

The art of building (Baukunst) of Mies van der Rohe



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Abstract

This dissertation attempts to interpret the statements of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) that pertain to his lifelong theory of Baukunst, or the art of building in terms of tectonics. In order to use the concept tectonics as a criterion according to which one can comprehend Mies words and works, this dissertation attempted to define tectonics in a more general sense by collecting existing definitions and categorizing them. The result of this endeavor showed that tectonics does not signify a supportive structure but the art of framing construction, in which linear elements are put together with joints and clad or infilled with lightweight material. It is proposed that Mies, who called the ideal of tectonic architecture the art of building, during his lifelong career, experienced two periods of critical awareness through which he established his own type of tectonic buildings: awareness of the open plan and then that of clear space. After the former occurred in 1926, he focused on the creation of inner spatial openness; after the latter, which this dissertation proposes occurred around 1930, when he met Karlfried Graf Drckheim (1896-1988), who had been absorbed in Lao-tzus philosophy, Mies intended to show that his architectural concern was beyond physical construction by employing the concept of changing nature and by designing his buildings to be neutral frames. Mies finally achieved a tectonically integrated body of a building that contained extroverted and undetermined space, which he referred to as clear space, or generally called Mies universal space, through his lifelong pursuit for the accomplishment of his own art of building, which this dissertation terms Miesian tectonics.

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