

What is Modernism and the International Style?

Worksheet

Modernism is an early-20th-century movement favoring function, honesty of materials, and minimal ornament; the International Style (from the 1930s) is its most influential branch, defined by flat roofs, glass curtain walls, open plans, and an absence of applied decoration.

Questions

1. The phrase 'form follows function' is most associated with
 - A) Neoclassicism
 - B) Modernist architecture
 - C) Art Nouveau
 - D) Baroque design
2. Which feature defines the International Style?
 - A) Ornate cornices and columns
 - B) Flat roofs and glass curtain walls
 - C) Steeply pitched thatched roofs
 - D) Twisted Baroque columns
3. Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye rests on pilotis to
 - A) Add decorative columns
 - B) Lift the building and free the ground floor
 - C) Support a Gothic spire
 - D) Mimic a classical temple
4. Mies van der Rohe's design philosophy is summarized as
 - A) 'Ornament is crime'
 - B) 'Less is more'
 - C) 'Form ignores function'
 - D) 'Decorate everything'
5. Explain how Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building (New York, 1958, 38 stories) exemplifies the International Style.
6. Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye (1931) is built on pilotis (columns) raising it about 3.5 m above ground. What does this demonstrate about his 'Five Points of Architecture'?
7. Compare the ornament cost of a Beaux-Arts facade (hand-carved stone, labor-intensive) with a curtain-wall International Style facade (prefabricated steel-and-glass panels).
8. Define: What does 'form follows function' mean?
9. Define: What defines the International Style?
10. Define: Name a key Modernist architect.

Answer Key

1. B) Modernist architecture - Modernism argued a building's shape should serve its purpose, not decoration.
2. B) Flat roofs and glass curtain walls - Flat roofs, glass walls, and unornamented surfaces are its hallmarks.
3. B) Lift the building and free the ground floor - Pilotis raise the building, opening the ground level for circulation.
4. B) 'Less is more' - 'Less is more' captures his minimalist, material-honest approach.
5. Its facade is a uniform grid of bronze-toned steel and glass, no applied ornament The building is set back from the street on an open plaza - form serves urban function A steel skeleton (not walls) supports the structure, expressed openly in the facade rhythm The motto 'less is more' governs every detail - minimal, honest materials
6. Pilotis lift the building, freeing the ground floor for circulation - Point 1 This allows a free facade and free floor plan since walls aren't load-bearing - Points 2 and 3 Ribbon windows span horizontally for even light - Point 4 A roof garden replaces the traditional pitched roof - Point 5
7. Beaux-Arts facades required skilled stonemasons carving each cornice and capital - slow, costly International Style curtain walls use factory-made, repeatable glass-and-steel panels Repeatable panels cut both material waste and construction time This efficiency helped the International Style dominate postwar corporate architecture
8. A building's shape should be determined by its purpose, not applied decoration.
9. Flat roofs, glass curtain walls, open plans, and no ornament.
10. Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, or Walter Gropius.

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