

Life's Work

A new film by photographer Don Freeman explores the personal space of some of design's greatest icons.

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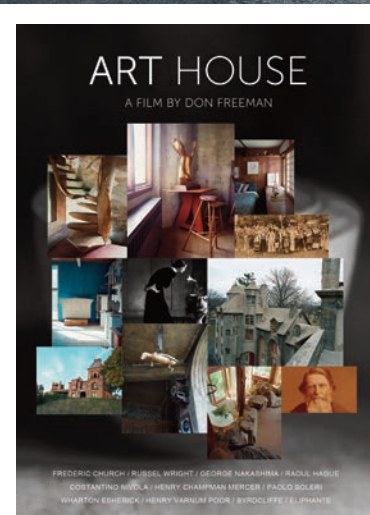


Don Freeman's recently completed film, *Art House*, celebrates the commonality between artistry, craft, sculpture and architecture. In an academic, but highly personal way, it weaves together the lives, aesthetics and philosophies of several iconic designers and artists, including Russel Wright, Paolo Soleri, Frederic Edwin Church, George Nakashima and Wharton Esherick, who created, hand built and finessed their homes over the course of their lifetimes. Each of them had a singular vision and saw their living space as a self-expressive canvas. Because they all shared an impulse to infuse creativity into the minutiae of their daily lives, they proved that buildings, furniture and objects are capable of manifesting their creator's true spirit.

Narrated by cultural critic Alastair Gordon and musically scored by Jamie Rudolph, Freeman's documentary evolves slowly. After *World Of Interiors* commissioned him to photograph Manitoga, Russel Wright's woodland house in Upstate New York, he shot several more environments across the country and produced editorials for *Architektur und Wohnen* and *The New York Times*. His work culminated in a book published by Abrams, "Artists' Handmade Houses." Soon after, Freeman picked up a movie camera and re-traced his footsteps. His reliance on natural light produces rich, painterly still images and his film work just as evocative. For *Art House*, Freeman slowly paced his lens, scanning rooms and landscapes in a moving meditation.

Constructed between the late 1800s and the mid-20th century, some of the projects featured in the film—like Soleri's house and ceramic studio in Arizona—are rarely visited, while others—including Manitoga, as well as the landscape painter Frederic Edwin Church's hilltop villa in Hudson, New York—are regularly appreciated by the public. Each one was organically built as a labor of love, showing its owner's reverence for nature and defying easy categorization or stylistic cliché. Some are well-maintained, while others—like Raoul Hague's cabin in the Catskill Mountains—need urgent restoration, so Freeman also serves as a preservationist advocating action.

Eliphante, a fantastical house built by Michael Kahn and his wife Leda Livant, is also in disrepair and begs to be saved. Created over the course of 28 years from discarded objects, its atmospheric "mixture of disarray and magic" surprised Freeman when he first encountered it. Set on three acres near Sedona, Arizona, its interior pitches to 25 feet, and its exterior is rough and primitive. "But when I walked in," he continues, "it was like walking into the Sistine Chapel. It takes your breath away."



Don Freeman's film, *Art House*, explores the homes created and lived in by 11 American artists and designers, including Jane Byrd McCall (pictured at top); Wharton Esherick's hilltop studio and residence in Paoli, Pennsylvania and the Mercer Museum & Fonthill Castle in Doylestown, Pennsylvania are also featured in the book.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ART HOUSE, 2015