The object transformed

With an introduction by Mildred Constantine and Arthur Drexler

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THE OBJECT TRANSFORMED

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The Museum of Modern Art, New York

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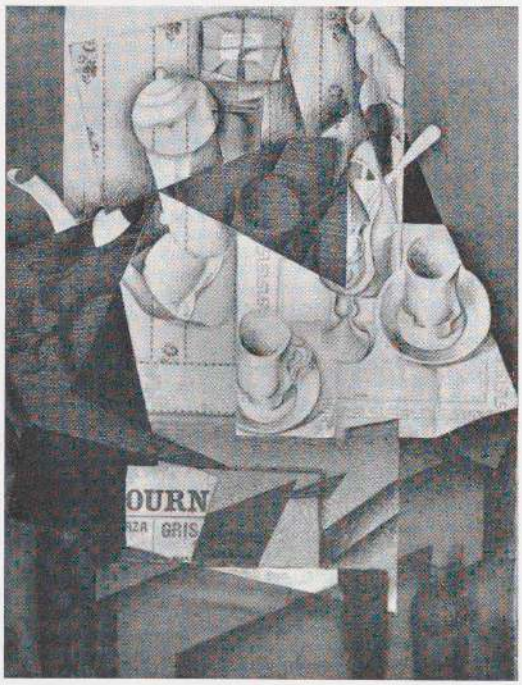
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June 29 – Sept. 5, 1966

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M.C.

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Sunami: 5 (no. 3), 16.



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The utility of any artifact presumably depends on how well it performs a specific function, such as picking up dust or conveying us from one place to another. But vacuum cleaners and automobiles, apart from the efficiency with which they perform their functions, are also generally recognized as emblems of a way of life involving powerful emotional commitments. Quite often the social distinctions we observe are the true objects of manufacture and in this sense the individual vacuum cleaner or automobile is only a passing manifestation, proving the owner's identification with a particular group.

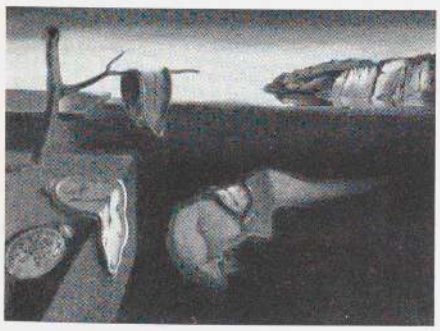
The strength of such emotional commitments is often deplored by those concerned with "good design." To the esthete and the design technician, the most relevant issues are those pertaining to performance characteristics and the consequent choice of appropriate forms. That the dominant forms of modern industrial design have been largely geometric is usually explained in terms of functional suitability, although, in fact, geometric forms have a strong emotional appeal, associated not only with painting and sculpture but also derived from the values established by what used to be called "moral philosophy."

Esthetic predilections would seem to be inescapable, but for even the most dedicated enthusiast of good design certain kinds of objects elude esthetic criteria simply by being what they are. Toilets, for example, are in fact no less eligible for rational design analysis than any other artifact; and yet to most of us, it seems safe to say, no matter how elegant or sculptural or rational a toilet may be, it is difficult to take its design altogether seriously. Weapons, on the other hand, are often superb examples of form perfectly adapted to function, with a concomitant esthetic excellence. But few of us are ready to appreciate the esthetics of weapons without reservation, because they are objects whose very purpose seems to deny the value of such excellence. Our attitude toward function, in other words, is not neutral. Some objects are made worse by being made better; it would be fatuous to pretend that excellence of design could make a well-upholstered chaise and an electric chair equally worthy of admiration.
Most objects occupy what may be called a

1. *Juan Gris: Breakfast. 1914. Pasted paper, crayon, and oil on canvas, 31⅞ x 23½". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest*



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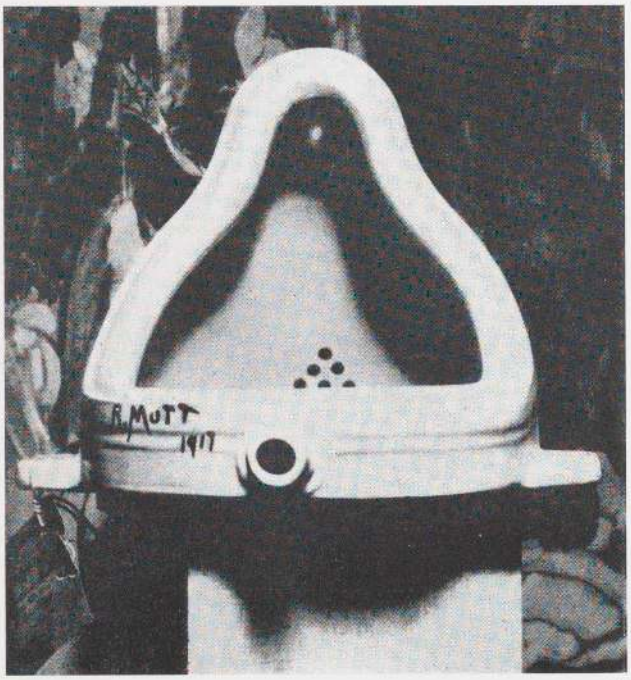
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2. *René Magritte: Personal Values. 1952. Oil on canvas, 32 x 40". Collection J.-A. Goris, Brussels*
3. *Salvador Dali: The Persistence of Memory. 1931. Oil on canvas, 9½ x 13". The Museum of Modern Art, New York*
4. *Joan Miró: Portrait of a Dancer. 1928. Feather and hatpin on background, 39⅜ x ⅞". Collection André Breton, Paris*

psychological temperate zone. They make few emotional demands on us. They are neither so trivial as to merit removal and destruction, like packing crates, nor so significant that they impinge on our consciousness by being explicitly beautiful. Undemanding objects are often particularly agreeable; the wine bottles, guitars, and pipes seen in cubist paintings are attractive partly because they have a certain friendly appeal, different from mere inoffensiveness. Most such objects seem to belong to categories of use pertaining to pleasure and renewal: eating, drinking, making music. The telephone, when it is not presented to us as an instrument of efficiency, is sometimes advertised in a similar context of relaxation—but the association is not altogether convincing.

The emotional content we associate with any object depends on more than the object alone. Hidden associations may be revealed when one object is related to another, or otherwise taken out of its familiar context, or when even a single detail is removed or altered. If the resulting visual metaphor is sufficiently powerful, even the most ubiquitous artifact may be transformed into an object of emotional rather than practical utility: a work of art. These abrupt reversals or transformations of psychic energy were exploited with unrelenting humor by the Surrealists. René Magritte's painting of a room, dominated by a comb and bar of soap, ordinary in every respect except for their monstrous size, challenges our indifference to such commonplace objects, partly because the change of scale makes us assume the existence of giants, and partly because the objects seem to have taken over the ordinary world. Salvador Dali's images of limp, perhaps melting, timepieces, on the other hand, do not imply misshapen human beings but rather suggest a poetic metaphor on the nature of time. Morris Graves's fantastic drawings of chairs (p. 16) distort furniture styles in order to comment on European politics just before World War II.

Complex associations can also be exploited without changing the object itself, or indeed without the object being actually present. In Joan Miró's *Portrait of a Dancer,* the dancer is not pictured but is implied by the conjunction on a background of a



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real feather and a real hatpin; the title acts as a catalyst producing a third reality. Marcel Duchamp achieved an even more drastic manipulation of association by placing a urinal upright on a pedestal and giving it the title *Fountain.* Knowing that the object is not what it is called can be especially important when our associations are contradicted by a sustained pattern of behavior. An example is the famous sequence from the film *The Gold Rush,* in which Charlie Chaplin carefully prepares and consumes with great pleasure a meal consisting of a boot. But the sequence of moving images on the screen, however engaging, does not physically involve the viewer. This involvement is produced by Michelangelo Pistoletto's painting, on a mirror, of a man with his back turned to the viewer (p. 34). The "unreal" man and the real viewer find themselves part of the same image.

However forceful pictorial images may be, they cannot compete with the violence done to our perceptions by transformations of actual objects. Meret Oppenheim's cup, plate, and spoon covered with fur (p. 13), and Man Ray's tack-studded iron (p. 28), force on us physical associations of singular incompatibility. The effectiveness of these objects depends to some extent on our recognizing the originals within the transformation; knowing that they are, or were, an authentic cup and iron is necessary to a just appreciation of their new effectiveness.

In recent years the useful object has again been of compelling interest to artists and designers, but not everyone who has found a point of departure in an object has retained the object itself. The soft typewriter of Claes Oldenburg, for example, and the leaning chairs of Lucas Samaras, are not actual objects that have been transformed. They are rather portraits, or perhaps caricatures, of the originals. The transformed objects chosen for this exhibition have in common the fact that they were once of practical use. Each of them functioned with reasonable efficiency, and the transformations were not intended to enhance the objects in any conventional design sense. An exception is Bruno Munari's clock (pp. 30-31), in which discs of colored plastic replace hands and numerals to make a kind of picture in motion in which time is deprived of its

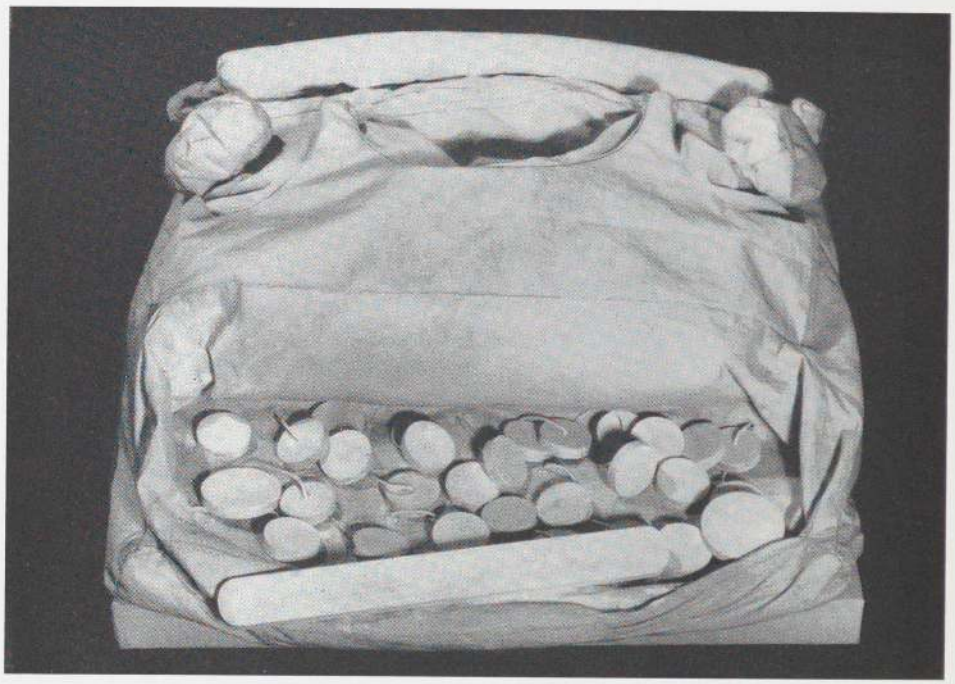
5. *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain. 1917. Readymade. Urinal, 18" high x 15⅛" wide x 12" deep. (Illustration of lost original)*

6. *Charlie Chaplin in "The Gold Rush." 1925. Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art, New York*
7. *Claes Oldenburg: Soft Typewriter I. 1963. Private Collection*
8. *Lucas Samaras: Leaning Chairs. 1966. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis*





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urgency. The philosophical overtones of this transformation depend on heightening the familiar elegance of that industrial precision which invests a real clock with solemn authority. More often, a transformation removes an object entirely from the realm of design, sometimes with extraordinary fervor. A book, for example, is usually a carefully made object we are conditioned to handle with respect. Three examples of transformed books in the exhibition upset this response by acts of destruction. Lucas Samaras covers a book with pins and nails and inserts between its pages a razor, a knife, scissors, and a broken pane of glass (pp. 26-27); seldom has a book been more dangerous to open. Jasper Johns presents us with an open book (p. 24), but its pages are congealed in colored wax, and the print is all but obliterated, concealing the information we suppose the book to contain. Our desire to separate its pages is frustrated by its being enclosed in a glazed box, apparently to preserve it for posterity. John Latham's book (p. 25)—actually one book and parts of others—has burned and folded pages, and is forced open by a closed volume wedged between them like a hatchet; one book destroys another.

Household furnishings are almost as emotionally charged as books. Two of the four examples in the exhibition are chairs. One by Les Levine (p. 20) is completely concealed under a tautly stretched skin of shiny plastic, under which the splayed legs and arms of a captain's chair seem to be struggling to emerge. Fabio de Sanctis' chair (p. 19) is swathed in painted fiberglas, its baroque folds and dripping paint combining to suggest the decomposing shroud of a mummy. A similar entombment is produced by the copper plates nailed over a table-top radio by Tony Palladino (p. 33). The transformation of these three objects is brought about by covering them with an extraneous material which destroys their usefulness but presumably preserves the objects themselves. The mattress by Ralph Ortiz (p. 23), however, is transformed by outright destruction. Gutted by fire and doused with water, and resembling a mass of gray seaweed, it is perhaps the embodiment of a nightmare.

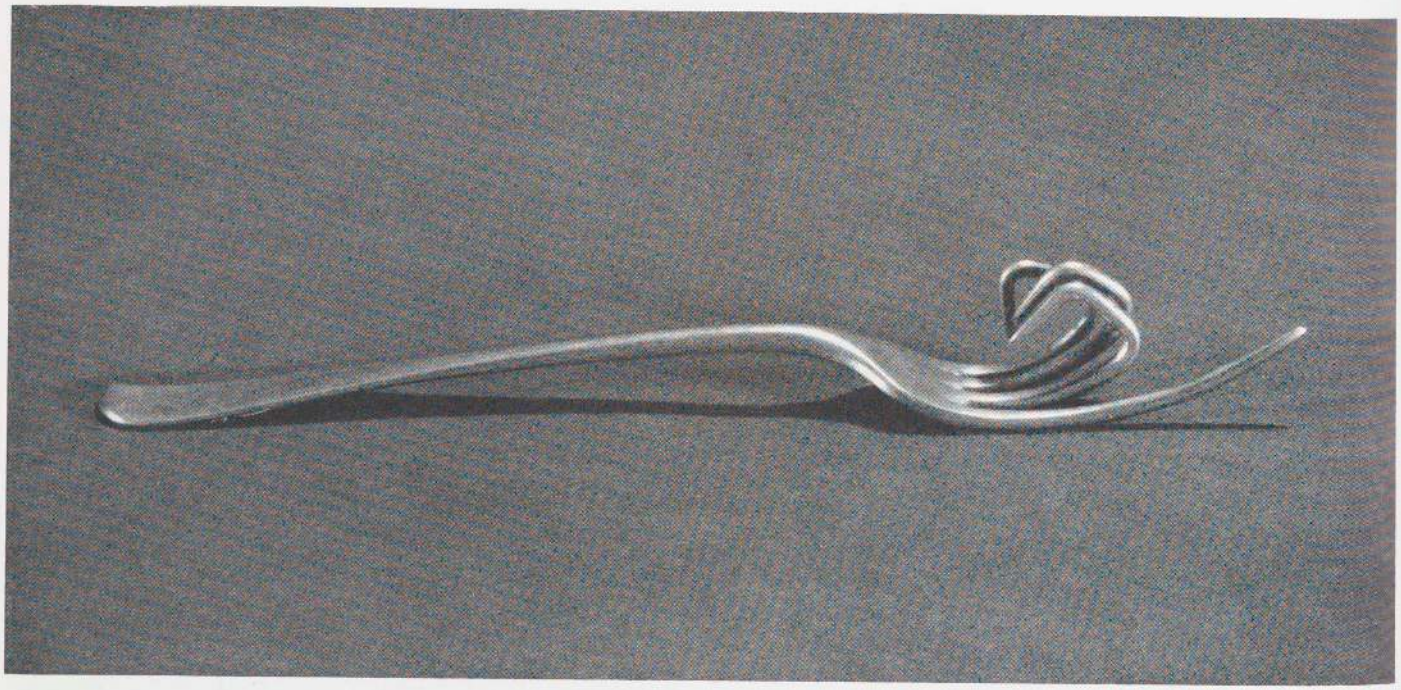
Less violent, and sometimes amusing, are those transformations which neither add, subtract, nor obliterate, but merely deform, like Janet Cooper's cluster of sagging milk bottles (p. 14) and Bruno Munari's gesturing forks (pp. 10-11). Of comparable humor are Man Ray's pipe with a permanent bubble (p. 18) and Preston McClanahan's glass overflowing with permanent foam (p. 21). Both transformations introduce images which suggest an ephemeral use while at the same time making such use impossible.

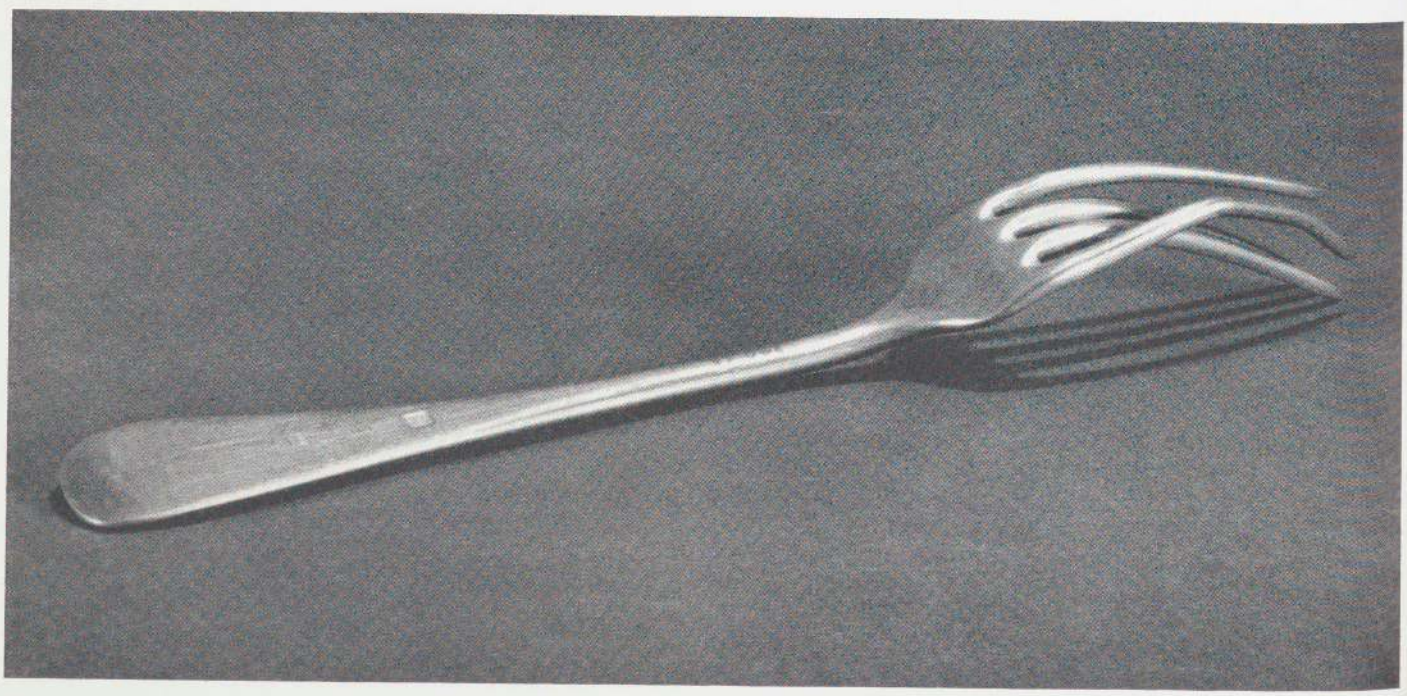
Even such relatively frivolous inventions have overtones of grim absurdity. Like many ideas and images current in the theatre, the transformed object is an apparition of everyday reality. For the twentieth century, it may be the most appropriate kind of still life.

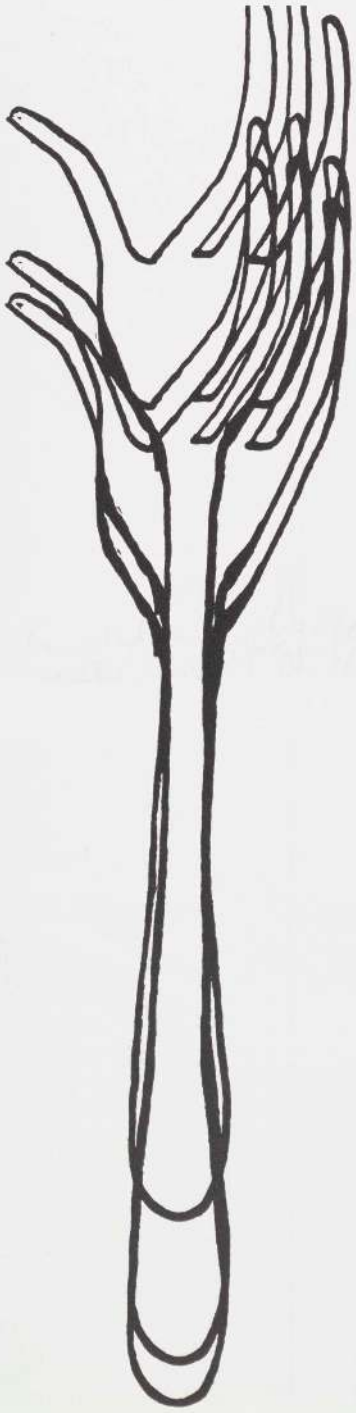
Mildred Constantine
Arthur Drexler
Department of Architecture and Design

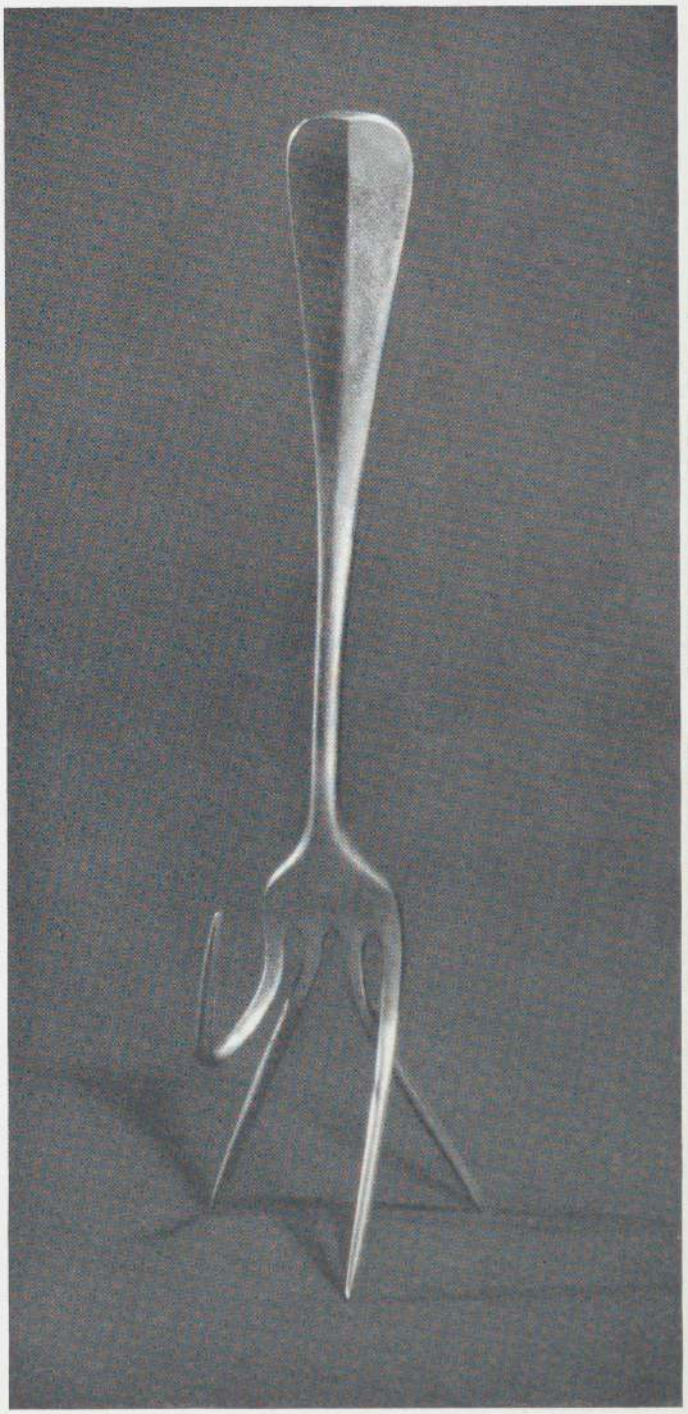
The Object Transformed

Bruno Munari: Untitled.
1964. Three silver forks, each 8½" long. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Greta Daniel Design Fund, 1964.
Drawing.
1964. Book of drawings, 2¾ x 8¼". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Miss Mildred Constantine, 1965

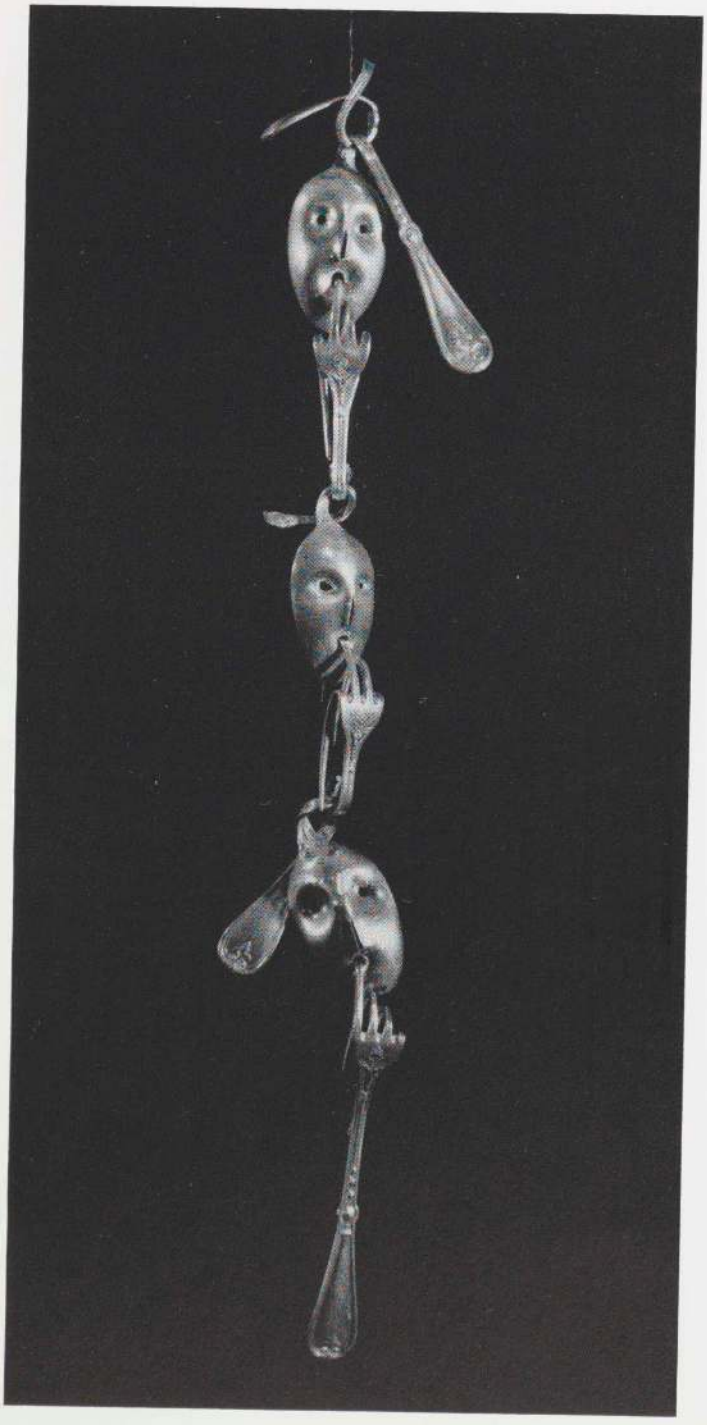








Habbah: Untitled.
1966. Silver forks and spoons, 24″ long. Lent by Galerie Iris Clert, Paris



Meret Oppenheim: Untitled.
1936. Fur-covered cup, plate, and spoon; cup 4⅜″ diameter, plate 9⅜″ diameter, spoon 8″ long. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, purchase, 1946



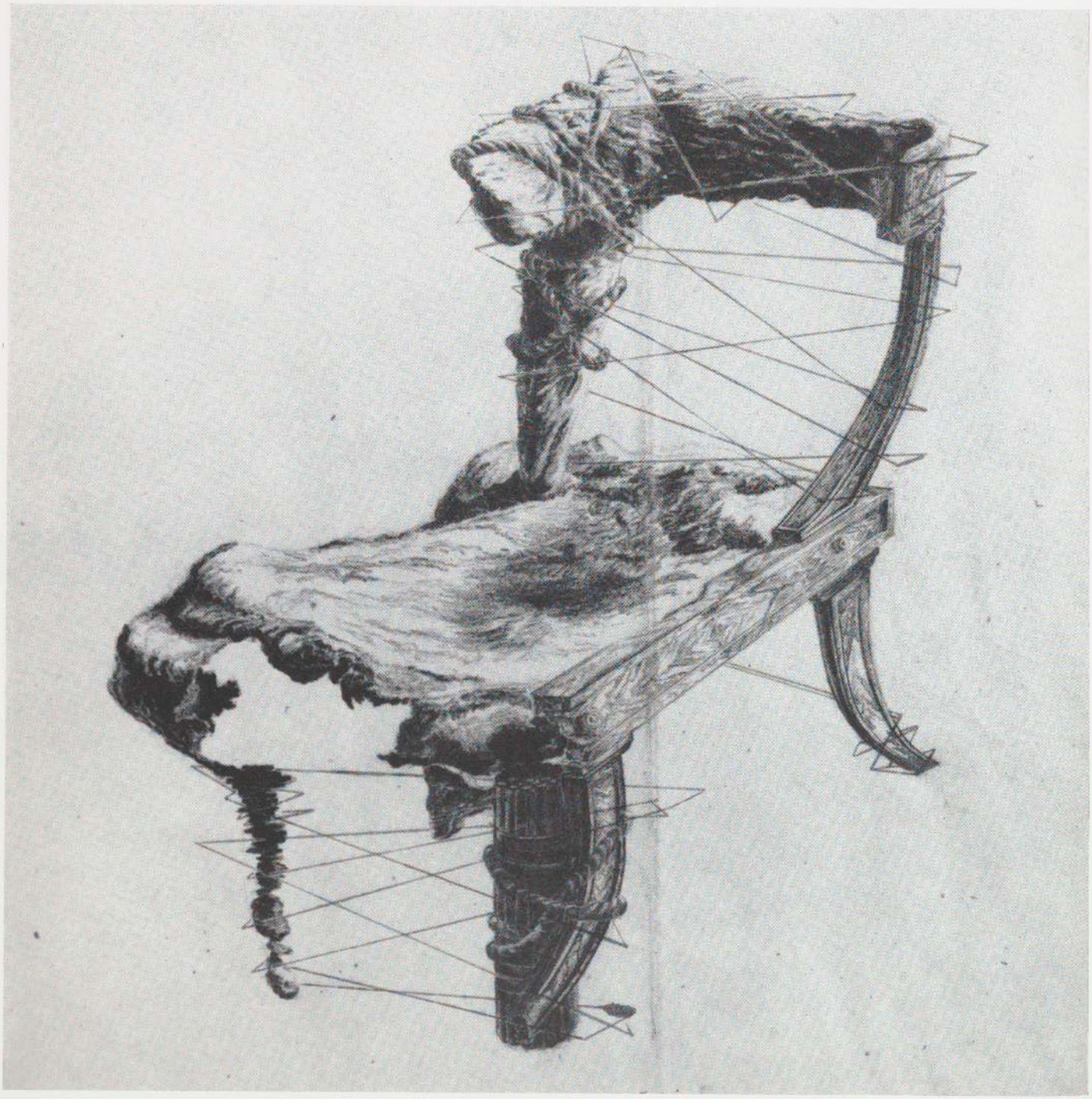
Janet Cooper: No Deposit, No Return.
1966. Glass milk bottles, 8 x 8″. Lent by the artist



Karen Karnes: Untitled.
1965. Ceramic pitchers, 9½ x 22⅜ x 12¾".
Lent by the artist



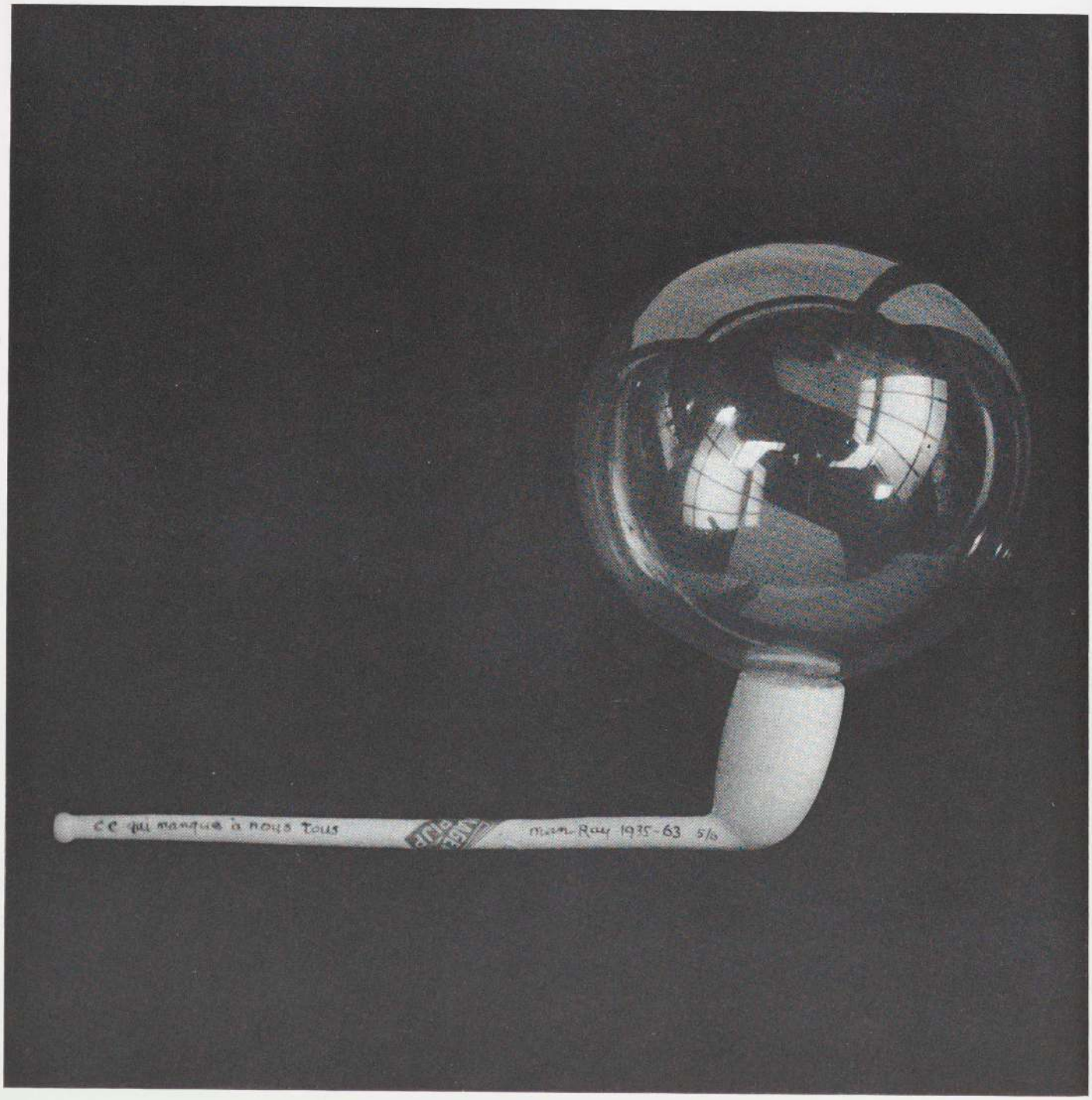
Morris Graves: Roman Nightfall Piece.
1938. Pencil with pen and red ink on buff paper, 26⅛ x 21″. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, purchase, 1942



Robert Rauschenberg: Bed.
1955. Combine with pillow and quilt, 74 x 31″.
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Leo Castelli, New York



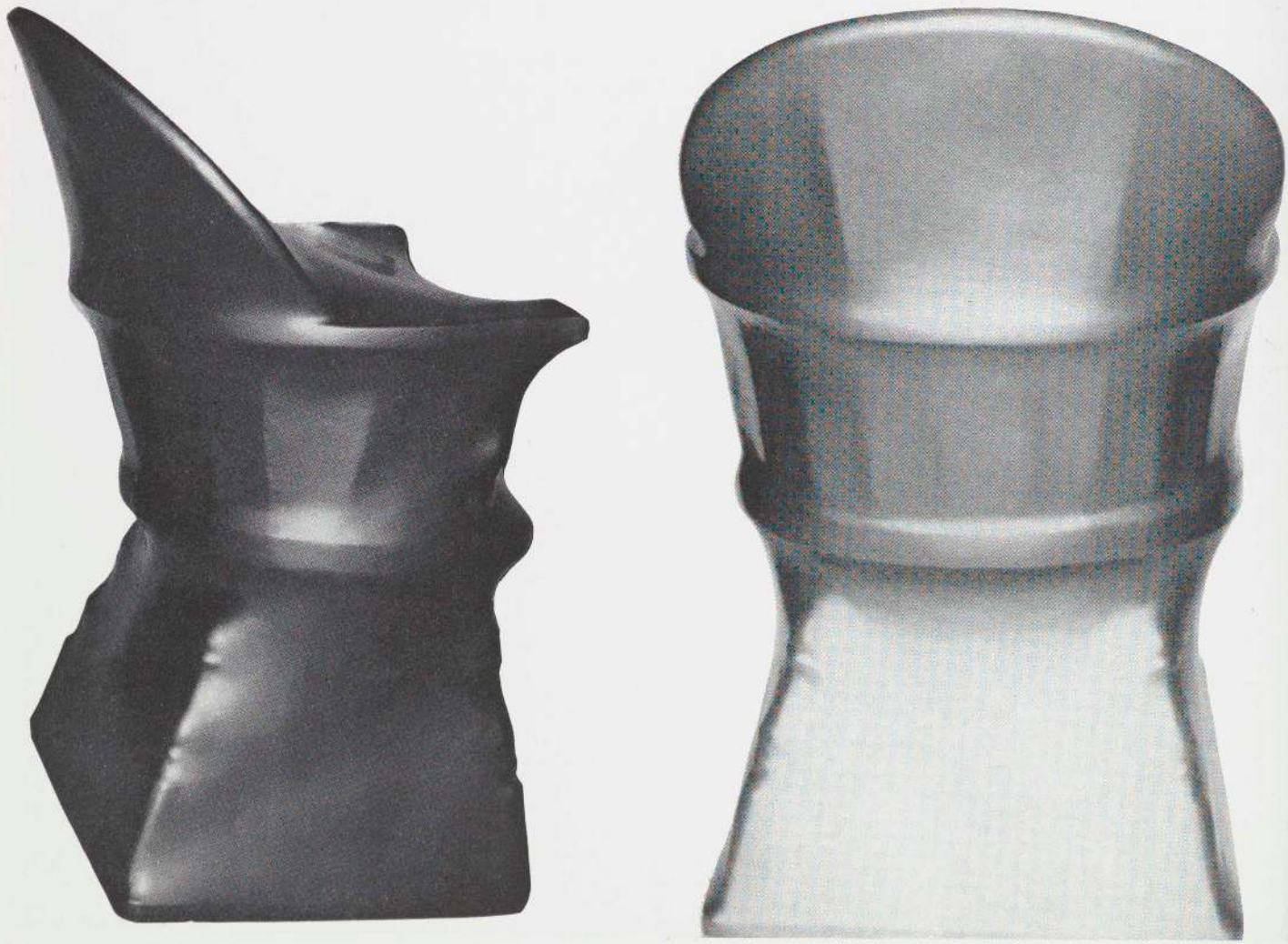
Man Ray: Ce qui nous manque à nous tous.
1925. Clay pipe and plexiglas bubble,
5¾ x 9 x 4¼". Collection Mr. and Mrs.
Burton Tremaine, Meriden, Connecticut



Fabio De Sanctis: The Designer's Rest.
1963. Fiberglas and enamel paint on wood, 37⅞ x 22⅜ x 20⅞". Collection 'Officina Undici'—(Fabio De Sanctis), Rome



Les Levine: Untitled.
1965. Thermo-plastic over captain's chair,
36¼ x 21⅝ x 26⅜". Lent by the Fischbach Gallery,
New York



Pres
1966
8¼ x

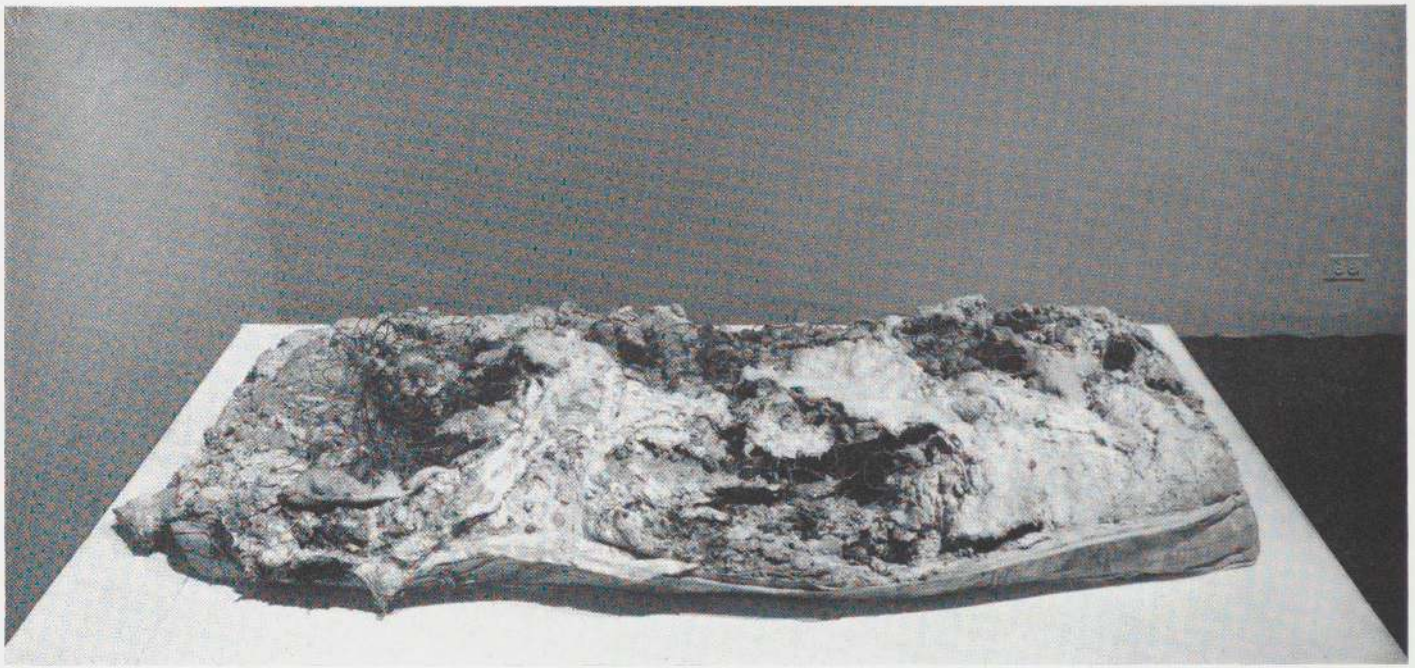
Preston McClanahan: Untitled.
1966. Brandy glass and urethane foam,
8¼ x 7½ x 6¼". Lent by the artist



Wolfgang Paalen: Nuage articule.
1938. Umbrella covered with sponge, 20½ x 31½"
(photograph only in exhibition).
Collection Madame Geo Dupin, Paris



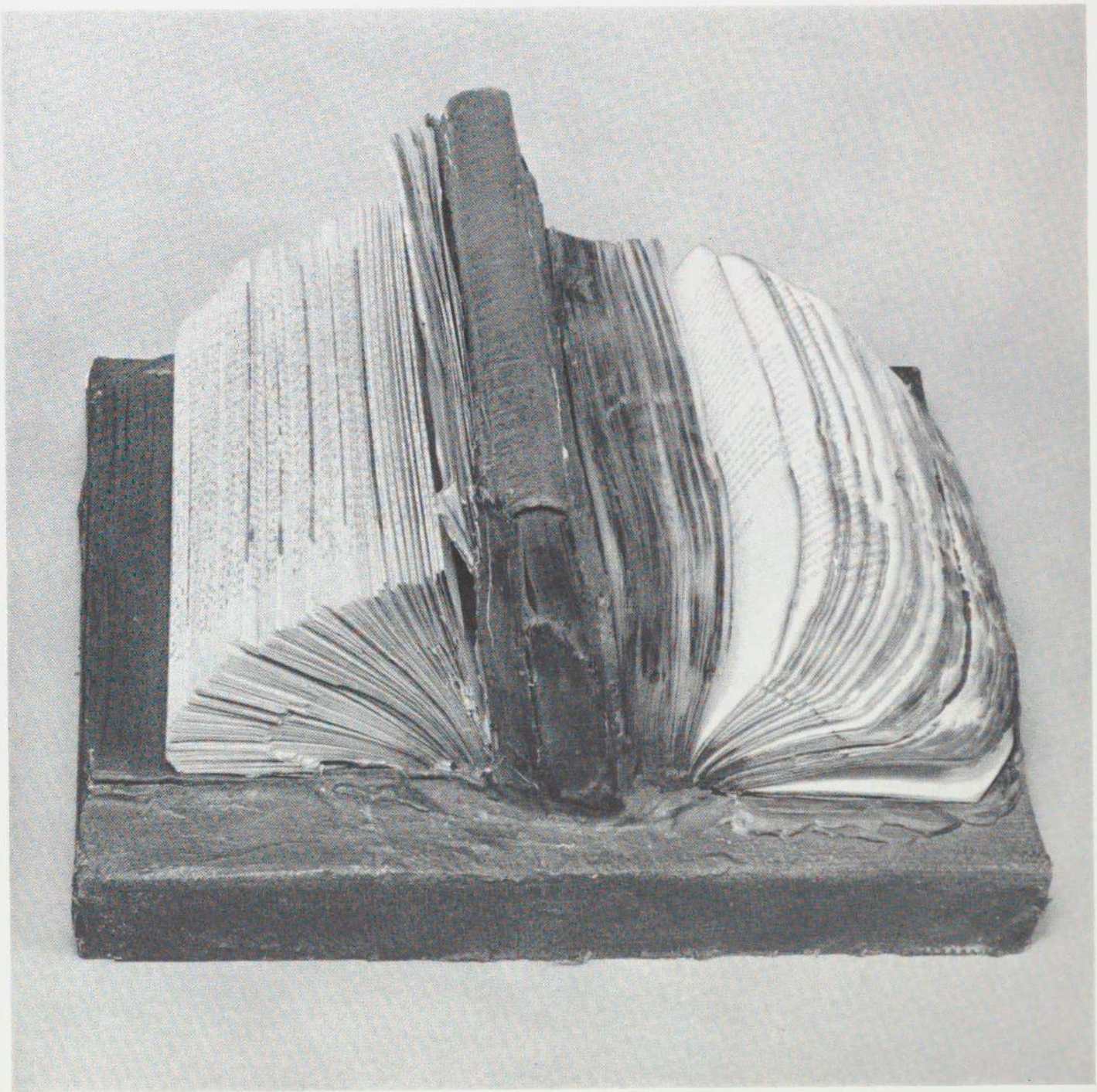
Ralph Ortiz: Archeological Find #3.
1961. Burnt mattress (dis-assemblage), 9⅜ x 74⅞ x 41¼″. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Mrs. Constance Levene, 1963



Jasper Johns: Book.
1957. Encaustic on book, 9¾ x 13″. Private collection, New York



John Latham: "Portraits of Illustrious Personages of Great Britain by Edmund Lodge. MDCCCL."
1962. Three books on board, 6 x 12 x 9". Collection Mr. and Mrs. Arthur A. Cohen, New York



Lucas Samaras: Untitled Sculpture.
1962. Book with pins, knife, scissors, razor, foil,
and piece of glass, 5½ x 11⅜ x 8⅞".
Collection Philip Johnson, New Canaan, Connecticut





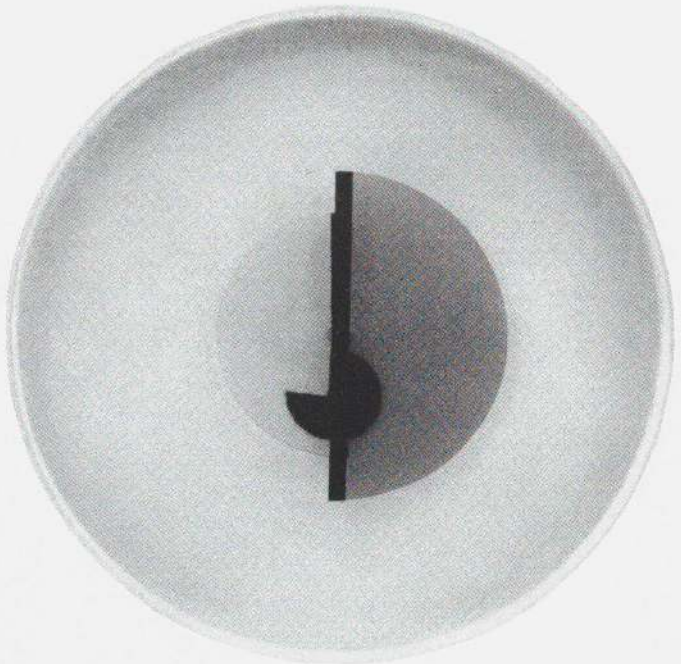
Man Ray: Cadeau.
c. 1958. Replica made by the artist after original of 1921. Flatiron with tacks, 6 x 4½ x 3½". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, purchase, 1966

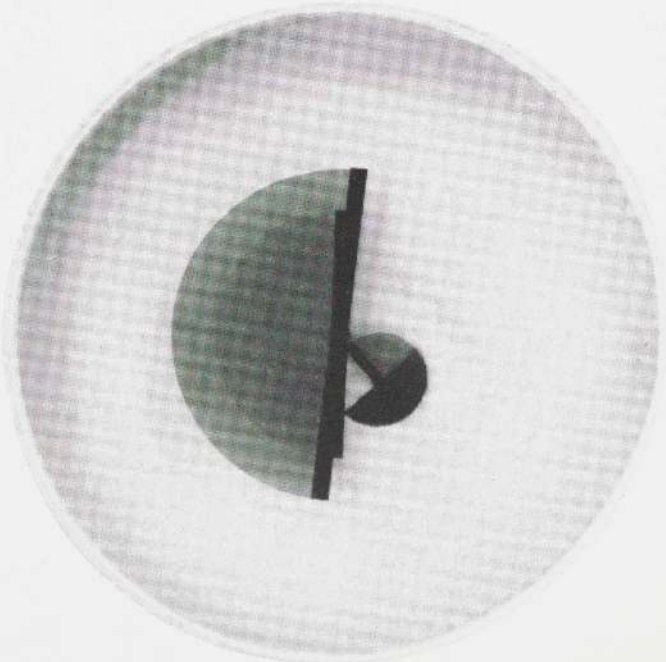


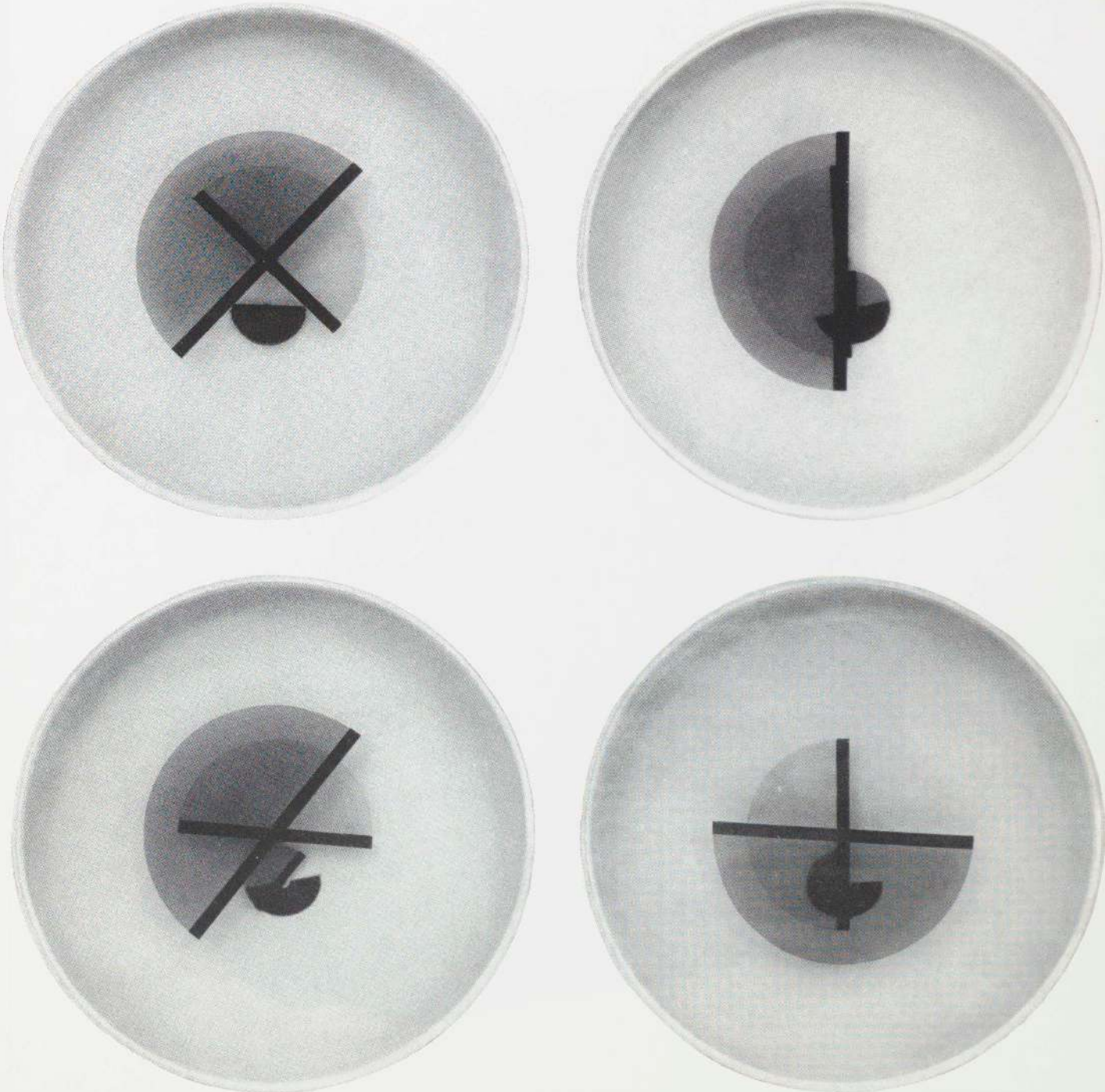
Kusama: Dress.
1964. Flannel, macaroni, and silver plastic paint,
52 x 35 x 2". Lent by the Castellane Gallery, New York



Bruno Munari: L'Ora X.
1962. Clock: aluminum and plastic, 7⅞″ diameter x 2½″. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Greta Daniel Design Fund, 1963



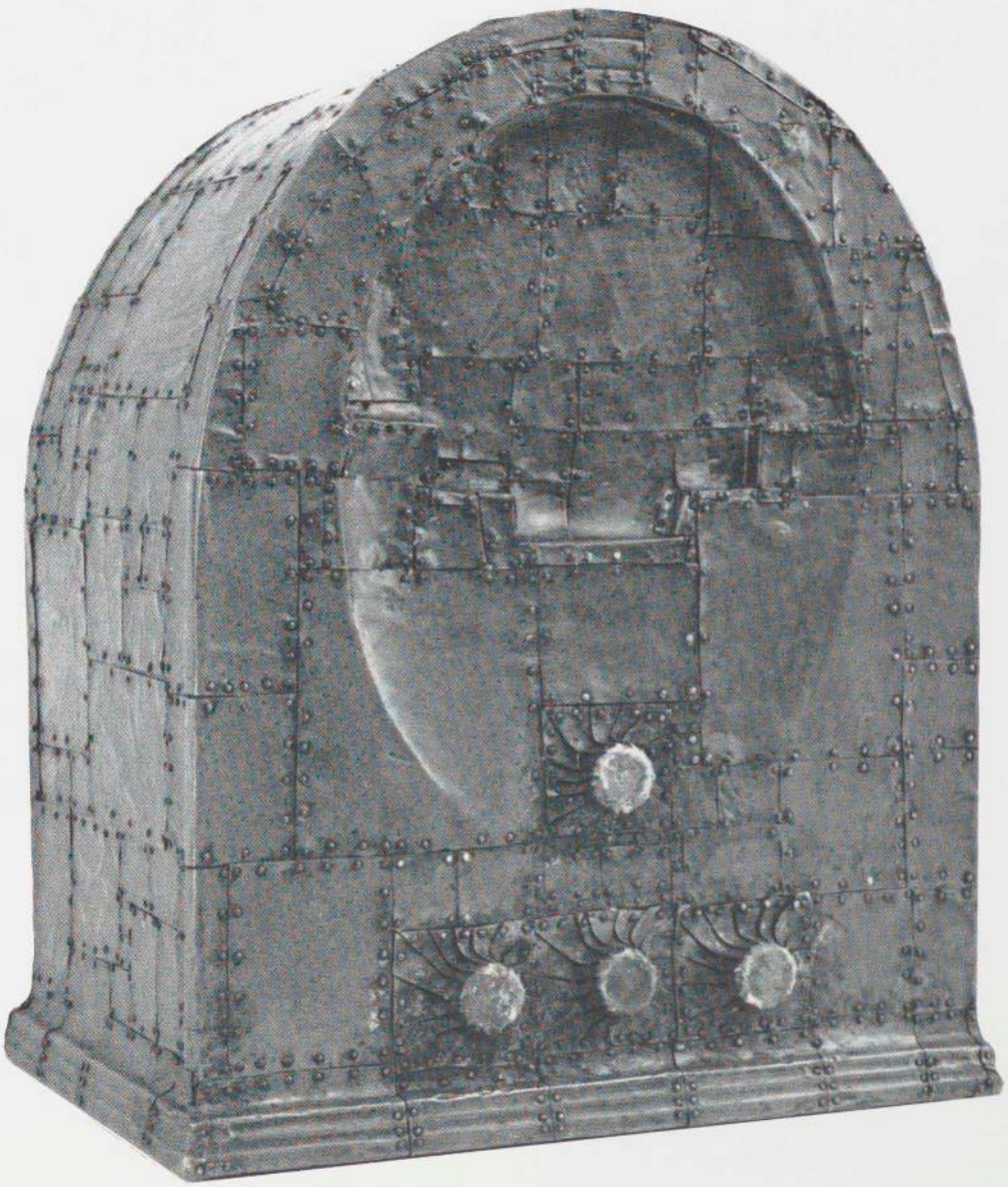




Olen Orr: Grand Union.
1965. Wax on paper bags, 25½ x 15 x 13⅜".
Private collection, New York



Tony Palladino: Radio is Dead!
1960. Copper and nails over table-top radio,
16⅛ x 13 x 9⅜". Lent by the artist



Michelangelo Pistoletto: Man with Yellow Pants. 1964. Paper collage with oil color and pencil over stainless steel, 78⅞ x 39⅜". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Blanchette Rockefeller Fund, 1965



Tony Palladino: S-Public Shelter.
1960. Paint on metal, 14 x 21″.
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Ivan Chermayeff, New York



In dimensions, height precedes width and depth. All works are illustrated with the exception of catalog numbers 2, 3, 4, 9, 30.

JANET COOPER.
American, born 1937 in Englewood, New Jersey. Studied at Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio, and New School for Social Research, New York. Has exhibited ceramics in New York, New Jersey, and California.

1. No Deposit, No Return.
1966. Glass milk bottles, 8 x 8″. Lent by the artist. Ill. p. 14.

MORRIS GRAVES.
American, born 1910 in Fox Valley, Oregon. Greatly influenced by travel in Far East. Exhibitions in United States, Europe (especially Scandinavia), and Far East since 1936. Participated in Museum of Modern Art's exhibition "Americans 1942." Two major retrospective exhibitions, 1957 and 1963. Has lived in Ireland since 1957.

2. English Nightfall Piece. 24⅛ x 20½″.
3. French Nightfall Piece. 26 x 21″.
4. German Nightfall Piece. 26⅛ x 21⅛″.
5. Roman Nightfall Piece. 26⅛ x 21″. Ill. p. 16.
Series of four drawings representing four participating countries of Munich peace talks, 1938. Pencil with pen and red ink on buff paper. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, purchase, 1942.

HABBAH.
Iraqi, born 1928 in Bagdad. Studied painting and sculpture (primarily in metal). Left Middle East in 1955 for Paris, where he began working with materials such as chewing gum, pasteboard boxes, and papier mâché which "lend themselves endlessly to multiple transmutations." Lives in Paris.

6. Untitled.
1966. Silver forks and spoons, 24″ long. Lent by Galerie Iris Clert, Paris. Ill. p. 12.

JASPER JOHNS.
American, born 1930 in Allendale, South Carolina. In various group and one-man shows since 1956, including Museum of Modern Art's exhibition "Sixteen Americans," 1959, and United States representation at XXXII Biennale, Venice, 1964.

7. Book.
1957. Encaustic on book, 9¾ x 13″.
Private collection, New York. Ill. p. 24.

KAREN KARNES.
American, born 1925 in New York. Studied in Italy and at Alfred University, Alfred, New York. Potter-in-residence at Black Mountain College, North Carolina, 1952-54. Silver medal, XIII Triennale, Milan, 1964, and two awards in Syracuse International, Syracuse, New York. Teaches at her own studio and at Haystack School, Deer Isle, Maine.

8. Untitled.
1965. Ceramic pitchers, 9½ x 22⅜ x 12¾″.
Lent by the artist. Ill. p. 15.

KUSAMA.
Japanese, born in Matsumoto, Japan. Has participated in group shows in United States, Japan, and Germany since 1955, and has had one-man shows in United States and Japan since 1952.

9. Handbag.
1964. Leather, macaroni, and silver plastic paint, 23½ x 14 x 4½″.
10. Dress.
1964. Flannel, macaroni, and silver plastic paint, 52 x 35 x 2″. Ill. p. 29.
Lent by the Castellane Gallery, New York.

JOHN LATHAM.
British, born 1921 in Northern Rhodesia. Studied at Chelsea School of Art, London, 1946-51. In various exhibitions in Europe and United States, including Museum of Modern Art's exhibition "The Art of Assemblage," 1961. Lives in London.

11. "Portraits of Illustrious Personages of Great Britain by Edmund Lodge. MDCCCL."
1962. Three books on board, 6 x 12 x 9". Collection Mr. and Mrs. Arthur A. Cohen, New York. Ill. p. 25.

LES LEVINE.
Canadian, born 1936 in Dublin. Studied at Central School of Arts and Crafts, London. Emigrated to Canada, 1958. Various group and one-man shows in Canada and New York since 1963.

12. Untitled.
1965. Thermo-plastic over captain's chair, 36¼ x 21⅝ x 26⅜". Lent by the Fischbach Gallery, New York. Ill. p. 20.

MAN RAY.
American, born 1890 in Philadelphia. Exhibited in New York, 1912, and participated in proto-Dadaist group, New York, 1917. Paris 1921, a member of Dadaist group, and later of Surrealist group. Began working in photography in 1921. Participated in Museum of Modern Art's exhibition "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism," 1936. Recent one-man show at Cordier & Ekstrom Gallery, New York, 1965. Lives in Paris.

13. Cadeau.
c. 1958. Replica made by the artist after the original of 1921. Flatiron with tacks, 6 x 4½ x 3½". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, purchase, 1966. Ill. p. 28.
14. Ce qui nous manque à nous tous.
1925. Clay pipe and plexiglas bubble, 5¾ x 9 x 4¼". Collection Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine, Meriden, Connecticut. Ill. p. 18.

PRESTON McCLANAHAN.
American, born 1933 in Charleston, West Virginia. Studied at Art Academy of Cincinnati, 1951-54. In group shows in Pennsylvania, Boston, Houston, and New York since 1965.

15. Untitled.
1966. Brandy glass and urethane foam, 8¼ x 7½ x 6¼". Lent by the artist. Ill. p. 21.

BRUNO MUNARI.
Italian, born 1907 in Milan. Graphic and industrial designer. Participated with Gruppo N experiments in programmed art. Group shows in Europe and United States, including Museum of Modern Art's exhibition "Two Graphic Designers," 1954. Major one-man show at Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, 1965, including all aspects of his work.

16. L'Ora X.
1962. Clock: aluminum and plastic, 7⅞" diameter x 2½". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Greta Daniel Design Fund, 1963. Ill. pp. 30-31.
17. Untitled.
1964. Silver fork, 8½" long. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Greta Daniel Design Fund, 1964. Ill. p. 10.
18. Untitled.
1964. Silver fork, 8½" long. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Greta Daniel Design Fund, 1964. Ill. p. 10.
19. Untitled.
1964. Silver fork, 8½" long. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Greta Daniel Design Fund, 1964. Ill. p. 11.

MERET OPPENHEIM.
Swiss, born 1913 in Berlin. Participated with Surrealists in Salon des Surindépendents, Paris, 1933; subsequently participated in almost all shows of this group in Europe and United States. Participated in Museum of Modern Art's exhibition "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism," 1936. Various one-man shows since 1936. Lives in Basel and Paris.

20. Untitled.
1936. Fur-covered cup, plate, and spoon; cup 4⅜" diameter, plate 9⅜" diameter, spoon 8" long. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, purchase, 1946. Ill. p. 13.

OLEN ORR.
American, born 1939 in Glenmora, Louisiana. Studied art at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, 1957-58, and sculpture at Art Students League, New York, 1961.

21. Grand Union.
1965. Wax on paper bags, 25½ x 15 x 13⅜". Private collection, New York. Ill. p. 32.

RALPH ORTIZ.
American, born 1934 in New York. Studied architecture at Pratt Institute, New York, 1952-53, and at Art Students League, New York, 1955-57. Brooklyn Museum, 1957-58. Pratt Institute Department of Art Education, 1961-63. One-man exhibition, Pratt Institute, 1962. Included in Museum of Modern Art's exhibition "Recent Acquisitions," February 1965.

22. Archeological Find #3.
1961. Burnt mattress (dis-assemblage), 9⅜ x 74⅞ x 41¼". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Mrs. Constance Levene, 1963. Ill. p. 23.

WOLFGANG PAALEN.
Austrian, born 1905 in Vienna. Studied painting in Italy, 1921, with Leo von König, and in Berlin, 1923, with Adolf Meyer. Academy Hoffmann, Munich, 1925. Participated in Surrealist exhibitions in Paris and London. Lived in Mexico from 1939 to his death in 1959.

23. Nuage articule.
1938. Umbrella covered with sponge, 20½ x 31½" (photograph only in exhibition). Collection Madame Geo Dupin, Paris. Ill. p. 22.

TONY PALLADINO.
American, born 1930 in New York. Designer and illustrator since 1948. Studied at High School of Music and Art, New York. Art Director, Van Brunt Company, New York.

24. Radio is Dead!
1960. Copper and nails over table-top radio, 16⅛ x 13 x 9⅜". Lent by the artist. Ill. p. 33.

25. S-Public Shelter.
1960. Paint on metal, 14 x 21". Collection Mr. and Mrs. Ivan Chermayeff, New York. Ill. p. 35.

MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO.
Italian, born 1933 in Biella, Italy. Studied in Turin. Worked until 1957 with his father as a restorer of paintings. Has had group and one-man shows since 1958, including a one-man show at Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1966, and Museum of Modern Art's exhibition "Recent Acquisitions," April 1966.

26. Man with Yellow Pants.
1964. Paper collage with oil color and pencil over stainless steel, 78⅞ x 39⅜". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Blanchette Rockefeller Fund, 1965. Ill. p. 34.

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG.
American, born 1925 in Port Arthur, Texas. Studied at Black Mountain College, North Carolina, 1948-49, and at Art Students League, New York, 1949-50. Has lived in New York since 1953. In Museum of Modern Art's exhibition "Sixteen Americans," 1959. First prize, XXXII Biennale, Venice, 1964.

27. Bed.
1955. Combine with pillow and quilt, 74 x 31". Collection Mr. and Mrs. Leo Castelli, New York. Ill. p. 17.

LUCAS SAMARAS.
American, born 1936 in Kastoria, Greece. Studied at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1955-59, and Columbia University, New York, 1959. One-man shows at Rutgers University, Reuben Gallery, New York, and at Green Gallery, New York. Was included in Museum of Modern Art's exhibition "The Art of Assemblage," 1961.

28. Untitled Sculpture.
1962. Book with pins, knife, scissors, razor, foil, and piece of glass, 5½ x 11⅜ x 8⅞". Collection Philip Johnson, New Canaan, Connecticut. Ill. pp. 26-27.

FABIO DE SANCTIS.
Italian, born 1931 in Rome. Architect and interior designer. Studied architecture at Rome University. Designed Mogadishu Airport, Somaliland, and at present is building a hotel group and villas at Monte Argentario in the district of Grosseto, Italy.

29. The Designer's Rest.
1963. Fiberglas and enamel paint on wood, 37⅞ x 22⅜ x 20⅞". Collection 'Officina Undici'—(Fabio De Sanctis), Rome. Ill. p. 19.

UNKNOWN.
American.

30. Untitled.
1936. Object made from a Sears-Roebuck catalog, Northern Vermont, paper, 11 x 9" diameter. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Mrs. Victor Herbert Lukens, 1937.