**Victor Lundy: Sculptor of Space**  

The life and career of architect Victor Alfred Lundy (b. 1923) have been long and varied. Born in New York City to Russian immigrants, Lundy studied architecture at New York University before World War II and with Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design after the war. His first buildings are considered part of the so-called Sarasota school, although their soaring, scooping, and generally curvaceous forms were far more expressionistic than those designed by Lundy’s fellow Harvard and Sarasota school colleague Paul Rudolph (1918–97). After Sarasota, Lundy moved back to New York and established a practice that produced everything from a church in East Harlem to an IBM headquarters in New Jersey to the snack bars at the 1964 New York World’s Fair. In the mid-1970s, Lundy headed west to California and then settled in Houston, where, at ninety-one, he still lives today (Figure 1).

This documentary film, freely available on the U.S. General Services Administration’s website, is the tenth and latest in the GSA’s Historic Building Film Series. Since 2002, the series has documented the rehabilitation and preservation of properties owned by the GSA that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. As required by the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act, the GSA must identify historic properties and prepare building-specific guidance to preserve them. According to the GSA website, the Historic Building Film Series is part of an effort to support Executive Order 13287 (Preserve America), and “the detailed visual documentation [produced] becomes part of the historical record to guide future preservation and stewardship decisions.”

The film series is funded from revenue earned through the leasing of underutilized space in historic buildings to nonfederal entities.

After a brief introduction, *Victor Lundy: Sculptor of Space* presents nine chapters, each of which chronologically covers an aspect of Lundy’s life. The first of these, “Origins,” tells the story of Lundy’s birth in New York, his parents’ return to Russia in 1933 with Lundy and his sister, their subsequent return to New York, and his Beaux-Arts training at NYU from 1939 to 1943. It is a fascinating look into the international and urban environment that shaped the talented young artist who would later become an architect. The next chapter, “War,” narrates Lundy’s combat experience with Patton’s Third Army in France, including discussion of the twenty-seven sketchbooks that he produced during this time (eight of which can be found on the Library of Congress website at http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010645883). In this chapter Lundy also describes the saving of his left arm, which was wounded in battle, by famous orthopedic surgeon Hampar Kelikian, whom Lundy credits with saving his life by keeping him off the battlefield and in the hospital making operating room sketches.

The chapter titled “Education and Inspiration” describes Lundy’s architectural studies with Gropius at Harvard, where he received a bachelor’s degree in 1947 and a master’s degree in 1948. Following his time at Harvard, Lundy beat out Paul Rudolph to win a Rotch Traveling Scholarship from the Boston Society of Architects, which he used to tour both the classic and modern landmarks of Europe. Statements by Lundy in this chapter such as “Painting, making marks, that’s part of how I think,” help the audience begin to understand him as much more than just an architect.

“Art and Architecture” chronicles Lundy’s move in 1951 to Sarasota, Florida, which John Howey, author of *Sarasota School of Architecture*, describes in the film as a concentration of creative types (artists, writers, photographers) who served as enlightened clients to the experiments carried out not only by Lundy but also by Sarasota school “founders” Ralph Twitchell (1890–1978) and Rudolph, as well as Mark Hampton (b. 1923), Gene Leedy (b. 1928), William Rupp (1927–2002), Edward “Tim” Seibert (b. 1927), and Jack West (1922–2010). Lundy’s contribution to the Sarasota school consisted of expressionistic forms such as mushroom canopies (Warm Mineral Springs Motel, 1958), umbrella-spoke cantilevers (Galloway Furniture Showroom, 1939), butterfly overhangs (Alta Vista Elementary School, 1958), and soaring roofs utilizing laminated wood beams (Bee Ridge
Presbyterian Church, 1956, and St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, 1958).

Taking its cue from these last two projects, the next chapter, “Embracing the Light,” chronicles the period of the early 1960s when Lundy was considered a “church architect” because of the half dozen houses of worship he had constructed. The chapter focuses on one structure in particular, the First Unitarian Church in Westport, Connecticut (1961), which consists of two angled planes seemingly floating above the ground thanks to glass walls and a ridge opening. The chapter that follows, “Reverence for Structure,” describes Lundy’s projects during his time in New York, which vary in location and style from the U.S. embassy in Sri Lanka (1961–85) to an inflatable pavilion for the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission that toured South America (1960). Tying these projects together with a Manhattan shoe showroom for I. Miller (1965), the 1964 World’s Fair snack bars, and several temporary shade canopies for the Smithsonian (1965), the chapter highlights Lundy’s work as not about style but about “architectural form inseparable from structure.”

The next chapter, “A Podium for Justice,” is the raison d’être of the film—it focuses on Lundy’s U.S. Tax Court in Washington, D.C. (1974), chronicling the commission, design, and construction of the building, which features a huge granite block floating above its glass entrance. The following chapter, “A New Climate,” recounts Lundy’s western moves and settlement in Houston. Together, these chapters and those that precede them summarize Lundy’s constant search for the new and innovative in his projects. The final chapter, “Legacy,” notes that Lundy’s archives have been donated to the Architecture, Design and Engineering Collection of the Library of Congress. When asked to assess the donation, the director of the collection, C. Ford Peatross, is unable to hold back his enthusiasm, exclaiming, “It’s a doozy!”

Indeed, not only is Lundy’s archive a doozy—a reflection of his long and varied life’s work—but this film is a doozy as well. In contrast to all the other films in the series, which focus on specific buildings—courthouses, post offices, and customs houses—Victor Lundy is a complete and comprehensive documentary of the life and work of one architect. In the words of GSA historic preservation specialist Joan M. Brierton, “In documenting the U.S. Tax Court, I recognized that Victor was a modern master whose work was underappreciated, underrecognized, and that beyond the Tax Court there was this entire body of work that needed to be documented.” Incredibly, a monograph on the life and work of Victor Lundy has not yet been published, despite the vast number of buildings he has completed and the artistic innovation that can be seen in all of them. Thankfully, we have this documentary, the closest thing to a Lundy monograph that currently exists.

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