

**MoMA REVISITS WHAT 'GOOD DESIGN' WAS OVER 50 YEARS LATER**

**Installation Explores MoMA's Legacy in the Good Design Debate**

***What was Good Design? MoMA's Message 1944-56***

May 6, 2009-November 30, 2009

The Philip Johnson Architecture and Design Galleries, third floor

**NEW YORK, April 29, 2009**—At mid-century, The Museum of Modern Art played a leading role in the definition and dissemination of 'Good Design,' a concept that started taking shape in the 1930s and emerged with new relevance and currency in America and Europe in the decades following World War II. ***What was Good Design? MoMA's Message 1944-56*** presents over 100 selections from the Museum's collection—ranging from domestic furnishings and appliances, to textiles, sporting goods, and graphics—to illuminate the primary values of Good Design as promoted by MoMA within an international debate conducted by museums, design councils, and department stores. Iconic pieces by designers including Marcel Breuer, Charles and Ray Eames, Eero Saarinen, and Hans Wegner are shown alongside more unexpected items such as a hunting bow and a plumb bob, as well as everyday objects including an iron, a hamper, a rake, a cheese slicer, and Tupperware. The exhibition is organized by Juliet Kinchin, Curator, and Aidan O'Connor, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art. It will be on view in The Philip Johnson Architecture and Design Galleries on the third floor from May 6, 2009, to November 30, 2009.

"Is there art in a broomstick?" asked *Time* magazine in 1953; "Yes, says Manhattan's Museum of Modern Art, if it is designed both for usefulness and good looks." The article's title, "Good Design," was a ubiquitous term, invoked frequently in advertising, academic journals, women's magazines, and government reports. Eager to shape postwar consumer culture, MoMA championed its own brand of Good Design founded on the modernist precepts of functionalism, simplicity, and truth to materials.

Though MoMA's voice was resonant, the concept of Good Design extended far beyond Fifty-third Street. From the beginning of mass production in the mid-nineteenth century, thorny questions of design standards and popular taste were raised by design reformers in Europe and America. At mid-century, an international network of authorities—design councils, department stores, and other museums—heightened this debate.

MoMA promoted modern design starting in the 1930s, but it was in the decade following World War II that a discernible Good Design program matured. Competitions run by MoMA for printed textiles (1946), low-cost furniture (1948), and lighting (1950), stimulated new works of Good Design. Furnished houses assembled in The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden (1949-50) showcased complete Good Design environments. The exhibition *Design for Use, USA* (1950-52) toured Europe to broadcast Good (American) Design for the U.S. State Department. If

Good Design was MoMA's doctrine, its preacher was Edgar Kaufmann, Jr. A curator with a family background in retail, Kaufmann wrote the defining text, *What Is Modern Design?* (1950) and directed MoMA's famous *Good Design* exhibition series (1950-55), the ultimate expression of its message. On the basis of "eye appeal, function, construction and price," furniture, textiles, and domestic products were selected annually for two installations at the Chicago Merchandise Mart and a culminate exhibition at MoMA.

Say the curators: "For over 60 years, MoMA's mid-century message of Good Design has been critiqued as both elitist and crassly commercial—and not without cause. But, however problematic, these exhibitions succeeded in forging unprecedented connections between designers, manufacturers, retailers, and consumers. With sincere conviction, the Museum raised the profile of modern design at home and abroad."

A range of materials—some "classic," some unexpected—from the Museum's collection are presented in this installation to illuminate this vital moment in MoMA's history.

Charles Eames's (American, 1907-1978) Full Scale Model of Chaise Longue (La Chaise) was entered in MoMA's *International Competition for Low-Cost Furniture* in 1948, and shown in *Prize Designs for Modern Furniture* in 1950. This chaise longue was inspired by and nicknamed after Gaston Lachaise's 1927 sculpture *Reclining Nude*. It did not receive a prize because it was considered too "specialized in use" and too expensive to manufacture at the time. However, it was highlighted by the judges, who admired its "striking, good-looking and inventive" molded construction. La Chaise finally went into production in 1990 and is now one of Eames' most recognizable works.

The Chemex Coffee Maker (1941) by inventor and chemist Peter Schlumbohm (American, born Germany, 1896-1962) was shown in MoMA's exhibition *Useful Objects in Wartime* (1942). In developing its form Schlumbohm was inspired by the modern spirit of the inter-war period and particularly the Bauhaus. He was inclined to adapt scientific principles and laboratory equipment—in this case an Erlenmeyer flask—to the design of domestic objects.

Other objects in the exhibition include chairs by Alexey Brodovitch, Donald R. Knorr, William H. Miller, Jr., George Nakashima, and Davis J. Pratt; lamps by Greta Von Nessen and Gilbert A. Watrous; textiles by Eszter Haraszty and Alexander Girard; a teapot by Edith Heath; tableware by Kaj Franck; as well as an ax, a sewing machine, knives, kitchen tools, a pressure cooker, a cocktail shaker, a fishing rod, and a wastebasket.

#### **SPONSORSHIP:**

The exhibition is made possible by Design Onscreen.

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**MoMA Monday Nights:**

MoMA will remain open until 8:45 p.m. on selected Mondays, giving visitors extended hours to view special exhibitions and the museum's collection. The evenings will include entertainment and a cash bar. Regular admission applies. The museum will stay open from 10:30 to 8:45 on the following Mondays: May 4, and June 8.

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**Public Information:**

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, NY 10019

Hours: Wednesday through Monday: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Friday: 10:30 a.m.-8:00 p.m.  
Closed Tuesday

Museum Admission: \$20 adults; \$16 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$12 full-time students with current I.D. Free for children 16 and under. Free for members.  
Admission includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs.  
Free admission during Target Free Friday Nights 4:00-8:00 p.m.

*The public may call 212/708-9400 for detailed Museum information. Visit us on the Web at [www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org).*