

James S. Ackerman, Special Golden Lion to an historian of Architecture

James Sloss Ackerman the doyen of the international community of historians of Renaissance architecture. He is one of the scholars to have created the modern history of architecture, founded on a systematic approach and making use of a critical examination of all written and visual sources. It is capacity to use erudition, a sharp sense of observation combined with the sensibility for architecture and an innate facility to bring back to life the great architects of the past with immediacy, almost making them our contemporaries and constantly present in our culture, is perhaps the greatest of Ackerman's achievements. His work has had a considerable influence on both historians of architecture and architects themselves. In his field, he has written two of the most important monographs of the century that has just closed, dedicated to Michelangelo and Andrea Palladio.

Ackerman was born in San Francisco 1919 and first studied the history of art and architecture at Yale and then New York University under Henri Focillon, Erwin Panofsky and Richard Krautheimer. He discovered Italian art while moving north up the peninsula with the US army in the Second World War. Fascinated by Italy, he chose it as his field of study and obtained a scholarship from the American Academy in Rome. In a series of influential and cultured articles, many of which republished in 1991 in *Distance Points: Essays in Theory and Renaissance Art and Architecture*, Ackerman opened new horizons regarding the way of considering the Italian Renaissance. Much of Ackerman's work has been dedicated to Michelangelo, culminating in the excellent monograph, *The Architecture of Michelangelo*, which was published in English in 1961 and subsequently also in Italian, Spanish, French, Japanese and German. After having written about Michelangelo, Ackerman turned his attention to Palladio, investigating him both as architect and as intellectual in his brilliant book, *Palladio*, published in 1966, which is still considered the best introduction to this historic figure. The influence of this book has been immense, especially thanks to its innovative approach towards patronage. James Ackerman is a scholar of great originality and productivity, a skilled writer of architecture and a lecturer who has guided many eminent scholars in their first steps. He is a member of the British Academy, of the Royal Academy of Arts, of the Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura in Vicenza, of the Ateneo Veneto and of the Accademia di San Luca in Rome. He has received an honorary degree from the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia and he is also a Grande Ufficiale dell'Ordine al Merito della Repubblica Italiana.

In 2003, he was awarded the Balzan Prize in the field of the history of architecture and gave half of the prize money to help young architectural historians, financing the publication of their first work via the annual James Ackerman Prize for the history of architecture (now at its fourth edition), and instituting a scholarship at the American Academy in Rome for young foreign students wishing to undertake paleographic studies in Italian archives.