

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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MUSEUM OF MODERN ART TO GIVE ANNUAL DESIGN AWARDS

Beginning in 1946, annual awards will be made by the Museum of Modern Art to the three outstanding designs of the year in mass-produced objects of everyday use. The awards will not be limited to any specific field and may be conferred upon a tractor or a toothbrush, a canoe or an ashtray, a can opener, lamp, sofa, desk, chair, alarm clock, bicycle, wastebasket, fountain pen, or any of a multitude of other useful objects.

The annual awards are to be part of a three-way program initiated by the Museum's Department of Industrial Design to stimulate the creation of better design in manufactured articles. The program also includes an annual publication which will catalog currently available consumer goods recommended for their design excellence. To round out the program, and as a guide to the buying public, the Museum is preparing a small seal which manufacturers will be authorized to attach to the products appearing in the book, thus providing a visible symbol of the Museum's commendation for design excellence.

The first issue of the catalog will be published in the early Autumn of 1946, at which time the awards will be made and the winning designs placed on exhibition at the Museum. It will not be possible to buy space in the book, and no fee will be charged those whose products are shown. The volume will be published in a large edition for wide sale through usual Museum channels as well as through bookstores all over this country and also abroad. Exhibitions in New York and for circulation will be coordinated with the publication from time to time.

Eliot Noyes, Director of the Museum's Department of Industrial Design, announced the new program at the opening of this year's edition of the Museum's annual exhibition of Useful Objects. Recently returned as a Major from three-and-a-half years' service in the Army Air Forces, Mr. Noyes said:

"The purpose of the new program is to expand the basic idea of the Useful Objects Exhibitions to a national scale and to a much broader range of objects in type, size and cost. As the Useful Objects shows have supplied our New York public with a guide to well-designed objects recommended for purchase so our new three-way program--catalog, seal and awards--will provide a nation-wide picture of articles of everyday use which have been carefully selected as outstanding examples of good modern design. We hope the public will use this catalog as a purchasing guide.

"In making its selections for the catalog the Museum will canvass the field, each year screening from thousands of objects a hundred or so

to appear on its recommended list and to bear the stamp of its approval. Through intensive search of the markets and in the department stores throughout the country, we will select only those objects meeting the highest design standards.

"It should be borne in mind, however, that the Museum's seal of approval will apply only to the design of the object and not to the mechanical function, although the Museum will not knowingly give its design approval to an object which obviously is mechanically or otherwise faulty. In other words, as it is not equipped to conduct laboratory tests, the Museum cannot guarantee that a coffee percolator will continue forever to perk or a watch to tick. So far as design is concerned, our selection will not be on the basis of superficial design fashion such as 'streamlining'; the only criterion will be design quality as demonstrated by fitness for the intended use, intelligent use of materials, reasonable adaptation to the manufacturing process, and a contemporary esthetic solution. These catalogs should provide future historical records of the significant designs produced in each year.

"By its new program the Museum hopes to stimulate consumer demand for really good modern design in manufactured objects, thus assisting manufacturers and retailers to produce better modern design. Now consumers are eager for tangible and purchaseable evidence of the arrival of the postwar world so long promised. Obviously, this does not mean variations of French Provincial or Colonial design, and the wise manufacturer should see that this is his chance to strike out boldly in the direction of original and genuinely modern design.

"While we intend to canvass the field as thoroughly as possible, we hope designers and manufacturers will of their own accord send us information and pictures of any pieces of their work which might be suitable for inclusion in the catalog and eligible for awards."

The Museum began its exhibition series of useful objects in the Fall of 1938 and has held one annually except during the years 1943 and 1944 when almost all manufacturing facilities were devoted to the production of war goods. This year the useful objects show is small, as just a slight trickle of products has begun to arrive in the stores. Supplies are short and many of the items shown are of limited availability. Possibly the most interesting are spun aluminum lamps originally designed for commercial installation and now adapted for domestic use as a result of the enthusiasm of architects, designers, and the Museum. These lamps are very welcome as stores carry few if any good modern lamps for household use.

Many articles in the show are of plastic and have been selected particularly to show the good use made of the material. Among other objects in the exhibition are cigarette lighters, plastic picture frames and garden hose, sun glasses, salt and pepper shakers, baskets, stools, a plastic pillow, table glasses of various sizes, and so forth. As usual, a check list is available, giving prices and the names of the stores where the objects may be purchased. The items included in this year's exhibition were assembled by Susanne Wasson-Tucker of the Department of Industrial Design, who also designed the installation.

The 1945 exhibition of Useful Objects opens at the Museum Wednesday, November 21, and closes the evening of January 6, 1946.