

Princeton University

HONORS FACULTY MEMBERS
RECEIVING EMERITUS STATUS



May 2017

The biographical sketches were written by staff and colleagues in the departments of those honored.

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ESTHER DA COSTA MEYER



Esther da Costa Meyer came to Princeton as a visiting professor in the spring of 1998 and joined the permanent faculty that year. With her arrival in the Department of Art and Archaeology, the teaching of architecture blossomed within the department's curriculum on an unprecedented and international scale. An authority of modern architecture, from its nineteenth-century developments through those of the present day, Esther has presented a generation of Princeton students with an exemplary model for wide-ranging scholarship in a field that has come to know few of the traditional boundaries—be they material, national, stylistic, or ideological—and she has, over the years, cultivated a devoted following among our students, both graduate and undergraduate, who have profited immensely from her teaching, her guidance, and her vision.

Esther's scholarship has demonstrated her mastery of the full breadth of the modern architectural tradition and the full geographical scope of its production—from California to China, from Germany to Brazil. She has excelled in both the study of individual practitioners as well as of the large problems of schools, styles, and movements. Her books have treated some of the major figures, not only in modern architecture and design, but also in the history of modernism more broadly conceived (Antonio Sant'Elia, Arnold Schoenberg and Wassily Kandinsky, Frank Gehry, and most recently, Pierre Chareau). In a long series of articles, she has also made important contributions to our understanding of a host of significant topics in the cultural history of modernity, including the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the formation of civic landscapes, and the role of women in architectural history and practice. In addition, a good portion of her scholarship has been produced in conjunction with exhibitions that she has curated—yet another aspect that suggests the broad intellectual landscape in which Esther has so compellingly conducted herself as a scholar.

These notable aspects of her intellectual work have not gone unrewarded. Esther has been the recipient of a number of important fellowships and awards, among them a Clark fellowship, a Graham Foundation grant, and a first-place award, given by the American

section of the International Art Critics Association, for the Best Thematic Museum Exhibition in New York (as co-curator for *Schoenberg, Kandinsky, and the Blue Rider* at the Jewish Museum in 2004). And to these one should add an acknowledgement of the phenomenal critical and public success of her most recent exhibition devoted to Pierre Chareau at the Jewish Museum.

At Princeton, Esther has long been recognized, above all, for two very significant things. First, with the wide range of her scholarly interests and expertise, she has proven a valuable, indeed formidable, colleague, one who has been a strong and consistent advocate for the development of the department's curriculum intellectually in its pursuits, internationally in its scope, and ideologically in its commitments. Indeed, Esther has long championed the study of non-Western cultures, of the role of women, and of the great social and cultural changes that have come to define our contemporary world. And second, her broadly ecumenical and inclusive vision has proven a major reason for the success of her teaching, as her many undergraduate and graduate advisees, her wonderfully varied topics of courses and seminars (many of which were team-taught with various colleagues), and in recent years, her famously successful student excursions and Global Seminars to India, Brazil, China, and most recently, Cuba.

Esther's retirement from the faculty will surely not divorce her from Princeton. Her long-awaited monograph, *Imperfect Past: Paris, 1850–1870: Urban Renewal and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, will be published within the year by Princeton University Press; five of her Ph.D. students will be defending their dissertations in short order; and her colleagues look forward to seeing her—perhaps even more often than before—in Marquand Art Library, continuing her research and her scholarship, which will, in its distinctive way, continue to contribute to the department's mission for a very long time to come.