

**COUNTER SPACE: DESIGN AND THE MODERN KITCHEN EXPLORES
THE 20th CENTURY TRANSFORMATION OF THE KITCHEN AS A REFLECTION OF
SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL CHANGE**

Counter Space: Design and the Modern Kitchen

September 15, 2010–May 2, 2011

The Michael H. Dunn Gallery, Second Floor

NEW YORK, September 2, 2010—The Museum of Modern Art presents ***Counter Space: Design and the Modern Kitchen***, an exhibition that examines the kitchen and its continual redesign as a barometer of changing aesthetics, technologies, and ideologies, from September 15, 2010, through May 2, 2011. Comprising almost 300 works drawn from the Museum's collection, including design objects, architectural plans, posters, photographs, archival films, prints, paintings, and media works, the exhibition's centerpiece is an unusually complete example of the iconic "Frankfurt Kitchen," designed in 1926–27 by Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky and recently acquired by MoMA. In the aftermath of World War I, about 10,000 of these kitchens were manufactured for public-housing estates built around Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany, as part of a comprehensive 5-year program to modernize the city. Schütte-Lihotzky's compact and ergonomic design, with its integrated approach to storage, appliances, and work surfaces, reflected a commitment to transforming the lives of ordinary working people on an ambitious scale. Since the innovations of Schütte-Lihotzky and her contemporaries in the 1920s, kitchens have continued to articulate, and at times actively challenge, our relationships to food; popular attitudes toward the domestic role of women, family life and consumerism; and even political ideology, as in the case of the famous 1959 Moscow "Kitchen Debate" between Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev at the height of the Cold War. *Counter Space: Design and the Modern Kitchen* is organized by Juliet Kinchin, Curator, and Aidan O'Connor, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art.

Historically, kitchens were often drab, poorly ventilated, and hidden from view in a basement or annex, but by the end of the 19th century the kitchen became a bridgehead of modern thinking in the domestic sphere. Counter Space shows the variety of innovations that were developed in the 20th century through an array of design objects: appliances powered by gas and electricity (the earliest, a 1907 kettle designed by Peter Behrens for AEG); heat-resistant glass and steel wares that were featured in MoMA's landmark 1934 *Machine Art* exhibition; and colorful plastics ranging from Tupperware to Japanese artificial food for restaurant display from the 1970s. These objects are complemented by works by artists including Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg and Laurie Simmons, all drawn from MoMA's collection.

The exhibition is arranged in three sections which span the 20th century. **The New Kitchen**, an interwar design concept that embodied modernist principles of efficiency, hygiene, and standardization, appeared in numerous iterations throughout Europe and the United States.

By transforming daily life at the level of the kitchen, it was argued, behavioral change and improved social well-being would follow. Modernist architects and designers like Schütte-Lihotzky looked to the model of the laboratory or factory to create rational, labor-saving kitchens that minimized drudgery. Their ambitions are reflected small-scale in works such as Wagenfeld's 1938 Kubus storage system or Rex Stevens' stainless steel mixing bowls. The section concludes with World War II, during which rationing of food and materials emphasized frugality and necessitated new products such as the glass frying pan by Corning, which introduced Pyrex.

After World War II, particularly in America, a climate of abundance and an emphasis on consumer choice put a new spin on the well-established rhetoric of efficiency and anti-drudgery in design for the kitchen. **Visions of Plenty** looks at postwar kitchens—larger, more colorful, and family-centered—that glorified the ease and comfort of fully-automated design. The idea of the "dream kitchen," captured in Tom Wesselmann's exuberant *Still Life #30* collage of 1963, was celebrated in commercial films produced by manufacturing giants such as General Electric and Frigidaire, several of which are in the exhibition. Images from the Museum's vast collection of film stills, for example, *Full of Life* (1956), with Judy Holliday, emphasize how Hollywood helped prime consumer desire for modern kitchens and appliances.

During the 1950s, the German appliance company Braun, began to develop a cohesive family of objects that quickly became known for their superior functionality and pure form, such as the Multipurpose Kitchen Machine, which is exhibited complete with all 16 different fixtures. Italy pioneered design in plastics, and in the 1960s designers re-imagined the entire kitchen in flexible, mobile, and miniaturized forms. An example is Virgilio Forchiassin's *Spazio Vivo* mobile kitchen unit (1968), featured in the exhibition.

Alternative design thinking for the kitchen by the 1970s pushed beyond new materials and forms to social and environmental concerns. In Sweden, groups like Ergonomi Design shaped kitchen tools for the elderly and physically disabled. And dedicated designers like Lebanese diplomat Adnan Tarcici supported sustainable energy with impressively simple solar cookers, a collapsible version of which is featured. Contemporary designers continue to creatively address the enormous range of materials, functions, possibilities and problems that reside in the modern kitchen.

The final section, **Kitchen Sink Dramas**, introduces a human element to the kitchen—a space that evokes a gamut of emotions, from genuine pleasure to anxiety. Photographs, prints, and media works by contemporary artists highlight the kitchen as a subject that has permeated artistic practice since the late 1960s as a means of addressing larger debates around economics, politics, and gender. Included in the installation are Cindy Sherman's untitled film stills with groceries in a kitchen, William Eggleston's photographs of the inside of an oven and a freezer, and Martha Rosler's 1975 video, *Semiotics of the Kitchen*.

Throughout the exhibition prominence is given to the contribution of women, not only as the primary consumers and users of the domestic kitchen, but also as reformers, architects, designers, and as artists who have critically addressed kitchen culture and myths.

SPONSORSHIP:

Counter Space is supported by Silestone Quartz Surfaces.

WEB SITE:

The *Counter Space* website will be launched on September 15 and will offer users the ability to explore the exhibition, archival materials, and video clips, as well as a blog.

www.moma.org/counterspace.

***Modern Women: Women Artists at The Museum of Modern Art* Publication**

This exhibition is presented in conjunction with MoMA's publication of *Modern Women: Women Artists at The Museum of Modern Art*. Featuring illustrated essays by nearly 50 writers, including both MoMA curators and outside scholars, *Modern Women: Women Artists at The Museum of Modern Art* presents a variety of generational and cultural perspectives and a diverse range of artists whose works span the spectrum of mediums and genres in the Museum's collection. It is published by The Museum of Modern Art and is available at MoMA Stores and online at www.MoMAstore.org. It is distributed to the trade through Distributed Art Publishers (D.A.P) in the United States and Canada, and through Thames + Hudson outside North America. The publication is made possible by the Modern Women's Fund, established by Sarah Peter. 512 pages, 402 illustrations. Hardcover, \$70.00.

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Hours: Wednesday through Monday: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Friday: 10:30 a.m.-8:00 p.m.
Closed Tuesday

Museum Admission: \$20 adults; \$16 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$12 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). Target Free Friday Nights 4:00-8:00 p.m.

Film Admission: \$10 adults; \$8 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D. \$6 full-time students with current I.D. (For admittance to film programs only)