



# BRUTALISM

Brutalism is an architectural style that spawned from the Modernist architectural movement and which flourished from the 1950s to the 1970s. The early style was largely inspired by the work of Swiss architect, Le Corbusier (in particular his Unité d'Habitation building) and of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. The term originates from the French *béton brut*, or "raw concrete". Brutalist buildings are usually formed with striking blockish, geometric, and repetitive shapes, and often revealing the textures of the wooden forms used to shape the material, which is normally rough, unadorned poured concrete.

Brutalism as an architectural style was also associated with a social utopian ideology which tended to be supported by its designers, especially Peter and Alison Smithson, near the height of the style. The failure of positive communities to form early on in some Brutalist structures, possibly due to the natural urban decay of the post-WWII period (especially in the United Kingdom), led to the combined unpopularity of both the ideology and the architectural style.

Brutalism is related and similar to (and often confused with) the Modernist, Minimalist and Internationalist styles of architecture. All of these styles make heavy use of repetition and regularity in their features, but brutalist designs also often incorporate striking, abject irregularities as well.

Brutalism gained large momentum in Britain during the middle 20th century, as economically depressed (and WWII-ravaged) communities sought inexpensive construction and design methods for low-cost housing, shopping centers, and government buildings. Combined with the socially progressive intentions behind brutalist "streets in the sky" housings like Corbusier's Unité, brutalism was promoted as a positive option for forward-moving, modern urban housing. In practice however, many of the buildings lacked many of the community-serving features of Corbusier's vision, and instead developed into claustrophobic, crime-ridden tenements. Some such buildings took decades to develop into positive communities. The rough coolness of concrete lost its appeal under a damp and gray northern sky, and its fortress-like material touted as vandalproof soon proved vulnerable to spray-can graffiti.

Brutalist designs were also often initially criticised as eyesores. The current Fodor's guide to London mentions the Home office structure as "hulking." Because the style is essentially that of poured concrete it tends to be inexpensive to build and maintain (but very difficult to modify).

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