

The Museum of Modern Art

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FACT SHEET

EXHIBITION DESIGNS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING
An Exhibition of Products for the Aging and Physically Disabled

DATES April 16 - June 7, 1988

ORGANIZATION Cara McCarty, Assistant Curator, Department of Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art

SPONSORSHIP Made possible by generous grants from Volvo and the National Endowment for the Arts.

FOCUS This is one of the first exhibitions to focus on products designed for the aging and the physically disabled. Representing recent innovations and a change in attitude in this rapidly expanding industry, the exhibition features outstanding examples of mass-produced objects developed within the past ten years.

Designing for people with functional limitations is an increasingly important aspect of today's design activity. Traditionally, adaptive equipment was developed by occupational therapists and medical technicians. While useful, most of these objects were extremely cumbersome in design, helping to foster the user's feelings of inadequacy and further contributing to society's stigmatization of the disabled. The recent involvement of industrial designers has had a significant and successful impact on product development, deriving from the collaboration between designer, medical professional, and user. Whether for people with temporary or permanent disabilities, the objective is to design products that provide access and integration into the community.

Ms. McCarty writes in the exhibition brochure, "An important quality of these new products is that they do not emphasize the fact that they are aids for people with physical limitations. They are unobtrusive in appearance. Ultralight wheelchairs, for example, are so minimal in design that the viewer focuses on the user rather than on the equipment. In the hands of sensitive designers, these products have been enhanced by an aesthetic value not usually associated with adaptive technology. Beauty is found in their economy of design, and the purity of form is determined by their function."

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CONTENT

Selected for their excellence of design, the exhibition includes approximately forty-five objects, ranging from mobility equipment and communication aids to clothing and household items. Examples include marathon wheelchairs, sculpted cane handles, brightly-colored support systems resembling abstract sculpture for children with motor disabilities, and tableware for those with arthritis or limited hand strength. Products are on loan primarily from Sweden, as well as from England, Switzerland, and the United States.

PUBLICATION

A brochure with an essay and exhibition checklist by Cara McCarty accompanies the exhibition.

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