

ALFRED PREIS. DISPLACED - VIENNA IN THE TROPICS

Curated by Alex Schmitzberger, with support from Laura McGuire
February 22, 2022 – March 31, 2022

Opening Reception: Tuesday, February 22, 2022 | 6-9 PM
Austrian Cultural Forum New York | 11 East 52nd Street, New York



Alfred Preis, Johnson and Perkins, U.S.S. Arizona Memorial, 1962, photography Olivier Koning

NEW YORK—The Austrian Cultural Forum New York is pleased to present *ALFRED PREIS. DISPLACED – Vienna in the Tropics*, a cross section of the visionary work of the Austrian-born US architect Alfred Preis (1911-1994), the architect of the Pearl Harbor Memorial. The opening reception, which will include a panel talk with the curators, will take place on Tuesday, February 22, 6 – 9 PM.

The exhibition, on the eve of Alfred Preis's 111th anniversary and the 60th anniversary of the USS Arizona Memorial inauguration in 2022, is the first major effort to this date to bring the US-Austrian architect back into the international spotlight by capturing, illustrating, and contextualizing the wide spectrum and influence of his prolific architectural and advocacy work. With his architecture as central focus, the exhibition seeks an opportunity to highlight Preis's built work to a larger audience and acknowledge the bi-cultural exchange between Austria and the US state of Hawai'i. The exhibition is curated by Axel Schmitzberger, with contributions from Laura McGuire.

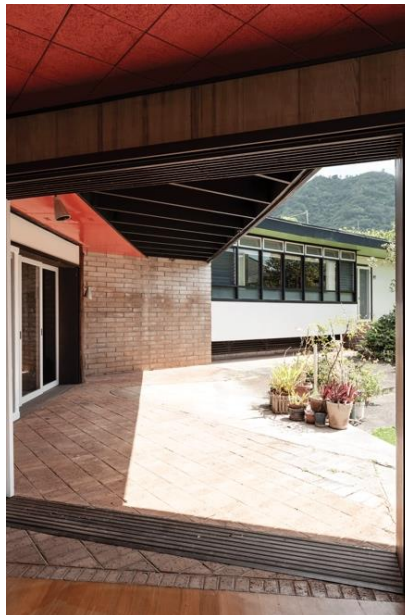
The exhibition features 35 selected projects which foster an intellectual dialogue of the past with the local conditions on the ground that Preis liberally embraced. The result is a vivid expression of vernacular modernism that sets his work apart from contemporary exiles on the mainland. The show touches on the historic, theoretic, and cultural nuance of this exchange that has freed Preis to reference and reinterpret past architectural inquiries while generating innovative ideas and practices relevant even to the technology and culture of ambitious contemporary design.

Born, raised and educated as an architect in Vienna, Preis had to flee from Nazi-occupied Austria in 1939 and emigrated to the paradisaical Honolulu on the island of O‘ahu in the US territory of Hawai‘i. Briefly imprisoned as “enemy alien” after the United States entered World War II, he emerged as one of Hawai‘i’s leading architects in the 1950s and 60s. His celebrated career spanned over twenty-four years comprising approximately 180 built projects ranging from residences, schools, and parks to the famous U.S.S. Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor. Throughout his active years he not only pioneered an unprecedented advocacy for the environment and arts but also distinctively merged Viennese modernism with Hawai‘i’s cultures and climate, forging intriguing novel idioms for modern architecture and design in the tropics.

His work is centered exclusively on the archipelago of Hawai‘i and therefore maybe less recognized internationally. Most importantly, though, Preis’s decision to leave architecture behind—at the peak of his career—and to dedicate himself to his advocacy role as founder and president of the State Foundation for the Culture and the Arts in Hawai‘i (1963 to 1980), and the Alliance for Arts and Education (dba Hawai‘i Arts Alliance) after 1980 until his death in 1994, increasingly removed him from the eyes of critics and historians.

Alfred Preis had a long and intertwined career, and his remarkable body of work is in large parts destroyed, endangered or difficult to document. Divided losley in seven chapters titled “Refugee”, “Apprentice”, “Developer”, “Spacemaker”, “Advocate”, “Art Czar”, the work and life of Alfred Preis is captured through texts, original and new photography, as well as reconstructions and drawings.

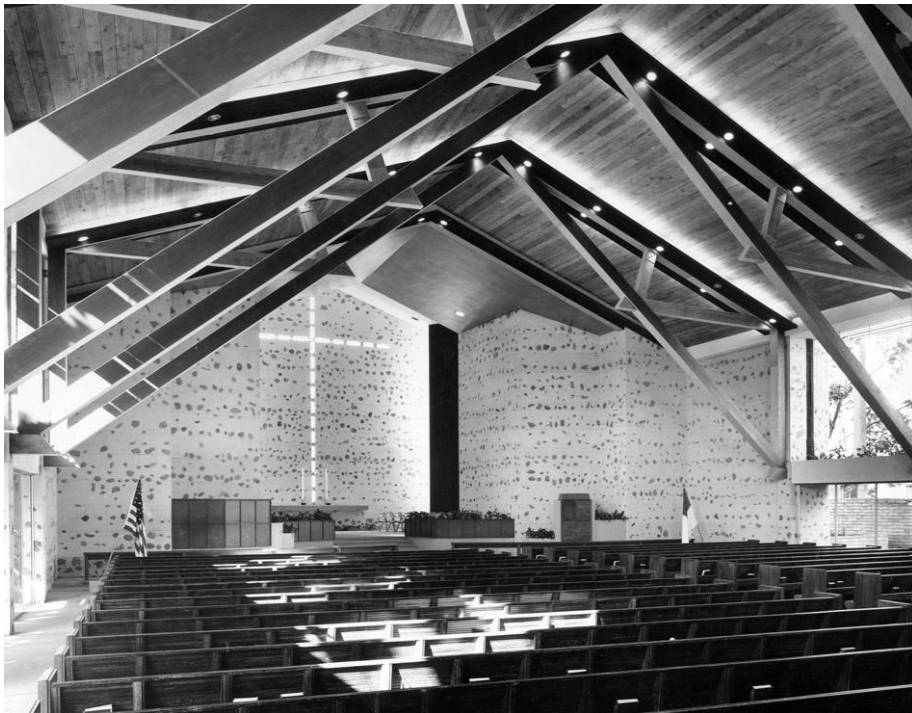
The recognition of Alfred Preis’s work and life was first presented with an [online exhibition](#) and is followed by this expanded physical traveling exhibition. An accompanying catalogue and a book are in preparation.



Left: Waldemar Bechert residence, 1948, photography Robert Wenkam, courtesy of the Wenkam Family Archive
Right: Edward Lau residence, 1951, photography David Franzen



Leonard Oechsli residence, 1951, photography Robert wenkam, courtesy of the Wenkam Family Archive



First United Methodist Church, Sanctuary, 1953, Robert Wenkam, Courtesy of the Wenkam Family Archive

This exhibition on the work and life of Alfred Preis was is sponsored by and organized under the auspices of the Austrian Consulate General in Los Angeles as part of a program series highlighting the major contributions of Austrian émigrés from Nazi-occupied Europe to US culture. The online content has also been made possible in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities: Grant FEL-262343-19, "A Biography of Alfred Preis (1911-1993): Immigrant, Architect, and Designer of the USS Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor." The

project is supported by the Preis Family Archives, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Archives, the Robert Wenkam Family Archives, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Wiener Filmarchiv, Technische Universität Wien Archiv, Bishop Museum Archives, Hawai'i Arts Alliance, Hawai'i State Archives, National Parks Services Archives and various individual collections.

Opening Reception | Tuesday, February 22, 6 – 09 PM

6:15 PM: Panel Talk with the curators, Prof. D.I. Axel Schmitzberger, R.A., California State Polytechnic University Pomona and Assistant Prof. Laura McGuire, PhD. University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

For the talk, RSVP to Bettina.SLAMANIG@bmeia.gv.at

7:00 PM: Opening remarks by Michael Haider, Director of the Austrian Cultural Forum New York, Laka Preis Carpenter, Grandson of Alfred Preis, Prof. Axel Schmitzberger, R.A., Curator

Masks and proof of Covid-19 vaccination is required to enter the venue. Photo ID will be checked.

About the curators

Axel Schmitzberger is an Austrian architect based in California and Hawai'i who co-curated the exhibition RESIDENT ALIEN – Austrian Architects in America at the Austrian Cultural Forum New York in 2019/2020. Laura McGuire is a Hawaii-based historian who currently works on a comprehensive Alfred Preis biography. Her prior research includes fellow Austrian architects Friedrich Kiesler and Adolf Loos.

About the Austrian Cultural Forum New York

With its architectural landmark building in Midtown Manhattan, the Austrian Cultural Forum New York is dedicated to innovative programming, showcasing Austrian contemporary art, music, literature, performance and academic thought in New York and throughout the United States. In addition to presenting exhibitions in its multi-level gallery space and housing around 13,000 volumes of Austriaca in its library named in honor of the late Vienna-born American writer and intellectual Frederic Morton, it hosts over 100 free events per year in its auditorium and supports at least as many projects at partner institutions across the nation.

Media Contact

Dalia Stoniene | StudioStripe NYC

T: +1 (718) 316-5509 | E: dalia@studiosripe.nyc