

communiqué /press release**For Immediate Release****CANADIAN CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURE
TO PRESENT *MIES IN AMERICA*
17 OCTOBER 2001 – 20 JANUARY 2002**

Montréal, 15 October 2001 – A profound thinker, painstaking artist, and one of the greatest architects in history, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe emigrated from Germany to the United States in 1938, when he was already in his fifties and one of the recognized masters of his profession. Transplanted from the Bauhaus (of which he was the last director) to a technical institute in Chicago, from the European avant-garde to Midwestern steel mills, he embarked on an astonishing second career, in which he not only transformed his own building art, but eventually made a significant impact on the architecture of this continent.

Mies's confrontation with American technology, and the three decades of evolution and achievement that resulted, are the subjects of *Mies in America*, to be presented at the CCA from 17 October 2001 to 20 January 2002. The exhibition has been organized by the Canadian Centre for Architecture and the Whitney Museum of American Art with the cooperation of the Mies van der Rohe Archive and The Museum of Modern Art, New York. It draws upon a wealth of archival material and recent scholarship to offer visitors a deeper immersion into Mies's thought than has ever before been possible.

Mies in America is curated by Phyllis Lambert, founding director and chair of the CCA, whose association with Mies began in 1954 when she selected him to design New York's Seagram Building and served as the project's Director of Planning, and who subsequently earned her degree in architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology. Artist Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle designed the exhibition, in addition to completing an original work on the New National Gallery, Berlin. *Mies in America* was first shown at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (21 June – 23 September 2001), and will subsequently be presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (16 February – 26 May 2002).

"The conventional version of Mies's career in North America portrays him as a creative genius sprung fully formed into his new environment," notes Phyllis Lambert. "He is seen, after the fact, as the magisterial designer of new building types: the mullioned high-rise and the clear-span steel-frame structure. *Mies in America* reveals to us a much different

image: that of an architect engaged in a protracted and profound inquiry into structure, materiality and space. We see his slow, hard-won evolution from the European avant-garde of the 1920s, through the bluntness of primal industrial pragmatism, to a tough, hardened lyricism, which is uniquely American and yet still carries within it his earliest vision of architecture as 'the will of an epoch translated into space.' "

To trace that evolution, *Mies in America* presents some 220 drawings made by Mies and members of his office; 60 photographs of Mies, his colleagues, and his projects; and models of four key buildings: the Resor House (Jackson Hole, Wyoming, 1937–38), the Convention Hall (Chicago, 1953–54), the Seagram Building (New York, 1954–58), and the New National Gallery (Berlin, 1962–68). An intellectual and artistic context is provided through presentations of books from Mies's extensive library as well as works of art by Vasily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and Kurt Schwitters, which formed part of Mies's noteworthy personal collection.

Artist Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle has produced a new video work, *Alltagszeit* (In Ordinary Time), a sixteen-minute projection of footage shot within a period that began at dawn and ended at dusk inside Mies's last architectural project, the New National Gallery building in Berlin. Together with three other video works directed by Manglano-Ovalle (with cinematography by Allan Siegel), and still photography by Guido Guidi and Richard Pare, specially commissioned for *Mies in America*, the accompanying art works capture through time-based imagery the sense of movement within stillness of Mies's greatest projects. *Atmospheres*, a computer animation of Mies's project for the IIT Library and Administration Building by architect Ammar Eloueini, envisions the way the building would have looked in the changing light over the course of a day.

Mies in America distinguishes four phases of the architect's career in North America. The first began with his introduction to the United States through his work on the Resor House, then continued with the commission that he thought posed the most difficult problem he would encounter as an architect: the design of a campus for the Armour Institute of Technology (now the Illinois Institute of Technology) in the slums of Chicago's Near South Side. In the course of designing the campus, Mies created both a new form of openness and movement within the urban fabric and a new vocabulary and grammar of architecture, based on off-the-shelf materials from the Midwest's steel mills.

A second phase represents an extraordinary leap in Mies's art, exemplified by the Farnsworth House in Plano, Illinois (1945–51), and the high-rise apartment towers at 860–880 Lake Shore Drive in Chicago (1948–51). In these projects, which raised to the level of poetry the architectural language he had been developing, Mies achieved for the first time the spatial freedom of his clear-span buildings; brought to realization the glass-enclosed high-rise structure that he had first conceived in Berlin (1921–22); explored the possibilities of inserting a complex of glass towers into the city fabric; and, above all, elevated structure to art, in the hope that architecture and technology would grow together so that one would be the expression of the other.

The third phase spans the 1950s, when his practice was in transition. Although Mies rarely sought clients, work increasingly flowed into his office during these years; more and more recent IIT graduates began working under his direction; and model-making began to supplant drawing as his principal medium for investigation and presentation. The greatest work of this phase, the Seagram Building in New York, brought the art of Mies's high-rise buildings to a pinnacle of refinement; while in the vast, steel two-way span structure of the unbuilt Chicago Convention Hall – and in the iconic Crown Hall at IIT (1950–56), its muscular girders standing out against the sky – he further advanced the concept of the clear-span, space-enclosing structure.

In the fourth phase, the 1960s, Mies devoted his attention to a few projects that allowed him a further exploration of the spatial issues arising in his work on urban schemes. These projects were the Federal Center in Chicago (1959–64), the Toronto Dominion Centre (1963–69), and Montréal's Westmount Square (1965–68). In the New National Gallery in Berlin, he also found the ultimate resolution of his long aspiration toward a pure marriage of space and structure. Within the mysteries of its void, formed by a hovering black steel roof held by eight slightly tapering steel columns poised on an expansive granite podium, the New National Gallery sublimely realized Mies's notion of "building art as spatial expression spiritually connected to its time."

"By looking closely at the buildings to which he devoted the greatest attention, we may understand that although Mies's work was always grounded in reason, ultimately he was an artist," Phyllis Lambert concludes. "Working within a metaphysical worldview, he practiced the difficult art of the simple. As he remarked toward the end of his life, 'Spinoza has taught us that great things are never simple. They are as difficult as they are rare.' "

Public Programs

A series of lectures, *Mies Revealed*, will look at the idea of space in Mies's work. A public forum on how contemporary architects and artists have chosen to intervene with Mies's buildings will also be presented on 17 November 2001. The film series *Modern Life*, focusing on how postwar architecture reflected the desire to be modern, completes the program. Walking tours that explore modern architecture and the work of Mies in Montréal will be offered, as well as guided tours of the exhibition. Presented in collaboration with CBC's Radio Two and Radio-Canada's Chaîne Culturelle, a series of concerts, *Music in America, 1938–1969*, will feature new music in the United States during the period when Mies was developing a new architecture for the North American city.

Catalogue

In conjunction with *Mies in America*, the CCA and the Whitney Museum, with Harry N. Abrams, Inc., have published an extensive scholarly catalogue of the same title. Featuring 447 illustrations in black and white and 139 in color, the catalogue includes a set of essays by Phyllis Lambert, unfolding for the first time the sequence of design strategies that can be reconstructed from the complex web of Mies's drawings.

Other distinguished contributors include:

- ◆ Werner Oechslin on Mies's resistance to formalism and determinism;
- ◆ Vivian Barnett on Mies as an art collector;
- ◆ Cammie McAtee on Mies's first visit to the United States (1937–38) and the reception of his work in America;
- ◆ Detlef Mertins on the concept of the organic in Mies's architecture and the art of city building;
- ◆ Sarah Whiting on Mies's IIT campus as a force in the development of Chicago's Near South Side and a model for large-scale urban renewal projects.
- ◆ K. Michael Hays on how Mies's work can be interpreted as suggesting specific strategies for addressing today's society.

Architects Peter Eisenman and Rem Koolhaas contribute visual essays on the relationship of their work to that of Mies; and newly commissioned color photographs by Guido Guidi and Richard Pare reveal the many aspects of Mies's built work.

By focusing intensively on the evolution of Mies's design thinking and method, the catalogue breaks new ground by devoting to a major modern figure the rigorous, concrete, and systematic analysis that has been brought to the discussion of earlier masters.

The CCA has also published a 49-page color illustrated booklet in French and English, presenting a portfolio of the photography of Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, Guido Guidi, and Richard Pare, together with texts by Mies van der Rohe and Phyllis Lambert. The booklet is for sale at the CCA Bookstore.

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