

"*Art House* reconnects art with its architectural context, a recurrent theme in the history of art and architecture. Don's work reminds us of the origins of art works within the all-encompassing architectural environment, and *Art House* demonstrates that works of art are not separate from the place in which they originate, even in our modern world."

Jon Ritter, Ph.D.  
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PRESS RELEASE

## ART HOUSE/ A FILM BY DON FREEMAN

Some artists don't just create masterpieces -- they live in them. Photographer Don Freeman's poetic journey through 11 houses artists built for themselves. A love song in film to the places art lives.

### SYNOPSIS

In the documentary film *Art House*, photographer and filmmaker Don Freeman explores the handmade homes created and lived in by an eleven distinguished American artists, shedding light on a unique architectural typology characterized by a D.I.Y. aesthetic, the appropriation of building techniques from art practice, and a fierce spirit of individual expression that deserves deeper examination in this age of architectural standardization.

### DETAILED SYNOPSIS

*Art House* traces the trajectory of the American artist-designed home from its 19th-century roots, exploring houses created by 11 artists from diverse disciplines. The film reveals the inventiveness derived from the dialogue between each artist's practice and the construction of their handmade homes. The results range from the romantic (Hudson River School painter Frederic Church's Olana, framing views of the Catskills to echo his paintings), to the futuristic (Urbanist Paolo Soleri's silt-casted structure Cosanti growing out of experiments in bellmaking in the Arizona desert). Commentary from cultural critic Alastair Gordon and a haunting score help to evoke the spiritual dimension of the locations and argue the case that the intuitive vision of artists can create great architecture. Some of the structures are in imminent danger of demolition, while others have already been altered beyond rescue,

making study of this previously neglected typology a timely and important contribution to scholarship.

## **DIRECTORS STATEMENT**

Each of the private domains featured in *Art House* is deeply imbued with the unique vision of its creator, and a physical embodiment of what it means to be an artist, to live an integrated life dedicated to art. For the most part the artists were not architects, and built over a lifetime (Henry Varnum Poor's Crow House, Wharton Esherick, Maverick artist Raoul Hague) giving each place a sense of resonance and duration that most architecture doesn't possess. George Nakashima and Paolo Soleri, who did train as architects, gave precedence to a craft-based approach to building their houses.

The fate of many of the houses in the film remains in the balance, for example that of Eliphante and Raoul Hague's home and studio, to name just the most urgent cases. Even the handful of houses that have been awarded National Historic Landmark status, such as White Pines at Byrdcliffe and Russel Wright's Manitoga would benefit from conservation efforts that often come at a high price tag.

"It's my hope that the dissemination of this film will bring awareness to these houses so that the public will support and experience them in person."

## **DIRECTORS BIO**

Don Freeman is an American artist, filmmaker and photographer. His work has been widely published in *French, German and American Vogue, The World of Interiors, Elle Décor* and *Architectural Digest*, international galleries and private collections, and four books.

His book *My Familiar Dream* is a compendium of early works first exhibited in New York at White Columns in 1985. It is in the permanent collection of the Getty and Victoria and Albert Museum in London. *The Hotel Book: Great Escapes North America*, (Taschen 2006) and *Ted Muehling; a portrait by Don Freeman* (Rizzoli 2008) and *Artists' Handmade Houses*, (Abrams 2011) a celebration of homes built by artists for themselves, which evolved into the film *Art House*.

His film work includes a music video for Japanese recording artist Tomoyo Harada (2014), a series of color-trend videos for Sherwin-Williams (2013), and *Tires, Velvet Paws* (in post-production) a short film based on Andre Breton's *Nadja*, shot on location in Paris. *Art House* is Don Freeman's first feature-length documentary film.

## **CREW AND CAST**

**ALASTAIR GORDON- Commentator**

Alastair Gordon is an award-winning critic, curator, filmmaker and author who has written about art, architecture and the environment for many publications including *The New York Times*, *Architectural Digest*, *Vanity Fair*, *Interior Design*, *Town & Country*, *House & Garden* and *Dwell*. He is a Contributing Editor at the *Wall Street Journal* and is the author of numerous critically-acclaimed books on architecture, art and urbanism including *Weekend Utopia*, *Naked Airport*, *Spaced Out*, *Wandering Forms*, *Theater of Shopping*, *Qualities of Duration*, *Beach Houses*, *Romantic Modernist*, and the soon-to-be-published, *Think or Swim*, an in-depth biography of R. Buckminster Fuller. Gordon has four children and is married to designer/environmental activist Barbara de Vries. Together they founded Gordon de Vries Studio, an imprint that publishes books about the human environment.

### **JUDY RHEE-Production Designer**

Judy Rhee is a Production designer who has developed her film design sensibility working for some of the most innovative and acclaimed filmmakers in the industry. As an Art Director, Judy's credits include such notable films as *My Blueberry Nights*, directed by Hong Kong visionary Wong Kar Wai; *The Hours*, directed by Stephen Daldry; *Requiem for a Dream*, from Darren Aronofsky; and Todd Solondz's *Storytelling*. Equally at home in high-scale dramas and independent comedies, Judy was the art director on David O. Russell's breakthrough film, *Flirting with Disaster*, while she was part of the team on *The Hours* honored with an Excellence in Production Design nomination from the Art Directors Guild in 2003. Her recent Production Design credits include, *Stoning of Soraya M.*, directed by Cyrus Nowrasteh, which was runner up to Slumdog Millionaire for the People's Choice Award at the prestigious Toronto Film Festival in 2008.

### **JAMIE RUDOLPH- music composer**

Since the late eighties, veteran NYC composer/musician Jaime Rudolph has been creating sonic works ranging from classically inspired to experimental. When he was growing up in Florida in the seventies, his father first introduced him to classical music, including a recording of note, *Switched-On Bach*. Later in his early teens, Jaime was drawn to the piano. While attending Western Carolina University, he took piano and music theory classes. This influence would later develop into an autodidactic interest in composition. Electronic dance and ambient music also became an interest which resulted in releases (from 1993-1996) under the name *Evolve Now* on Instinct Records and Invading Records. Jaime moved to NYC from North Carolina in 1994. His influences are numerous and his music has been described as, "Soundscape-like," "The advanced stage of electronic dance," "Stimulating." Jaime continues to write and record works in a variety of styles for film/video soundtrack, performance artists, singers, fashion shows, remixes and more.

### **SARAH ENID HAGEY-Sound Design**

Sarah Enid Hagey is an artist and filmmaker living and working in Brooklyn, New York. Inspired by great works of suspense, horror, and the wonders of the natural aural world, she specializes in experimental, abstract, and minimal soundscapes. Her film work has screened

at festivals around the country and museums including the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

## THE ARTISTS AND HOMES

**GEORGE NAKASHIMA (1905-1990)**- was a Japanese American woodworker and one of the leading innovators of 20th Century furniture design and a father of the American craft movement. In 1983, he accepted the Order of the Sacred Treasure, an honor bestowed by the emperor of Japan and the Japanese government. Nakashima's signature woodworking design was his large-scale tables made of large wood slabs with smooth tops but unfinished natural edges. He built his home and studio in New Hope, Pennsylvania listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places in August 2008. Mira Nakashima has extended the tradition of the George Nakashima Studio by producing the classic and traditional lines, and continuing the "Altars of Peace" project, his dream that if each were made for each continent of the world, as centers for meditation, prayer and activities for peace, the world would be a better place.

**WHARTON ESHERICK (1887-1970)** - Impressionist painter who studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Sculptor and father of the current studio-furniture movement built his studio and home in Chester County, near Philadelphia in three stages. From 1921 to 1941 and then in 1966. Wharton made (and decorated) absolutely everything possible, imaginatively drawing on the landscape around him, using the local wood and stone, constructing outbuildings, crafting furniture, carving utensils, a testament to the artist's dramatic vision. "If you want to know me, look at my work," he once said. The artist died in 1970. His Heirs and hundreds of friends have kept the studio intact: everything is polished and dusted; the landscape is still wooded and open to the public.

**HENRY VARNUM POOR (1888-1970)**- Little heard of today, in the first half of the 20th Century, was considered one of this country's most important painters, living among a secluded colony of writers, artists and assorted Hollywood glitterati in upstate New York. **Crow House**-where he felled his own timber and quarried his own stone to realize a home inspired by Arts and Crafts ideals-became the informal center of this American Bloomsbury. Poor's versatility and lifelong involvement with pottery is also evident throughout Crow House: cups and bowls are visible on shelves, vases are set into niches and on table tops, and ceramic plates, rather than paintings, are hung on (and sometimes embedded into) the walls as decoration. As recently as last year, Crow house has been saved from ruin, a foundation has been established and work has begun on restoring and preserving this treasure.

**RUSSEL WRIGHT (1904-1976)** - The Great American designer created a home on an abandoned quarry in Garrison New York that bears comparison with the best of Frank Lloyd Wright. **Manitoga** "Home of the Great Spirit" may be the single superb example of ecological design in the United States says famous landscapist Ian McHarg. Wright opened his land to the public a year before he died, at the age of 72, in 1976. In 1997 Manitoga was

listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The home is preserved and maintained by the Russel Wright Design Center realizing Wright's "goal to bring to American culture an intimacy with nature".

**PAOLO SOLERI, (1919-2013)**, artist and environmental architect, whose famous experimental town in the high desert of Arizona called Arcosanti is well known, his home and ceramic studio **Cosanti** 70 miles to the south is rarely seen or visited. There his ceramic and bronze windbells and siltcast architectural structures featuring many imaginative design elements reflect the innovative construction techniques that make it a true work of art.

**FREDERIC EDWIN CHURCH (1826-1900)**- One of America's most important artists, a student of Thomas Cole, and a major figure in the Hudson River School of landscape painting. Built **Olana** high on a hill near Hudson, New York between 1870 and 1891, called by Church "The Center of the World." Olana's Persian style house and 250 acres are a masterpiece as grand as any of his paintings. It is now a New York State Historic Site, and National Historic Landmark, and one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Hudson Valley and upstate New York.

**RAOUL HAGUE (1905-1993)**- For over 40 years the American Abstract Expressionist inhabited a modest cabin nestled in a valley in New York's Catskill mountains, where he created his most important sculpted work and gave his living quarters a rustic aesthetic. Visitors to Hague's home have likened the experience to being inside a Joseph Cornell box with the same visual tropes, including collage, ballet, birds, mirrors and clocks, He treated walls like scrapbooks and called his collection of modified antique clocks "temperamental teenagers". On Hague's death in 1993, one final sculpture remained-largely completed-in his studio, where it resides today. The artist's home and studio are now part of the Raoul Hague Foundation, set up by Hague to care for his work after his death. The cabin's delicate contents require periodic conservation, but otherwise Hague's home remains as he left it.

**HENRY CHAPMAN MERCER (1856-1930)**, noted tile-maker, archaeologist, antiquarian, artist and writer, founder of the Moravian Pottery Works in 1910-1912 and the Mercer Museum in 1913. His residence **FONTHILL** is a showcase for Mercer's own decorative tiles, a display of tile makers' art throughout history, and museum for Mercer's world-class collection of prints and artifacts. With 44 rooms, 10 bathrooms, 5 bedrooms, 32 stairwells, 18 fireplaces and 21 chimneys his "castle in concrete for the New World" is one of the most unusual and architecturally significant homes in America. In 1985 it was designated a National Historic Landmark and is supported by a corps of 40 volunteers.

**MICHAEL KAHN (1936 – 2007)**, and his wife **LEDA LIVANT (1926 - present)** - The little known sculptural home that is **Eliphante**, located in red-rock country, near Sedona, Arizona, three acres of fantastical domes, shacks and follies created over 28 years by painter Michael Kahn and his wife, Leda Livant a textile artist. Here there is the residence, which has 25-foot ceilings and incorporates rocks and scraps from construction sites, a labyrinthine art gallery called Pipedreams, in which every painting has its own environment, and the building that gave the compound its name has a long trunk like entrance made of rock and an irregularly Mounded roof, and a stained glass interior that is a mixture of

disarray and magic. The future of Eliphante is not clear, as the property is in desperate need of repair.

**COSTANTINO NIVOLA (1911-1988)** - The Italian sculptor's home in East Hampton, NY became the centerpiece for the New York art scene in the 40's. His friends were de Kooning, Kline, James Brooks, Pollack and others. There he produced his famous sand-cast relief sculptures and collaborated with Corbusier to create the stunning wall murals that are still in his home today.

**BYRDCLIFFE ARTS AND CRAFTS COLONY-** (Established in 1903 by Ralph Radcliffe artists Jane Whitehead, John Ruskin, William Morris, Hervey White and Bolton Brown is possibly the oldest continuously operating arts and crafts colony in the nation. White Pines, the main residence and 30 other buildings were built on 1500 acres in the Catskills Mountains of New York, just outside the hamlet of Woodstock. The Colony produced pottery, painting, weaving, metalwork, and furniture and still has an active artist in residence program.

## **CREDITS**

PRODUCED, DIRECTED, AND EDITED BY **DON FREEMAN**

CO-PRODUCED BY **JAIME RUDOLPH**

STILL PHOTOGRAPHY, CINEMATOGRAPHY - **DON FREEMAN**

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