

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
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THE GRAPHIC DESIGNS OF HERBERT MATTER

Through December 3, 1991

An exhibition of thirty works by Swiss-born designer, photographer, and filmmaker Herbert Matter (1907-1984) is on view at The Museum of Modern Art through December 3, 1991. Organized by Christopher Mount, curatorial assistant, Department of Architecture and Design, **THE GRAPHIC DESIGNS OF HERBERT MATTER** features posters, brochures, catalogues, and magazine advertisements and covers by this prolific graphic artist.

Herbert Matter was a member of an early generation of modern designers, who, because of refinements in printing techniques, were able to experiment with photography. Matter's works were particularly innovative in their use of photomontage and represented some of the earliest and most successful syntheses of photography and typography. A pioneer in his use of abstraction in the graphic arts, Matter often utilized extreme juxtapositions of scale to create dramatic and effective compositions.

Some of Matter's earliest commissions as a graphic designer were awarded in the mid-1930s by the Swiss National Tourist Office. His travel posters revolutionized both the medium and the genre and were among the first to use purely photographic imagery. What initially appears to be a single photograph turns out to be a cleverly composed photomontage. The designer used preexisting tourist photographs and, through cropping, created arresting images.

Emigrating to the United States in 1936, Matter brought with him first-hand knowledge of the avant-garde art and design movements of Europe, as well as

the teachings of Jan Tschichold, a major proponent of asymmetrical typography. His early puzzle-like designs also reflect the influence of the Surrealist and Dada movements. During his long career in this country, Matter worked as a freelance photographer and graphic designer for numerous companies and institutions, including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, The Museum of Modern Art, The Container Corporation of America, and the New Haven Railroad. His designs appeared in such magazines as *Harper's Bazaar*, *Vogue*, *Fortune*, and *Arts & Architecture*.

From 1946 to 1966, Matter worked as a design consultant for Knoll Associates Inc., designing many of its elegant advertisements and catalogues and helping to establish the company's corporate identity. His advertisement featuring a dirty chimney sweep sitting on a red armchair appeared annually in *The New Yorker* from 1958 to 1971. Matter's series for Eero Saarinen's Molded Plastic Chairs reveal his affection for organic abstraction and remain some of the most sophisticated advertisements ever designed. From 1952 to 1982, Matter taught graphic design and photography at Yale University. By his death in 1984, he had helped establish a place for photography and photomontage in the graphic arts. As a practitioner and teacher, he had helped define the discipline of graphic design in the United States.

Herbert Matter's 1949 film produced for The Museum of Modern Art, *Works of Calder*, is shown continually in the Museum's Edward John Noble Education Center on the ground floor during the course of the exhibition.

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No. 49

For further information or photographic materials, contact the Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750.