

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, February 23, 2012

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Syracuse University Library to unveil Marcel Breuer Digital Archive



On Friday, March 23rd, Syracuse University Library will launch the *Marcel Breuer Digital Archive* with a reception in the Slocum Hall auditorium from 5 to 7 p.m. The website (breuer.syr.edu) represents a collaborative effort headed by the Library to digitize over 30,000 drawings, photographs, letters, and other materials related to the early career of Marcel Breuer, one of the most influential architects and furniture designers of the twentieth century. The project unites resources from several international partner

institutions, including the Bauhaus-Archiv, Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau, the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich, Harvard University, the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, the University of East Anglia, and the Vitra Design Museum.

The creation of the website and digitization of archival materials created prior to 1955 were funded by a 2009 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Library is currently working to secure funding for the second phase of the project, which will allow the remainder of Breuer's papers to be digitized.

Rich metadata allows for easy searching and enables researchers to make connections across media and among geographically dispersed materials. High-quality, zoomable images permit even the faintest pencil sketch to be examined in detail, while project descriptions and biographies provide context for the individual objects and for Breuer's career.

Born in Pécs, Hungary, in 1902, Marcel Lajos Breuer achieved remarkable success as a student in the furniture workshop of the Bauhaus, leading Walter Gropius to offer him a faculty position in 1925. That same year, he earned widespread critical acclaim for his tubular steel "Wassily" chair, which incorporated the radical simplicity of form and interest in industrial materials often espoused by the Bauhaus. After a brief but productive sojourn in England, Breuer followed Gropius to the United States and Harvard University in 1937. The two maintained a joint architectural firm in Cambridge, Massachusetts until 1941, when Breuer founded his own office.

Breuer helped to redefine post-war American domestic architecture through projects like the “bi-nuclear” house and the demonstration house in the garden of New York’s Museum of Modern Art (1949). He designed some sixty private residences by the mid-1950s, all of which are represented in the *Marcel Breuer Digital Archive*. The ensuing two decades witnessed some of his most well-known governmental and institutional projects, including the UNESCO headquarters in Paris (1958) and the Whitney Museum of Art in New York City (1966); the records related to these later projects will be digitized during the second phase of the project.

Barry Bergdoll, The Philip Johnson Chief Curator of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art, offered this assessment of Breuer’s influence and the potential impact of the digital archive: The project “is an essential one if one of the most valuable yet consistently under-tapped resources of twentieth-century architectural history, and of American art, social and urban history is to be rendered fully accessible. The Breuer project could open not only a new generation of Breuer scholarship, it could open a whole new set of questions about the profile and issues of American modernism from the 1930s through the late 1970s.”

The Special Collections Research Center is a hub for primary source research located on the 6th floor of Syracuse University’s Bird Library. It is devoted to collecting and preserving rare research materials in all formats and to connecting students, faculty, outside scholars, and the community to its collections. For more information about SCRC, please visit scrc.syr.edu. Inquiries about the Marcel Breuer Digital Archive may be directed to the project coordinator, Teresa Harris, at 315-443-2916 or tmharr01@syr.edu.