

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
February 1996

LILLY REICH: Designer and Architect
February 8 - May 7, 1996

The first exhibition of work by the German architect and designer Lilly Reich (1885-1947), one of the most influential women practicing in her field during the 1920s and 1930s, opens at The Museum of Modern Art on February 8, 1996. Long known for her professional association with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Reich also maintained her own atelier, creating a professional career as a designer of exhibitions, clothing, furniture, products, and interiors. The exhibition, which runs through May 7, 1996, features forty-five drawings and thirty documentary photographs of Reich's work, focusing on her installation designs as well as furniture and product designs.

The material in the exhibition was drawn from the Museum's own collection of Reich's work, which includes more than 800 sketches, working drawings, and furniture designs and nearly 100 photographs of completed works and installations. The only major archive of Reich's work, the collection is part of the Ludwig Mies van der Rohe bequest to the Museum in 1968. In addition to the archival material, the exhibition features two furniture prototypes and one architectural model made especially for this occasion. A linoleum floor covering is an integral part of the installation, as it was in many of Reich's exhibition installations and interiors.

Organized by Matilda McQuaid, Associate Curator, Department of Architecture and Design, the exhibition traces Reich's collaborations with Mies while revealing her contributions as a dynamic artist in her own right. As Ms. McQuaid explains in the accompanying catalogue, "Reich was crucial to the elevation of modern exhibition design as an art and as a discipline."

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In her most eloquent displays, Reich allowed the materials and contents to act as the primary design feature as well as the subject of the exhibition itself.

Reich derived and exercised much of her creative philosophy through her association with the progressive German Werkbund, an organization dedicated to promoting and upholding the highest standards of design and manufacture in Germany. She was the first woman elected to the board in 1920, an unprecedented appointment for a woman of that era. Reich assimilated the Werkbund's principles, approaching design with the ideological intent of improving society. She sought the overall integration of good design into everyday life through the refinement of consumer display techniques, fashion, furniture, and interiors.

Born in 1885, Reich was awarded one of her first commissions in 1911 for the Wertheim Department Store. This project was succeeded in 1913 by a window display for the pharmacy Elefanten-Apotheke, in which she showed the initial signs of an essentialist sensibility by displaying medicine jars flanked by the utensils used for making the medicine -- an advertising technique exposing the source of the products she was marketing. Ms. McQuaid fixes Reich's professional turning point at the 1926 exhibition *Von der Faser zum Gewebe* (From Fiber to Textile) at the fifteenth annual International Frankfurt Fair: "Here, for the first time, Reich altered the prevailing custom of presenting raw materials and techniques as a mere adjunct to the finished product by choosing material and process as the essence of her installation. This became the archetype for all of her future exhibitions."

Reich's official association with Mies van der Rohe began in 1927 at the Werkbund exhibition in Stuttgart, the centerpiece of which was the *Weissenhofsiedlung* (Weissenhof Housing Settlement), which showcased modern architecture by an international array of architects and the work of the most progressive Werkbund representatives. She was responsible

for the design of all the exhibition areas located in the central part of Stuttgart and collaborated with Mies on the Plate-Glass Hall.

Reich's selection as artistic director and architect at *Die Wohnung unserer Zeit, deutsche Bauausstellung Berlin* (The Dwelling in Our Time, German Building Exposition, Berlin) in 1931, considered the designer's crowning achievement, accorded her creative authority over five installations. Here she demonstrated her talent in using the latest building materials to present some of the newest achievements in the architecture and building trades. In 1932, Reich was named director of the weaving studio and the interiors workshop of the Bauhaus in Dessau.

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PUBLICATION

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PANEL DISCUSSION

Lilly Reich: Women, Design, and Collaboration, moderated by Mary McLeod, Associate Professor of Architecture, Columbia University. Panelists are Dr. Rosemarie Haag Bletter, Professor, Art History and German, City University of New York Graduate Center; Caroline Constant, Associate Professor, Department of Architecture, University of Florida; Esther da Costa Meyer, Assistant Professor, Department of Art History, Yale University; and Franz Schulze, Professor of Art, Lake Forest College. **Sunday, March 17, 12:00 noon.** The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2, The Museum of Modern Art. Tickets: \$8.00; members \$7.00; students and seniors \$5.00. Available at the Lobby Information Desk.

For further information or photographic materials please contact Alexandra Partow, Department of Communications, 212/708-9750.

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