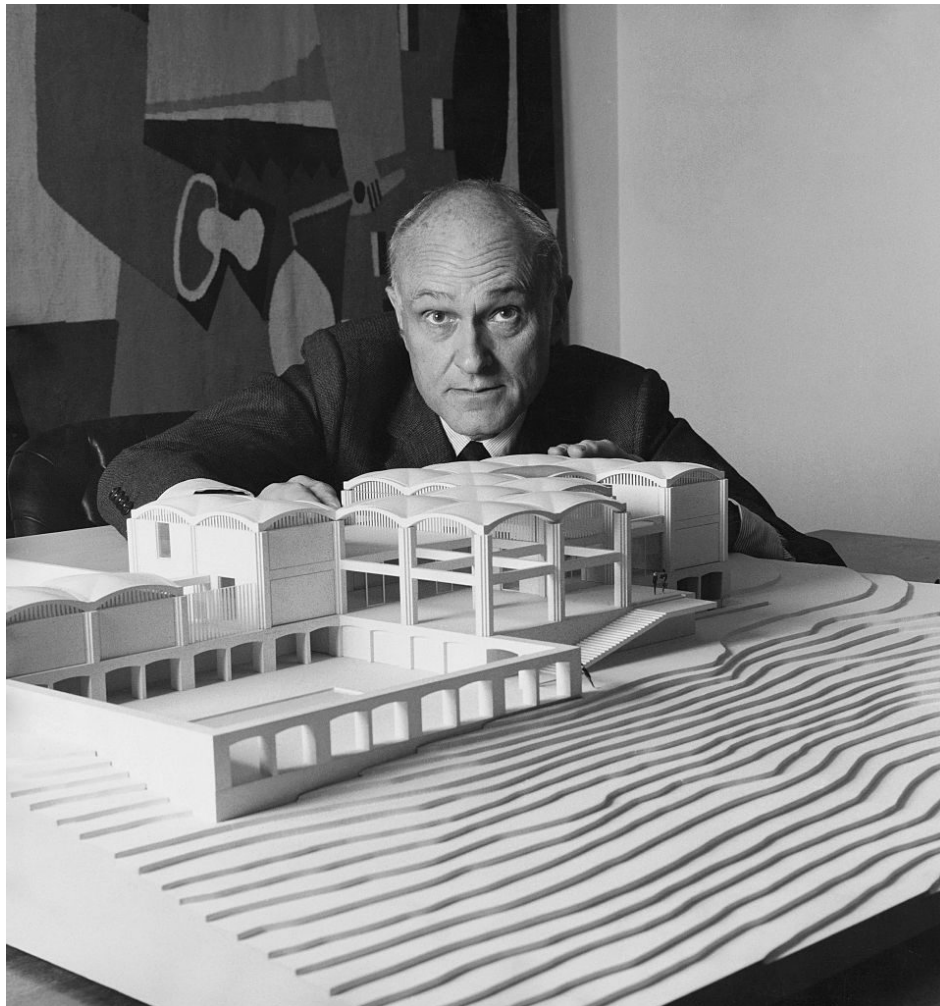


Prominent Architects Are Calling on MoMA to Remove Philip Johnson's Name From Its Walls Over His Ties to Fascism

Seven of the 10 architects in an upcoming exhibition at the museum were among the signatories of an open letter.

Taylor Dafoe, December 2, 2020



Architect Philip Johnson.

An anonymous collective of artists and architects is calling on the Museum of Modern Art to remove Philip Johnson's name from all titles and buildings because of the late architect's ties to fascism.

The collective, which calls itself the Johnson Study Group, sent a letter to MoMA director Glenn Lowry and the institution's chief curator of architecture and design (whose title is named after Johnson), Martino Stierli last Friday outlining its demands. Given "Johnson's widely documented white supremacist views and activities," it says, he is an "inappropriate namesake within any education or cultural institution that purports to serve a wide public."

"There is a role for Johnson's architectural work in archives and historic preservation," the letter continues. "However, naming titles and spaces inevitably suggests that the honoree is a model for curators, administrators, students, and others who participate in these institutions."

Representatives from MoMA did not respond to a request for comment.

In addition to the unnamed members of the Johnson Study Group, the letter was co-signed by 38 artists and architects, including six of the 10 participants in the upcoming MoMA exhibition, "Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America": Emanuel Admassu, Sekou Cooke, J. Yolande Daniels, Felecia Davis, Olalekan Jeyifous, and Amanda Williams. The show, slated to open February 20, is branded as MoMA's first to explore the architecture of African American and African diaspora communities in the US.



MoMA's Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden, designed by Philip Johnson in 1953. Courtesy of MoMA.

Another artist included in "Reconstructions," V. Mitch McEwen, has identified herself among the members of the Johnson Study Group.

"The architecture world is just so complicit with white supremacy that people bat an eye and keep going," McEwen told Curbed. "It sets up a standard for abuse—that's what the title of 'Philip Johnson' does; it's what a gallery named after Philip Johnson does."

Among the other signatories are artists Xaviera Simmons and Mario Moore; landscape architect and MacArthur Fellow Kate Orff; and dean of the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Amale Andraos.

Johnson's political inclinations are well documented. He was investigated for his connections to the Nazi party, wrote for an anti-Semitic paper, and attempted to found his own fascist party in Louisiana. As late as 1964, he described Hitler as "better than Roosevelt."

Johnson served as the first director of MoMA's department of architecture and design, from 1932 to 1936, and then again from 1946 to 1954. He was elected a trustee in 1957 and continued his relationship with the museum until his death, in 2005. Today, the position's title bears his name, as do several walls in the museum.

"He not only acquiesced in but added to the persistent practice of racism in the field of architecture," the letter reads, "a legacy that continues to do harm today."