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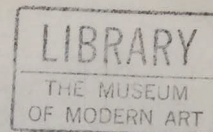
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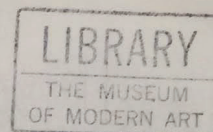
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'Tribute to the late Mies Van der Rohe'
Institute of Arts and Letters - Annual Meeting
New York
December 5, 1969

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TRIBUTE TO THE LATE MIES VAN DER ROHE

BY MR. PHILIP JOHNSON

DELIVERED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE

AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARTS AND LETTERS,

NEW YORK CITY, 5 DECEMBER 1969

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MIES VAN DER ROHE

The architects of the Western World are in mourning. The greatest artists in our field have all died in the one decade just passed - the latest - Mies van der Rohe, aged 83. First Frank Lloyd Wright, then Le Corbusier, then Walter Gropius, now Mies.

It is the consensus among us that there are no heirs just as it would seem there were few progenitors. A strange period our 20th Century - the first half so brilliant, so clear, the second, from this date at least, uncertain, murky.

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Mies van der Rohe was very different from his three contemporaries; in four ways his work stands out as unique:

First: his passion for objectivity - he left "originality" to others. As he said, "I would rather be good than original". He prided himself that others could also practice his principles. The architecture of most tall buildings in the United States proves his prescience.

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MIES VAN DER ROHE - 2

His second passion: building. He believed that the key to good design is the art of building. Baukunst not Architektur. His favourite word was Bauen. His greatest compliment to work of architects: "Das ist gebaut". "That is really built". His building method with steel and glass is now universally copied, if alas sometimes mis-copied.

His third passion: clarity. He disliked what he called "fantasy", whether ornaments added to a building or in the forms themselves. The entrance must be clear, the logic of structure obvious. The observer must perceive clearly the way a building is built. Although he admired both, Frank Lloyd Wright was to him a romantic; Le Corbusier a painter/sculptor rather than an architect.

The fourth passion was Mies' love of elegance. And Mies the man was as elegant as his buildings. Reasonably priced buildings he would build, cheap buildings he would not. He savoured fine cigars, fine building materials. Bronze, vellum, marbles, silks he loved. He used to say only these materials grow old beautifully. And he followed his taste in his own life. He grew old beautifully.

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MIES VAN DER ROHE - 3

To be in Mies' presence was to feel his greatness, to feel the inner strength, the consistency, the calmness of his convictions. He never wavered, he never changed his aim: truth to the laws of building. "Beauty" he often quoted St. Thomas Aquinas "is but the radiance of Truth".

Mies' place in history is already obvious: the right man at the right place at the right time. Post-war America was ripe for a philosophy of art suited to a technological world, an economic world. And this world embraced Mies and Mies' philosophy to a degree without parallel in the arts today. Amazingly enough in a materialistic age, Mies had already achieved before he died a popular and even financial success equaled by only a handful of artists in all history.

New York
12/5/69