

NINA CULLINAN PAPERS

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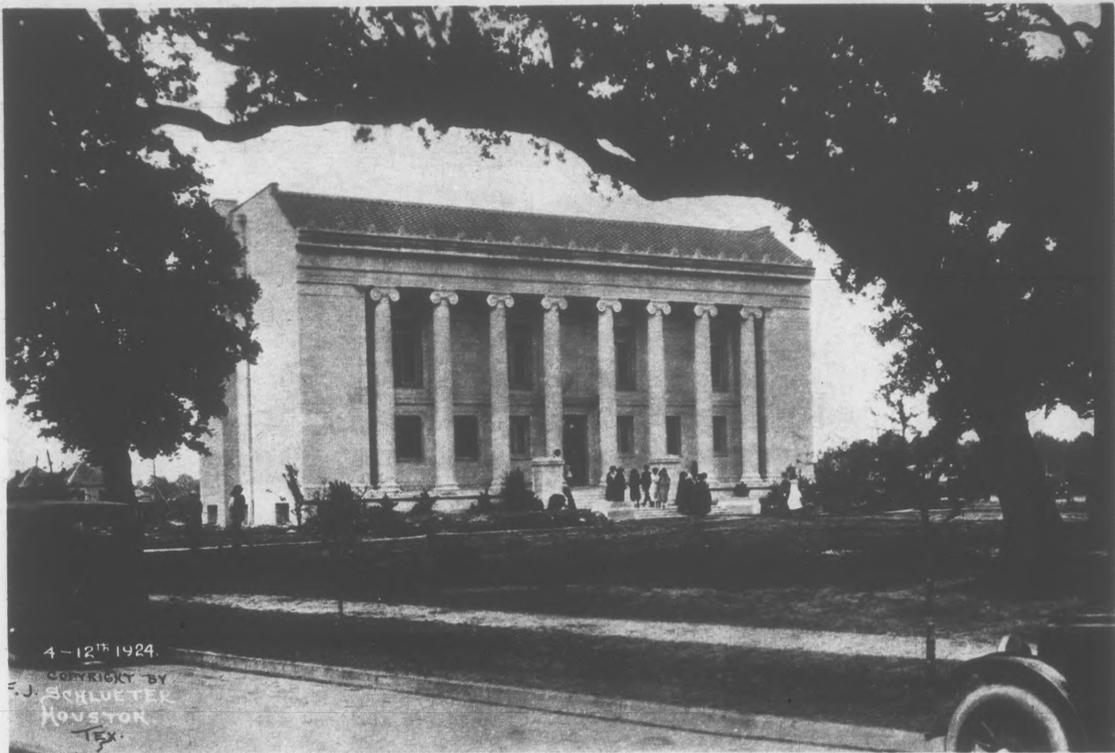
NINA CULLINAN PAPERS

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Wino Sullivan

Shipings



April 12, 1924, was a big day for Houston. It marked the opening of the Museum of Fine Arts, top. Cullinan Hall, above, was a modern addition in 1958. At right, punch is served. The reception, in 1946, opened the Pepsi-Cola "Portrait of America" exhibit. Left to right, Mrs. John McClellan, Mrs. E. Richardson Cherry, Director James Chillman Jr., Mrs. R. W. Knox, Herbert Godwin and Mrs. W. G. Smiley.



□ It was a city where oil formed rich patterns in the ground rather than on canvas. Culture? What's that? So a group of the elite decided it was high time to start painting a new image.

Thus we find, on a blustery March afternoon in 1900, a gathering of chattering women and two men in the elegant home of Mrs. R. S. Lovett. Their intent was to form an art league. A guest speaker, Mrs. Jean Sherwood of Chicago, proceeded to give them a flowery account of the art action in her windy city.

Her keynote was two lines from a poem, "Mother to Child":
 "For the sake of my child, I must hasten to save
 All the children on earth, from the jail and the grave."

These resolute words, according to the minutes of that first meeting, resulted in the group's enthusiasm subsiding "into a deep earnestness." They elected officers. Mrs. Lovett was named president.

This was the start of the Museum of Fine Arts which was called, in those innocent days, the Houston Public School Art League. During the next two years membership rose to 164, with dues amounting to \$76.50 in 1902 and expenses reaching \$57.54. Meetings were held in homes. Teachers and pupils helped raise \$402.10 for purchase of reproductions of famous paintings. These hung on school walls, giving young—and old—viewers a sense of pleasure not unmingled with uneasiness. The world, they sensed, would never be the same again. Art had come to Houston.

It came, in a more significant way, when the Houston Art League evolved from the Houston Public School Art League and was chartered on April 7, 1913 for "the promotion of painting, music and other fine arts, and a perpetuation of a Fine Art Spirit in the City of Houston."

Meetings were first held in the Scanlan Building. Then a building at 1806 Main, known as the Charles House Mansion, was leased for exhibition space.

Annual exhibits of "Selected Paintings by American Artists" were arranged and first pictures were bought as a nucleus of a permanent collection. These were "Autumnal Morn" by Charles Warren Eaton, "Old Violinist" by Charles

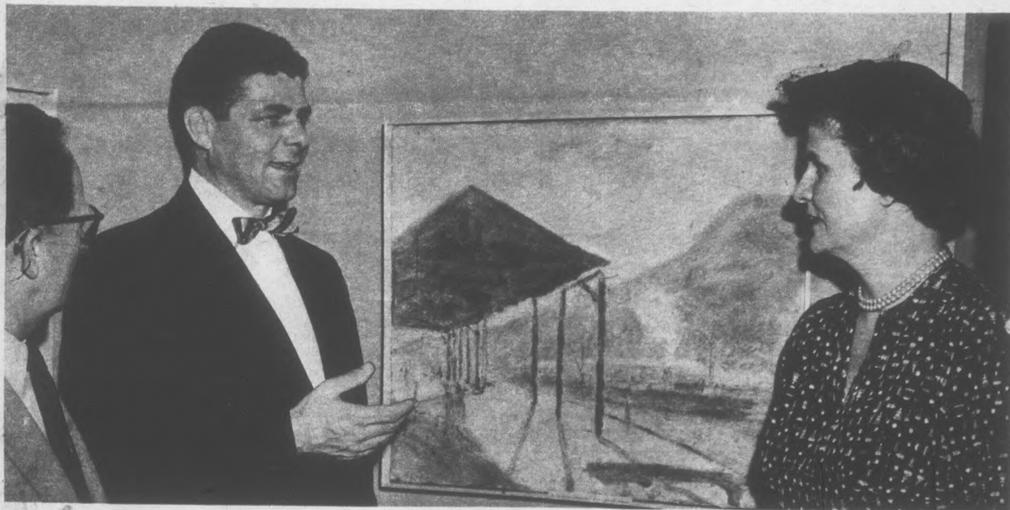
Continued

By **Martin Dreyer**
Houston Chronicle Staff

The day
ART
came to Houston



The young and the old have enjoyed the museum through the years.



At left, Lee H. B. Malone, who became director in 1953, discusses the art scene with Jose Trabanino Jr., consul for El Salvador, and Mrs. William Buchanan, chairman of the museum extension exhibits.

The birth
of the Museum of Fine Arts,
'a Place Which Rests the Eye
and Feeds the Intellect'



Ruth Pershing Uhler is shown at left conducting a class for servicemen in 1942. Above, famed artist Peter Hurd plays and sings hill-billy songs at opening of the Blaffer wing in 1953.

It was the first art museum in Texas



The present director, James Johnson Sweeney, is shown at right telling important facts about the sculptures in a 1964 sculpture exhibit to guides who will conduct youngsters through the museum. The above photos, left to right, show the G'Ann Boyd Dancers, who give performances at the museum for children; the museum's permanent room, with James Sorsby, former custodian, in foreground; and visitors at the opening of a Texas General Exhibit several years ago.



Friday winds up the month-long drive of the Museum of Fine Arts to raise \$200,000, about one-third of the funds needed for its 1968 operations. The rest of the money comes from endowments, special gifts, membership, special activities and school tuitions. The museum does not charge an admission fee. Mrs. Risher Randall heads a team of volunteers working on the drive. Checks may be sent to the museum at 1001 Bissonnet.

Curran, "The Puff of Steam" by Birge Harrison, and "Zuider Zee Fishing Boats" and "Moorish Garden" by Alexander Robinson. The latter four are still in the collection.

So it's time for the big step--"a museum of our own."

J. S. Cullinan met with J. J. Settegast Jr., chairman of the executors of the Hermann Estate, to look at locations near Hermann Park and both liked the "location between Main and Montrose boulevards adjoining the Circle." There was a check from the Cullinans, the land was deeded to the Houston Art League and the site was dedicated April 12, 1917.

A news release subtitle said: "Municipality and Members of Art League Have Linked Hands in Making Houston a Place Which Rests the Eye and Feeds the Intellect."

The mayor sent city teams and wagons to help clear the property.

A marble pedestal marked the spot where a museum building was to be built after the war. Each April 12 a re-dedication service was held. During the 1918 ceremony a young artist, stationed at Ellington with the Air Force, flew over the grounds and waved a salute.

A speaker at this ceremony was Dr. Henry Barnston, rabbi of Temple Beth Israel and a guiding light of the new art scene. Referring to the women of the Art League, he said, "Of them we may apply the words of the Book of Proverbs, 'many daughters have done valiantly, but thou excellest them all.' And it is now for the men of the city 'to give them of the fruits of their hands that their works may praise them in the gates.'"

At an Art League luncheon in the Rice Hotel, Dr. Barnston said, "Art will give us the truth," and illustrated his statement, according to a newspaper story, "by showing how the excessive use of cosmetics had made a lie of some women's faces and how the cultivation of art appreciation and good taste would make truth more attractive than a lie."

The year 1918 was also distinguished by the first large bequest of art works to the Art League. It was from George M. Dickson, of a pioneer Houston family.

In February, 1923, ground was broken by Mrs. Henry Fall, League president, for the first unit of the museum, to cost about \$225,000. Houstonians were invited to contribute to the building fund. This allowed them to sign a parchment scroll in "everlasting ink." The scroll was enclosed in the building's cornerstone.

Came the big day, April 12, 1924, when the Museum of Fine Arts—the first art museum in Texas—swung open its doors.

In a speech at the opening, Homer St. Gaudens, director of the Fine Arts Department at Carnegie Institute and son of American Sculptor Augustus St. Gaudens, laid it on the line:

"I would ask you to define the function of this museum as first and foremost to bring art into the everyday life of the layman, to convince him that it is not something to revert to as a holiday pleasure, for seasonal interest only, but something of as live and continuing importance as the front page of our newspapers."

Thousands of Texas art-lovers jammed the museum for the opening.

Time Magazine, in recounting the scene, said that "a stampede of 10,000 curious Texans wore the varnish off the floors in four hours. The excitement wore off almost as fast. Only 20,000 visited Houston's Museum of Fine Arts all the rest of that year, and part-time Director James Chillman knew that he had a big job ahead of him transforming the museum from a one-day novelty into a permanent addition to Houston's cultural life."

The museum began spreading its wings. Or rather, it took on new wings. Two units were added in 1926. In 1953 the Robert Lee Blaffer Memorial Wing was added, a gift of Mr. and Mrs. John H. Blaffer. Also that year the Frank Prior Sterling Galleries were completed, with funds given by Mrs. Harris Masterson. The Junior Gallery, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Masterson, was opened in 1958. At that time, Mrs. Harry C. Wiess and the late Mr. and Mrs. Jesse H. Jones provided funds for remodeling and air-conditioning the remaining portions of the older building.

Continued

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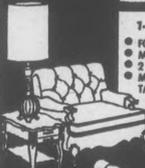
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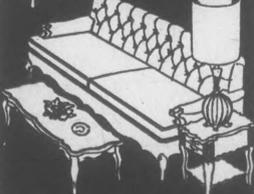
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Museum—continued

A matter of money

The most modern touch was Miss Nina Cullinan's gift of Cullinan Hall in 1958. This steel-and-glass addition, the work of Mies van der Rohe, provided 10,000 feet of unbroken exhibition space, five studios, a research library, offices and storage space.

Chillman, who divided his time between directing the museum and serving as professor of architecture at Rice University, used radio and TV to tout the museum's treasures and to prove that "Art is fun." He was a big force in the growth of the collections and in getting Houstonians to use the museum.

His Yankeeeland origin and his bounding energy prompted The Chronicle to put this head on a story about him: "Chillman's Yankee Zing Makes Museum Sing."

In 1953 he relinquished his part-time duties as director in favor of a full-time administrator, Lee H. B. Malone, who had headed the Gallery of Fine Arts in Columbus, Ohio.

James Johnson Sweeney, a top international art figure, quit the directorship of New York's Guggenheim Museum to take over in Houston in 1961. At that time he was quoted as saying: "The Houston museum should have a collection with roots in the soil but it should not be regional or parochial. It must extend its tentacles to Kytoko as well as to Paris."

Sweeney has brought in many major shows, such as "The Heroic Years" and "Pierre Soulages: A Retrospective Exhibition," which have attracted worldwide attention. His imaginative hangings of shows in the vast Cullinan Hall have won him wide praise. Since he took the helm, the collections have been enriched by many gifts and purchases. These include important accessions in the contemporary field.

But now, due to lack of funds, the museum will have to do without Sweeney's full-time services. His new title is Consultant Director. Curtailment of the museum's \$40,000 directorial budget is blamed in part on the public's failure to respond to the general fund drives of recent years.

In the consultant post Sweeney will mount one major art exhibition this fall and will also be called on for advice in working out details of an anticipated addition to the museum, which would double its present size. A New York company is now making a survey to see whether the community is receptive to the addition.

S. I. Morris Jr., president of the museum's board of trustees, said it would eventually be a \$6 to \$10 million program, "as we envision not only the added building but the endowment to maintain it and the art to put in it."

During the reign of the three directors a woman was considered by many as the power behind the throne. For the past 30 years you couldn't walk into the museum without seeing handsome, stately Ruth Pershing Uhler. She started out as art school instructor, became long-time curator of education. She died last year.



A small boy is sent scurrying by the bogeyman's ominous stares. It was a display of ceremonial sculptures that opened at the museum in 1966.

The museum's permanent collection—paintings, sculpture and artifacts—is valued at more than \$8 million.

There are works to satisfy any taste. You can wander from the Renaissance art in the Straus Collection to the French impressionists in the Blaffer galleries to the Hogg Brothers Collection of Remington art in the Western gallery. Do you go for Spanish and Italian paintings of the High Renaissance? Well, look in at the Kress Collection. If ancient art from Egypt, Greece and Rome is your bag, then try the Finnigan Collection. And you might feel like whooping as you view the Bayou Bend Collection of Indian art of the Southwest.

Also, there's a permanent collection of Early American furniture and decorative arts valued at \$3 million. This is at Bayou Bend, No. 1 Westcott, the former home of Miss Ima Hogg which she gave to the museum in 1966.

Museum activities through the years have included art classes, courses in art crafts and interior decoration, public lectures on art appreciation, museum tours for children, Sunday afternoon concerts, films, exhibits and week-end activities slanted at young art-lovers in the Junior Gallery, and a yearly show of works of Houston artists—a show that was discontinued several years ago.

The museum played to a big house last year—more than 230,000 visitors. They tuned in on the masters, pop and op with varying degrees of enthusiasm.

Many of them grooved on such recent accessions as paintings by Motherwell, Miro, Pollock, Kline and Mondrian, and sculpture by Brancusi, Calder, Chillida, Tinguely and Picasso. But others sneered at the "crazy modern paintings and sculpture."

In a panel discussion last year, Sweeney and other art leaders said that Houston still lacks cultural emergence. ■

Transcription from recording by Mr. James Chillman, Jr., Director Emeritus of The Museum of Fine Arts and Trustee Distinguished Professor of Fine Arts, Rice University, on March 6, 1968. Mr. Chillman was the first Director of The Museum of Fine Arts.

Subject: Recollections of Miss Annette Finnigan

She came from a Houston family, that, like all Houston families, was not necessarily native to Houston. Her father was undoubtedly very interested in real estate, perhaps made his fortune in real estate much as Mr. Rice did. The Finnigan estate, when Miss Finnigan was alive, owned the old Brazos Hotel, which was torn down to make way for the Southern Pacific Station, which in turn was torn down to make way for the Post Office. The Brazos Hotel used to be a regular meeting place on Sunday evenings. Everyone went there for Sunday evening supper. The Finnigans also had lots of other properties in the city. The one property that I remember was the corner of Rusk and Main now occupied by Leopold, Price and Rolle clothing store. It used to be the site of the old University Club years back; it has all been remodeled.

When I first met Miss Finnigan in connection with the Museum, I believe I was introduced to her by the late librarian of the Houston Public Library, Miss Julia Ideson. At any rate, Miss Finnigan had many friends who were members of The Houston Art League, that sponsored the Museum, and later were members of the Museum itself. Miss Finnigan, as I understand it, was a young woman of some athletic prowess; used to play tennis a lot; took part in many athletic activities which were not quite so common with young women at the turn of the century.

Sometime in middle life, Miss Finnigan was taken with, I believe, a form of polio. At any rate, she became reasonably crippled. She could get around; walk with assistance; carry a cane. She generally kept a companion near her but had lost all the physical coordination which had made her keenly athletic in her younger days. She was always distinctly interested in forms of art of all kinds and, as a result of perhaps a native interest and perhaps also as a result of her illness, she started to do quite a bit of traveling. She had the funds, was able to get around and, don't mistake me, she was not completely crippled, but she needed a cane. She

walked with a decided limp; her right arm was more or less paralyzed. Whether this was the result of a stroke or whether it was the result of polio, I can't say. I don't know because I knew her only in the latter portion of her life. Each summer she would go somewhere with her companion. The first thing I was conscious of was that she was going to Egypt, and she said that she would bring back some things from Egypt for the Museum which I welcomed. From that time on, we were good friends, and she was the ideal Museum collector in many ways--but in modest ways¹--because she would always ask me what I would want or whether I would want a certain thing, rather than imposing her ideas on the Museum--a situation which might have been embarrassing to both parties. In this way, she got the collection of Greek vases when she was in Athens and also the Greek jewelry and Greek coins that we have, some of which are on continuous exhibit. She had the assistance, incidentally, in picking out the selection of vases of the famous restorer and excavator of King Minos' Palace at Knossos in Crete, Sir Arthur Evans, who gave her some very valuable advice.

There is a number of little stories we could mention about Miss Finnigan, but she would come back to Houston and spend the winters here, and she gradually built up our collection of textiles. The last big collection she gave us was the collection of Laces² which is not any longer on exhibit.

Upon her death, Miss Finnigan left certain of her things to the Museum. We find among them some of the Persian silverwork and Persian ceramics. The little Kufic beaker, which is Persian and a part of our collections, she bought one time at my request. It was not left to us after she died; it came to us first. As an example of what I mean, when she went to Greece, she asked me what I might want, and I called her attention to the fact that we needed some originals of Greek pottery--Greek vase painting, but I also asked her, if she could find some little fragment of Greek marble, to try to bring that back too. As a result, we have the upper portion of the fourth-century grave stele from Greece, which is one of the treasured

possessions of the Museum.

I am not sure about the following facts, but I do not believe that there are any of Miss Finnigan's relatives still living in Houston. She did have a nephew³ who lived in New York and, I believe, one of the attorneys for the Finnigan estate, a Mr. Fain, came to Houston quite regularly to see Miss Finnigan. The extent of her family here in Houston or outside Houston, I could not say, nor do I know who is now handling the residue of her estate or in whose hands it might be.

Note: Miss Finnigan was most civic-minded; interested in many activities directed toward civic welfare. Another of her loves was the Houston Public Library, to which she gave and left a number of manuscripts. One of these, a church missal, was given to the Museum.

1. She always disclaimed great means.
2. A very complete summary of the history of lace.
3. Her sister's son

The Miesian Code

IT WAS another time, another day, when Ludwig Mies van der Rohe first came to Chicago—and wondered if it was worth it.

The year was 1938 and he already was 52, with an international renown as an architect, although he had built relatively little. Armour Institute (now the Illinois Institute of Technology) wanted him to head its department of architecture. A great sea of slums lapped at the edge of the old South Side campus. Chicago was drab, dim, depressed.

"What are your terms?" the Chicago architect John Holabird asked the quiet master of Germany's Bauhaus, the "house of building." Mies was only a few months out of the nightmare of Naziland.

"I would like a completely free hand," he said. "And \$10,000 a year."

Henry Heald, Armour's president, was happy to give him the free hand—but the salary apparently was closer to \$8000 than \$10,000. Fortunately for Chicago, Mies said yes.

In the 30 years since then, Chicago has become a Miesian city, thanks to the free hand it gave a German exile. He began by designing the Illinois Tech campus (a task he unfortunately never was given the chance to finish).

Symbolically, however, its noblest building, the glass-and-steel Crown Hall, stands on the site of the squalid old Mecca Flats, that notorious slum, peopled with 1500 squatters.

In 1955, when Crown Hall opened, the students held a prom in its majestic open space. Duke Ellington's orchestra played, and the Duke was bowled over by the brilliant acoustics in Miesian crystal.

Mies (pronounced Meece) has tried to create a sort of anonymous architecture for our time, so flexible it can be used for almost any purpose. It is controlled, orderly, logical, and not everyone can live easily with it.

"I was interested in anything in America that was steel construction and rational. I liked these buildings best when they were half-finished, for that is when they were clearest: When the skeleton was already built, but before all the style was applied to the surface to hide what was true, what was at the foundation. I have not much sense for the stylistic. But I care about the truth."

Frank Lloyd Wright's granddaughter, so the story goes, once worked for Mies, and walked up to his desk one day, worried.

"But Mies, what about self-expression in architecture?" she asked him point-blank.

Mies, grandly massive and a slow starter, told her, "Wait—first let me get a cup of coffee. Come back in two hours." She did, and the elderly master politely asked her to write her name on a slip of paper.

The man who changed architecture's face to glass believes he can't do what he wants but must do what is right.

BY M. W. NEWMAN

"There," he said, "so much for self-expression. Now let's design a good building."

"Architecture has nothing to do with self-expression. It must express something other than self, if it is going to express anything. That something is the essence, the spirit, of the civilization the architecture represents. That is what all great buildings have done. They have said something about an age, not a man. If a man has to express himself, let him be a painter."

It was almost half a century ago that Mies, a stonecutter's son and then a young architect who never even managed to get a high school diploma, made a brilliant breakthrough. Germany lay broken after defeat in World War I, but the tyrannical Kaiser was gone and freedom was in the air. It was an ideal time for an architect with no clients to give himself up to visionary dreams.

For Mies, this took the form of sketching and modeling "glass houses" far ahead of their time.

Carefully, Mies cut up strips of glass and pressed them against lumps of clay to simulate a glass skyscraper.

"I discovered by working with actual glass models that the important thing is the play of reflections and not the effect of light and shadow as in ordinary buildings," he later noted. You can see these youthful dreams, dated about 1920, reflected as clouds, sun and sky in the glass faces of hundreds of skyscrapers in hundreds of cities today.

But Mies was 30 years ahead of his time. The first "glass house" was not built until 1951—his famous Chicago apartment buildings. They made him the world's most slavishly copied architect, for he had found an answer to a universal problem. But no one else seemed to have his uncanny eye for proportion, quality and detail.

"I really always wanted to know about truth. Truth and reason are what matter most and reason is the first principle of all human work. My pencil would bend if I did not follow this..."

Mies' work can be, and often is, criti-

cized. "No relation to site, climate, insulation or function—the compulsive, bureaucratic spirit" are just some of the complaints.

I find particularly false the notion that his work is "cold and sterile." Rather, it shows patrician self-control; his apartment buildings really are romantic sculpture in glass. He employs Tinian marble, Roman travertine and other lavish materials whenever he gets the chance.

"The only time I ever saw Mies lose his temper was after he stayed up all night on a student design project at Illinois Tech," a Chicago architect recalled.

"He ran out of cigars around 2 a.m. There weren't any available in the neighborhood and about an hour later Mies became irritable and blew up at a student.

"But at 6 a.m., a store opened and Mies finally got some cigars and relaxed."

The story is told about him that late at night he has sometimes felt an overwhelming desire to work at something he liked.

"I shake it off by smoking a cigar and drinking a glass of brandy and going to bed," this iron-willed elder confided. "I don't want to do what I like. I want to do what is right."

This is a profoundly moral code, of course, humanized by cigar smoke and brandy. The old master, although victimized by arthritis, manages to enjoy life. A widower, he likes to loosen up late at night and reminisce.

"In architecture," Mies says, "one faces problems and finds solutions. The best architecture is the clearest and most direct solution in a problem."

But it may be that he will have the last word. For it is Mies' controversial thesis that "form no longer follows function" in architectural design. Rather, he says, we need "universal spaces" that can be put to varying uses in a time of expanding population and vast demand for buildings. Structures designed for one purpose often are used for another, he points out.

There are the three famous houses that dominated home architecture in our century until World War II. Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie house here now is the home of the Adlai Stevenson Institute of International Affairs. Le Corbusier's light, cleaned Villa Savoye in France, a masterpiece, was used for a time as a hayloft! and Mies' Tugendhat house in Brno, Czechoslovakia—in some ways the first modern glass house—was brutally turned into a Gestapo headquarters by the Nazis in World War II.

Still later, Czech authorities converted it to a children's gymnasium. Someone took a snapshot of it and showed it to Mies, who said with a grin: "And you know, it didn't look bad at all!"

Chicago Daily News



Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, now 82

Fine Arts

Mies' first museum design to be constructed was his two-part addition to the Museum of Fine Arts here. The first part, Cullinan Hall, was completed in 1958. Working plans and a model of the second section, which would push the fan-shaped glass facade to Bissonnet, have been obtained. Cullinan Hall will become a sculpture court, overlooked by an upper gallery in the two-story expansion. This expansion will provide painting exhibition space, administration and restaurant areas. Unusual lighting effects for both parts have been devised.

