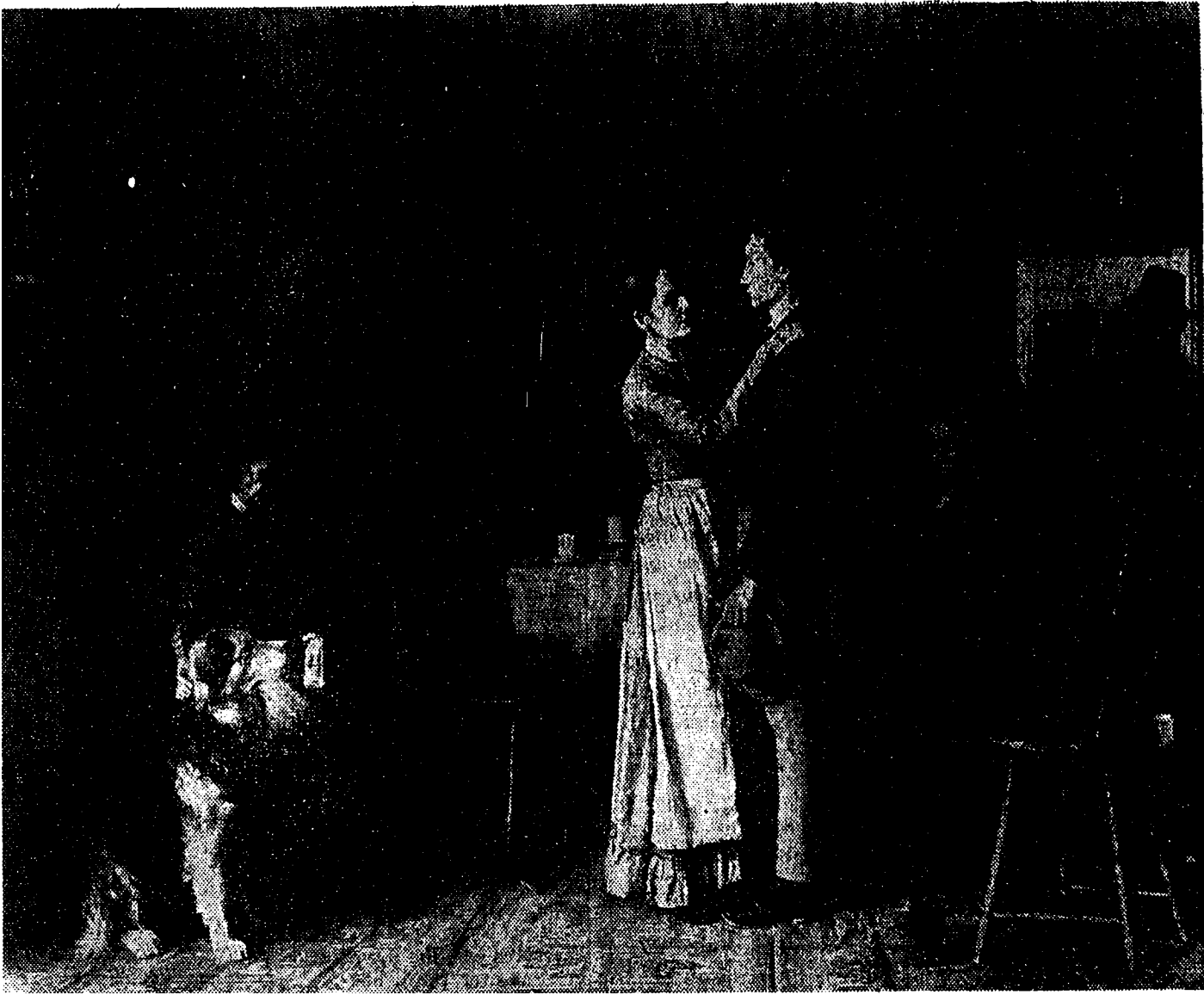


JET AGE TRIUMPH: SAARINEN'S NEW AIRPORT FOR WASHINGTON IS A SUPERB ...

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE
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LONG, LONG AGO—Hovenden's "Breaking Home Ties," 1890, in show of American genre painting, Kennedy Galleries.

JET AGE TRIUMPH

Saarinen's New Airport for Washington
Is a Superb Monument to Our Time

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

WASHINGTON. Federal backing but was not accepted easily by the airlines, architecture, and what is a model of logic, efficiency may prove to be one of and convenience. (In architecture, politics and salesmanship its most significant monuments is nearing completion are not divorced from art.) The centralized terminal building becomes the dominant element of the jetport design.

John Foster Dulles International Airport at Chantilly, Va., the \$175,000,000 Federal Aviation Agency project designed by the late architect Eero Saarinen with the engineering firm of Ammann & Whitney, is scheduled to go into service in the fall of 1962. Its 600-foot long terminal building and connecting control tower have reached their final shaping in that most expressive of twentieth-century materials, reinforced concrete, and Saarinen's revolutionary concept of air-age architecture can be clearly seen and judged.

The visitor approaching the airport across the rolling hills of the Virginia countryside receives a double impact: the realization that he is viewing a kind of architecture of a force and importance unparalleled since the unique synthesis of philosophy and style that produced the Renaissance, and that he is faced with a structure of singular beauty.

The experience is a moving one, as is the direct confrontation with any work of art of primary stature. But the spectator's emotional response to the Dulles building stems from more than fortuitous esthetics; it is an indication of the full meaning and accomplishment of architecture in our time.

Today's Problems

The basic objective of architecture, of course, is the same now as it has been at any time in the past; it succeeds or fails on its ability to analyze and solve problems of use. Today's problems are larger in scale and more radical in nature than ever before. Significantly, we have unprecedented materials and techniques that make new forms possible. We stand in the historic position of witnessing a period of spectacular architectural change and innovation of the first magnitude, and here is a landmark structure of our civilization. Only the blind or the blasé could fail to react to its expressive force.

Saarinen's airport scheme represents an important breakthrough in design. Planned from its inception for jet operation, it eliminates the increasingly cumbersome arrangement of the conventional "finger" plan, where miles of scattered, decentralized corridors stretch out to planes, and replaces them with a single, focal building and a system of "mobile lounges," which serve both as waiting rooms and a means of transportation to scheduled flights.

These huge, lounge-car buses, with crayfish-like adjustable ramps, hook into the rear of the terminal building, and connect directly to the planes. The solution, which has received

Most important of all, however, is the fact that these carefully studied factors of function and form have been fused into a great work of architecture by a conscious creative act—the result has been definitively molded by the taste, beliefs and purely esthetic impulses of the designer.

Therefore, we call Dulles a monument advisedly. In spite of its practical triumphs, one sees immediately that the graceful suspended arc of the terminal building's roof and its dramatic supporting pylons are conceived primarily for their stunning visual qualities. Saarinen's avowed purpose, realized beyond anyone's most optimistic hopes, was to devise a symbolic entrance to the nation. He has done so by using, soaring, sculptured, 65-foot high concrete supports for a striking catenary roof, to create a dominating facade and form on a 9,800-acre flat plain.

Multiple Virtues

In architect's language, it works. It scales with uncanny perfection in any view, from any distance. The details of entrances and concrete canopies, the proportions of the podium-like lower levels, the shape and size of the slanting pylons and the way they thrust through openings in the handsome slung roof to grasp it with curving ends, the complementary mass of the tower, are all carried out with impeccable insight and elegance. It works esthetically, as a kind of monumental abstract sculpture. And it works symbolically, as a strong, splendid statement of the architecture of our age, our needs and our nation.

As it stands now, still lacking window walls and finishing details, the huge shiplike structure and tower give an impression of uncompromised power and grace. It will never be so forceful again. In contemporary terms completely appropriate to its needs, it achieves an effect not unlike that of the great temples of Greece, although it does so with lively, nonstatic, nontraditional shapes.

Creative Spirit

The fact that Saarinen consciously employed theatrical structural devices for dramatic exploitation has disturbed his critics, and even some of his admirers. Form follows structure is the current dictum that has replaced form follows function for the architecturally pure-in-heart. It is accepted procedure to point to the work of Pier Luigi Nervi, for example, as an object lesson of how logical construction is the only right and proper determinant of the building's final appearance, rather than the other way round. As a result, Nervi's buildings are invariably greatest where they are closest to pure engineering; when they move away from it, as in some of the "architectural" exteriors of his superb space shells, they cause polite embarrassment.

At Dulles, a significant transmutation has taken place. For perhaps the first time, adventurous structural development per se is subordinated to a pre-selected, controlled architectural scheme, and serves it convincingly. Hazzarding a guess, based on the evidence of history, this is a sign of a crystallizing style, and a great moment in art. Only when the technical means—material and structure—have developed to the point where they can further the ends—the dominating, conscious concept of the building—does any architecture approach maturity. The Dulles terminal is a mature work; a fact that underlines the tragedy of Saarinen's untimely death.