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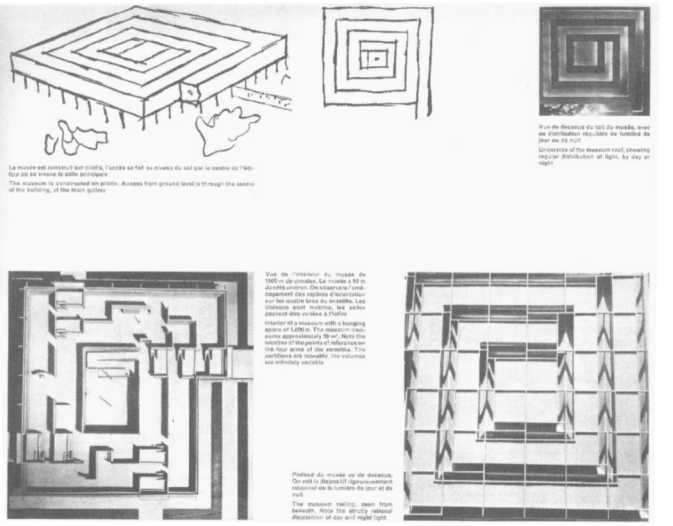
# The Endless Museum: Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe

What if the most radical modernist proposals for the museum were simultaneously projects for a new kind of house? What if the most public buildings of the last century were first incubated in the most private commissions? What if domesticity is the real source of modernity in museums? Take Villa Savoye of 1929–31, perhaps the best known building of Le Corbusier if not of all modern architecture, and his Tokyo National Museum of Western Art of 1957–59. What do these two buildings have in common? One is a relatively early work, the other is one of his very last. One is small and lightweight, the other is large and heavy. One is a house, the other is a museum. But the basic concept is the same. They are both square boxes suspended off the ground. You enter both by passing underneath through a field of columns and rising up to the core of the building on a ramp. The big difference is the obvious one. In the house you keep moving up the ramp until your view explodes out in all directions through the horizontal windows. In the museum, the ramp turns into a spiral folded in on itself. There are no windows. You cannot see the outside. There is no simple relationship between inside and outside. Indeed, the central space from which all of the galleries spiral has become a kind of exterior space, with sunlight pouring in from above.

The Tokyo museum came at the end of a long line of museum projects that Le Corbusier had been working on since 1929 – variations on one obsessive theme, starting with his controversial project for the Mundaneum in 1929, to be built in Geneva, Switzerland. That project was the result of Le Corbusier's involvement with Paul Otlet, a Belgian industrialist, who wanted to establish an international organization of intellectuals with a center that he called the Mundaneum, which included an airport, a university, a stadium, botanical and mineral gardens, exhibition spaces, a world library, and a world museum: "Our desire is that in one place on the globe the total image and significance of the world should be visible and understood; that this place



LE CORBUSIER, MUSEUM OF UNLIMITED GROWTH, 1939. FROM *LE CORBUSIER: ŒUVRE COMPLÈTE*, VOL. 4, 1938–46, 17. IMAGE © 2009 ARS, NEW YORK / ADAGP, PARIS / FLC.

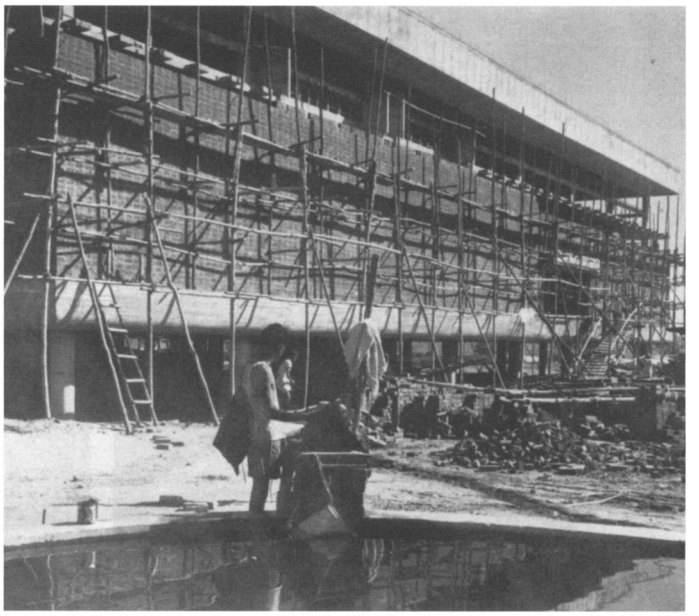
should become a holy place."[1] The central element of the Mundaneum was the museum: a pyramid made out of a square spiral, a continuous gallery that would show the various stages of civilization in continuous development. Visitors would take an elevator to the top of the pyramid (the beginning of civilization) and walk down the spiral ramp until reaching the ground: the present day.

For the next version of the museum Le Corbusier flattens the spiral when he proposes a Museum of Contemporary Art in Paris in 1931. The museum is made out of a single continuous wall folded into a square spiral. This system provided a linear exhibition space that could be extended as the collection grew. Le Corbusier's radical idea was for the donor of a painting to also donate a length of wall. When describing the project he insisted:

*The museum has no facade; the visitor will never see a facade; he will only see the interior of the museum. One enters the heart of the museum by means of an underground passage and the wall opening for the entrance door would, once the museum has reached its full magnificent size, comprise the 9000th meter of the total developed length of the museum.*[2]

The space of the traditional museum has been transformed into a length, a wall continuously folding upon itself. Only a few cuts are made in the wall to allow the visitor to break the fixed trajectory and move through the building in different ways. The museum is entered through an underground passage. And the collection is to be experienced in a singular guided promenade along a seven-meter-wide space – a spiral that keeps expanding as more wall is added. Le Corbusier recommended that "a mason and a labourer . . . be

1. Promotional booklet, quoted in Tim Benton, "The Era of the Great Projects," in *Le Corbusier: Architect of the Century*, eds. Michael Raeburn and Victoria Wilson, exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery (London, 1987), 165.
2. "Le musée n'a pas de façade; le visiteur ne verra jamais de façade; il ne verra que l'interieur du musée. Car il entra au cœur du musée par un souterrain dont la porte d'entrée est ouvert dans un mur qui, si le musée arrivait a une étape de croissance magnifique, offrirait à ce moment le neuf millième mètre de cimaise." Le Corbusier to M. Zervos, 8 December 1930, in *Cahiers d'art*, reprinted in Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Œuvre Complète*, vol. 2, 1929–34 (Zurich: Éditions d'Architecture, 1964), 73. English translation in *Le Corbusier 1910–65*, eds. W. Boesiger and H. Girsberger (Zurich: Éditions d'Architecture, 1967), 236.



Le Corbusier, Museum in Ahmedabad, India, 1962–56. Photo courtesy the author.

permanently employed in building this museum in an uninterrupted and perennial operation."[3] The endless museum would be endlessly under construction.

In 1939, Le Corbusier comes up with a different version of the museum in a project for Philippeville (known today as Skikda) in Algeria called Museum for Unlimited Growth. He now breaks into the spiral with a swastika pattern, further increasing the possible trajectories. Even the partitions can now move.[4] The outer layer is only "the temporary facades destined to become interior partitions."[5] The spiraling future pattern of growth is marked on the ground around the box and the model shows the box covering 1,000 square meters and expanded to 3,000 square meters. The museum is an ever-expanding interior without an exterior. It is a machine for swallowing the outside.

In 1945, this omnivorous museum becomes part of the civic center of Le Corbusier's Saint-Dié town plan. In fact, Le Corbusier seems to insert an endless museum project wherever he goes. The fixed layout of buildings and open spaces in his city plans always includes the forever-unfixed museum.

The first version of the museum to be actually built was designed for Ahmedabad in India between 1952 and 1956. The museum aimed, according to the director, "to bring about the active participation of people . . . instead of encouraging mere irresponsible contemplation of rare luxury objects torn from their contexts. . . . The objects will appear not in unique isolation but as a reality – against . . . the pattern of culture that produced the artifacts."[6] The program included

3. Le Corbusier, *My Work*, trans. James Palmes (London: The Architectural Press, 1960), 101.
4. Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Œuvre Complète*, vol. 4, 1938–46, 16–21.
5. Ibid., 18.
6. Brochure, quoted in Raeburn and Wilson, eds., *Le Corbusier: Architect of the Century*, 301.

a library, open-air theater, traveling exhibitions, audience participation, music, and cinema all housed in one collection of buildings. According to the director, "The whole world was to be there."

The intersection of a spiral and a swastika then travels to Tokyo in the National Museum of Western Art. Le Corbusier adds a pavilion for temporary exhibitions and a building dedicated to theatrical experiments, which he long ago named "Box of Miracles." The museum was constructed by the Japanese architects Maekawa and Sakakura, who had worked for Le Corbusier in Paris between 1928 and 1931 (that is, during the crucial years when the idea of the Museum of Unlimited Growth was first formulated) and returned to his office after the war.

In 1963, the "endless" project goes back to Europe when Le Corbusier proposes a museum near Frankfurt: the International Art Center at Erlenbach. The plan provides, once again, for a Museum of Unlimited Growth, a "Box of Miracles," and a "Spontaneous Theater." Like Villa Savoye, it is located in the open countryside, at what Le Corbusier describes as the strategic "crossing of the axis Stockholm-Rome and Paris-Vienna-Belgrade-Bucarest."[7] He presents it in a book titled *Le Musée du XXe siècle*,[8] showing how this project to represent the whole world is to be positioned on a key node in a transnational network.

From 1964 to 1968, the project goes back to India when Le Corbusier brings another version of the museum to Chandigarh. And finally, in 1965, the project returns to Paris when Le Corbusier is commissioned to do a "Museum of the 20th Century" by André Malraux, then minister of culture in France, to be sited in Nanterre. Le Corbusier kept insisting that it should be in the center of Paris, near the Grand Palais. He dreamed of a museum of the 20th century set on 10-meter (or higher) *pilotis* above the streets and squares of Paris. He even thought of bridging the river Seine across the Quai d'Orsay. Le Corbusier was at work on the Nanterre version of the museum project when he died in August 1965. His associate André Wogenscky worked a little more on the museum scheme, but the project was never realized.

Le Corbusier's obsession with the idea of the endless museum never ended. The idea mutated and traveled all over the world, preoccupying him for over 30 years. But the idea of the museum actually goes back to his domestic projects of the 1920s.

The museum and the house have the same logic. Indeed, the museum obsession started with a house, Maison La

7. Le Corbusier and Jeanneret, *Œuvre Complète*, vol. 7, 1957–65, 163.
8. Ibid., 164–77.

André Malraux surrounded by images for the Imaginary Museum, circa 1950. Photo courtesy the author.

Roche-Jeanneret, in Paris, 1923 – today the headquarters of the Fondation Le Corbusier, a kind of museum displaying Le Corbusier's paintings, furniture, drawings, photographs, and all the documentation of his projects, as well as his correspondence, telephone bills, electricity bills, laundry bills, bank statements, postcards, suitcases and trunks, travel snapshots, family pictures, court proceedings (he was often involved in lawsuits), pottery, rugs, seashells, pipes, books, magazines, newspaper clippings, mail-order catalogues, drafts for lectures, doodles, scribbles, notebooks, sketchbooks, diaries . . . in short, a museum of everything.

The project began when the client, Raoul La Roche, a young Swiss banker and director of the Crédit Commercial de France who was one of the major sponsors of *L'Esprit Nouveau*, commissioned Amédée Ozenfant and Le Corbusier to purchase a collection of Cubist paintings for him. At Le Corbusier's prodding, La Roche ended up also buying Purist paintings by Ozenfant and Le Corbusier.[9] Once the collection was assembled, Le Corbusier talked La Roche into doing a house for the paintings: "La Roche, when you have a fine collection like yours, you should also have a house built worthy of it."[10] Modern domestic architecture was, therefore, developed as a frame for Cubist and Purist paintings.

La Roche used to open the house to the public on Tuesdays and Fridays and visitors would write their names in a book by the door. Soon the issue of whether visitors were signing in for the paintings or for the house became blurred, at least for Le Corbusier, who later recommends to

9. Le Corbusier and Ozenfant acted as La Roche's bidders for the confiscated Kahnweiler paintings of Picasso, Braque, Léger, and Gris at the four art auctions held in June and November 1921, July 1922, and May 1923. Russell Walden, "New Light on Le Corbusier's Early Years in Paris: The La Roche-Jeanneret Houses," in *The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier*, ed. Russell Walden (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), 135.
10. La Roche to Le Corbusier, 24 May 1926 (Fondation Le Corbusier).

Le Corbusier, La Roche House, 1923. Photo © 2009 ARS, New York / ADAGP, Paris / FLC.

Madame Savoye to leave a "golden book" by the entrance to her house too (even if she did not have an art collection displayed there): "You will see how many fine autographs you will collect. This is what La Roche does in Auteuil, and his Golden Book has become a veritable international directory."[11]

Conflict arose between Le Corbusier and both La Roche and Ozenfant on this issue: Le Corbusier wanted some of the walls to be kept free of paintings. He wrote to Ozenfant: "The La Roche house should not take on the look of a house of a (postage-stamp) collector. I insist absolutely that certain parts of the architecture should be entirely free of paintings, so as to create a double effect of pure architecture on the one hand and pure painting on the other."[12] La Roche responded to Le Corbusier's desire to exhibit the house itself: "I commissioned from you a 'frame for my collection.' You provided me with a 'poem of walls.' Which of us two is most to blame?"[13]

The paintings in the La Roche house were hung in a specific sequence along the promenade of the house (and it is important to remember that it is precisely here, in this house, that Le Corbusier invented the architectural promenade). The architecture was meant to guide the visitor past the paintings in a way that – conveniently for Le Corbusier – demonstrated the triumph of Purism over Cubism.

This program is echoed in Tokyo, where the building is meant to guide the visitor in a "scientific" itinerary through the evolution of Western art, starting with Impressionism. The story of the building goes back, according to Le Corbusier, to a Japanese collector, Kojiro Matsukata, who had accumulated an imposing collection of Impressionist paintings and sculptures. The French government confiscated it as a war prize and only agreed to return it on condition that it would be placed in a new building in Tokyo.[14]

11. Le Corbusier to Madame Savoye, 28 June 1931 (Fondation Le Corbusier).
12. Le Corbusier to Ozenfant, 16 April 1925 (Fondation Le Corbusier; dossier La Roche). Quoted in Tim Benton, *The Villas of Le Corbusier: 1920–1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 67.
13. "Do you recall the origin of my undertaking? 'La Roche, when you have a fine collection like yours, you should also have a house built worthy of it.' And my response: 'Fine Jeanneret, make this house for me.' Now, what happened? The house, once built, was so beautiful that on seeing it I cried: 'It's almost a pity to put paintings into it!' Nevertheless I did so. How could I have done otherwise? Do I not have certain obligations with regard to my painters, of whom you yourself are one? I commissioned from you a 'frame for my collection.' You provided me with a 'poem of walls.' Which of us two is most to blame?" La Roche to Le Corbusier, 24 May 1926 (Fondation Le Corbusier). Quoted in *The Villas of Le Corbusier*, 70.
14. Le Corbusier and Jeanneret, *Œuvre Complète*, vol. 6, 1952–57, 168.

The scenario is complicated. On the instructions of a Western government, a Western architect is commissioned to present Western art for an Eastern audience, in the East, from a collection that has been put together by an Eastern man while living in the West. Into this folding backward and forward between East and West, Le Corbusier brings one of his most traveled ideas, an idea that goes all the way back to the promenading ramp of the La Roche house. And even then, there is yet another fold. Le Corbusier claims to have gotten the idea of the promenade from non-Western architecture. He writes:

*Arab architecture gives us a precious lesson. It is appreciated by walking, on foot; it is by walking, by moving, that one sees the order of the architecture developing. It is a principle contrary to that of baroque architecture, which is conceived on paper, around a fixed theoretical point. I prefer the lesson of Arab architecture. . . . In this house [Villa Savoye] it is a question of a real architectural promenade, offering constantly changing views, unexpected, sometimes astonishing.*[15]

In each of the versions of the spiral museum, Le Corbusier emphasizes the surprising lateral views within the labyrinthine spaces. The thinking of the museums emerged literally out of the house. The famous ramps that define his domestic architecture are in the museum simply exaggerated and celebrated into a kind of hyperramp. The carefully choreographed views of nature through the windows in the houses are simply replaced with the view through the frame of each painting. The windowless concrete surface of the Tokyo museum actually shares the same logic as the perforated surfaces of Villa Savoye. Even the stairs that finally break through the surface of the museum and take the visitor back down to the ground can be found in the first version of Villa Savoye.

In fact, all of Le Corbusier's design philosophy, including the urban schemes, comes out of his thinking about "the house." To understand the endless museum, we have to understand Le Corbusier's houses and the way in which they transformed the status of the wall, the line between inside and outside.

Mies van der Rohe's houses are likewise assembled through an act of collection and exhibition. And once again the design of the house acts as the basis of a radical proposal for a new kind of museum.

It is important to remember that Mies himself was an art collector who acquired, over the course of his life, more than 40 works of art (22 by Klee; 14 by Schwitters; some

15. "L'architecture arabe nous donne un enseignement précieux. Elle s'apprécie *à la marche*, avec le pied; c'est en marchant, en se déplaçant que l'on voit se développer les ordonnances de l'architecture. C'est un principe contraire à l'architecture baroque qui est conçue sur le papier, autour d'un point fixe théorique. Je préfère l'enseignement de l'architecture arabe. Dans cette maison-ci, il s'agit d'une véritable promenade architecturale, offrant des aspects constamment variés, inattendus, parfois étonnants." Le Corbusier and Jeanneret, *Œuvre Complète*, vol. 2, 1929–34, 24.

Beckmann, Kandinsky, and Picasso).[16] Most of the works in his collection were small and he used them in his domestic settings. Not having any savings, Mies used to say that his collection was his life insurance.

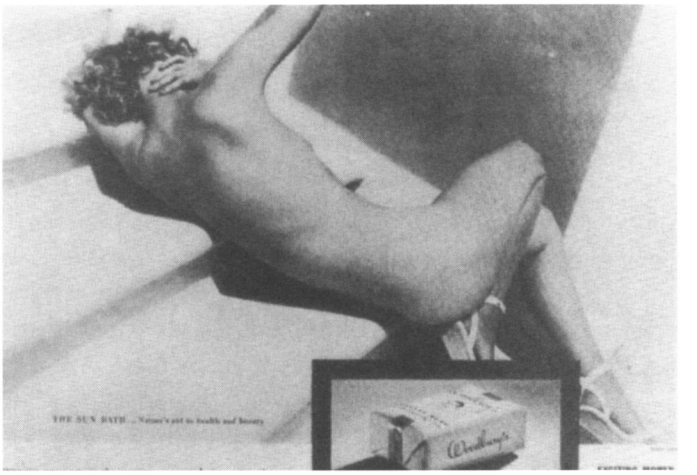
Even more significant, many of Mies's clients were prominent art collectors: Hugo Perls in Berlin, for whom Mies designed a house in 1910; Helene Müller, who commissioned the unrealized project for the Kröller-Müller house in the Netherlands in 1912 (50 van Gogh paintings alone had to be accommodated in the plans of the project); Hermann Lange, a collector of German Expressionist art, who commissioned Mies to do a house for him in Krefeld, etc. In fact, most clients of Mies – whether bankers, lawyers, or industrialists – were also amateur art collectors, and Mies always made proposals for how to hang their art, considering the placement of works of art part of the design of the house.

It was also an art collector, Helen Resor, who brought Mies to the United States. She was a trustee of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) who was introduced to the work of Mies by Alfred H. Barr. In the controversy over who should design the new MoMA, Barr was in favor of Mies while Nelson Rockefeller preferred Philip Goodwin and Edward Durrell Stone. Resor was on Barr's side despite the fact that she was a client of Goodwin, who had already built a small guest cabin at the Resors' ranch in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. In support of Barr, she fired Goodwin and commissioned Mies to do a house at the ranch.[17]

Resor was a force. She was the director of the world's largest international advertising agency (J. Walter Thompson Company) and a legendary copywriter, famous for coining the phrase "a skin you love to touch" for the advertising campaign of Woodbury Soap. She was also inventive with images that transformed the look of advertising. She hired Edward Steichen, later director of MoMA's photography department, with an exclusive contract in 1924. She put together innovative advertising campaigns introducing new products to American consumers (for example, Cutex nail polish and Lever Brothers' Lux soap). If MoMA was trying to repackage modern architecture for an American audience, Helen Resor had all the expertise to do it. Mies was simply the next product to be imported, displayed, and promoted.

Resor was a brilliant fundraiser at MoMA and made a financial agreement with Barr so she could buy art in Europe for MoMA without restrictions. She would keep whatever MoMA didn't take with the understanding that the museum could buy it later at the original price. Even the

16. For a detailed account of Mies's collection see Vivian Endicott Barnett, "The Architect as Collector," in *Mies in America*, ed. Phyllis Lambert (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 90–131.
17. See Cammie McAtee, "Alien #5044325: Mies' First Trip to America," in *Mies in America*, 132–91.

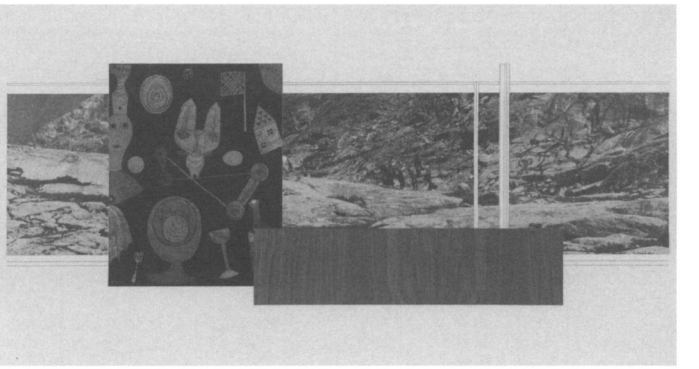


Advertisement for Woodbury Soap, conceived by Helen Resor, circa 1930. Photo: Edward Steichen. Image courtesy the author.

importing of Mies seems to follow that pattern. In the end, MoMA went for Goodwin-Durrell Stone and Resor kept Mies. She even personally brought Mies over from Europe, traveling back to the United States with him by ocean liner, arriving in New York in August 1937. Resor wanted to fly to her ranch in Wyoming (United Airlines being one of her advertising clients) but Mies refused, preferring to take the train via Chicago.[18]

18. Ibid.

Back in New York, Mies worked for six months on the design of the house, producing over 800 drawings. The basic idea was to create a bridge with the sense of an open box floating in the air. Goodwin had already decided the location over a small river and installed a set of concrete piers to support the house. Mies's project used the same piers and thinned all the elements down to create a large glass room suspended in the air. Much of the endless redrawing of the project attempts to position floating walls in the space, culminating in a famous collage where the view through the expansive glass wall is transformed into a new kind of space. The deep view toward the distant mountains that the site makes available has been replaced with a still from a Western movie facing a steep hillside. It reads like a depthless flat screen with a set of floating panels in the foreground. One of the panels, an enlarged reproduction of Klee's *Colorful Meal* (a painting in the Resors' collection, purchased during Mies's stay in New York and probably with his advice) becomes a freestanding element, juxtaposed with a wood veneer panel in the foreground that has the same proportions as the landscape view. The view offered by the house is no longer a direct exposure to the outside. Rather, the outside is reframed, brought inside, and transformed into a large painting, or more precisely, a cinematic frame. The project



Mies van der Rohe, Resor House, project. Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Perspective of living room through south glass wall. 1937–41, unbuilt. Graphite and collage of wood veneer and cut-and-pasted reproduction and photograph. © 2009 ARS, New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn / Photo courtesy Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, New York.

was canceled in 1938, but Mies kept working on it, presenting new models and drawings of the house in his 1947 exhibition at MoMA.

The house had launched a key concept for Mies. Its transformation of the status of both art and architecture led directly to his project for a Museum for a Small City in 1942, a project that stands with Le Corbusier's Museum of Unlimited Growth as one of the two most significant proposals for museums of the Modern Movement.

The Museum for a Small City was the result of a commission from the journal *Architectural Forum* to design a church for a special issue of the magazine dedicated to "New Buildings for 194X" to be published in 1943. Mies, who had been tutoring George Danforth, a student doing a museum thesis, suggested to *Architectural Forum* that instead of a church he would design a museum. Danforth had worked on the Resor collages and was testing the same strategy on a larger scale.[19] The collages of the museum are very similar to those of the Resor house. Paintings and sculptures are used in the museum as if they were walls and columns defining a space with the feeling of the outdoors. For Mies, the main point was not to contain the art with the architecture but to use the art to create architecture. In his text for *Architectural Forum* Mies wrote:

*The first problem is to establish the museum as a center for the enjoyment, not the internment of art. In this project the barrier between the art work and the living community is erased by a garden approach for the display of sculpture.*[20] *Interior sculpture enjoys an equal spatial freedom, because the open plan permits them to be seen against the surrounding hills. The architectural space thus achieved becomes a defining rather than confining space. A work such as Picasso's* Guernica *has been difficult to place in the usual museum gallery. Here it can be shown to greatest advantage, and becomes an element in space against a changing background.*[21]

Art for Mies was a spatial element. In the Museum for a

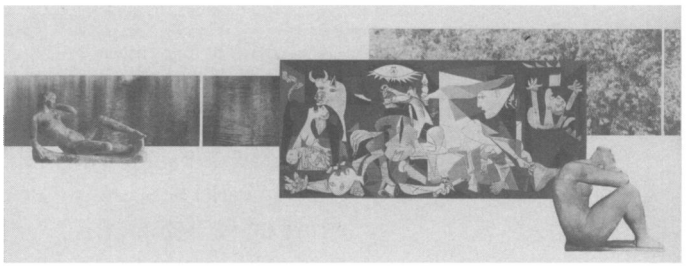
19. *For a year or so he had been experimenting with collages of large artworks defining a public gallery. One day, he says, he walked into the office and Mies was smiling with a telegram in his hand. He said: 'Ja, shall we do it?' And that stopped my work on the thesis.* Kevin Harrington, interview with George Danforth, quoted in Phyllis Lambert, "Space and Structure," in *Mies in America*, 426.
20. Mies van der Rohe, "Museum for a Small City," *Architectural Forum* 78, 5 (1943): 84–85. Reprinted in Fritz Neumeyer, *The Artless World: Mies van der Rohe and the Building Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 322.
21. Ibid.

Small City, Picasso's *Guernica* becomes a freestanding wall. As in the Resor house collage and similar images for the earlier Court House projects, all the traditional elements of architecture – floor, walls, ceilings, and columns – are barely delineated or simply invisible. It is the unrestrained art that takes over. The works on exhibit become the real architecture that is occupied.

This strategy continues in the project for the unbuilt Bacardi headquarters in Santiago, Cuba (1957–60) and culminates in the Neue Nationalgalerie (New National Gallery), Berlin (1962–68), where all of the elements of the building are thinned down or buried in the plinth so that the structure offers the minimum definition and the works of art displayed will define a different architecture for each exhibition. Once again, depthless collages of suspended panels communicate the essence of the building, even though the building itself does not appear in the collages. In exhibition photographs, plain white panels suspended from the ceiling and designed to support paintings act as minimalist paintings in their own right. Architecture as exhibition.

When Mies presented his work at MoMA in 1947, exhibition became architecture. Floor to ceiling photomurals, models, and sculptural furniture pieces again float in a square room, redefining the space. Charles Eames, sent by the magazine *Arts & Architecture* to photograph the exhibition, was at first disappointed because he didn't see anything new in the projects that were exhibited, but he was nevertheless impressed by Mies's design of the exhibition itself. The exhibition was significant, according to Eames, not because of the individual exhibits, but because of the way Mies had organized them.[22] The organizational system communicated the idea of Mies's architecture better than any single object (model, drawing, photograph, etc.) on display. When Eames published his photographs of the Mies exhibition in *Arts & Architecture,* he wrote: "The significant thing seems to be the way in which he [Mies] has taken documents of his architecture and furniture and used them as elements in creating a space that says, 'this is what it's all about.'"[23] Eames was very impressed by the zooming and overlapping of scales: a huge photomural of a small pencil sketch alongside a chair towering over a model next to a twice-life-size photograph, and so on. He also noted the interaction between the perspective of the room and that of the life-size photographs. The visitor experiences Mies's architecture, rather than a representation of it, by walking through the display and watching others move. It is a sensual encounter:

22. Beatriz Colomina, "Reflections on the Eames House," in *The Work of Charles and Ray Eames: A Legacy of Invention*, ed. Donald Albrecht (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 146.
23. Charles Eames, "Mies van der Rohe," photographs by Charles Eames taken at the exhibition, *Arts & Architecture* (December 1947): 27.



Mies van der Rohe, Museum for a Small City Project, 1941–43. Interior perspective. Cut-out photographs and photo reproductions on illustration board, 30 1/2" x 40 1/2". © 2009 ARS, New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo courtesy Digital Image © ARS / The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, New York.

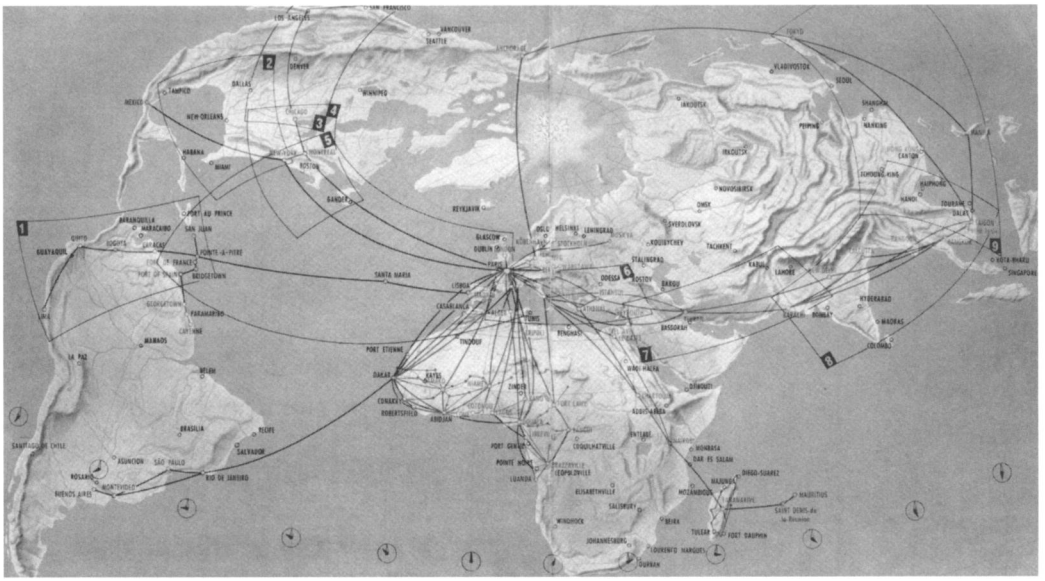
"The exhibition itself provides the smell and feel of what makes it, and Mies van der Rohe, great."[24]

What Eames learned from Mies is less about buildings, more about the arrangement of objects in space. Exhibition design, layout, and architecture are indistinguishable, as Mies had demonstrated in his layout for the magazine *G* and his numerous exhibitions with Lilly Reich, the Silk Café, the Barcelona Pavilion, and so on. Eames picks up on the idea that architecture is exhibition and develops it. The Resor house, like Le Corbusier's La Roche house, launched a new fusion by undermining the traditional divisions between art and architecture, inside and outside, private and public.

Both architects will keep studying the effect of this transgression. The two radical museum concepts that emerge from this relentless testing, the endless museum of Le Corbusier and the glass pavilions of Mies, appear at first to be antithetical: a closed, solid square box with no windows versus an open, glass square box that is only window. But the similarities are actually stronger than the differences. For Le Corbusier, the box is not at all closed. Quite the opposite. It is infinite. For Mies, the infinite is systematically thwarted. In spite of the glass, the eye is never permitted to travel far. That is the very point of the collages. All of the views through the glass are quickly terminated by flat two-dimensional surfaces, a courtyard wall, or a flat landscape image. Even horizontal water appears as a vertical screen in the collage for the Museum for a Small City. The outside always retains the logic of the inside. The landscape in the Resor house appears to be the same distance from the glass as the paintings floating inside. It is domesticated. In a sense, there is no outside in Mies. The interior simply expands to absorb everything. An all-glass pavilion is just as internalized as Le Corbusier's spiral museum. In both cases, domestic space swallows the world.

Soon this relentless fusion of museum and house, exhibition and modern space, would go one step further with the "museification" of modern architecture itself. At the beginning of 1965 André Malraux ordered that the Villa Savoye be

24. Ibid.



Map for all available flights worldwide. From Le Corbusier, *My Work* (London: The Architectural Press, 1960). Image courtesy the author.

preserved as a national monument, at about the same time he commissioned Le Corbusier to design the Museum of the 20th Century. Le Corbusier was at work on the preliminary drawings for the latest version of his radical museum when he died in August of the same year while swimming at Cap Martin. Once again, he was arguing for a square box that could grow endlessly, absorbing and classifying the entire world outside.

"The true museum is the one that contains everything," Le Corbusier wrote alongside an image of a bidet in *L'Esprit Nouveau* in 1924. With this definition, the world and the museum are conflated. Museum architecture, in the literal sense of a bounded space, an enclosure containing objects, becomes redundant. In 1951, Malraux would call for a "museum without walls," an imaginary museum that comes into being with the new means of communication that allow any object to be collected without the need for a physical space. Le Corbusier's project for an endless museum tested the limits of an equally radical concept of a museum that is only wall.

A museum that can be anywhere, collect anything – an architecture independent of the ground and of culture, a nomadic architecture for a globally networked world. The spiral museum travels just as easily as the architect. If in the 1920s Le Corbusier was already fascinated with the global distribution of the subscribers to *L'Esprit Nouveau*, by the 1960s he is obsessed with the mobility of the architect. In his last retrospective book, *My Work,* he publishes a map of global flight paths and says:

*The world now has 24 solar hours at its disposal. Marco Polo took his time. Nowadays we say: "Here are your papers, Sir, your contract and your airline ticket. Leaving at six to-night, you will be in the antipodes to-morrow. You will discuss, you will sign and, if you wish, you can start back the same evening and be home next day."*[25]

Le Corbusier could be said to be the first global architect. In an age in which every architect is a global architect it is hard to appreciate how radical Le Corbusier's mode of operation was. And even harder to appreciate that his extremely global mobility was the basis for a new form of domesticity. By comparison, Mies was an almost provincial figure. It's not just that he didn't like to fly. Even trains upset him.[26] He only crossed the Atlantic when his hopes for practice in Europe had died. If Le Corbusier moved lightly like a bird, considering all issues in all locations at all speeds, Mies lumbered slowly like a large animal, setting up camp in one spot for long periods and concentrating on a very narrow set of questions. Yet both invented an explosive concept of the house redefined by the exhibition of art that would travel all over the world and spread its logic through not only museums but the entire spectrum of building types. In that sense, both domestic projects became endless. The endless museum is the endless house.

25. Le Corbusier, *My Work*, 152.
26. Beatriz Colomina, "Mies Not," in *The Presence of Mies*, ed. Detlef Mertins (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994), 202–03.

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