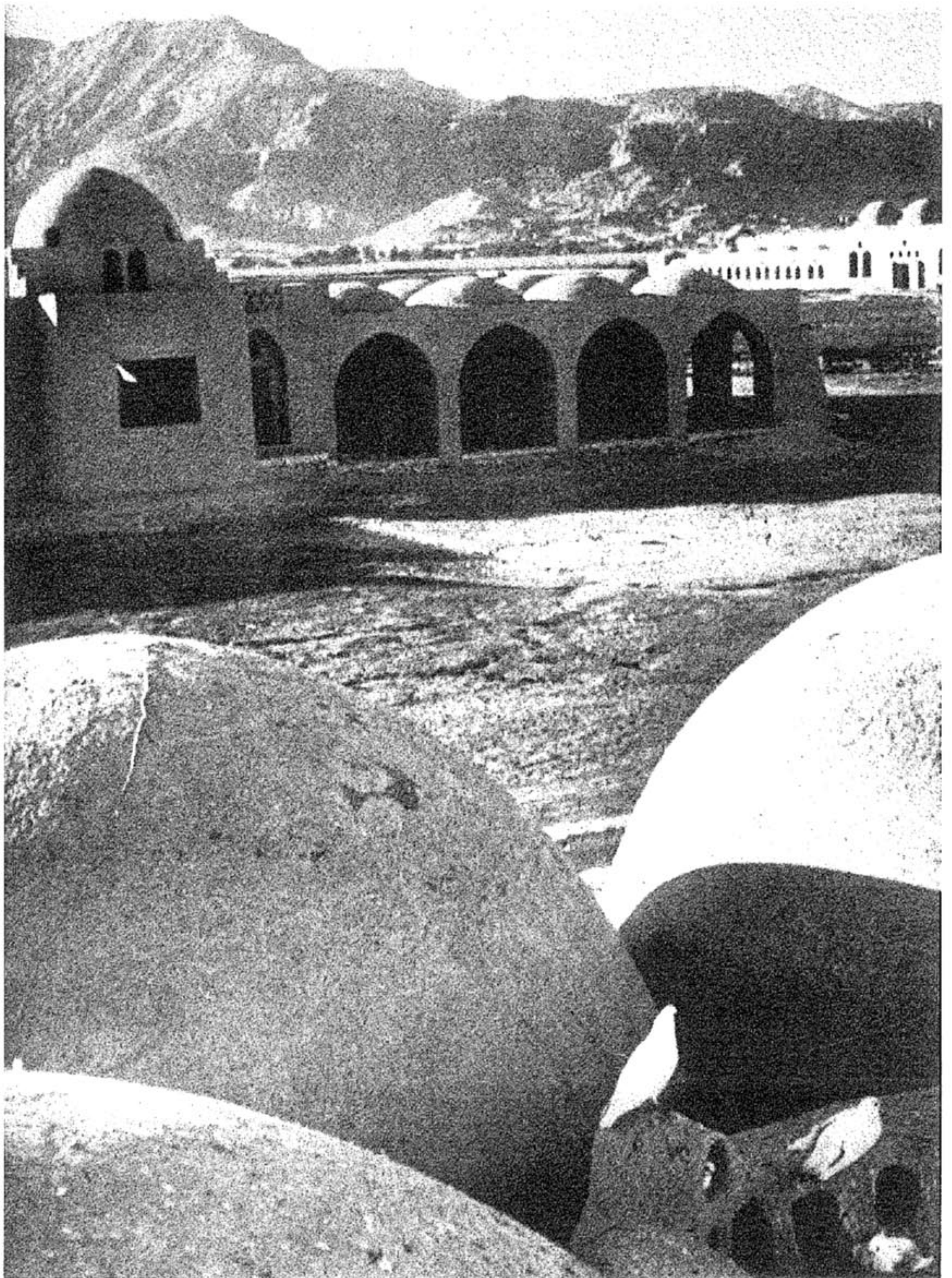


CAN LLUQUER

DIRUOK : L. PREVEDELLO

0 1 2 3 4 5 10 20 30 40 metres

L. Prevedello. Elevations of 11 houses built by Philippe Rotthier in Eivissa (Ibiza), Spain, 1983-1990.



Hassan Pathy, New Gurna, main square.

Montaner links Lévi-Strauss, Rykwert, Hundertwasser, the Meadows report, Schumacher, Rudofsky, Boudon, Jacobs, Lefebvre both because in many instances their approach is rooted in the social sciences and because "they encouraged the popular, alternative, and ecological movements that were beginning to arise during the seventies."²³¹ A conjunction between the spirit of the period and the contents of his works led to Rudofsky's appearing as a hero of anti-modernism; Brolin, Blake, and Wolfe have drawn attention to the responsibilities of the modernist movement in the destruction of the landscape, using arguments and principles derived, in part, from his writings.²³²

Rudofsky belongs to that rare race of architects (Fathy, Chermayeff, Alexander, Erskine)²³³ who turn their attention to the inhabitants/builders. But while he takes self-construction for granted in spontaneous architecture, his trust in the creative self-awareness of the modern individual is uncertain.²³⁴ Despite his ferocious criticisms of architects, it does not seem to me that he really intends to deprive them of their work; nor — partly on account of his inveterate individualism — does he offer arguments on the basis of which a participatory approach to planning and design might be developed, even though his texts have undoubtedly contributed to the inspiration for such an approach. He does, however, declare himself in favor of appropriation on the part of the inhabitant: he publishes a design by Carl Koch, with "[t]he exterior wall chosen by the tenant," which "would become part of the whole façade." This pleases him because it determines an "informal yet organized architecture...akin to the timeless kasbahs, medinas and hilltowns."²³⁵ (If this does not coincide with Hundertwasser's *Fensterrecht* or with Lucien Kroll's *Maison de l'Étudiant* for the Faculty of Medicine at Woluwé-Saint-Lambert, it strongly recalls Habraken's *Supports*.)²³⁶

Moreover, Rudofsky's praise of unobtrusive architecture takes on political significance: "If we [Americans] didn't have a monopoly on democracy, we might...[say] that Japanese domestic architecture is the *only* democratic architecture in the world."²³⁷ From this standpoint, as with clothes for example, Rudofsky's positions seem suspended between revolutionary utopia and regressive nostalgia, as has also been observed about Loos's thought.²³⁸

231 AR93.1.

232 Peter Blake, *Form Follows Fiasco. Why Modern Architecture Hasn't Worked*, Boston-Toronto, 1977; Brent C. Brolin, *The Failure of Modern Architecture*, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976; Tom Wolfe, *From Bauhaus to Our House*, New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1981.

233 Hassan Fathy, *Architecture for the Poor. An Experiment in Rural Egypt*, Chicago-London, 1973; Richard Plunz (ed.), *Design and the Public Good. Selected Writings 1930-1980 by Serge Chermayeff*, Cambridge, Mass.-London, 1982; Christopher Alexander et al., *The Production of Houses*, New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985; Peter Collymore, *The Architecture of Ralph Erskine*, London, 1994.

234 BPW, p. 165-166.

235 SFP, p. 253.

236 *Das Haus Hundertwasser*, Wien: Österreichisches Bundes-Verlag - Compres Verlag, 1965²; Lucien Kroll, *Buildings and Projects*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1988; N.J. Habraken, *Supports. An Alternative to Mass Housing*, London: The Architectural Press, © 1972.

237 Bernard Rudofsky, unpublished lecture in Japan, ca. 1958-59, p. 3 of manuscript. The statement echoes Bruno Taut's observations (*Houses and People of Japan*, cit.).

238 Janet Stewart, *Fashioning Vienna. Adolf Loos's Cultural Criticism*, London-New York: Routledge, 2000. In a preparatory note for SFP, Rudofsky overtly spoke of his intention of pointing "the way to an utopian past rather than an obsolete future."



Friedensreich Hundertwasser. Hundertwasser-Haus, Wien, elevation on the Kegelgasse (architectural design by the architects Josef Krawinger and Peter Pelikan), 1985. Hundertwasser's approach shares many points with Rudofsky's, but their formal output is far from similar. The first's idea that every tenant ought to have the right to shape the façade's appearance — at least in the area surrounding his or her own windows — clashes against his strong artistic imprint on the building which, not by chance, has taken his name.

Convinced that there is no such thing as progress in art, Rudofsky was among those who did for architecture that which writers, travelers, and painters had achieved for primitive art: he "discovered" previously ignored buildings and facilitated their spread through high culture. According to Maass, "The work of Bernard Rudofsky has enlarged the field of the history of art."²³⁹ As a matter of fact, in the American context, his work can be recognized as among the most influential in expanding — not only geographically but also socially — the domain of the architectural discipline. In its time, *Architecture without Architects* was seen as "a salutary antidote to the personality-oriented formalism of '60s design."²⁴⁰

During the same decades, anthropology was exploring human habitation starting from a standpoint different from that of the architects. Although Rudofsky placed domestic behavior at the center of his explorations, he did not investigate — as the anthropologists were doing — the ways of life in the primitive dwellings of which he was publishing photographs. In this sense, the broadening of the discipline that he facilitated had more to do with minor architectural fabric in historic civilizations than with forms of human habitation. (We observe once again that Rudofsky did not consider nearby territories as a field for his search for diversity. The participatory observation of neighborhoods and the study of the many cultures that live together in them formed no part of his methods. Only in *Streets for People* do there appear photographs of the New York urban environment and the ways in which it is used.)

Whatever the scope of its impact on subsequent theoretical and architectural work, one must, in any event, register the fact that "archi-

239 AR69.7.

240 AR76.3.



ecture without architects," which is just one of the topics on which Rudofsky worked, became, quite by chance, the only reason for his being remembered in the historiography of the discipline.²⁴¹ Together with *Streets for People* (which contributed significantly, especially in the United States, to the development of a culture of revitalization and pedestrianization of city centers), *Architecture without Architects* is the work of his that has had the most influence on architects — even if the consequences others have drawn from it have often been far removed from his intentions and sensibility.

Rudofsky's thought can be connected with that of the anti-theoreticians who have given priority to concern for quality, balance, and the sustainability of the solutions adopted, rather than to the configuration of logical plans or to ideological strictness. It places him alongside those writers and architects who have insisted on sensory, psychological, humanistic, and ethical values in architectural creation. He is at one with the Frank of "Accidentism," who declares that "[e]very place where one feels comfortable — rooms, streets, and cities — has originated by chance. [U]niformity is not the result of necessity but of an ideology."²⁴² And with Arnheim, who compares the old cities of Europe to natural landscapes; who considers that to lose oneself in them is "entirely adequate;" who recognizes the stimulus created by the sequence of perceptions that progressively offer themselves to the experience of those who move through them.²⁴³ With the theory of Steiner, which pursues an architecture capable of stimulating sensa-

Unknown photographer. Medical Faculty at Woluwé-Saint-Lambert near Bruxelles, by Lucien Kroll. Partial view of the complex with Alma métro station in the foreground, ca. mid 1980s.

241 Cf. for instance Nikolaus Pevsner et al., *A Dictionary of Architecture*, London: Allen Lane, 1975, s.v. "anonymous, architecture".

242 Josef Frank, "Accidentism", *Form* (Stockholm), LIV, 1958, p. 161–166 (republished in Johannes Spalt, Hermann Czech (eds.), *Josef Frank 1885–1967*, cit., p. 215 ff.

243 Rudolf Arnheim, *The Dynamics of Architectural Form*, op. cit.

Bernard Rudofsky. *Street in Valletta, Malta, 1973.*

Rudofsky was delighted by discovering and showing to his readers vernacular examples of monumental or high-art typologies.



tions and harmony, of "warming the soul."²⁴⁴ With those (Jacobs, Goodman and von Eckhardt, Lewis, Lynch, and later Sennett)²⁴⁵ who, starting in the sixties, have demanded that public spaces have an attractive identity, social recognizability, and spatial, architectural, and sensory qualities that nourish the spirit.

The Ethical Function

It seems to me that, at least through the forties, Rudofsky continued to believe that the architect, "advocate of a better life,"²⁴⁶ could have a role not only in formulating a new way of building, but also in a modern transformation of customs. In the fifties he lost hope that certain ethical principles might permeate planners' and designers' commitment: with

244 Christopher Day, *Places of the Soul*, op. cit.

245 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press, 1960; Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, New York, 1961; Wolf von Eckardt, *Life for Dead Spaces. The Development of Lavanburg Commons. An Architectural Proposal by Charles Goodman*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, © 1963; David Neville Lewis (ed.), *The Pedestrian in the City*, Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1966; Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye. The Design and Social Life of Cities*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990.

246 BR43.1, p. 63.

Beyond the Picture Window, he initiated a critique of architects' responsibility for the loss of quality in domestic living and public space. In the last chapter of *Streets for People* (1969), the tone turns apocalyptic: with Disraeli, Rudofsky states that "[n]o profession has done its duty until it has furnished a victim."²⁴⁷

His frontal attack is directed against a professional group which he had been proud to belong to, but towards which he now feels in a marginal position, and whose ethical decay arouses his indignation.

It is thus that he can provocatively tell a public made up primarily of architects: "I rarely address an audience of architects, if only because I consider them a hopeless breed, and a threat to humanity. I prefer to speak to laymen instead, since it is from them that any re-orientation in the field of architecture must come."²⁴⁸ Rudofsky — an enemy of the "experts," who are the "American idols" — would have shared Ivan Illich's radical critique of the "disabling professions" that have expropriated people's awareness and abilities, attributing the right to know, act, or prescribe exclusively to ever more powerful, highly self-referential technocratic castes.²⁴⁹

Rudofsky maintains that there should be formulated "ethical precepts for the performance of the... profession" of architect, along the lines of the Hippocratic Oath for physicians.²⁵⁰

But what does he mean by the ethics of design? The first point is the renunciation of artistic protagonism, of originality for its own sake in the design of buildings or objects meant for use in people's lives: "As a designer, I have come to believe that the man-made shape of a *tool* (in contrast to a gadget) should be subject to laws as exact as those of jurisprudence. In other words, design ought to be reducible, if not to a moral basis, at least to common sense and good judgement."²⁵¹ The well-being of the inhabitant or user should be the designer's principal concern.

A second point is architects' and designers' moral uprightness. In Rudofsky's view, these groups have opted for personal gain, for the interests of real-estate speculators and manufacturing firms, ignoring the higher interests of the community, the urban environment, ecology, and inhabitants.

In a lecture at Monticello, Rudofsky states: "I can't recall a single architect who has refused a commission because he did not want to add his share to the general architectural constipation."²⁵² It is nonetheless for industrial designers that he reserves his harshest words, since he holds them responsible for deliberately creating unauthentic needs, promoting wastefulness, and dismantling the critical faculties of the individual.

From this standpoint, Rudofsky is quite close to Victor Papanek, for whom "the designer abrogates his responsibilities to himself and others and operates as a pimp for the sales department... The result is

247 SFP, p. 339.

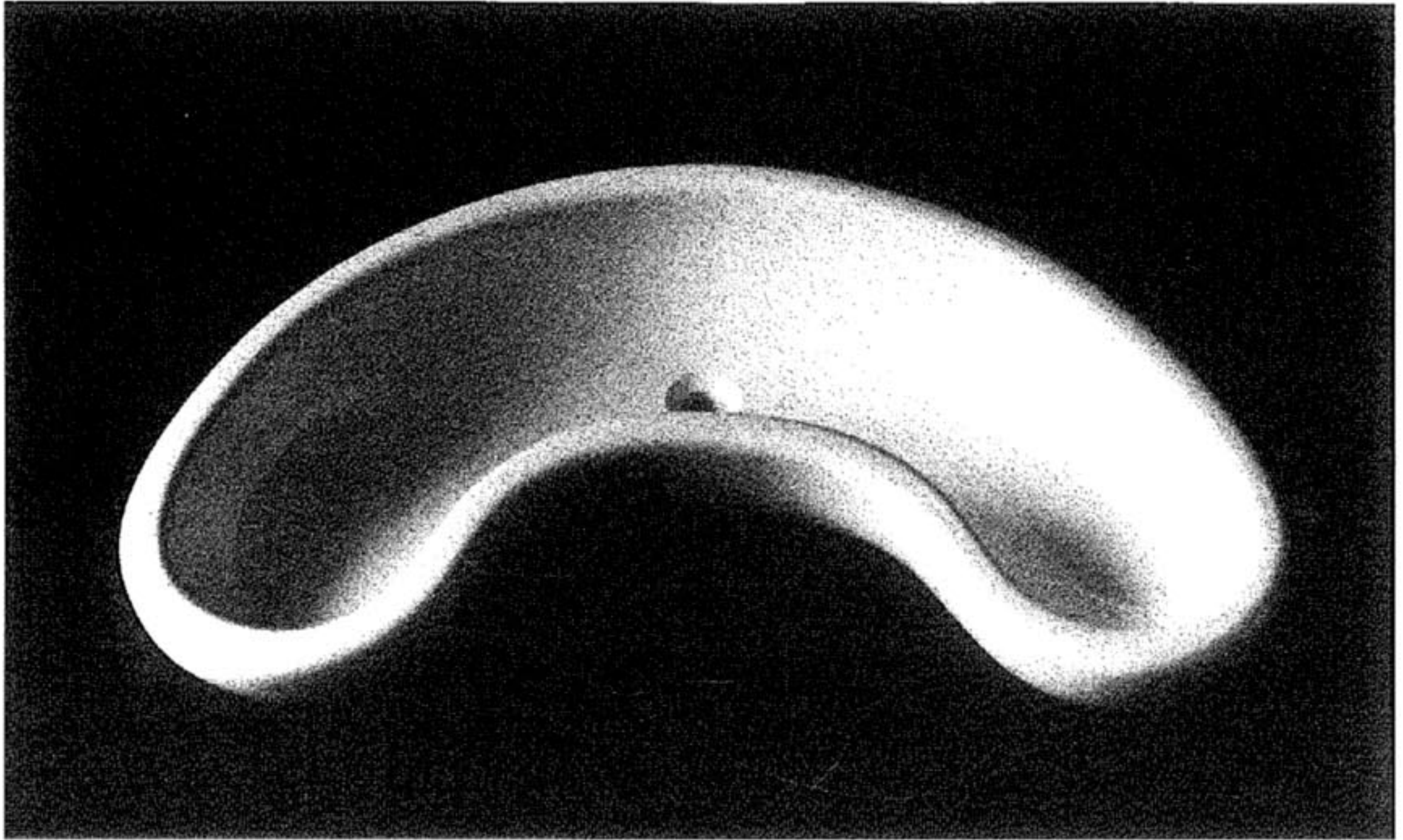
248 Bernard Rudofsky, *Back to Kindergarten* (unpublished lecture in Copenhagen), 8 April 1975, p. 1 of manuscript.

249 Ivan Illich et al., *Disabling Professions*, London-Salem, N.H.: M. Boyars, 1977.

250 SFP, p. 337-342.

251 BPW, p. 44.

252 Bernard Rudofsky, unpublished lecture with slide show at the Virginia University, on *Architecture without Architects*.



Bernard Rudofsky. Prototype of a C-shaped wash-basin, designed by Rudofsky, 1987 (?). Originally made as a one-off piece for the Brussels Expo, the sink was rebuilt for Sparta/Sybaris exhibition. It derives from a traditional Japanese shape, but was never mass-produced for lack of cultural acceptance.

a collection of élitist trivia for the home and anti-human devices for the working environment... Much recent design has satisfied only evanescent wants and desires, while the genuine needs of man have often been neglected by the designer. The economic, psychological, spiritual, technological, and intellectual needs of a human being are usually more difficult and less profitable to satisfy than the carefully engineered and manipulated 'wants' inculcated by fad and fashion."²⁵³

The two seem to concur entirely in their condemnation of change for its own sake, which only serves the interests of industry. Papanek says: "Our system is designed for consumer dissatisfaction and forced obsolescence."²⁵⁴ (But hadn't Josef Frank already declared — in 1930! — that "[t]he goal of pure science [sic] is currently to produce mass articles and induce people to need them" and that "[t]he artist is ready and willing to enter into the service of industry and commerce, since they are able to translate value into figures and can provide even him with an existential justification"?)²⁵⁵

Rudofsky seems to long for a stable and enlightened world, one which will have won for itself a rational awareness of its own needs and eliminated the system of fashions both in clothing and in dwelling. This is one reason why he frequently asks us to compare our way of life with "timeless" traditions: primitive, peasant, popular.

In general, Rudofsky is more than skeptical regarding the results of the mechanization of everyday practices and the obsessive introduction of

253 Victor Papanek, op. cit., p. 51 + 92 + 24.

254 Victor Papanek, op. cit., p. 121.

255 Josef Frank, "Wertlose Arbeit" and "Aufschwung", *Architektur als Symbol*, cit. The word "designer" didn't exist yet.

unnecessary innovations. The consumer is prey to pressures to buy equipment designed more to save labor and time (which does not always prove to be the case) than to assure improved quality. This trend generally provokes the reduction of the range, and even the very possibility, of individual choice, and makes individuals more dependent on devices over which they have no direct control and on the will of others.

In Huizinga, Mumford, Giedion, and Rudofsky one encounters converging statements regarding the absence of a relationship between the progress of industrialization and the quality of life. According to Huizinga, "the belief that every new discovery or every improvement in existing means implies the promise of higher values or greater happiness is naive in the extreme."²⁵⁶ Mumford complains of the "abyss of boredom" created by the availability of labor-saving devices; he laments the disappearance of "the small variations, the minor initiatives and choices, the opportunity for using one's wits, the slightest expression of fantasy" from the life of modern man, "caught in big organizations that do his thinking for him."²⁵⁷ Rudofsky wonders whether "free time" is not a mere illusion created for the sole benefit of the sellers of entertainment, of mass distraction; and he proposes that we think afresh about the existential significance, the moral and hedonistic value of the effort of daily tasks.

Rudofsky's criticism is not, however, aimed only at professionals. There exists a reciprocal relationship between what the market supplies and what consumers demand. Single individuals are responsible if they allow themselves to be manipulated by advertising, if, "[a]t the end of the long historic process of the reduction of dwelling to a function, ...they are content with a consumption of symbols in which the act of inhabiting completely disappears."²⁵⁸ He urges people to regain possession of the full meaning of their own actions, to identify "real, authentic needs," to refound their existence on the basis of common sense: "good design and good manners...go hand in hand. Why ever mention a 'well-designed' spoon if we deliberately ignore the meaning of its shape? Why bother with designing an object to perfection if we have no intention to use it accordingly?"²⁵⁹ And to "[e]njoy the good things that are for free:"²⁶⁰ often "an expensive, difficult and arbitrary makeshift [is preferred over] a simple and natural cleancut gratuitous solution."²⁶¹

Particularly from the sixties onward, Rudofsky frequently uses the adjective "natural" ("natural philosophy," "natural history," etc.). In the foreword to *The Prodigious Builders*, he explains that "the material at hand is presented from the naturalist's point of view as distinct from that of the historian. The...builders of alien and archaic architecture ...never needed to be told what was good for them. Their unpretentious and occasionally awesome achievements merit consideration; no architecture, it seems to me, is outdated that works for man rather

256 Johan Huizinga, *In de schaduwen van morgen*, op. cit.

257 Quoted in BPW, p. 199.

258 Antonio Tosi, *Ideologie della casa: contenuti e significati del discorso sull'abitare*, Milano: Angeli, 1980, p. 41-42.

259 BPW, p. 44.

260 BPW, p. 105.

261 NIL, p. 128.

The Didactics of Curiosity

It does not seem to me that there exist many examples of such close attention to the aspects of material culture, paralleling Rudofsky's devotion to the detail.²⁷⁰ For acuteness of analysis and selection of elements in the comparison between diverse cultures, Rudofsky seems to recall Montesquieu, de Tocqueville. Like theirs, his picture of a foreign land is mainly meant as a critical mirror of domestic reality in his own country.²⁷¹

The Kimono Mind transmitted to Americans certain aspects — hitherto, for the most part, largely neglected by works aimed at a general audience and by guidebooks — of the Japanese mentality and way of life. The unrealized show *The Japanese Culture* was to have revealed daily life and art above all through objects for practical use.²⁷² Rudofsky's displays in the U.S. pavilion at the Brussels Expo told Europeans about the American's domestic life, of which they knew

270 In his *Houses and People of Japan*, Bruno Taut shows a range of interests somewhat wider than Rudofsky's: unlike the latter, he also considers technological and building matters and social housing (slums, Siedlungen, etc.). Cf. also G.E. Kidder Smith, *Italy Builds*, London, 1955.

271 See for instance Bernard Rudofsky's foreword to the Japanese translation of *The Kimono Mind*: "Only one of the many reviewers of [the American original edition of] *The Kimono Mind* correctly pointed out that the book is actually a critique of the American way of life; Japan merely serves as a vehicle to drive home a point."

272 Letter from Bernard Rudofsky to Mrs. Maki, 28 June 1961.

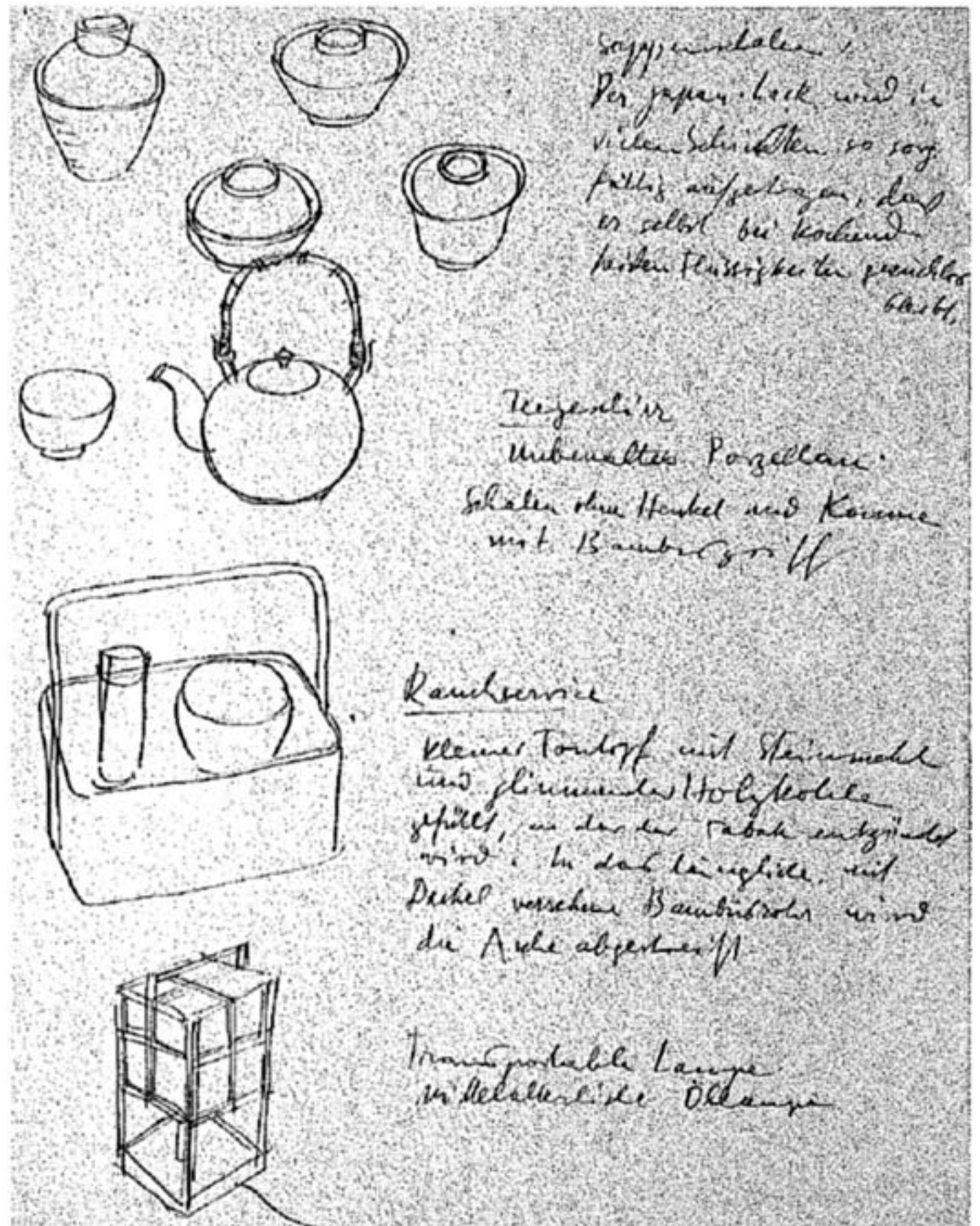
Bernard Rudofsky. Suppenschalen, Teegeschirr, Rauchservice, Transportable Lampe (Soup bowls, Tea-service, Smoking set, Transportable lamp), 1955-60.

The notes read:

"Soup bowls. The Japanese lacquer is so carefully applied layer by layer that it remains odourless even when coming into contact with boiling liquids.

Tea-service. Unpainted porcelain. Teacups without handles; teapot with bamboo handle. Smoking set. Small clay pot filled with sand and smouldering charcoal used to ignite the joss sticks.

Transportable Lamp. Medieval oil lamp."



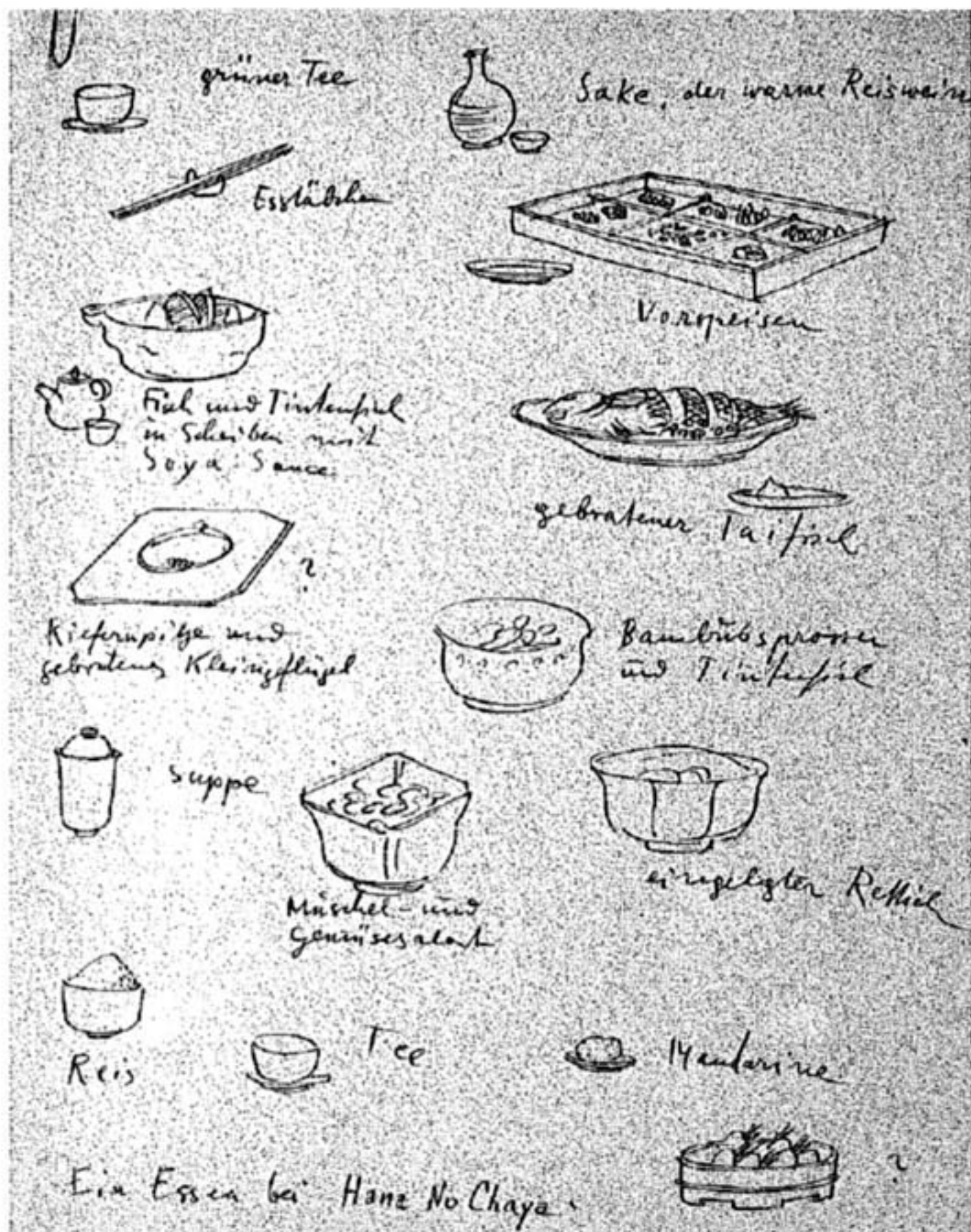
very little: "Of undeniable interest, therefore, will be his native environment, especially the man-made kind; his house and the objects he accumulates in the pursuit of happiness; his likes and dislikes as reflected in his surroundings, whether a town or a room; his interests and aspirations; his pet loves and pet hates; the things that make him laugh. All these can be shown by a minimum of words, by way of pictures and objects. They furnish the best means for *understanding* him."²⁷³ The film sequences that he chose and edited for Brussels "are not to teach, amuse, or advertise. They are much too short for that. Rather, they ought to tickle and tantalize. [B]y the time the visitor has had a look at the film loops, he ought to have developed a voracious appetite for more information which he feels he can never satisfy, short of a visit to the United States. He will be compelled (I hope) to seek information from people or books; he will look with different eyes at American movies, etc., etc."²⁷⁴

Rudofsky's choices concerning the elements to be shown are highly personal; nonetheless, they are, as Joseph Rykwert said, an effective expression of the "total experience of a culture."²⁷⁵

273 AR57.5, from a memorandum to James Plaut, Deputy Commissioner, from Bernard Rudofsky, dated 5 June 1957.

274 Letter from Bernard Rudofsky to Thurston J. Davis, 20 May 1957.

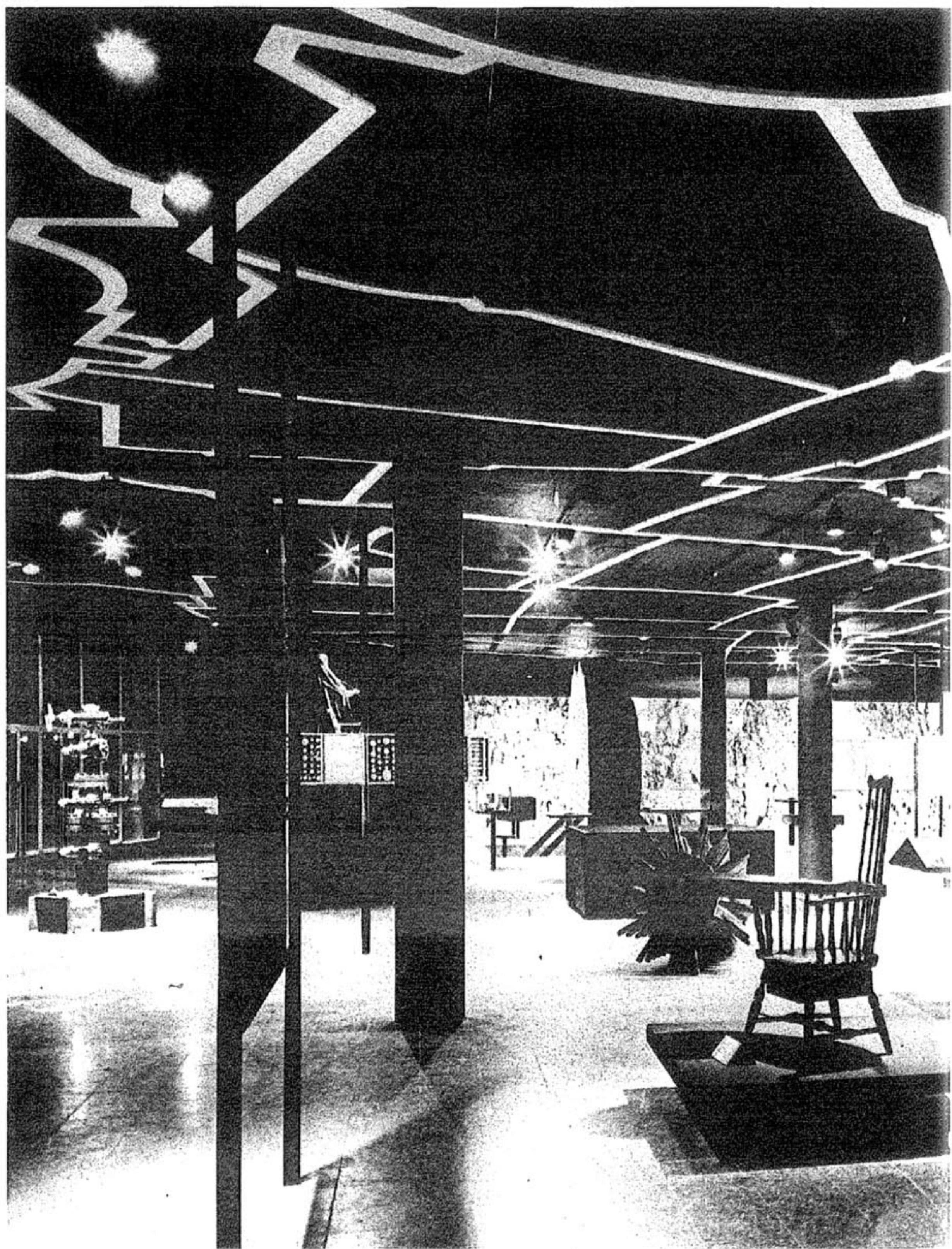
275 AR66.2.

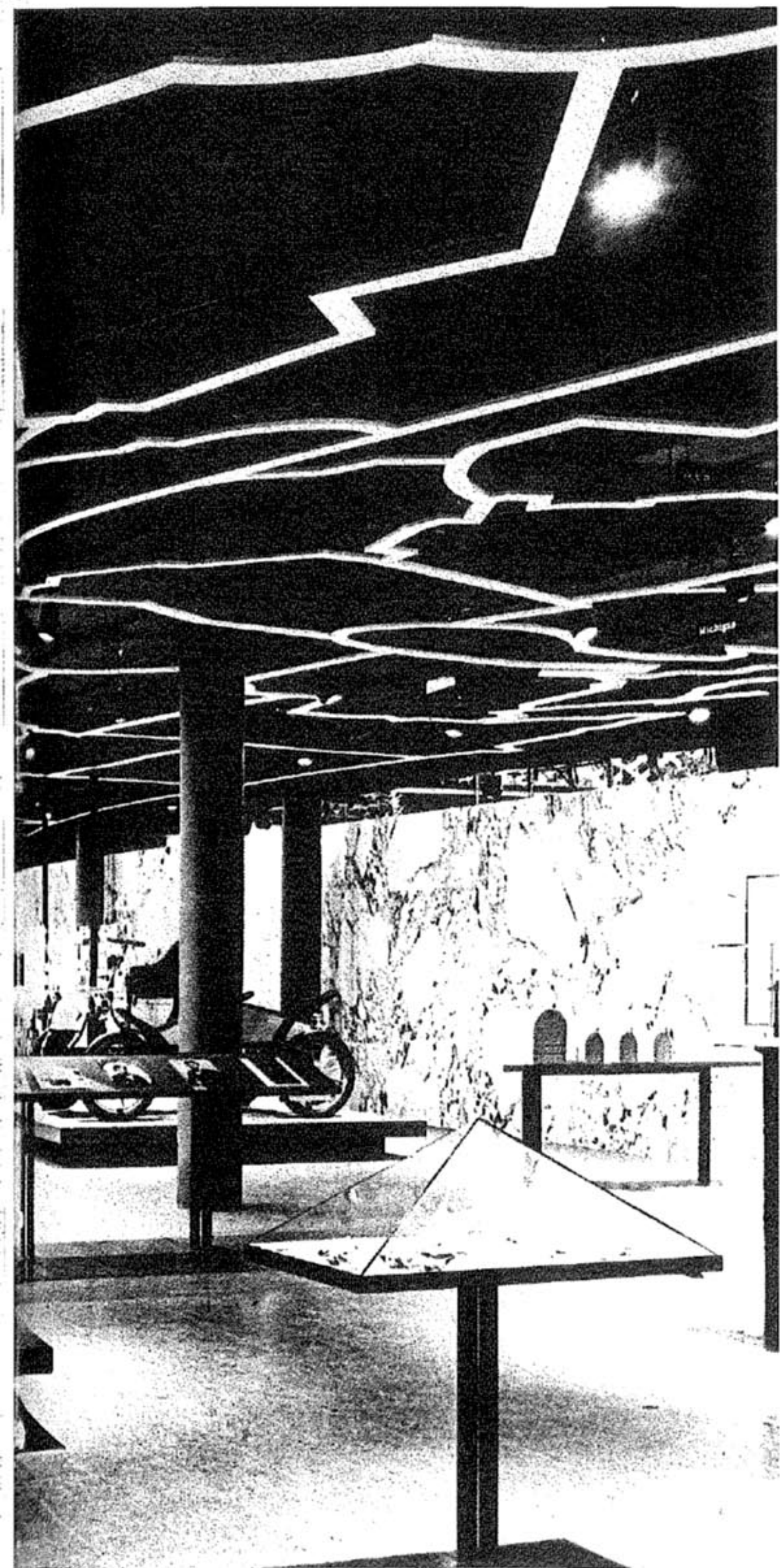


Bernard Rudofsky. Ein Essen bei Hana No Chaya (A meal at Hana No Chaya), 1955-60.

The notes read:

"Green tea. Sake, the warm rice-wine. Eating sticks. Hors-d'oeuvre. Sliced fish and squid with soy sauce. Grilled tuna. Mushrooms and small fried fowl. Bamboo sprouts and squid. Soup. Clam and vegetable salad. Pickled radish. Rice. Tea. Mandarin."





Giorgio Casali. *The Face of America* exhibition in the USA Pavilion at the Brussels Expo (designed by Rudofsky), 1958. "A pictorial map of the United States, consisting of objects and groups of objects that bring to one's mind places, states or sections of the United States of America". Some examples: the Sunday edition of *The New York Times* of 2 December 1956 (550 pages), spread out page by page on a plywood structure; a facsimile of the cancelled check of the Alaska Purchase; a slab of a redwood tree (for California); the cape of a Hawaiian chief; a primitive wooden carving from New Mexico; Arizona minerals; Idaho potatoes; the first gold found in 1849; three ears of corn harvested some 1000 years before Columbus; a Ford model A; a porcupine thresher; mail boxes; tumble weeds; the automobile license plates of every state and every possession; a collection of contemporary American restaurant menus and wine labels; 16 panels of American campaign buttons; Edison's first electric bulb; a Jefferson chair; some photographs of Abraham Lincoln as a young man; opera playbills from the Wild West; Walt Disney's first sketches of Mickey Mouse; petrified wood; Spanish moss; a collection of American garments, hats, sportswear and shoes; shells from the Pacific; a working juke-box; a football player's uniform.



Bernard Rudofsky. Rural house in Turkey, 1966.

As Wright had done 65 years before, Rudofsky affirmed that "sometimes...vernacular architecture [like] the villages of the Greek islands, the white towns of Andalusia and Apulia...convey to us an undefinable sense of well-being; a sort of built-in pleasure that trained architects only very rarely are able to express in their work." (Unpublished lesson in Copenhagen # 4, 7 April 1975, p. 6 of manuscript.) A great part of Rudofsky's work can still be read as an introduction to the realm of architecture.

Loos's ephemeral magazine, *Das Andere* (1903), bore as its subtitle *A Periodical for the Introduction of Western Culture into Austria*. In the same way, in *Streets for People* Rudofsky tells Americans about the quality and uses of Italian public space. Significantly, the subtitle is *A Primer for Americans*. He promulgates ideas frequently inherited from European cultural movements of the beginning of the century (modernism in architecture, especially as regards "architecture without architects;" the Reform, so far as clothing and domestic practices are concerned), introducing into the United States an Old-World *savoir vivre*. *Are Clothes Modern?*, *Now I Lay Me Down to Eat*, and *Sparta/Sybaris* are attempts to put visitors and readers in workable communication with other domestic cultures and habits of dress.

It is Gio Ponti who best catches Rudofsky's mission to divulge the love for architecture and full living. He writes that "Bernard doesn't see architecture...abstractly or academically or historically[,] ...nor in terms of cultural classifications[,] ...nor as proportional schemes...[,] and still less technologically. He sees it...as a function of...human functions; that is, he sees it as the *state of nature*... Rudofsky [is] a sublime, I would almost say a professional stroller...to "train" architects who serve architecture rather than using it... I write...out of the passionate desire to make you want to read [*Streets for People*] and, by way of it, to turn yourselves into lookers, enjoyers, enthusiasts, connoisseurs."²⁷⁶

276 AR70.4 (see also BR65.5).



Bernard Rudofsky. Multi-storied wooden loggia in Tembleque, Spain, 1972.

A Map of the Places Covered by *Architecture without Architects* and *The Prodigious Builders*



The images in Rudofsky's two books on spontaneous architecture reflect quite faithfully the itineraries of his journeys and the geographical and cultural areas that most interested him. The Old World always gets the lion's share, with a particular emphasis on Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Japan, and Persia.



In some instances, it is a single site or theme that attracts his interest, and he deals with it in both books: the windscoops of Hyderabad, the rock salt mines of Wieliczka, his beloved Santorini, Cappadocia with its troglodytic dwellings, the towers of Svanetia (western Caucasus), the *trulli* of Alberobello, Mount Athos, the cities excavated from the loess

in Honnan (China). Other places and themes appear only in *The Prodigious Builders*: the Orkneys and the Hebrides, Malta, Crete, Pantelleria, the Sardinian *nuraghi*, Delhi...

The geographical distribution of the examples chosen is more balanced in *Architecture without Architects* than in *The Prodigious Builders*, where the percentages of all the areas decrease (except for a slight increase for the Americas) in the face of a clear advance for Europe. It would thus appear that *Architecture without Architects* sets itself a more universal and encyclopedic goal. In *The Prodigious Builders* it seems that Rudofsky — having, perhaps, recognized the impossibility of bringing together a truly complete and homogeneous repertory — makes the opposite choice: to use, in support of his arguments, the examples (including iconographic ones) with which he is most familiar.

	AWA	TPB
North and Central America	1 (1%)	6 (2%)
South America	2 (1%)	6 (2%)
Europe	57 (37%)	159 (51%)
<i>of which the Iberian peninsula</i>	24 (15%)	39 (13%)
<i>of which the Italian peninsula</i>	10 (6%)	43 (14%)
<i>of which Greece</i>	9 (6%)	21 (7%)
Asia and Arabia	47 (30%)	67 (22%)
<i>of which Japan</i>	4 (3%)	18 (6%)
Africa	32 (21%)	32 (10%)
Oceania	3 (2%)	1 (0%)
not attributable	14 (9%)	40 (13%)
total	156 (100%)	311 (100%)

It should further be noted that only 1 among the 156 images in *Architecture without Architects* refers to North America: a (European) engraving of 1668, of doubtful objectivity. In short, there are no American examples; not even the predictable ones from Mexico and the Southwest of the U.S. Perhaps Rudofsky doesn't think that American anonymous architecture provokes that sense of estrangement and remoteness that he wants to arouse (as through *The Kimono Mind*); he may think that, in order to explore questions imagined to be common to the human condition, it is necessary to observe the most alien and distant examples, going "the long way around."²⁷⁷ One key might therefore be the elimination of that "architectural ethnocentrism" that "stands as a major obstacle in the way to [architectural] knowledge."²⁷⁸ (Another hypothesis is that Rudofsky feels no interest in North American "anonymous" architecture, and believes that the pinnacles of civilization are found around the Mediterranean and in Japan.)

277 Francesco Remotti, "Il giro piú lungo, ovvero il senso dell'antropologia", Francesco Remotti, *Antenati e antagonisti*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1986. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le regard éloigné*, Paris, Plon, 1983. (Engl. transl. *The View from Afar*, New York: Basic Books, 1985).

278 Bernard Rudofsky, *Invitation to a Seminar* (Presentation of West Dean College project), ca. 1973, p. 3 of the unpublished manuscript.

	AWA	TPB
Govt. Information offices and tourist boards	17 (11%)	15 (5%)
Museums (mostly anthropological)	24 (15%)	21 (7%)
Other institutions	37 (24%)	28 (9%)
Bernard Rudofsky	20 (13%)	103 (33%)
Private individuals	24 (15%)	41 (13%)
Period books and prints	28 (18%)	98 (32%)
not attributable	6 (4%)	5 (2%)
total	158 (100%)	311 (100%)

As for the sources of the images used in *Architecture without Architects* and *The Prodigious Builders*, their heterogeneity gives an idea of Rudofsky's ability to derive useful elements from matter outside the usual, codified fields. Sources from within the architectural discipline are practically absent, with the exception of the work, perhaps one-of-a-kind, published by the Portuguese Sindicato Nacional dos Arquitectos.²⁷⁹ Additional sources include numerous institutions connected with other disciplines (anthropology, geography) and tourist boards: besides using several of his own photographs, Rudofsky reproduces others taken by photographers, intellectuals, artists (such as, for example, Noguchi, Griaule and, in *The Prodigious Builders*, Bloc and Fathy) or drawn from publications.

In this case, too, the passage from *Architecture without Architects* to *The Prodigious Builders* involves a reduction in heterogeneity: the photographs taken personally by Rudofsky become a third of the total; another third is made up of images drawn from books and prints, some of them old and exotic.

The pleasure of a direct quotation from a "cultured" source is frequently accompanied, in these instances, by a taste for observing how "the others" see "us" (implicitly entailing a warning about the cultural and historical relativity of every representation). The earlier *The Kimono Mind* was already filled with representations of Western people and objects, as seen by the Japanese.

²⁷⁹ *Arquitetura popular em Portugal*, Lisboa: Sindicato Nacional dos Arquitectos, 1961.

Rudofsky as a Photographer ¹

Rudofsky recalled: "During my years as a student of architecture I had logged 22 months of travel through most of the continent and into Asia Minor, forever armed with a sketchpad and a water color box. I never touched a camera. It probably was a case of misplaced snobbism but mostly my head was still in the clouds, and the clouds belonged to an eighteenth-century sky."²

His first photographs — those taken in 1929 in Greece, shot with "a clumsy affair for film packs as big as a man's hand,"³ still show a painterly taste for picturesque views, with particular attention paid to the composition of the framing and the volumes it contains. The same eye and the same intentions lie behind both the photographs and the large watercolors made during that summer; sometimes the same subject is portrayed in both media.

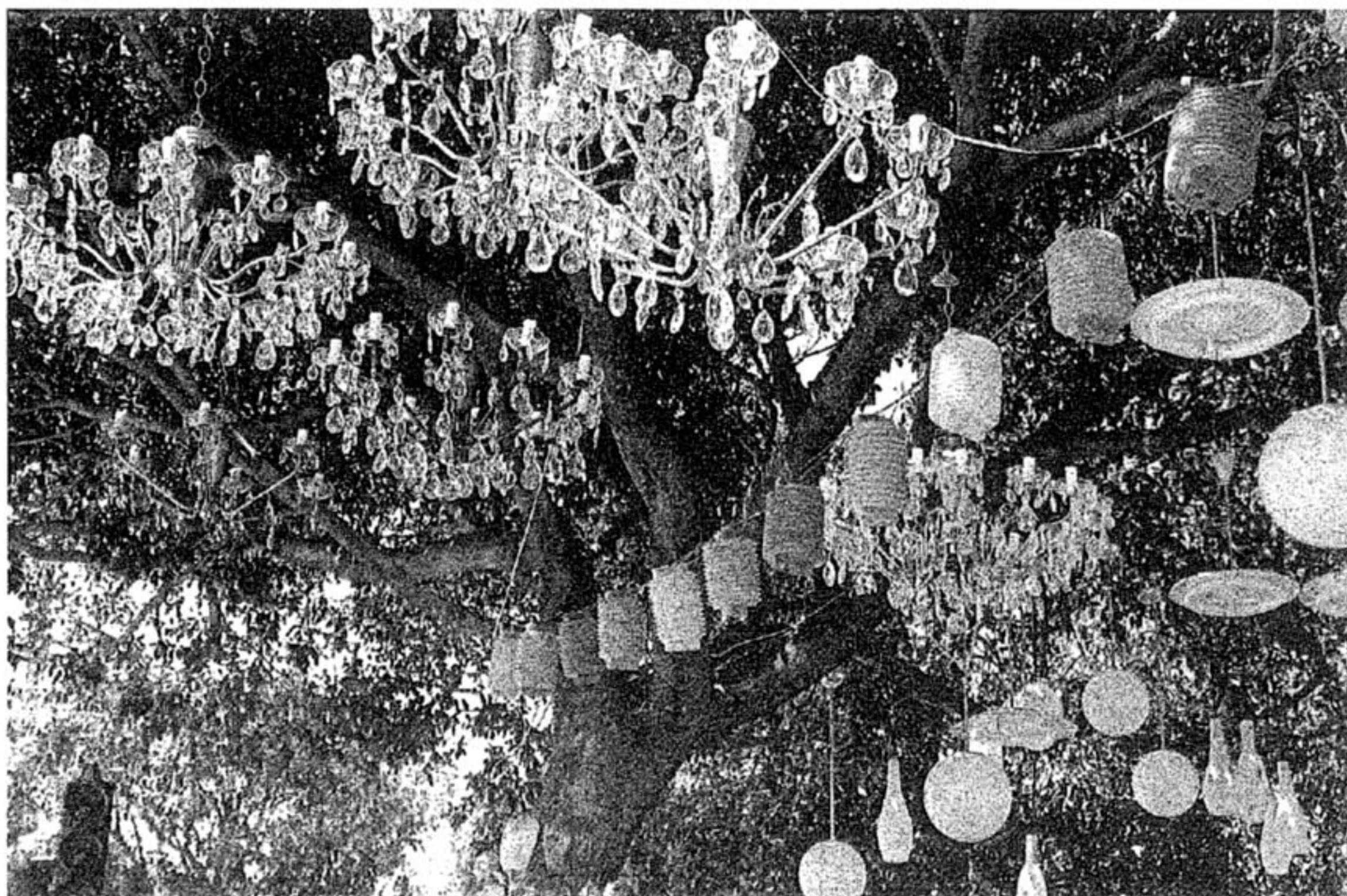
In the photographs taken between 1929 and 1935, the framing is broader; individual objects are not singled out for attention, and the intention seems to be to reproduce the observer's field of vision. One perceives a tendency (not only in the taking of the photographs, but also in their printing) to soften contrasts, and an interest in the materials and textures of the subjects represented. These photos are valuable — and this was Rudofsky's intention — above all as travel notes. They reveal a precocious interest in vernacular architecture as a subject; human subjects are practically absent.

Bernard Rudofsky. Chandeliers for sale hanging from a tree in an avenue of Agrigento, Sicily, 1967.

1 I am particularly grateful to Pierangelo Cavanna for his advice.

2 GYC, "Sketching", 1955.

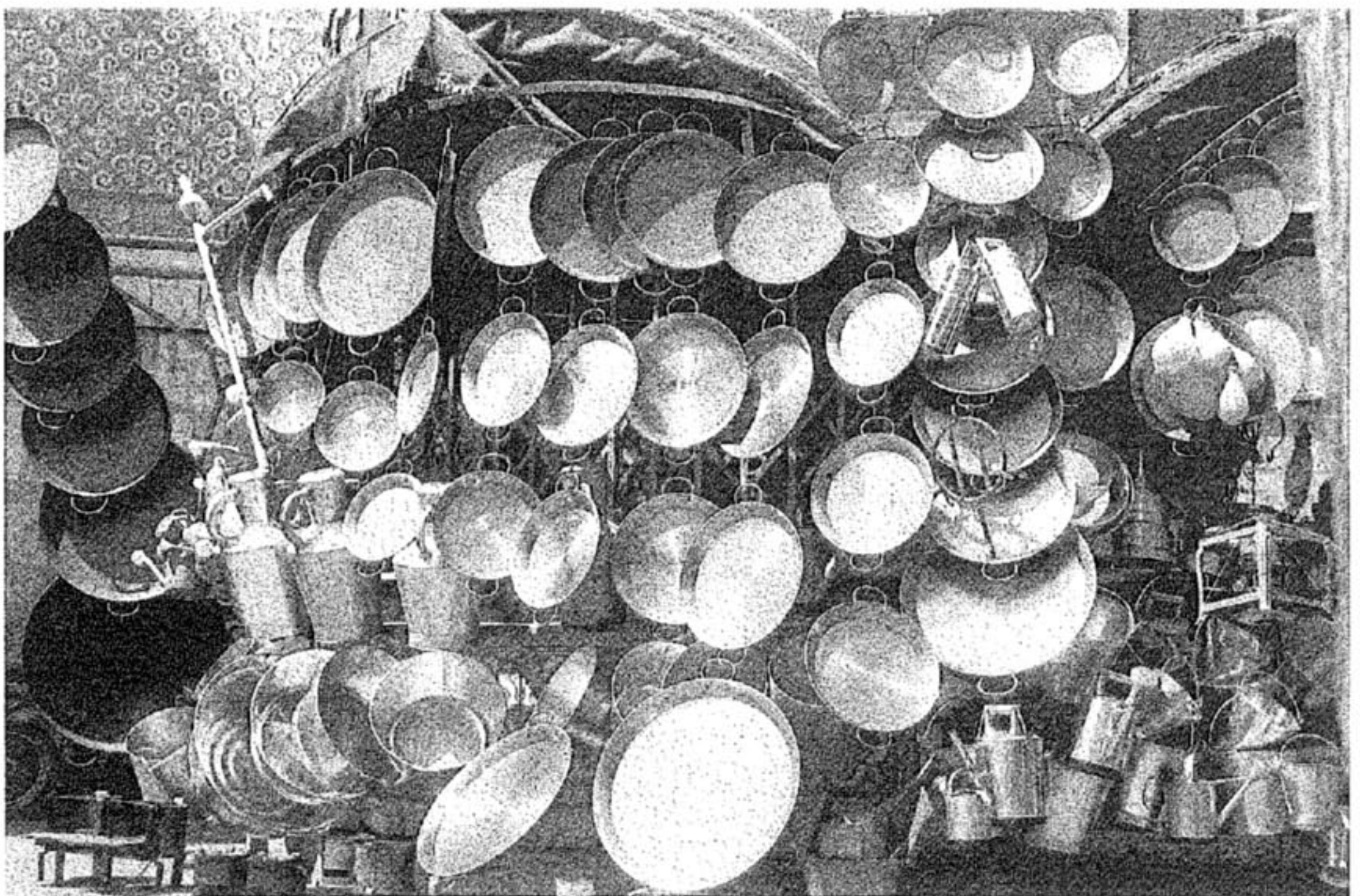
3 *ibid.*



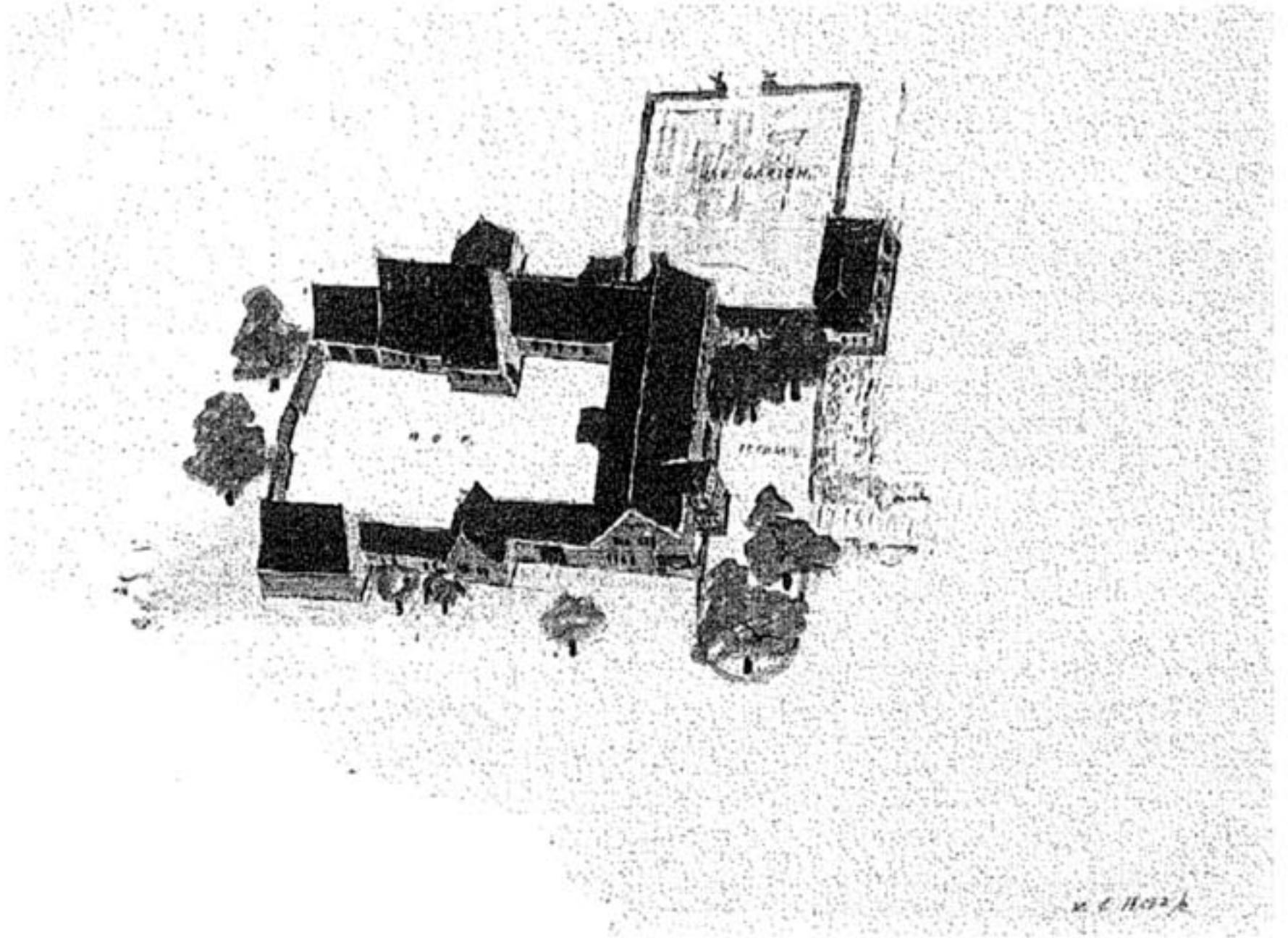
In the course of the thirties — perhaps, in part, on account of the influence of the architectural magazines' advanced photographic culture, or as a result of his having changed cameras (he now used a Leica) — one notes an evolution in Rudofsky's way of taking photographs. His work now tends to become, literally, "writing with light," from this standpoint, the photos taken during the last days he spent in Naples in 1935 seem particularly significant. Certain shots also suggest the presence of noteworthy minor themes: neo-realism and surrealism, comparable to certain other explorations then underway (Pagano's photographs of spontaneous architecture, 1936; Cartier-Bresson's Andalusian campaign, 1938).

From then on, photography took on a heavily preponderant role in Rudofsky's iconographic documentation; certain of his books (*Streets for People*, *The Prodigious Builders*) are, in large part, illustrated with his own photos. He would continue to develop certain personal themes (one of the most recurrent being the merchandise displayed in shops and in market stalls), but the principal object of interest would always remain architectural exteriors: the play of volumes and surfaces, details (without any special interest in technological and constructional aspects). Rudofsky's photographic explorations did not intersect with his interest in human ways of life, just as his study of spontaneous architecture around the world didn't cross the threshold of the house to deal with the organization of domestic interiors.

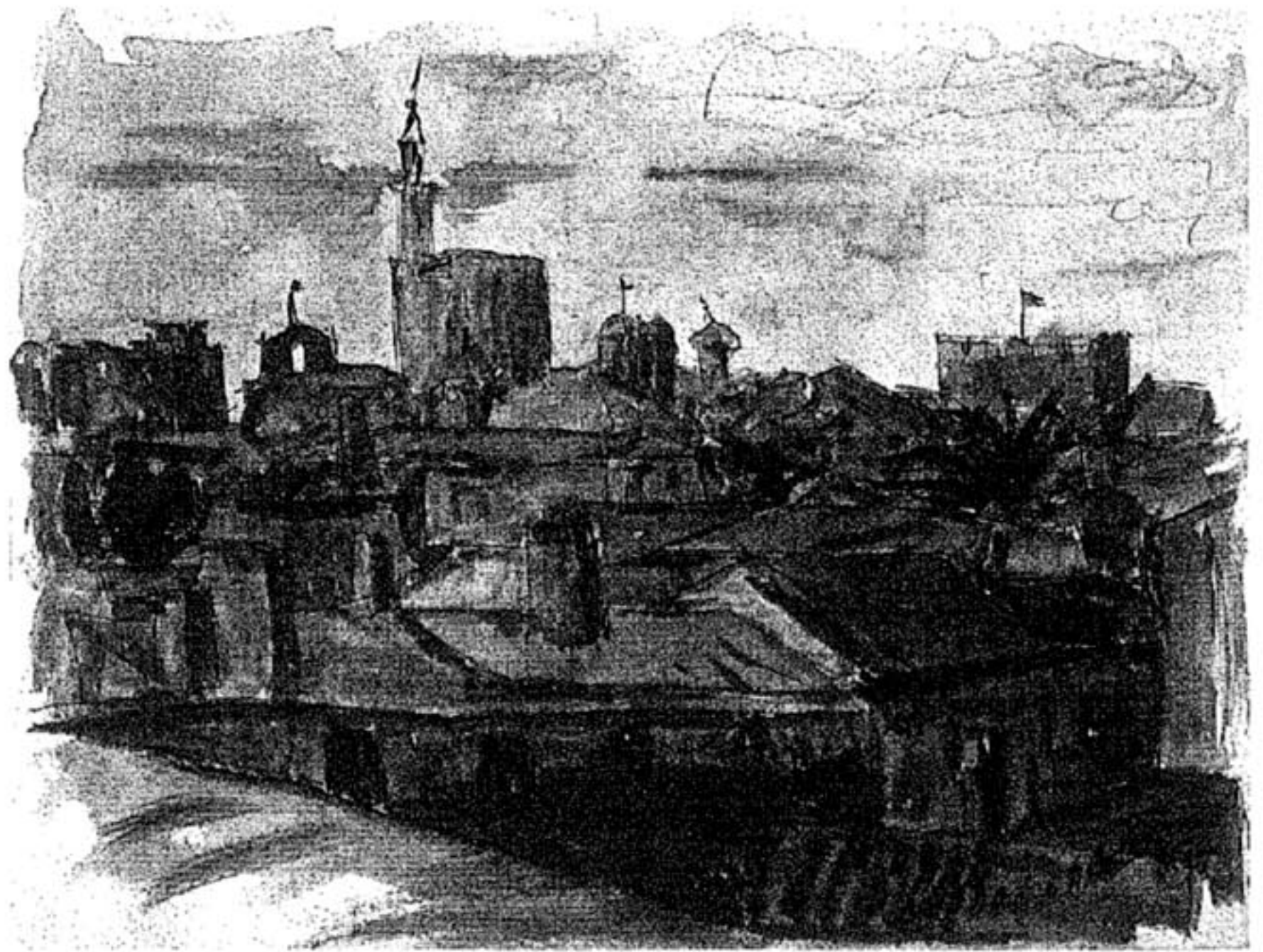
Bernard Rudofsky. Display of kitchenware outside a shop in Murcia, Spain, 1963.



Portfolio

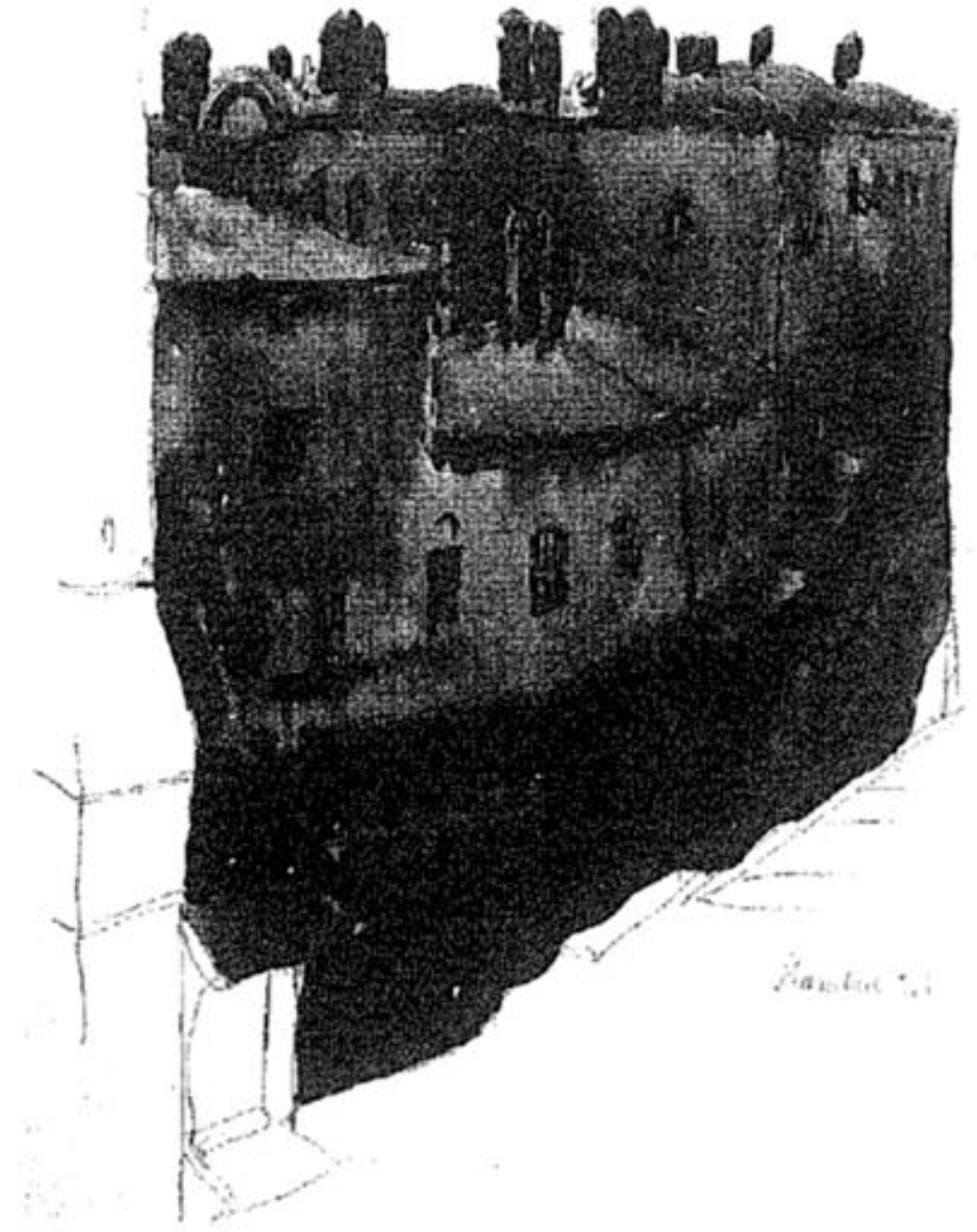


Bernhard Rudofsky. Bird's eye view of a farmhouse, probably designed as a practical exercise at the Technische Hochschule in Wien, second half of the 1920s (?).

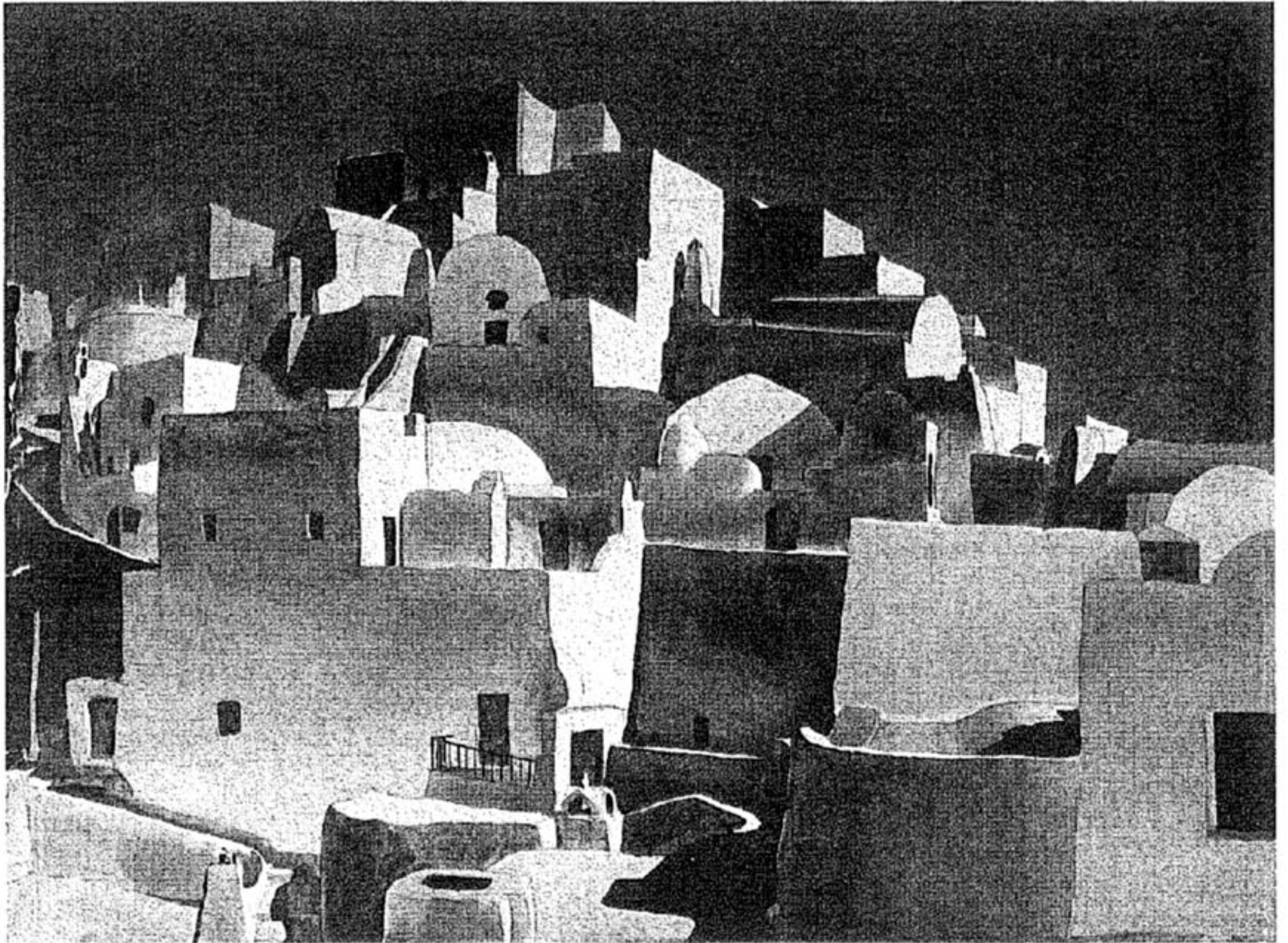


Bernhard Rudofsky. A town in southern France, 1926. Even in his early paintings, Rudofsky rarely depicts monuments. From his travels in France in 1926, one is able to recognize the church of St.-Julien-le-Pauvre in Paris, the Roman theater at Orange during a performance. The rest is architecture "without architects," rivers, urban ensembles.

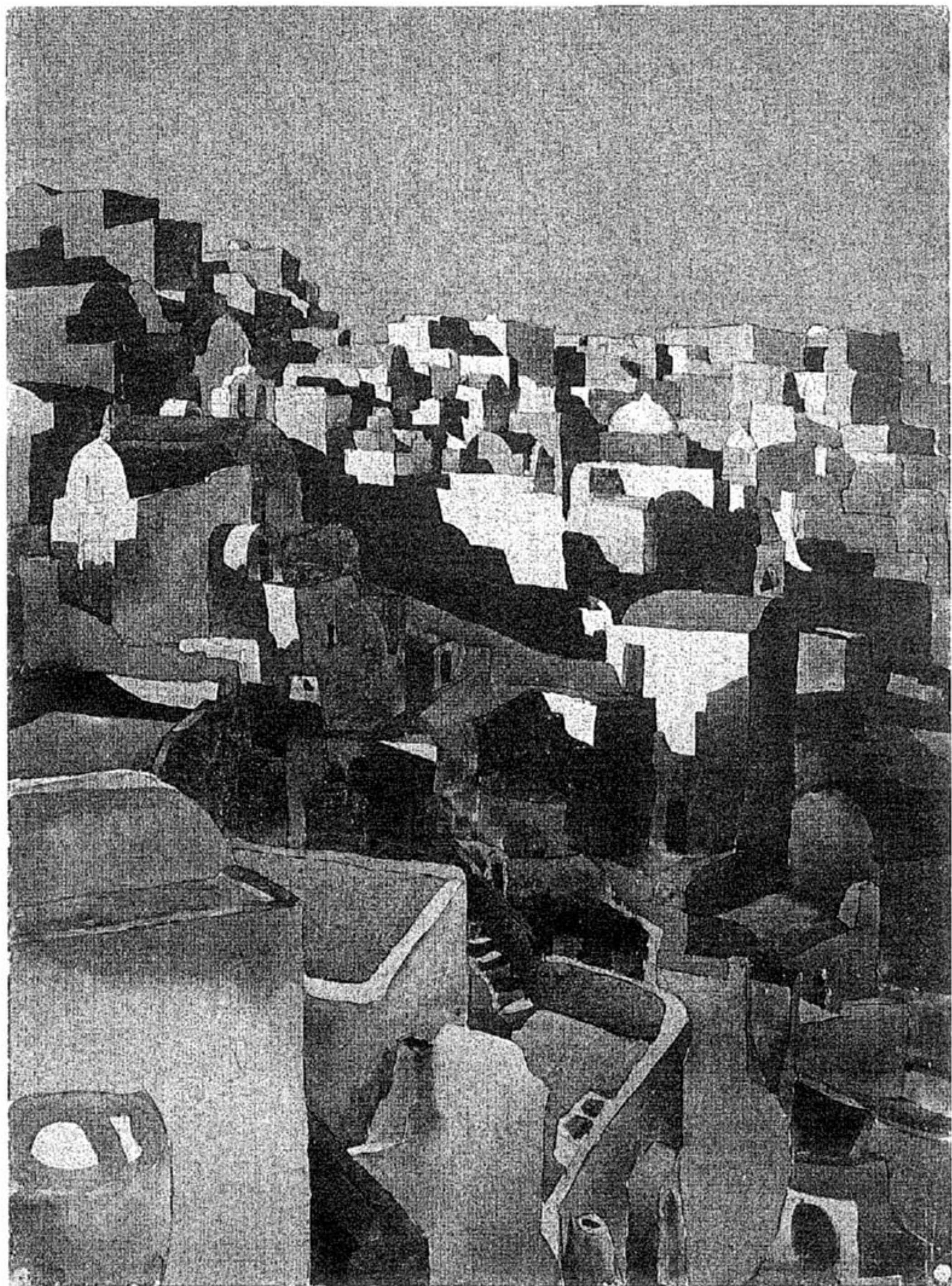
Bernhard Rudofsky. *Buildings of Stambul, 1925.*
Rudofsky's experience of pre-WWII cities and villages made him say, with Baudelaire, that "La forme d'une ville change plus vite, hélas, que le coeur d'un mortel".



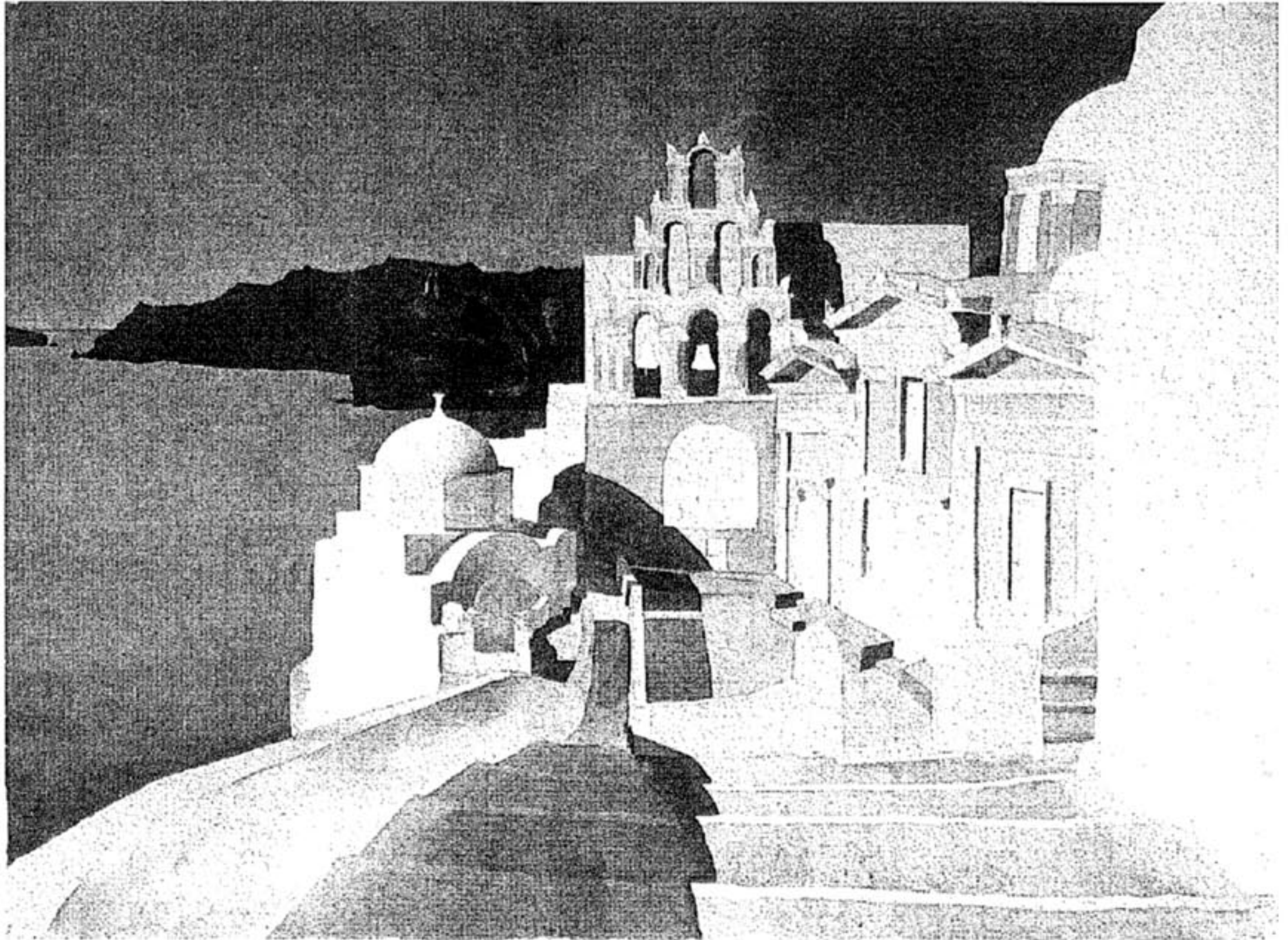
Bernhard Rudofsky. *The banks of the Seine in Paris (?), 1926.*



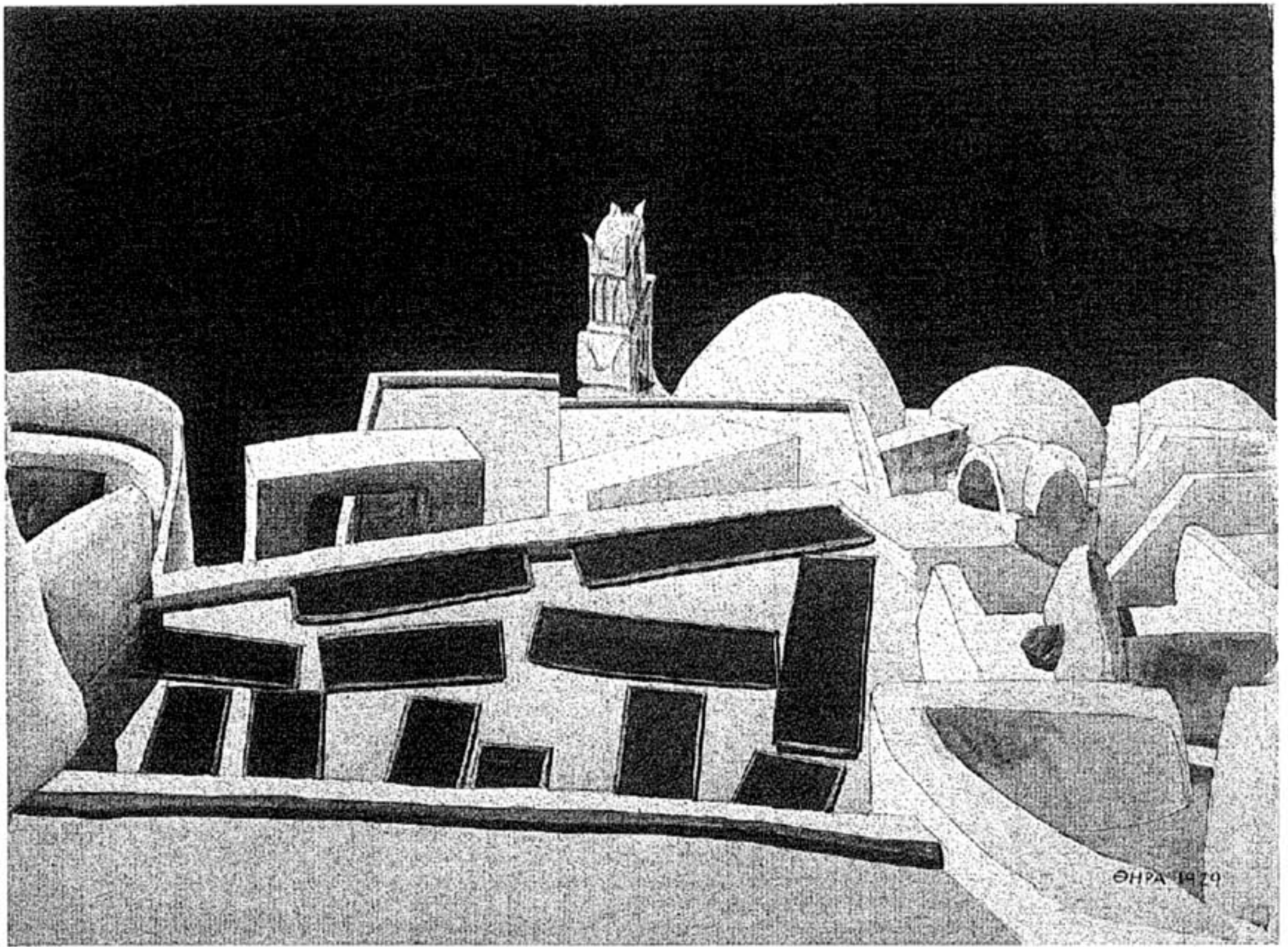
Bernhard Rudofsky. Oia II, 1929.
In certain regards, Rudofsky's architectural purism was born of Expressionism: his pictorial representation of the architecture of the island of Santorini is vividly polychromatic. This way of seeing, however, is not the fruit of wild imaginings, but instead expresses the experience of color at various times of day.



*Bernhard Rudofsky. Oia III, 1929.
The elementary architectural volumes seem to
have been disposed with an almost "natural"
irregularity. But the landscape contains no
natural elements.*

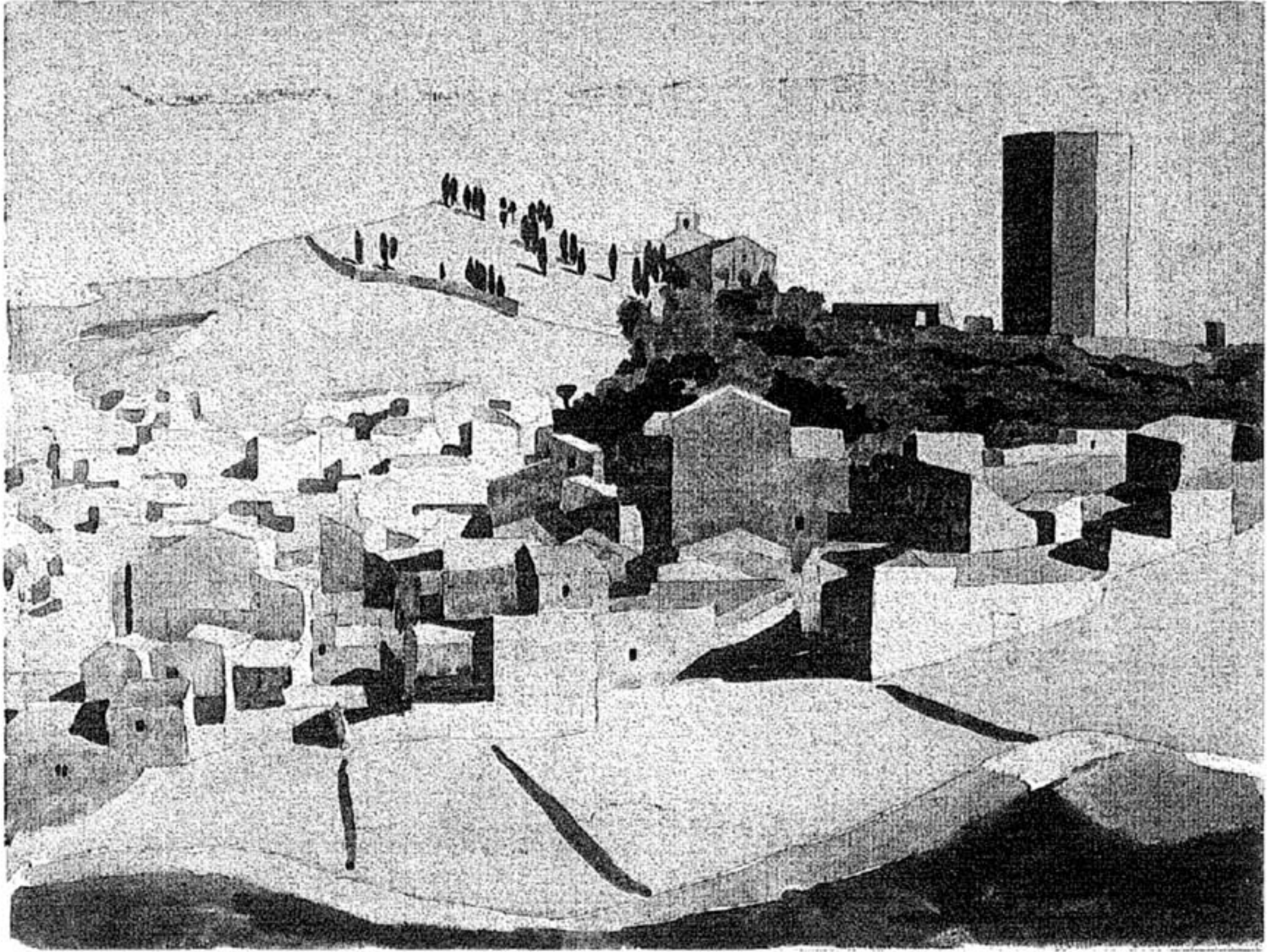


Bernhard Rudofsky. Oia IV (Kykladen), 1929. Rudofsky recounts: "I must have had little confidence in my imminent photographic exploits because I also packed the biggest sketching block yet, a made-to-order affair of 50 sheets of the best English paper. The sheets measured 18" by 24" and, when mounted, weighed as much as an architect's drafting board. The only way to transport this unwieldy block on the Greek islands was by securing it to the back of a mule. In a strong wind – and the islands are notorious for stormy weather at all seasons – it had a tendency to act as a sail, so that only by placing it flat on the ground, securing it with stones and following the practice of the Japanese painters of old and working by kneeling in front of it, could I get results. These watercolors need no apology, the more so as color film was not commercially available in the nineteen-twenties." (GYC)

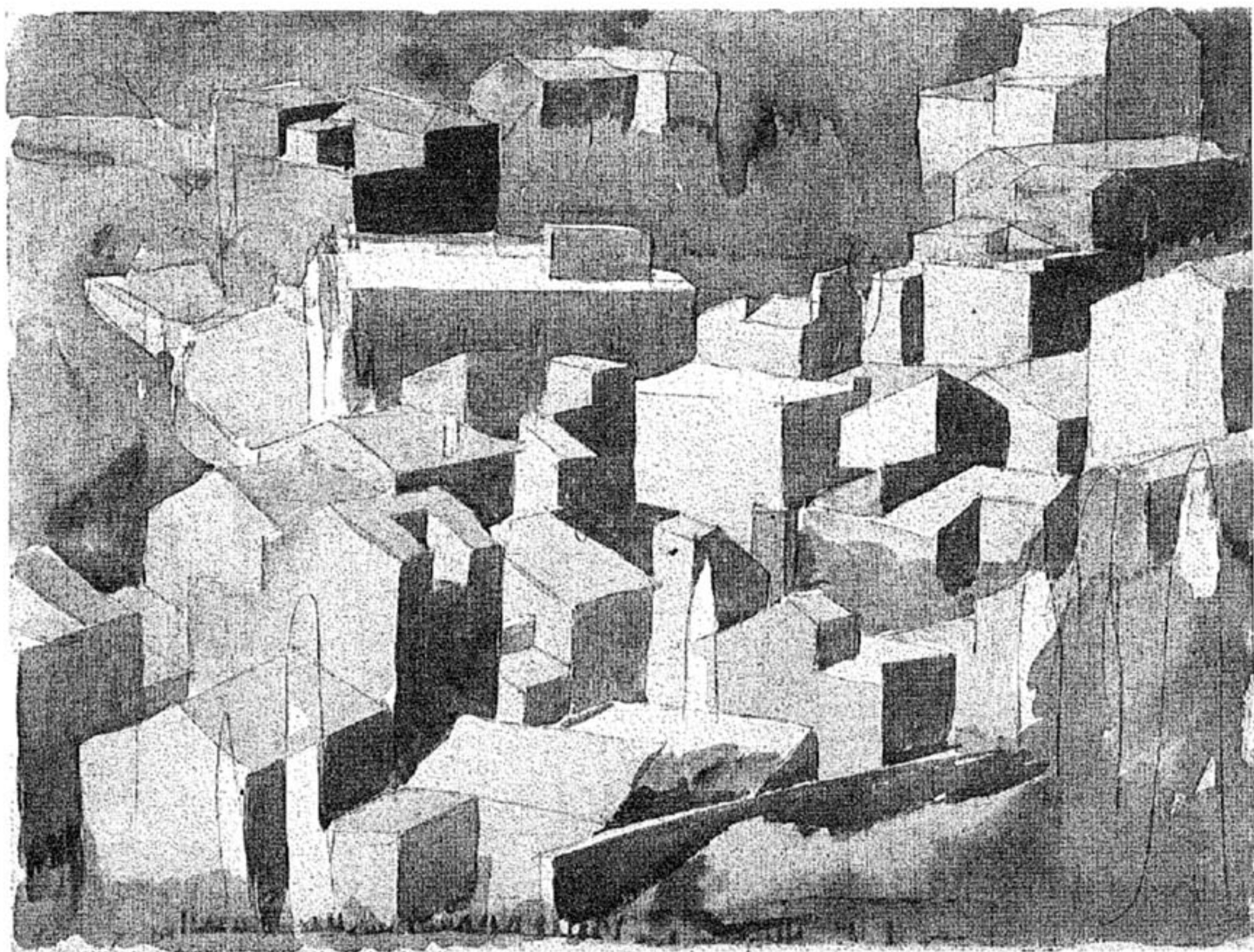


Bernhard Rudofsky. Roofs of a Santorini village, probably Oia, vertically overlooking the sea, 1929.

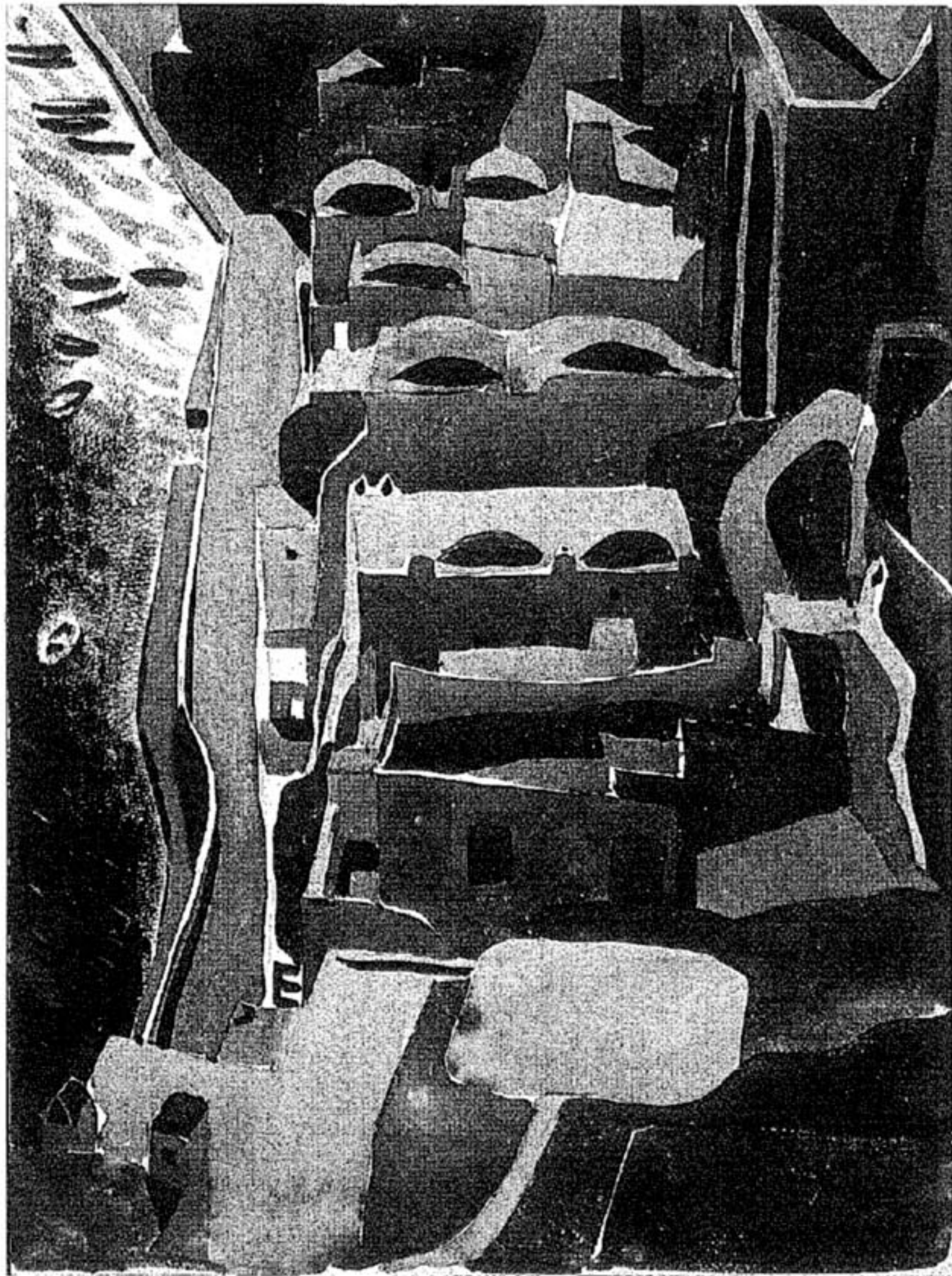
The red rectangles on the terrace roof are tomatoes laid out to dry in the sun.



*Bernhard Rudofsky. Mediterranean village
with a huge tower, second half of 1920s/
early 1930s (?).*



*Bernhard Rudofsky. Mediterranean (Italian?)
village by the sea (?), second half of
1920s/early 1930s (?).*



*Bernhard Rudofsky. Procida, Marina
Corricella (?), mid 1930s (?).*