MIES' UNIVERSAL SPACE: IIT as a laboratory of Ideas.

Garcia-Requejo, Zaida; Jones, Kristin Jones

University of A Coruna (Spain); Illinois Institute of Technology (US)

The architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe began to work on the development of open spaces as early as 1945, materialized for the first time in the unbuilt proposal for the Cantor Drive-in restaurant in Indiana, USA. Until the completion of the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin in 1968, he developed many projects that explored the possibilities of a space free of internal structural supports; a flexible space, a universal space.

With the understanding that architecture exists in a state of tension between change and permanence, Mies conceived of the structure as an architectural factor capable of resisting the passage of time, while the function of the space was expected to change. In the steel frame structure, Mies found that with lighter profiles and greater spanning capability the interior space could be liberated by reducing or eliminating the need for interior structural supports, and the facades could be opened up to let in more daylight and air. Because such a building could accommodate any kind of function, the steel frame structure soon became tied to the expression of a universal space.

Mies worked on this research both professionally and in his educational work. From 1938 when he became the director of the Architecture Department of the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago until he left in 1959, the graduate program in architecture was a
laboratory of ideas in which to test new solutions. This paper explores the development of these ideas in two parallel tracks, through relevant master thesis projects supervised by Mies at IIT, and through the proposals developed by the architect in his office. The aim is to demonstrate a connection between the architecture of Mies and that of his students in the development of the concept of universal space.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Zaida Garcia-Requejo


Kristin Jones
Kristin Jones, Ph.D. is a principal of the architecture firm Studio Integra, Ltd. and adjunct professor at Illinois Institute of Technology. Jones’ practice focuses on social and cultural impact work through educational, commercial and residential projects. Jones has taught at IIT since 2006, earning a Ph.D. in Architecture in 2016 with a dissertation on Visual Training within Architectural Education. In addition to teaching, she is also a doctoral research advisor, research associate in the Center for Learning Innovation and board member of the Mies van der Rohe Society, with work published in multiple exhibits, journals, and conference proceedings. Jones previously held positions at the Chicago architecture firms of Holabird and Root, DeStefano + Partners, and OWP/P (Cannon Design) working on projects for the Chicago Public Schools, Walgreens Corporate, and University of Chicago.