

The Museum of Modern Art

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FACT SHEET

EXHIBITION MIES VAN DER ROHE CENTENNIAL EXHIBITION

DATES February 10 - April 15, 1986

ORGANIZATION Arthur Drexler, Director of the Department of Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art

SPONSORSHIP Made possible by GFI/Knoll International; Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Inc. Fund; and the National Endowment for the Arts; and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

CONTENTS In 1986, the centennial year of his birth, the Museum will present the most comprehensive exhibition ever devoted to the architecture and furniture of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969), one of the great pioneering architects of the modern movement. Drawing on the Museum's Mies van der Rohe Archive, the exhibition and its accompanying publications will include completed projects, as well as preliminary studies and variations. It will also show unbuilt and previously unpublished projects, some of them "missing links" in the development of the architect's ideas.

It is generally acknowledged that Mies van der Rohe was the most influential architect in the years following World War II. According to Arthur Drexler, "There is no country in the world in which architecture does not somehow bear his mark; in the United States there is no city that does not have some evidence of his American presence; in New York his influence was apparent (Lever House) even before he designed the Seagram tower, which of all his tall buildings is the acknowledged masterpiece.... It is in this context that the exhibition will explore the range, variety, and unfulfilled possibilities of Mies's work; and it is in this context that genuine critical evaluations must be made. Some Mies buildings are better than other Mies buildings; the exhibition will deal with the failures as well as the successes."

The centennial exhibition will consist of approximately 300 drawings, accompanied by photographs, some of them mural-size, of Mies's major buildings. Also included will be eight architectural models and a large mock-up of the column and roof detail of the New National Gallery in Berlin. The famous cruciform chrome-plated steel column designed for the German Pavilion at the 1929 Barcelona Exposition (now being reconstructed in Barcelona) will be shown in full size. The exhibition will also present furniture designed by Mies, along with his most important furniture drawings.

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THE ARCHITECT

Ludwig Mies (van der Rohe was his mother's surname) was born in 1886 in the ancient city of Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle), on Germany's border with Belgium. He attended the Cathedral School there until he was thirteen, and spent two years more at a trade school; at fifteen his formal education ended. From his father, a master mason and proprietor of a small stone-cutting shop, Mies learned the possibilities and limitations of masonry construction. In 1905, at age nineteen, he went to Berlin to gain knowledge of wood construction and for two years apprenticed himself to Bruno Paul, a leading decorator and furniture designer. In 1907 he left Paul's office to build his first house. From 1908 to 1911 Mies worked for Peter Behrens, leaving in 1912 to begin his career as an independent architect.

Following his service during the first world war, Mies returned to independent work in Berlin until 1937. Five projects from the twenties established his fame: the Friedrichstrasse Skyscraper (competition entry, 1921), the Glass Skyscraper (proposal, 1922), the Concrete Office Building (1922), the Brick Country House (1923), and the Concrete Country House (1923). From 1926 to 1932 he was first vice-president of the Deutscher Werkbund, an influential organization founded by industrialists and architects to improve the quality of German architecture and design.

In 1929 for the International Exposition at Barcelona, Mies designed the German Pavilion, one of the most influential masterpieces of modern architecture. It was for this pavilion that he designed the famous Barcelona chair. Along with the Barcelona Pavilion, Mies secured his international reputation with the Tugendhat House (1930) in Brno, Czechoslovakia, with furniture and fittings especially designed by him. In 1930 Mies was appointed director of the Bauhaus School at Dessau. After moving it to Berlin he was forced to close it under Nazi pressure in 1933. He moved to the United States in 1938, having been appointed director of the school of architecture at the Armour Institute (now Illinois Institute of Technology), Chicago, for which he designed a major campus plan (1939-40). He became an American citizen in 1944. In 1963 Mies received the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

The history of Mies's architecture in the United States involved the development of highly rationalized building types based on the design of structure. After the IIT campus, other important works completed were an all-glass house, built for Dr. Edith Farnsworth (1950), and the twin apartment towers on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago (1951). The Seagram tower on Park Avenue (1958), a collaboration with Philip Johnson, was Mies's only New York commission, and was to become one of the most admired skyscrapers of the twentieth century. His last major work was the New National Gallery, Berlin (1962-67). Mies van der Rohe died in 1969 in Chicago.

THE ARCHIVE

The Ludwig Mies van der Rohe Archive was established in 1968 as a division of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design and contains over 20,000 sketches, presentation drawings, working drawings, blueprints, architectural models, and furniture designs by Mies and his associate Lilly Reich. The Archive also includes work-related correspondence from 1911 to 1969 (his personal correspondence was given to the Library of Congress).

The Archive was established with a generous grant from Phyllis Lambert, and with additional assistance from Philip Johnson. Dirk Lohan, Mies's grandson, and other friends of the Archive have also been among its patrons. The Archive's curator from 1968 to 1980 was Dr. Ludwig Glaeser; it is now under the supervision of Arthur Drexler. In recent years, additional generous support has been given by Fritz Thyssen Stiftung; the National Endowment for the Humanities; and the Luce Fund for Scholarship in American Art, a program of The Henry Luce Foundation, Inc.

PUBLICATIONS

Two Museum publications will accompany the exhibition. The first, by Arthur Drexler, will survey the major achievements of Mies's career and will include many unfamiliar photographs. The second will consist of essays by five Mies scholars, who will examine all aspects of the architect's work, including its philosophical and political context. The Museum's 1977 catalog on Mies's furniture by Ludwig Glaeser will also be available.

Additional publications sponsored by the Mies Archive will include a recent biography of Mies by Franz Schulze, published by The University of Chicago Press, and an English-language edition of Wolf Tegethoff's Mies van der Rohe: Villas and Country Houses. Garland Press will publish the first four volumes of a catalogue raisonné, which will list all the Archive's drawings from 1910 to 1938, and will illustrate 2,000 works.

TRAVEL

After its New York showing, the exhibition will be seen at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (May 8 - August 10, 1986), the New National Gallery, Berlin (November 13, 1986 - January 15, 1987), and a Barcelona showing will follow (under the sponsorship of the Foundation of the German Pavilion of Barcelona by Mies van der Rohe).

SYMPOSIUM

In conjunction with the exhibition, a symposium on the architect will be organized and moderated by architectural critic and writer Franz Schulze. Speakers and date to be announced.

PRESS PREVIEW

Wednesday, February 5, 1986, 11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

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For further information or photographic materials, contact Jeanne Collins or Jessica Schwartz, Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750.