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MOBILE DESIGN (Slides)
1948-51

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Slides

MOBILE DESIGN

\$20. reduced to \$10.

1948	Oct. 25 - Nov. 8	Long Beach Unified School District Long Beach, Cal.
1949	Feb. 7 - 14	State Teachers College Potsdam, N.Y.
	Oct. 24 - 31	Alfred University Alfred, N.Y.
1951	Oct. 14 - 21	Contemporary Arts Association Houston, Tex.

Additional early booking:

1948	Apr. 24 - May 1	Minneapolis Institute of Arts Minneapolis, Minn.
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MOBILE DESIGN (Slide Talk)

by: Sue Fuller, Instructor of Mobile Design Class
Educational Program
Museum of Modern Art

Prepared and circulated by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y.

The exploratory and experimental work shown in this slide talk grew out of an effort to channel into the classroom the enthusiasm and spontaneity of young people which characterizes their nonsense and recreation. The experiment was carried on with a group of 15 to 17 year old high school students in a special class of the Educational Program of the Museum of Modern Art. The students were selected from the New York City Public High Schools. Teaching was based upon the fundamental fact that young people already possess within themselves untold realms of creative ideas and the ability to express them when awakened to the recognition of this native endowment. Hence teaching became the setting of the stage for the student to act - not according to the dictates of a limited class problem, but according to the stimulation of his own reaction to that which the "stage set" suggests. Setting the stage consisted of using contemporary media such as window display, movies, television, electric signs, as basis for artistic discussion. The students brought out many interesting points of view. It also naturally led to consideration of the aesthetics of the symbols and spirit of the engineering genius of our day (revealed as balance, motion, suspension, tension, transparency, light, etc.). The students' conception of the media of art expanded.

The materials they used included anything that would supply a need or stimulate a response - wood, wire, plastic, glass, gelatin, hardware were staple items, as well as simple tools to work them.

Form, line and color were considered from different standpoints in a deliberate attempt to have the student create directly in new media using his natural feeling for design. In this way he was encouraged to explore materials and to transform

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them into aesthetic realities under the dictates of his own creative ingenuity.

LINE: Wire being essentially linear provided the students with the experience of constructing three dimensional drawings.

SLIDE I. As this student worked with a piece of wire, curving and straightening it, her fingers moving along its unformed length described the path of a point through space. Yet the student's own native sensitivity regulated the relation of the spaces between the path so described as well as the rhythm and continuity of its total shape. That the two cut ends of wire did not connect to form a complete unit, troubled the student who explained that she ran out of wire before she had finished.

SLIDE II. From a completely different point of view another student used wire to form an arabesque of a fantastic bird.

SLIDE III. Suspension of descriptive caricatured elements of the head of an Ubangi Savage reveal still a different starting place.

SLIDE IV. While the free rhythms of linear exploration, incorporating a few whisps of broom straws, describe what might be sketches for jewelry.

FORM:

Since many of the problems of a present designer in the field involve the use of pre-fabricated or pre-determined shapes, a miscellaneous assortment of mechanical parts were put at the disposal of the students who chose them as a basic element of design for construction. The selected shape was considered from a design rather

SLIDE V. than a utilitarian standpoint as in this use of the handle to a cold water faucet. In this designed construction it becomes a white massive shiny form whose shape is echoed in the undulations of shiny blue pattered plastic shelf-edging and its shadow, set off by the more

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neutral elements of variations on pink in wood, cloth and paint, creating a fine interplay of dull and shiny, smooth and textured surfaces.

SLIDE VI. Machine stamped supports for curtain rods provided the initial considerations for another student, whose further selection of ribbed tin stripping and display foil repeated the striation of the basic selection. These elements were arranged and rearranged until resolved to the student's own satisfaction.

SLIDE VII. A counter display rack for toothbrushes became an interesting series of intersecting directional planes. Its three uprights suggested to the student additional axial poles. The introduction of round black wheels included the idea of connecting them. The mechanical nature of the composition was accented by the choice of color.

SLIDE VIII. Surface, shape, line, and grain of wood punctuated by the dots of tack heads are the secondary consideration of this construction of tensions.

MOTION:

Consideration of motion as a requirement of a construction posed

SLIDE IX. many interesting problems and the students' exploratory attempts to create moving structures led to their discovery that weight and balance have a great deal to do with motion.

SLIDE X. Extension of the idea of wire wound into springs in asymmetrical arrangement lead to some delightful surprises of balance in this piece which teeters delicately when set in motion.

TEXTURE:

SLIDE XI. Products of nature such as feathers, bones, shells have always been material for artists from time immemorial. Phenomenon of nature such

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as fire have afforded a way of treating material. An exploratory attitude developed in the students led to consideration of changes in color and structure effected by systematic burning or searing materials.

SLIDE XII. Selection of feathers and bone by an imaginative student led to the creation of this fantastic creature. The bone is used as the point of interest against a setting of feather arrangements. In these arrangements, a smooth and orderly mass makes up the bulk of the setting, while freer arrangements elsewhere make expressive digressions, accenting the peculiar character of the conception.

LIGHT:

SLIDE XIII. A study of light was begun by the introduction of a spotlight into the classroom. This study opened up manifold possibilities in the treatment and consideration of design. By experimenting the students found that light itself is a medium in which to create. By it, the appearance of the simplest material may be transformed and extended. Shadow became a positive rather than negative consideration of the composition. Color could be introduced in the projection of the light, and the mixture of light-color opened up a whole new field.

SLIDE XV. By scratching the back surface of a mirror and placing color gelatins there instead, interesting patterns are made with reflection and transparency.

SLIDE XVI. The discovery by accident that a drop of water dissolves sheet gelatin stimulated one student to explore the nature of color gelatins by melting and pouring them, instead of using them in their manufactured sheet form which had been the customary method used by the students. Rather than regarding the drop of water on his sheet

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of gelatin as an irretrievable mistake, he observed what the water did to the gelatin and used this fact as a point of departure for creative work.

SLIDE XVII. This skeleton-like arrangement of suspended tubing and striped shells illustrates the student's completely intuitive selection and combination of material from a design standpoint. The tubing filled with colored liquid gelatin, striped by its own bubbles, gave the student the first idea of what he wanted next. By arrangement he tried to find material which would complement and extend the feeling evoked by his first selection. The composition was first laid out on a paper and conceived of as essentially two-dimensional. Since he did not wish to compromise the transparency of the glass by gluing it to an opaque background, the framing itself became a part of the problem. The solution arrived at was suspension of the elements by a fine wire within an open framework - a solution which maintained the student's feeling of the tenuous nature of the gelatin-striped glass tubing and fragile striped shells. But the student also conceived and arranged the display of the composition. Through lighting he completed the project in design by considering the character and placement of highlight and shadow.

SLIDE XVIII. Many effects were discovered by the students in their exploration for which they did not immediately find a use. The effect of colored light on hammered tin was one of these. Pooling their discoveries and freely exchanging ideas and criticisms led to the erection of a peep show about 3 feet square which was then admired for the wealth of ideas for stage setting it stimulated.

SLIDE XIX. Smaller peep shows were also devised inside cardboard mailing tubes.

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- SLIDE XX. The change in scale of working provided an interesting solution for the student who tried to put too many things into his construction because it forced him to simplify.
- SLIDE XXI. The jewel-like effect of poured gelatin illuminated from behind was the contribution of another student.
- SLIDE XXII. To inspire the students to new considerations, several different kinds of music were played for them to select one which they would consider the point of departure for their next creation in the various media they had explored. These slides can give but an indication of what was evolved by the students. The projection of light through a wheel of various colored gelatins onto a transparent screen where a collage of other gelatins was placed, resulted in change of color by the overlapping of various transparencies. Spinning the color wheel made the colors on the screen appear to advance and recede to the rhythm of the music. Verbal explanation of what happened serves but to illustrate the impossibility of achieving any such creative effects by discussion of theory alone. The students were inspired to create, to explore, to discover, directly in the medium. Many of their innovations were beyond their technical comprehension of the physics involved.
- SLIDE XXIII.
- SLIDE XXIV. Rotation of a light cylinder inside a polygon structure covered with a transparent screen resulted in asymmetrical paths of colored light on the sides of the polygon.
- Our age has already extended the borders of man's conception of physics. Time and space have new dimensions. Since artists have always expressed the spirit of the age in which they live, our art

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students find great stimulation in the consideration of
the fundamental principles of art from contemporary stand-
points. For who can teach the exact form of the art of
tomorrow? We can but stimulate the beginnings.

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