

Press Release

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**Architecture for All: The Photography of Paul Oliver
16 May – 11 October 2015**

What do we mean by ‘architecture’, and what does the term cover when we use it? Does it refer only to buildings designed by architects, or does it extend to all buildings? What explains the enormous diversity of architectural traditions around the world? And how can today’s architects learn from and respond to this diversity of architectural form, material, space and decoration?

These are some of the questions that concerned the noted architectural scholar Paul Oliver throughout a career that spanned more than five decades. The author and editor of a range of influential publications including *Shelter and Society*, *Dwellings: The House Across the World* and the *Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World*, Oliver called for an inclusive and cross-cultural approach to architecture; one that acknowledges the intricate relationship between architecture, society and culture, and that recognises all buildings, not just those of specific cultures or those made by architects, as cultural expressions worthy of admiration, study and conservation. ‘Architecture’, he wrote, ‘is not the prerogative of a few nor the privilege of an elite; it is for all, and by all’.

This exhibition is the first to document and showcase the photography of Paul Oliver. Throughout his career, Oliver was as prolific a photographer as he was a writer. During his travels that took him to more than 70 countries in all continents, he took over 22,500 photographs that together capture the ingenuity, richness and diversity of the architectural traditions of the world. An amateur photographer driven by a strong personal interest in and curiosity about other peoples and cultures, Oliver documented building materials, technologies, forms, details and decorations, as well as the people that made, used and lived among them. Altogether the photographs constitute an unparalleled record of the world’s architecture during the second half of the twentieth century.

The selection of photographs in the exhibition aims to capture the inclusive and cross-cultural understanding of architecture propagated by Oliver. They include images of landscapes, buildings and architectural details from cultures around the world: monumental as well as ordinary; traditional as well as modern; everyday as well as unique. Taken from the early 1960s up to 2008, they showcase the variety of ways in which all

cultures around the world continue to express their needs, beliefs, values and aspirations in architectural form. They remind us of the extraordinary richness, beauty and tenacity of the architectural heritage of the world and raise questions about how we should respond to and may learn from it.

Notes for Editors

- The photographs of Paul Oliver form part of the Paul Oliver Vernacular Architecture Library and are currently housed in the Main Library of Oxford Brookes University.
- Visit www.poval.org.uk for more information about the collection.
- The Pitt Rivers Museum is one of Oxford's most popular attractions, famous for its period atmosphere and outstanding collections from many cultures around the world, past and present. Admission, exhibitions and events are FREE.
- The Pitt Rivers Museum was founded in 1884 when General Pitt Rivers, an influential figure in the development of archaeology and evolutionary anthropology, gave his personal collection of 30,000 items to the University on condition that a museum was built to house the material, and that a post was created to lecture in anthropology. Today the collection numbers some 600,000 items and the Museum remains an active department of Oxford University, doing and supporting research and teaching in archaeology and anthropology.

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