

Elmhurst museum is home to more than rare Mies dwelling

GALLERIES

By Margaret Hawkins

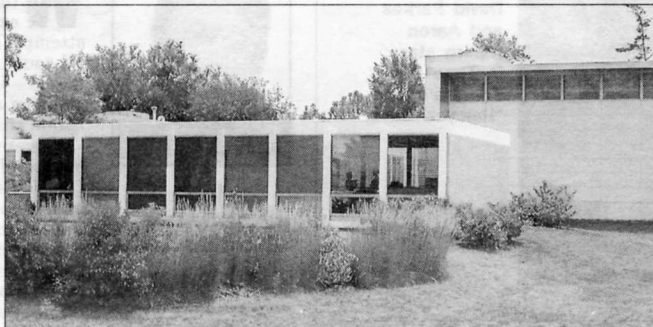
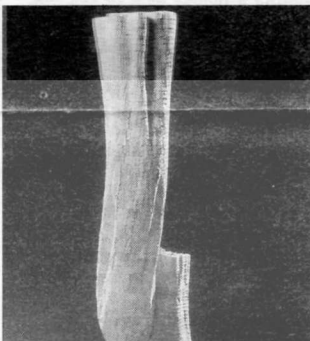
For those who haven't yet made it out to the western suburbs to visit the Elmhurst Art Museum, which opened in its new building in 1997, this month of Mies-o-mania is the perfect time to go. In addition to an ambitious schedule of serious shows, the museum offers what can't be had anywhere else in the Chicago area now: a look inside one of the only three private houses in the United States designed and built by architect Mies van der Rohe.

Built in Elmhurst in 1952 as a weekend and summer home for Robert McCormick, a land developer who worked on the Lake Shore Drive apartment towers with Mies, the house now stands as the finest acquisition in the museum's permanent collection.

In 1994, the house was moved two blocks across town to its current resting place in Wilder Park, where it is now connected to the museum by a glass walkway. The house has been left intact, galley kitchen and all, and portions of it are open to museum-goers who want a look at the inner workings of a real Mies creation. The Farnsworth house in Plano, Ill., which is commonly regarded to be Mies' finest house design, currently is closed to the public.

In addition to the Mies house, here's a sampling of what else is on view at Elmhurst Art Museum.

The Buddhists say that if you want to know what your past experience was, examine your body now, and if you want to know what your future body will be, examine your experiences now. **Barbara Cooper** cites this wisdom about the cycles of cause and effect in nature to explain her intentions in sculpture. Cooper takes waste from the lumber industry, specifically wood veneer scraps, and recycles it. By rolling the veneer into bundles and building tree-like forms with glue as dripping sap, she reconstructs the original life forms whose destruction supplied her materials. In this way, she imitates the cycle of life, death and transformation that takes place throughout nature. She also sug-



One of the three private houses in the country designed and built by Mies van der Rohe is now part of the Elmhurst Museum of Art's permanent collection.

Barbara Cooper and Toby Zallman

■ Through May 12

School of the Art Institute Printmaking Faculty Group Show

■ Through May 5

■ Elmhurst Art Museum, 150 Cottage Hill Ave.

■ (630) 834-0202

gests how the activities of a whole culture, of all the organisms whose joined efforts make up an ecosystem, will influence its future body for better or worse.

In the case of the microcosm of Cooper's work, living trees have died to make paper while the leftover scraps are used to make faux dead trees, suggesting that art is the decadent outcome of over-processing nature. As self-critical as these ideas may be concerning the relationship between art and nature, the art objects Cooper makes are lovely. The veneer she uses is fragile and light, like bark, and assembled in bundles as it is it mimics the way nature builds itself through the accretion of many small parts. The stumplike forms appear to be both living and dead. Their blond wood color looks fresh and young yet also bleached and dead. The giveaway hint in all of Cooper's work may be in the smallest, stumplike piece. Here we can look down inside to see visible metal staples holding it all together.

These tree trunks are about growth and its inevitable result, which is death. More simply, they are about the loveliness of materials and forms—the dry, flaky wood strips, the pinkish blond wood, and the simple grace of a twisted, truncated tree.

Cooper's works are on display with those of Toby Zallman as part of a joint exhibition of sculptural work.

Also on view at the museum is a group show by 15 members of the printmaking faculty of the **School of the Art Institute of**