

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

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FIRST HISTORICAL EXHIBITION OF DE STIJL, IMPORTANT MOVEMENT IN ARCHITECTURE, PAINTING, SCULPTURE AND DESIGN

Paintings, sculpture, architectural models, furniture and typography by members of the group of artists known as de Stijl will be on view in the first floor galleries of the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from December 17 through February 15. This is the first historical survey in America of the Stijl movement which started in Holland in 1917 and became one of the most influential groups of modern artists.

The exhibition will include paintings by the founder of de Stijl, Theo van Doesburg, who was also an architect, typographer and writer, and work by its principal members, the painters Mondrian and van der Leek, the sculptor Vantongerloo, architects J.J.P. Oud, Gerrit Rietveld, and van Eesteren. The main section of the show will deal with the development of the Stijl principles in painting, sculpture and architecture in Holland from 1917 until 1928. The contribution of the Stijl movement to the history of architecture and design in particular, the modern styles current immediately preceding de Stijl and to which it was a reaction, and the continuing influence today in the United States will be demonstrated in an adjoining gallery by a group of paintings, architectural photographs and diagrams and examples of typography.

The exhibition will illustrate the three principles which formed the fundamental basis of the work of de Stijl, whether in painting, architecture or sculpture, furniture or typography: in form, the rectangle; in color, the primary hues: red, blue and yellow; in composition, asymmetric balance.

Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Director of the Museum Collections, has written the text and Philip Johnson, Director of the Department of Architecture and Design has supplied the introduction for the bulletin which accompanies the show. The exhibition was brought to this country by the Dutch government and has been installed by Gerrit Rietveld, an original member of de Stijl. It was organized by Greta Daniel, Assistant Curator of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design.

In the entrance gallery a 6-foot-high enlargement of an architectural construction in color by van Doesburg and van Eesteren will be drawn on the wall. It is a typical example of de Stijl's projection of a painting. Flat rectangular vertical and horizontal planes define a complex of asymmetric volumes. The fact that the planes are white or painted in bright blue, yellow and red emphasizes the weightless freedom of the composition.

Three paintings by Mondrian, which in a tentative way anticipate the collective formal discoveries of the Stijl group, will be hung here as well as a painting by V. Huszar which was used as the first cover of the Stijl magazine published by the group from 1917-1932. A large model of a house designed by van Doesburg, van Eesteren and Rietveld for the Paris art dealer Léonce Rosenberg, and photographs of buildings by J.J.P. Oud illustrate the clean rectangular lines, asymmetric balance of shapes and suppression of incidental ornament characteristic of de Stijl.

Paintings in the main gallery have been hung according to the date of composition to show the development of de Stijl from 1917 to 1928, as the artists Mondrian, van Doesburg and van der Leek experimented with de Stijl principles. Van Doesburg's Composition (The Cow), a classic example of a Stijl abstract painting derived from a natural form, will be shown with its preliminary representational sketches. Van Doesburg's Rhythm of a Russian Dance of 1918 demonstrates the Stijl composition of vertical and horizontal lines so arranged that they never touch or overlap each other but instead seem about to slide by each other without collision. Two pieces by Vantongerloo, who applied the Stijl love of rectangles to sculpture, will be shown in this gallery.

Examples of Stijl architecture, which applied the same principles, will be shown here in models and photographs. The typical architecture of de Stijl grew first out of cubism by way of Mondrian. To Mondrian's plus-and-minus method of linear composition were added van der Leek's bright flat color planes. Then van Doesburg contributed his synthesis of the two, and Vantongerloo provided the architects with early examples of Stijl design in three dimensions.

Rietveld's house in Utrecht, 1924, in which the partition of space into volumes by means of freely abutting and interpenetrating planes was emphasized as never before in Western architecture, will also be shown in photographs and models, as will Oud's Café de Unie facade of 1925, a frank and amusing adaptation of paintings such as Mondrian's Composition of 1920, with the lettering following the Stijl principles of typography.

An 11-foot photo mural of The City in Space, designed by Frederick Kiesler for the Paris Exposition of Decorative Arts in 1925 represents technically the boldest creation in the Stijl tradition. It was a suspended framework constructed on a tension system without foundations or walls and without a static axis. In its consistent use of rectangles asymmetrically arranged it is a development of such Stijl designs as Rietveld's house of the year before.

Chairs, tables, lamps and a chest of drawers, designed by Rietveld, that are closely related to the paintings in this gallery, will be grouped in the center on a white floor. On rectangular panels, dividing the space within the gallery, examples of de Stijl typography will be shown.

The material for this exhibition was assembled by a committee of Dutch scholars and former members of the Stijl group appointed by the Dutch government, together with the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. It was shown in 1951 at the Stedelijk Museum and in 1952 at the Biennale in Venice.