

Slide 1

The (male) visible and the (female) invisible. Remarks to the cooperation of Lilly Reich and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe using the example of the Tugendhat House in Brno

Ivo Hammer, Vienna, Austria, 2021

Slide 2

"From 1926 until Mies moved to Chicago in 1938, (Lilly Reich) had a professional and personal relationship with Mies. In terms of their outward appearance, they had a relationship with separate apartments and separate offices that was unusual for the time.

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Lilly Reich's life as an exhibition and furniture designer, as the only female designer of her own tubular steel furniture collection and the only female member on the board of the Werkbund has been researched today. ¹" (wrote Christiane Lange 2006- in German)

To this day, many Mies biographers only refer to Lilly Reich as Mies' "employee", as his "co-worker"², and only give her *"at most an advisory role"*, *"probably largely responsible for the choice of fabrics and colour tones of upholstery, curtains and carpets"*, as Wolf Tegethoff writes.³ *"The **woman at the side** of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe"*, as you can read on the current page of the Bauhaus Foundation in Dessau.⁴

¹ Christiane Lange: Die Zusammenarbeit von Lilly Reich und Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, in: Helmut Reuter and Birgit Schulte (ed.), Mies und das Neue Wohnen. Räume/Möbel/Fotografie, Ostfildern (Hatje Cantz) 2008, p. 196.

² e.g. Terence Riley und Barry Bergdoll (eds), "Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Die Berliner Jahre 1907 - 1938", Ausstellungskatalog Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, München - London - New York (Prestel) 2001; Iveta Černá, Dagmar Černoušková (eds.), Mies v Brně. Vila Tugendhat, Brno 2012, 2015 (2) (English edition: Mies in Brno: Tugendhat House, Brno 2013; revised edition 2018).

³ Wolf Tegethoff, Catalogue of the Original Furnishings of the Tugendhat House, in: Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat, Wolf Tegethoff (eds.), Ludwig Mies van der Rohe: The Tugendhat House, Wien/New York 2000 (German edition: Wien-New York 1998; enlarged and revised version: Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat, Ivo Hammer, Wolf Tegethoff: Tugendhat House. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Basle-Berlin-Boston-Munich-Beijing-Warsaw-Vienna (Birkhäuser-De Gruyter) 2014 (revised edition: 2020), p. 230.

⁴ <https://www.bauhauskooperation.de/wissen/das-bauhaus/koepfe/meister-und-lehrende/lilly-reich/> (accessed February 3, 2021).

However, since the research of the past 30 years, for example by Debora Dietsch (1981), Sonja Günther (1988), Matilda McQuaid (1996), Christiane Lange (2006), Laura Lizondo Sevilla (2010), Carmen Espejel (2018) and others, (mostly female) architectural historians, there is evidence that Lilly Reich was a congenial professional partner of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and co-author of many important projects.⁵

Building on this research, I would like to make a few comments on the authorship of the Tugendhat House, especially Lilly Reich's contribution. I would like to qualify that I am not a specialist in the history of modern architecture, even if, as a conservator-restorer, I have been dealing with the surface of Modern Movement architecture for almost 40 years.

4th

In order to understand the design of the Tugendhat house, it is useful to outline the history of the collaboration between Lilly Reich and MvdR since 1926.

The first major joint work was the Werkbund exhibition “The Dwelling” in Stuttgart in 1927. Mies designed and managed the construction of the Residential Colony of Modern Housing, called *Weißenhofsiedlung*. Lilly Reich was responsible (at Mies' suggestion) for the organization and design of 8 exhibition areas and also designed some of the home furnishings (8 and 12) in Mies' apartment block of the *Weißenhofsiedlung*.

In the *Glass Hall* of the German Association of Glass Manufacturers of Cologne, set up on the initiative of Mies, we already find important elements of the aesthetics and materiality of the Tugendhat House and the Barcelona Pavilion: glass walls with

⁵ Dietsch, Deborah (New York: Heresies Collective, Inc): Lilly Reich, in: Heresies, 1981-01-01 (11), p.73; Sonja Günther: Lilly Reich 1885–1947. Innenarchitektin, Designerin, Ausstellungsgestalterin. Stuttgart 1988; Mathilda McQuaid: Lilly Reich, designer and architect. Department of Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, February 7 – May 7, 1996; Christiane Lange: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe & Lilly Reich. Möbel und Räume. Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern 2006; Lizondo Sevilla, Laura ; Bosch Reig, Ignacio ; Santatecla Fayos, José: Recuperación del legado cultural arquitectónico de las exposiciones de Mies van der Rohe y Lilly Reich: la exposición internacional de Barcelona de 1929, Instituto Universitario de Restauración del Patrimonio de la UPV ; 2010; Ivo Hammer, “Materiality of the Diaphane: Comments on the Tugendhat House by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich”, Franz Graf, Francesca Albani (eds.), Il vetro nell’ architettura del XX secolo: conservazione e restauro/Glass in the 20th Century Architecture: Preservation and Restoration, Giornate di studi internazionali, Mendrisio, Accademia di architettura, Università della Svizzera italiana 16./17.11.2010, Mendrisio 2011, pp. 340–359; Carmen Espejel, Women Architects in the Modern Movement, Milton: Routledge ; 2018 (Lilly Reich: p. 136-163).

different textures and colors, yellowish white linoleum floor, even a kind of winter garden.

As a whole, this exhibition was an enormous, internationally recognized success and a brilliant start to the cooperation between Lilly Reich and LMvdR.

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In the same year, 1927, LR and MvdR designed the *Café Velvet and Silk* as part of the *Women's Fashion* exhibition for the Imperial Association of German Fashion in Berlin. The photos show a continuous space, divided by high curtain walls made of silk, rayon and velvet. Individual areas are furnished with tables and chairs designed by Mies. Kenneth Frampton wrote of the curtain walls in 1985: "*The black, orange and red velvets, and the gold, silver, black and lemon-yellow silks no doubt reflect her (Lilly Reichs) taste, as did the acid-green cowhide upholstery used for the sitting room furniture of the Tugendhat House.*" Note also the semicircular floor plan of a curtain space.

6th

Lilly Reich was Artistic Director of all 25 areas of the international exhibition in Barcelona 1929, which were presented by Germany. Here, too, we find important elements of the aesthetics and materiality of the Tugendhat House.

7, 8

MvdR was responsible for the design of the German pavilion. At the same time, perhaps even a little earlier, Mies van der Rohe and LR began designing the Tugendhat house. There was little time between the signing of the contract for the pavilion in November 1928 and the opening of the exhibition on May 20, 1929. Construction work on the Tugendhat House did not begin until July 1929.

9

According to research by Christiane Lange published in German in 2006, Lilly Reich designed at least 13 pieces of furniture for the Tugendhat house, which, with two exceptions, have been attributed to MvdR to date. Christiane Lange studied the original plans using forensic methods and was able to secure the attribution to Lilly Reich, primarily due to the style of the writing on the plans.

This not only applies to Lilly Reich's well-known authorship for the bookshelf in Fritz Tugendhat's bedroom and the glass buffet (or display cabinet) in the living room. The authorship of Lilly Reich is also assured for 10 more pieces of furniture by Tugendhat: (We must self-critically admit: Unfortunately, in our publication on the Tugendhat House last published in 2020 in an expanded and revised edition, in the furniture catalog, Wolf Tegethoff has not included Christiane Lange's research concerning Lilly Reich).

10

So Lilly Reich's authorship on the following 10 pieces of furniture designed for the Tugendhat House has remained largely invisible to this day. The dining room buffet made of Macassar ebony. The chrome-plated steel tubes reflect the building principle of the house at least aesthetically, even though they might not be technically necessary due to the thickness of the furniture body.

11

The bridge table and the sofa in the library, both also made of Macassar ebony. The upholstery of the sofa and the Brno chairs are made of parchment (in this case, thin goatskin).

12

The yellowish white bench in front of the wall made of "onyx" marble and the desk of the library with the legs made of chromed tubular steel and the attachment for the writing utensils. The brown carpet was woven by Alen Müller-Hellwig in Lübeck based on the design by Lilly Reich.

13th

In the governess' room, specifically Irene Kalkofen, Lilly Reich's authorship for the design of the bed, the table and the bookshelf is guaranteed. Lilly Reich probably also chose the checkered fabric cover for the upholstery of the Tugendhat chair.

14th

After all, the beds of the parents, i.e. Grete and Fritz Tugendhat, were designed by Lilly Reich. There is a drawing by Lilly Reich of the wall unit in Grete Tugendhat's

bedroom. The original cherry-red leather upholstery for the Brno chair, designed by Mies, made of flat steel, a prototype, is probably a design by Lilly Reich.

15th

The room dividers made of yellowish white and black velvet and the curtains made of yellowish natural colored and black shantung silk are literally curtain walls. They can be changed, they can cancel the transparency of the glass walls, but they can also almost completely disappear.

One can quite safely assume that Lilly Reich is the author of this textile architecture.

16

The exterior and interior architecture is monochrome, determined by the yellowish-white material color of travertine. The monochrome continuity is orchestrated with the wall-high, material-colored bodies of polished onyx marble and smooth ebony and its “painterly” layout. There are only few brightly colored accents that we also know from the description of Grete Tugendhat: The “emerald”-green upholstery and straps of the Barcelona chairs and the “ruby”-red upholstery of the chaise longue. In daily life, color was brought by the abundant placement of fresh flower arrangements and vases or other pottery.

17th

I'd like to quote what I have written in our book on the materiality of the Tugendhat House in 2014:

“Lilly Reich’s display cabinet summarizes the design principles applied to the Tugendhat House much like a coda in music: The six chrome-plated steel feet echo the framework construction of the house and are recessed to the inside and traversed by the base and shelf. They allow for very delicate curtain walls and sliding doors made of bluish anthracite opal glass (“mouse gray”) that do not act as supporting elements. Viewed from the conservatory, one can see strong reflections in the black-stained pear wood interior

18th

and - viewed from the entrance - dark transparency of the glass. The thickness of the furniture body walls appears thinner as a result of the elegant chrome-plated

metal strip running along the top of the cabinet's front side. The exquisite matte off-white varnish integrating the furniture walls into the color continuity of the interior design enhances the impression of lightness and dematerialization. The quest for immateriality is realized by material means.”

Even if in further research it should be difficult and perhaps even impossible to determine the contributions of Lilly Reich and MvdR in detail, one can say that two congenial personalities have worked together here, both of whom have brought their specific abilities to the joint work.

Since 2001, the Tugendhat House is part of the World Heritage of Humanity. Its artistic authors are both, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich.

Using the example of Tugendhat and the collaboration between Lilly Reich and LMvdR, we saw that interior design cannot be separated from the design of space. We also saw the importance of materiality for the artistic appearance of the space. With a view to your university like the IIT, which trains architects, I would therefore like to make 2 proposals for curricula:

1. interior design as a training course and specialization that enables equal cooperation with other architects.
2. Conservation-restoration as a training course and specialization, which enables the conservation-science study and the equal cooperation with architects with the aim of the material preservation of the historical buildings of the Modern Movement.