

The Museum of Modern Art

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An exhibition documenting the destruction by neglect of a 20th century architectural masterpiece, the Villa Savoye built by Le Corbusier in 1930 outside Paris, will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from July 2 through July 24.

A model and photographs taken shortly after the house was erected in a meadow in Poissy-sur-Seine are shown with recent photographs which reveal the present state of deterioration: rusted window frames, broken or missing glass, peeling stucco, and a roof structure damaged by last year's heavy snows.

Arthur Drexler, Director of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design, says in the wall label that in the years since 1930 the Villa has become world famous-- a classic that can be compared with the most brilliant achievements of the past. "It demonstrates perfectly Le Corbusier's theories of design and planning, but it is more than a demonstration; it is a unique and glorious work of art. That is why its slow destruction through neglect is scandalous."

During World War II the Villa was occupied, and damaged, successively by German and American forces. Mme. Savoye, widowed and impoverished, moved to a nearby farm but refused to sell the house, which she used as a barn, because she hoped her grandson would one day be able to restore it. Meanwhile the quiet village of Poissy was linked to Paris by a superhighway and grew into a crowded suburb.

In 1959 the decision of the municipality of Poissy to build a school in the meadow and tear down the house provoked world-wide indignation. André Malraux, France's Minister of Culture, intervened and announced that the building would be saved.

It was not restored, however, and the deterioration of the past decade accelerated. Furthermore, the community erected a large school on the site.

"Every country has to face the difficult problem of preserving its great buildings, and few countries have as many buildings worth preserving as France,"

(more)

Mr. Drexler says. "There may yet be a happy ending to the story of the Villa Savoye. The Museum received these photographs in June, and shortly after deciding to exhibit them, was informed that workmen had appeared at the building to patch up the exterior stucco. Since the damage is already so great this repair can scarcely be called a restoration, but the Ministry of Culture is to be congratulated for its interest and applauded for its enterprise. At a meeting in Paris on June 24, André Woginsky, José Luis Sert and others conferred with representatives of the Ministry of Culture on plans to establish the Villa Savoye as a museum of Le Corbusier's work; it is hoped that their long efforts ultimately will be successful.

Even if it is now satisfactorily restored, Mr. Drexler points out, the Villa Savoye can never again be seen as a pure form in an open landscape, as it was originally, because of the recently built school. "No doubt an incomplete success is better than a complete failure, and if the building can still be saved, the students in that school will be able to look out of their windows at a Monument Historique that belongs, in a sense, to the whole world."

Le Corbusier died August 27, 1965, and was given an elaborate state funeral at which M. Malraux officiated.

Photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York, 10019. Circle 5-8900.