

Machine art
56
THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 7-7470

#27
March 5th, 1934.

Miss Amelia Earhart chose a section of spring for the first award ~~section~~ despite the fact that on her desk she has a ball bearing as an ornament.

Asked why she did not chose for first award the ball bearing in the exhibition, she said:

"As a matter of fact, in designing clothes, I made a buckle for a belt out of that ball bearing because I thought it was a beautiful thing. I have on my desk as an ornament an intake valve because it is beautiful and this section of spring I chose first because it is satisfactory from every angle. One doesn't have to know what it is to appreciate its form and I think that the Exhibition as a whole is a great step forward in that I believe people may see beauty in machine which so often we think of as only crude or lacking individuality which isn't the case at all for anyone who has eyes to see."

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Asked how he thought the Exhibition related to the quotation of Plato which appears in the Exhibition catalog, Professor Dewey explained:

"I do not know just how I can put it. I think it is somewhat extraordinary that Modern Machine production for industrial purposes should illustrate as well as it does the statement of Plato regarding the abstract beauty of geometric forms, made before any such thing as machinery existed.

I hope all those who are skeptical about the aesthetic possibilities of machine production will see the Exhibition. To my mind there is convincing proof that there is no essential opposition between production for utility and for beauty. The problem is essentially one of design and finish.

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Answering the query of what he considers the role of designer in the Machine Age, Professor Richards stated:

"The true function of the designer for the machine, it seems to me, is first of all not to try to reproduce in the machine the creations of the craftsmen. These latter very often naturally express themselves in plays of fancy which result in ornament. The natural office of the machine is not to reproduce ornament but to produce lines that express function, process and material. Mass production when dealt with in this spirit can produce not only things that are appropriate to the machine but things of real beauty.

This Exhibition is a demonstration of these possibilities."

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Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor, telegraphing from Washington with the catalog of the Exhibition as her guide chose simultaneously with the New York judges, a section of spring very similar to the first award and picked the outboard propeller which was the unanimous second choice of the Committee.

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PROOF OF
ENCLOSED
MATRIX



JUDGING EXHIBITION OF MACHINE ART
Miss Amelia Earhart, Professor John
Dewey and Professor Charles R. Richards,
holding first, second and third choices,
respectively.

(FOR RELEASE Saturday afternoon or
Sunday morning, March 17 or 18, 1934)

At last a prophet has found honor in his own country. Now that the machine age, so long despised and condemned as ugly, has been recognized by The Museum of Modern Art as a creator of beauty, there may be fewer artists sighing for "the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome." In cities built by machines, in the country that is the home of the machine, people are beginning to see a beauty of line, finish and material in the commonplace objects that surround them--in the twisted strength of steel cables, the shining smoothness of aluminum tubing, the delicate design of precision instruments, the geometric pattern of a ball bearing, the polished perfection of glass and copper utensils.

The objects displayed in the Exhibition of Machine Art that is attracting thousands to The Museum of Modern Art in New York, where it is currently on view, have been selected as the finest examples of machine design in this country. Usually the design is the unconscious result of the efficiency compelled by mass production. Where it is due to the directed art of an industrial designer, it is simply a conscious application of machine principles. Even a brief survey of the Exhibition will demonstrate to the most prejudiced observer that the machine age is characterized by beauty as pure and exact and enduring as mathematics.

On the opening day a committee composed of Miss Amelia Earhart, professor John Dewey and Professor Charles R. Richards met at the Museum to judge the Exhibition and to select the three most beautiful objects on display. Their first choice was a section of a large spring made by the American Steel & Wire Co.; their second, an outboard propeller made by the Aluminum Company of America; their third, a ball bearing made by S K F Industries, Inc. While these three judges were meeting at the Museum, Miss Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor, was judging the Exhibition by catalog in Washington. Miss Perkins' first choice was a small spring made by the American Steel & Wire Co.; her second, the outboard propeller which was the second choice of the other judges; her third, a brass plumb bob made by Eugene Dietzgen Co., Inc.

Miss Earhart, who has lately added to her achievements by becoming a designer of clothes that are both beautiful and appropriate to the age we live in, found it difficult to choose between the ball bearing and the section of spring. Asked why she gave the latter first place as most beautiful object, she said; "In designing clothes I made a buckle for a belt out of the ball bearing. And I have on my desk as an ornament an intake valve from an airplane because it is beautiful. Yet I chose this section of spring because it is satisfactory from every angle. One doesn't have to know what it is to appreciate its form. I think that the Exhibition as a whole is a great step forward in that I believe people may see beauty in machines which so often we think of as only crude or lacking individuality, which isn't the case at all for anyone who has eyes to see."

Professor Dewey of Columbia, doctor of philosophy and famous educator, was asked if he thought the Exhibition successfully demonstrated the beauty defined by Plato as composed of "straight lines and circles, and shapes, plane or solid, made from them by lathe, ruler and square....not beautiful relatively, but always and absolutely."

"I do not know just how I can put it," Professor Dewey replied thoughtfully, "but I think it somewhat extraordinary that modern machine production for industrial purposes should illustrate as well as it does the statement of Plato regarding the abstract beauty of geometric forms, made before any such thing as machinery existed. I hope that all those who are skeptical about the aesthetic possibilities of machine production will see the Exhibition. To my mind there is convincing proof that there is no essential opposition between

production for utility and for beauty. The problem is essentially one of design and finish."

Professor Charles R. Richards, head of the Museum of Science and Industry, outlined what he considered the role of the designer in the machine age. Professor Richards stated: "The true function of the designer for the machine, it seems to me, is first of all not to try to reproduce in the machine the creations of the craftsmen. These latter very often naturally express themselves in plays of fancy which result in ornament. The natural office of the machine is not to reproduce ornament but to produce lines that express function, process and material. Mass production when dealt with in this spirit can produce not only things that are appropriate to the machine but things of real beauty. The Exhibition is a demonstration of these possibilities."

The public has been invited to cast ballots for the most beautiful object in the Exhibition. So far, the voting has shown great diversity of choice. At present, the leaders in this unusual "beauty contest" are a large, highly polished brass boat propeller made by the Electric Boat Co., and the triple mirror for light signals made by Carl Zeiss, Inc. Runners-up are a graduated measure of Staybrite nonoxyd metalware manufactured by L.D.Cahn Co., a picture frame by Design Engineers, Inc., an aeroplane propeller by Hamilton-Standard Propeller Corp., and a Streamline Monel metal sink, made by International Nickel Co., Inc. Voting will close a week before the end of the Exhibition, April 30, and the winners will be placed on special display during the last week of the show.