

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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PACKAGES FROM U.S. AND ABROAD IN MUSEUM EXHIBITION

The package--one of the 20th century's most prominent useful objects--is the subject of an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art from September 10 through November 9. Almost 200 well designed packages which protect and preserve objects ranging from tiny seeds to many tons of milk have been selected for the show from about a dozen countries by Arthur Drexler, Director, and Mildred Constantine, Associate Curator, of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design.

The purpose of the exhibition, according to the wall label, is to appraise packages of all sorts for their design qualities and in so doing to re-examine and perhaps broaden our ideas of what actually does constitute a package. The packages on view were selected for excellence of structure and shape, color, texture, proportion and the suitability of these qualities to functional performance. Printed words and images were included only when they make an important contribution to a total design.

Both disposable and re-usable packages are shown in the exhibition. Among examples of disposable packages, intended to be thrown away after one use, is wrapping paper, metal and plastic toothpaste tubes, plastic squeeze bottles, and cardboard boxes.

Re-usable packages, intended to have continuing use for their original purposes, include wooden barrels, plastic drums and other bulk containers usually designed for industry and seldom seen by the public. A leather suitcase, a jewelry box and a shoe shine kit are examples of re-usable packages which are familiar to everyone.

Another kind of package on view is the working package which can be either re-usable or disposable, and in which the package performs a particular function in addition to that of protection. Sometimes the package is independent of the thing it contains, sometimes it is one element in a mechanical complex. Examples of such working packages in the exhibition are a slide projector which forms the lower half of its own carrying case, and the casings of radios, typewriters, and a new one-piece telephone.

Nature's packages for a grapefruit, an egg, a turtle, peas and a melon are shown in photographs as a preface to the exhibition along with examples of such

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primitive multi-purpose packages as baskets made 2000 years ago.

Commenting on the packages not in the exhibition, the wall label points out that an alarming number of packages are more elaborate and costly than the things they contain.

But the attention now devoted to package design recognizes that our artifacts have become so numerous and often so complicated, that their usefulness is largely determined by problems of transportation, storage, and protection.

The package designer may be a technician with special knowledge of materials or he may be the designer of the product. He may also be called upon to design the machines that will make the package. Thus in designing useful objects he must increasingly take into consideration the manner in which they will be packaged. He may use commonplace materials in designs of crude vigor, or he may use beautiful materials, refined detail, and perfect execution in designs of extraordinary elegance. In either case the aesthetic quality of the package, as of other artifacts, is the result of a conscious effort to organize materials and functions into clear shapes and relationships, with a due concern for their effect on the eye.

A 24 foot long black Sealdtank which collapses to a small size when not used to hold liquids, is shown along with other examples of re-usable industrial packages, such as large metal and glass drums and polyethylene containers. All are characterized by simple clean lines, efficient closure or spigots and are well made to withstand repeated use. Small bottles and jars, green and yellow plastic boxes, a red rubber vacuum bottle and other well proportioned packages familiar to consumers here and abroad are arranged on hanging shelves.

The modern replacement for the primitive multi-purpose basket, the carry-all, is shown along with a few examples of luggage, a compartmented brief case and other re-usable containers.

As packages can enclose human beings as well as machines, an inflated plastic suit used by technicians working with radioactive materials is shown. It is a flexible air-tight container designed to permit freedom of movement and is a working package that is quite literally a skin.

Disposable packages range from a handsome corrugated paper sleeve which is flexible enough to fit several bottle sizes and a cardboard container used to ship trees to an 8 foot high disposable paper house. Traditional disposal packaging includes elegant wrapping paper while recent innovations shown are continuous strips of plastic pillows which contain individual single units of such items as shampoo, bath oil, hair dye and furniture wax. These are from Holland, France and the United States. Finely detailed and proportioned aluminum cans, foil pans and glass bottles are shown along with molded packaging of urethane, polystyrene and pulp made to fit and protect objects ranging from delicate instruments shipped by industry to charcoal briquets sold at the corner grocery store and polyvinyl chloride containers for

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cookies, candy and fruit.

"The Package" was installed by Wilder Green, Assistant Director of the Department of Architecture and Design. Like many Museum exhibitions, it was made possible by special contributions. In this instance the co-sponsors are Container Corporation of America, Reynolds Metals Company and the National Distiller and Chemical Corporation of America.

Photographs and additional material are available on request from Elizabeth Shaw, Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street. CI 5-8900.