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Garden Committee Correspondence  
(Reformed as Advisory Subcommittee,  
1939, as staff committee, 1944)

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*MW Barr*

NOTES OF THE INFORMAL MEETING OF THE GARDEN COMMITTEE  
 Tuesday, January 1, 1939, at 12 o'clock at the Museum  
 of Modern Art.

It was decided at the meeting that the possibility of a  
 pavilion must be considered in any plans for the garden; that the garden and  
 PRESENT at the meeting were Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in the chair,  
 Mr. Joseph Hudnut, Mrs. Robert H. Fife, Mrs. Stanley Resor; ex officio, the  
 Mr. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Mr. John McAndrew and Mr. Philip Goodwin.

It was suggested that the garden could be made until it is known definitely whether a pavilion will be  
 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USE OF GARDEN SPACE:

For the exhibition of large sculpture during the summer, it is  
 recommended that for the present the entire garden plot be leveled, gravelled  
 and fenced to match the adjacent vacant lots. Instead of planting, it is  
 recommended that rented boxed plants be used and some free standing walls as  
 backgrounds for sculpture.

PROPOSED COMPETITION: Mrs. Fife was asked to consider the possibility of the Garden Club  
 a garden competition for their show next year.

Dean Hudnut recommended that the designing of the garden be placed  
 in the hands of architects, rather than landscapers, as he did not believe there  
 were landscape architects really qualified to handle the problem. This brought  
 up the question of having a competition.  
 Mr. Barr said that it would help a great deal if it were possible  
 to plant trees on the sidewalk of 54th Street. Mrs. Rockefeller stated that  
 if the trees were planted the Park Department would take care of them.  
 that the Building Committee was in favor of letting the matter of the Garden  
 rest for some time in view of the great cost of the building itself. Mr. Goodwin  
 stated also that it might be thought unfair to the competitors to have them sub-  
 mit designs unless the winner could be assured of the commission. Dean Hudnut  
 suggested a closed competition, with four or five selected architects, collaborating  
 with landscape architects, each to be paid a fee to cover expenses including \$200  
 for a model. However, as it is not possible to assure the winning designer the  
 commission for the garden, an educational competition, for the designing of a

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

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-2-

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garden for a purely theoretical plot, was recommended.

It was stressed at the meeting that the possibility of a Pavilion must be considered in any plans for the garden; that the garden and the Pavilion are very closely related, and that no definitive plans for the garden could be made until it is known definitely whether a Pavilion will be built. At this time the problem of subterranean storage could be reconsidered.

It was generally agreed that time was too short for a competition in time for the opening of the building, and that it would be best to postpone it until fall.

#### GARDEN CLUBS OF AMERICA

Mrs. Fife was asked to consider the possibility of the Garden Clubs of America sponsoring a garden competition for their show next year.

#### PLANTING

Mrs. Rockefeller suggested that a horticulturist be asked to work on the problem of what kind of plants would grow in ground surrounded by tall buildings. Mr. Barr said that it would help a great deal if it were possible to plant trees on the sidewalk of 54th Street. Mrs. Rockefeller stated that if the trees were planted the Park Department would take care of them.

#### HOUSE BY FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

Mr. Barr suggested that a possible use for the garden space during the World's Fair would be the exhibition of the \$5,000 Jacobs house by Frank Lloyd Wright. Admission could be charged, and in this way money may be raised to pay for the house, possibly even for the garden later on.

#### ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

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14 WEST 43 STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.

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TENTATIVE LIST OF TWELVE PIECES OF SCULPTURE FOR MUSEUM GARDEN

- During the past week there has been a good deal of discussion
- Mallol. Crouching figure, dark bronze, life size  
(Museum collection)
  - Lehmbruck. Standing Youth, ivory grey artificial stone.  
7 ft. high (Museum collection)
  - Lachaise. Floating Woman, black bronze, double life size  
(Museum collection)
  - Duchamp-Villon. Horse, dark bronze, 40 in. high  
(Museum collection)
  - Lipchitz. Sculpture, yellow bronze, 7 ft. high  
(Museum collection)
  - Brancusi. Bird in flight, 54 in. high, grey marble  
(Loan)
  - Zorach. Mother and child, white marble, c. 7 ft. high  
(Loan)
  - Despiau. Standing Woman, dark bronze, 7 ft. (Loan)
  - Archipenko. Boxers, orange cast stone, 30 in. (Loan)
  - Brancusi. Fish, grey marble, c. 8 ft. long (Loan)
  - Caldier. Mobile. (Designer may suggest character and size)
  - Picasso. Construction, wrought iron, 7 ft. high (Loan)

It is of course a very important to provide a background which will reveal the character of the work as well as to provide both space and background.

In choosing several pieces of sculpture in a limited space it is important to regard them visually by means of several points of view.

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- 2 -

TENTATIVE NOTES ON THE MUSEUM SCULPTURE GARDEN

Variety and contrast of forms are probable, visual isolation is an important factor in . . . During the past week there has been a good deal of discussion about the use of the lot which extends from the back of the Museum to 54th Street. This lot has usually been spoken of in the past as the sculpture garden. So far as I know, no definite program has been decided upon for the use of this space. Without recommending any final decision as yet, I should like to make a brief analysis of the problem, an analysis which has been greatly stimulated by the past week's study and discussion.

The Lot as a Place for Sculpture

I believe that the lot should be considered primarily as a kind of outdoor gallery for the exhibition of sculpture. The space measures 110 x 75 ft. This amounts to about the same area as the second or third floor gallery space. As a place for sculpture, it is large enough I think to contain ten or a dozen important pieces without overcrowding, providing the design is carefully handled with this purpose in mind.

Most sculpture in the round should I think be shown with sufficient space around it so that it can be seen as a three dimensional object. It should be possible and even desirable to walk around it. For many pieces of sculpture it is equally important to provide a background which will reveal the changing profiles of the work as one moves about it. It is of course not always possible to provide both space and background.

In showing several pieces of sculpture in a limited space it is important to try to separate them visually by means of screens, walls, or plant material. Especially in a collection of modern sculpture, where a great

The garden will be seen both from the northern gallery of the ground floor and from the windows of the second floor. The visitor, in walking along

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	EMH	I.12.k

- 2 -

variety and contrast of forms are probable, visual isolation is an important factor in installation.

The isolation of the various pieces, as well as the general interest of walking through the garden, can be further assured by the use of different levels.

It would also be interesting if the north wall could be broadened into a narrow terrace on which trees could be planted and from which an interesting view of the garden and building could be obtained. Such a terrace could be approached by a staircase or ramp.

Study should be made of the problem of lighting the sculpture and the garden at night.

The Lot in Relation to the Building

The lot not only abuts the building but is actually a continuation of the ground floor of the building from which it is divided only by a continuous sheet of plate glass. This continuation makes it reasonable to think of the lot as a kind of outdoor gallery.

In subdividing the lot by means of different elevations, screens, walls, hedges or garden pots, two general systems of design may be considered:

- (a) a design which will repeat more or less the severe angular character of the rear facade of the building; or (b) a design which will contrast with the architecture by the use of free curvilinear forms.

I very much prefer a contrasting design of the garden, which I believe would both set off and relieve the regularity and angularity of the architecture (as well as being more in harmony with contemporary esthetics.)

The garden will be seen both from the northern gallery of the ground floor and from the windows of the second floor. The visitor, in walking along

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- 3 -

these galleries, will have a continuous panorama of the garden on the ground floor, an interrupted panorama on the second floor. The design should be studied in relation to both these points of view.

In deciding upon the materials for the walls and screens of the garden, the white marble and blue tile of the building should be considered. For instance, the north wall might well be surfaced in blue tile inside and out. Both considerations point to a height of between nine and twelve feet.

The Lot in Relation to Adjacent Areas Not Owned by the Museum

The relation of the lot to the rear facade of the building has been discussed. To the east and west of the lot there will be, as I understand it, vacant lots or buildings under construction (and eventually completed buildings the nature of which is at present unknown). To the north of the lot is 54th Street with its noise and traffic. It seems to me that all these considerations point toward enclosing the lot with a wall which will serve to shut off the lots to the east and west, which are likely to be in a torn-up condition for some years to come. The wall to the north need not be a solid screen but might well be pierced so that the public could glimpse the garden and building in going by, without sacrificing quiet and a certain restful seclusion.

It would of course be possible to make these walls open metal grills or fences, but I think solid walls are preferable for the reasons indicated above.

In any case, some kind of wall is necessary for purposes of controlling the space. It seems to me preferable to make the garden accessible only

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	EMH	I.12.k

- 4 -

similar to the temporary partitions of the interior galleries, many of which from the Museum itself except on special occasions when a door could be opened on 54th Street. To insure the safety of the sculpture and the Museum, I do not believe there should be general public access to the garden except through the Museum.

The height of the walls should be determined partly by the factor of safety, partly by the desirability of having a wall high enough to serve as an adequate background for the sculpture. Both considerations point to a height of between nine and twelve feet.

#### The Lot as a Garden

I do not have the knowledge to give an opinion upon the kind of planting from a technical point of view. It seems to me that two or three fairly large trees in the garden itself and a row of fairly large trees placed at the north end are desirable. Economy and all year round appearances are certainly important factors. It is desirable, too, not to surround the sculpture with planting that cannot be walked on, though this difficulty can be got round in various ways.

It may be desirable to reduce the planting to a minimum relying upon careful design of paving or flagstones, walls, screens and so forth, for the effect. Movable hedges and plants in tubs would add to the flexibility of the design and perhaps to the economy of upkeep.

#### The Lot in Relation to the World's Fair show

It may not be wise to attempt to realize any permanent design for a year or so but any temporary design should be considered as an experiment.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	EMH	I.12.k

- 5 -

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MASSACHUSETTS

similar to the temporary partitions of the interior galleries, many of which  
presumably will be built of more permanent material after having been tried  
out during the World's Fair show. In other words temporary walls of wood may  
be tried instead of walls of stone or tile and concrete; screens of wooden  
stockades or wattle instead of marble; planting in boxes and tubs instead of  
in permanent beds.

The Lot in Relation to a Possible Pavilion

If the pavilion is a possibility of the near future, that is of the  
next two years, the garden should be designed in relation to it so that excessive  
changes would be avoided. However, this would imply a plan for the pavilion  
far more definite than is at present in hand.

If, however, the pavilion is a matter of the indefinite future, the  
interest of the garden should not be sacrificed for a non-existent building.

I have not had an immediate and practical experi-  
ence with plant materials. For an architect, experi-  
enced in the organization of interior spaces, to  
attempt such a project would seem to  
ask us for a man trained as a painter to undertake a  
piece of sculpture. But the trouble is that, so far as  
I know, there is no man experienced in plant form who has  
any conception whatever of the character and intentions  
of the modern movement in the arts. I know no garden in  
this country which could be honestly called modern.

Our problem is simplified by the fact that we shall use  
the garden for the exhibition of sculpture - which gives  
it a definite program. We are also fortunate in having  
a site as definitely defined by high walls that we have  
a definite situation already established. I should conceive  
of the whole as an outdoor room to be given expression  
through form and the development of sculpture. In this  
way the garden can be thought of as a sort of architec-  
ture - not that the having definite architectural qual-  
ities - but rather that it is given a definite confidence  
that an architect might be entrusted with its solution. My

Dec. 3, 1938

My condition should make this confidence  
and a program - not procedural, but - give the project  
in the hands of a modern architect and ask him to accept  
it as something a first-rate publicist. I really

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GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF DESIGN  
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DEPARTMENT OF  
ARCHITECTURE

November 25  
1938

*Copies sent  
to Handson Com  
11/26/38  
AC K*

Thomas D. Mabry, Jr., Esq.  
The Museum of Modern Art  
14 West Forty-ninth St.  
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Mabry:

I am very glad indeed to serve on the Garden Committee, although I am by no means sure that I can be of any use. Ever since I came to Harvard and found myself intimately associated with the Department of Landscape Architecture, I have given a good deal of thought to the problem presented by the modern garden, and I have even lectured and written papers on the subject; but I must confess I have n't yet arrived at anything like a solution.

In principle I think no one should attempt to design a garden who has not had an immediate and practical experience with plant materials. For an architect, experienced in the organization of interior space and structure, to attempt such a project would seem to be about as foolish as for a man trained as a painter to undertake a piece of sculpture. But the trouble is that, so far as I know, there is no man experienced in plant form who has any conception whatever of the character and intentions of the modern movement in the arts. I know no garden in this country which could be even remotely called modern.

Our problem is simplified by the fact that we shall use the garden for the exhibition of sculpture - which gives it a definite program. We are also fortunate in having a site so definitely confined by high walls that we have a third dimension already established. I should conceive of the whole as an outdoor room to be given expression through form and the development of accessories. In this way the problem may be thought of as a work of architecture--or at least one having definite architectural qualities--and perhaps that will in part justify a confidence that an architect might be successful in its ~~solution.~~ design.

If the Committee should share this confidence, I suggest (as a second-best procedure) that we place the project in the hands of a modern architect and ask him to accept as an associate a first-rate horticulturist. I really

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	EMH	I.12.k

TDM, Jr.

-2-

11/25/38

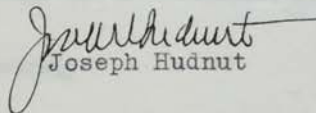
think that we will get better results in this way than ~~to try~~ to entrust the work to a conventionally trained landscape architect. If we have to choose between a deficiency in experience with materials on the one hand and an inadequacy in habits of thought and vision on the other, I should give preference to the man with the first deficiency. For example, one might commission Mies van der Rohe.

There are several garden architects in Europe who have made some progress in modern garden design. I should like immensely to bring one of these men to New York to design the Museum garden--for example, Mr. Albert Esch, of Vienna--but of course such a procedure would be expensive and also would have the elements of risk which it may be impracticable to assume in this moment.

I am very sorry indeed that I cannot attend the meeting at Mrs. Rockefeller's on Monday. I am coming down to New York on December 6, with Professor Gropius, and I hope to see you at that time.

With kindest regards, I am

Yours sincerely,

  
Joseph Hudnut

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Mabry

My dear Mr. Goodwin

One at a time, I have taken our Garden Club members (including Mrs. Fife, the former Garden Club of America president) over to see the garden site.

Toughly we think the simpler the garden the better: if possible all one level and as much as possible in one plant material (yew). The garden to say one thing only - and that very definitely.

We hope it will show no more than three pieces of sculpture at one time and that no fence will be used.

I suggested to Mr. Mabry that Mrs. Hencken (an amateur who makes good models and will work for nothing) work out in a rough model any ideas Mr. Barr and Mr. McAndrew now have and she started work with Mr. McAndrew this morning. I also suggested that Mrs. Fife and Mr. Morgan's superintendent act as plant material specialists to advise Mr. Barr and Mr. McAndrew; also that a temporary committee be appointed by Mr. Goodyear this afternoon with Mrs. Rockefeller as Chairman to work out different ideas and show a rough model of what is evolved at the next Trustees' meeting in December. All of this subject to your approval of course.

Both Mrs. Fife and I believe that there is no landscape architect today who can do a suitable garden for the new building.

Sincerely

Helene Rosen

November tenth 1938