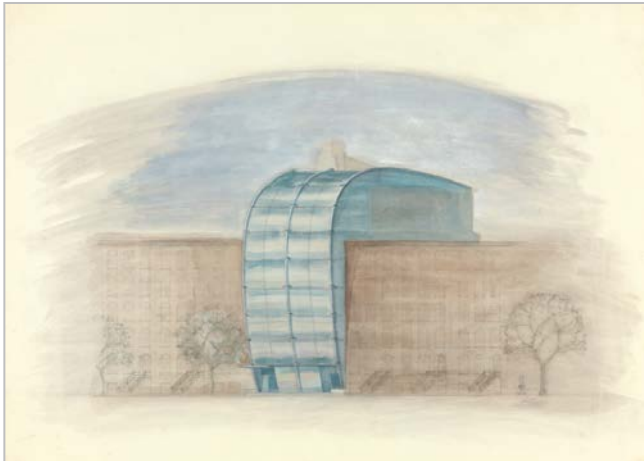


Unknown & Unbuilt?

Kiesler's Architectural Projects from the 1950s

June 18 – September 6, 2014



Opening:

Tuesday, June 17, 2014 at 7 p.m.

Frederick Kiesler Foundation
Mariahilfer Strasse 1b, 1060 Vienna

Opening hours:

Mo-Fr 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Sat 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Free entry!

The exhibition focusses on so far nearly unknown architectural projects by Frederick Kiesler from the 1950s and presents an unexpected struggle of the artist-architect for a fusion of utopia and pragmatism.

Special events: **Guided tours with the curator**

1st Date: Wednesday, June 25, 2014 at 6 p.m.

2nd Date: Thursday, September 4, 2014 at 6 p.m.

Press: Jill Meissner, Christine Pollaschek +43 1 5130775-10, office@kiesler.org

Press photos in high resolution as [download](#) at www.kiesler.org

Visit us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)

Unknown & Unbuilt?

Kiesler's Architectural Projects from the 1950s

Exhibition at the Frederick Kiesler Foundation

Curator: Gerd Zillner

In the summer of 2011 around 200 architectural plans were discovered in a box in the archive of the Frederick Kiesler Foundation, where only posters were supposed to be stored. Among the discoveries were partly hand coloured plans as well as impressive blue and brown prints. On the one hand they reinforced the knowledge about familiar Kiesler projects – like the *Shrine of the Book* (1957-1965), the *Endless House* (1958/59) or the *Grotto for Meditation* (1962-64) –, on the other hand material turned up relating to nearly unknown works, which were hitherto only grazed in scientific literature.

Three of these projects are now presented in an exhibition at the Frederick Kiesler Foundation to improve the so far non-existent research and to rectify the partly incorrect or incomplete published information. Two further projects will be presented in a sequel exhibition scheduled for 2016.

As an architect Frederick Kiesler is known primarily for his visionary projects, which remained unbuilt or were only realised as models. The three works presented date back to the 1950s and show an unexpected struggle for a fusion of utopia and pragmatism. In his posthumously published autobiographical notes titled "Inside the Endless House. Art People and Architecture: A Journal" Kiesler illustrated his inner turmoil:

"Here again looms the great question for me: to build or not to build. I feel like an imaginary totem pole built of ice blocks held together by red-hot iron bars, all enwrapped in screaming steam. Have I to quit the job because the compromise is too great, or am I to keep on fighting to save something that most probably would no longer pertain to my basic ideas, but only be a satisfaction to the committee and perhaps of some financial gain for me?"

(Frederick Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House*, New York 1966, p. 77)

Due to Kiesler's increasing prominence building owners showed growing interest in his visionary ideas. The possibility of putting his architectonic ideas into practice increased Kiesler's willingness to compromise. For decades his architectural projects failed, although they were again and again close to realisation. In regard to the projected costs and Kiesler's inexperience with the business-oriented building industry of his days, all projects came to nothing:

"Most owners want something new and better in design, color, materials and living conditions, but when they are confronted with a new solution, they back out at exactly the moment when they are about to put their signature to it."

(Frederick Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House*, New York 1966, p. 77)

Overview of the architectural projects:

Stifel-Building, 123-125 East 55th Street, New York 1956

In January 1956 Frederick Kiesler was hired as “designing architect” by the building owner Arthur C. Stifel to rework plans by the architect Robert Kaplan. In contrast to Kaplan’s intention to design the eight-storey building in colonial style, Kiesler conceived the façade as a modern parabolically curved outline that was supposed to be covered by a curtain of partly blue coloured glass. Thereby the *Stifel-Building* would have stood out confidently from the classical façades of the neighbouring five-storey brownstone buildings. Due to the more elaborate façade the construction costs increased, the expenditure should then be recouped by an upmarket tenant clientele that would be interested in a unique construction. In the end the building was not built – the reason for it remains in the dark, as the correspondence suddenly stops in June 1956.

Washington Square Village Project, New York 1956

Here as well Kiesler was consulted to rework existing plans drawn by another architect’s office (S. J. Kessler and Sons). This project of the real-estate developer Paul Tishman involved the construction of an apartment building within the course of the “Mayor’s Committee on Slum Clearance”. This superblock should have consisted of three 17-storey and nearly 200 metres long housing blocks arranged parallel to each other hosting 2004 apartments.

Kiesler’s task was to improve the unattractive draft, which for him was not a question of décor but a possibility to put his progressive ideas into practice. Kiesler planned to round down the box-like blocks with continuous flowing contours, to break up their prison-like character with surrounding garden terraces and to cover the buildings in strongly coloured bricks.

Again the specific reasons for the failure of Kiesler’s contribution are unknown. The compromise and the rigid corset of the original plan were presumably too demanding for the artist-architect. Instead the project was carried through without Kiesler, in 1958 Paul Lester Wiener was hired as additional architect. In 1964 Paul Tishman sold the apartment building to the New York University, which still uses it until today.

Robbins-House, West Palm Beach 1957/58 (together with Armand Bartos)

In 1957 and 58, Frederick Kiesler was working on a beach house for Mr. and Mrs. Karl Robbins together with his partner Armand Bartos. The few plans that have been preserved show a spacious ensemble on the Atlantic coast in Palm Beach in various planning phases. Elements like the continuously flowing shell recall Kiesler’s *Space House* of 1933, the design of the pillars the *World House Galleries* that had opened in January 1957.

The *Robbins-House* was not built either. On October 28, 1957 Kiesler mentions in his autobiographical notes that one of his draftsmen had finished the perspective outline of the house, but that the project unfortunately fell victim to the client’s generosity: He had donated a road between Iraq and Turkey.